Images of New Orleans: The Relationship Between Motion Pictures and Tourists’ Expectations of a Travel Destination

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**Introduction**

Visual media help create perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about the world, including how people imagine and perceive travel destinations.

Movies have the power to influence and even “pull” visitors to a travel destination (Riley and Van Doren 1992).
If more people are exposed to increasing amounts of visual media, one might assume that popular images depicted in movies play an important role in shaping city images and determining travelers' expectations of a particular destination.

What are the unofficial images of New Orleans that reach millions of potential travelers?
Problem Statement

- It is crucial for a city attempting to change its image, target a new segment of the population, or enhance its tourism industry to understand and identify the official images as well as the unofficial images of the city.

- Exploring some of the visual images of New Orleans through motion pictures is one of the ways to determine what tourists have been exposed to through the media and what they might expect to see on an actual visit to New Orleans.
Research Questions

- What images of New Orleans do visual media (selected motion pictures) project?
- Is New Orleans sending mixed messages to potential tourists?
- How do images of the city translate to travelers?
Unofficial Media Images

All sources of media that are not pre-packaged with the intention of selling a city to increase tourism. Unofficial media images can come in many forms and appear as negative, positive, or even neutral.

Examples: motion pictures, best-selling novels, photographs, television commercials, the Internet, and magazines.
Official Media Images

Promotions that cities construct to intentionally attract visitors. Advertising for official media may appear in magazines, television, newspapers, the Internet, and radio.
Methods

Content Analysis

- Technique to determine dominant themes and images.

  - A total of **331 images** were collapsed into **ten themes** to come up with a composite of unofficial images of New Orleans.
# New Orleans Motion Pictures, 1985-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>U.S. Gross*</th>
<th>N.O. footage**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Down by Law</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>$1.4</td>
<td>65 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel Heart</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>$17.2</td>
<td>36 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Big Easy</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>$17.7</td>
<td>108 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaze</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>$19.1</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pelican Brief</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>$100.8</td>
<td>37 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undercover Blues</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>$12.4</td>
<td>75 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard Target</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>$32.5</td>
<td>55 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview with the Vampire</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>$105.3</td>
<td>43 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candyman: Farewell to the Flesh</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>$13.9</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaven’s Prisoners</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>$5.0</td>
<td>59 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double Jeopardy</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>$116.7</td>
<td>39 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dracula 2000</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>$33.0</td>
<td>80 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*U.S. box office gross in million (does not include foreign revenue or video/DVD rentals).

**Approximate running time of New Orleans footage.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Genre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Down by Law</td>
<td>Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel Heart</td>
<td>Horror/Mystery/Thriller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Big Easy</td>
<td>Drama/Mystery/Romance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaze</td>
<td>Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pelican Brief</td>
<td>Drama/Mystery/Thriller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undercover Blues</td>
<td>Comedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard Target</td>
<td>Action-adventure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview with the Vampire</td>
<td>Horror/Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candyman: Farewell to the Flesh</td>
<td>Horror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaven’s Prisoners</td>
<td>Mystery/Thriller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double Jeopardy</td>
<td>Drama/Thriller/Mystery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dracula 2000</td>
<td>Horror</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New Orleans Motion Picture Themes

Percent

0 5 10 15 20 25 30

generic  deteriorating  uniquely N.O.  partying  supernatural  crime/violence  music  vice  cuisine  generic

Legend:
- Generic
- Deteriorating
- Uniquely N.O.
- Partying
- Supernatural
- Crime/Violence
- Music
- Vice
- Cuisine
Findings

Unofficial images of New Orleans are pervasive and unpredictable.

Many film images of New Orleans are in direct contrast to images of New Orleans in official promotional videos and tourism commercials.

Motion pictures present a multidimensional view of New Orleans.

While unofficial images can capture the city at its best, they may also portray some of the city’s less desirable characteristics.
Findings

New Orleans official tourism videos and commercials feature music, food, and celebration.

New Orleans motion pictures depict many images that are considered “negative” upon first glance:

- Cemeteries
- Public nudity
- Vampires
- Rainy nights
- Voodoo ceremonies
- Crowded streets
- Abandoned houses
- Violence
- Prostitution
Findings

Movies present a different side of the city to potential tourists. For a city like New Orleans, whose culture and history lend themselves to images of vice and the supernatural, these unofficial images do not do any harm. Actually, they most likely help.

"Do you know where that cemetery from Ashley Judd’s movie is located?"

-New Orleans Tourist
Findings

Uniquely New Orleans theme:
(27.8% of images)

-Mardi Gras Costume Ball
-Jazz Funeral
-Second Line Parade
-Street kids singing/dancing in French Quarter
-Crowds of people drinking on Bourbon Street
-Public Nudity on Bourbon Street
-Cemeteries
Conclusion

Recommendations for tourism agencies--

1) Take an inventory by conducting a content analysis of city specific movies to determine dominant themes and images.

2) Compile a list of selected films for potential tourists to view. This list could be added to the city’s official tourism website and used by potential visitors and conventioneers as supplementary information.
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