



Sacrifice and Survival: Identity, Mission, and Jesuit Higher Education in the American South

R. Eric Platt

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Sacrifice and Survival recounts the history and development of Jesuit higher education in the American South.


R. Eric Platt examines in *Sacrifice and Survival* the history and evolution of Jesuit higher education in the American South and hypothesizes that the identity and mission of southern Jesuit colleges and universities may have functioned as catalytic concepts that affected the “town and gown” relationships between the institutions and their host communities in ways that influenced whether they failed or adapted to survive.

The Catholic religious order known as the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) manages a global network of colleges and universities with a distinct Catholic identity and mission. Despite this immense educational system, several Jesuit institutions have closed throughout the course of the order’s existence. Societal pressures, external perceptions or misperceptions, unbalanced curricular structures rooted in liberal arts, and administrators’ slow acceptance of courses related to practical job seeking may all influence religious-affiliated educational institutions. The religious identity and mission of these colleges and universities are fundamentals that influence their interaction with external environs and contribute to their survival or failure.

Platt traces the roots of Jesuit education from the rise of Ignatius Loyola in the mid-sixteenth century through the European development of the Society of Jesus, Jesuit educational identity and mission, the migration of Jesuits to colonial New Orleans, the expulsion of Jesuits by Papal mandate, the reorganization of Jesuit education, their attempt to establish a network of educational institutions across the South, and the final closure of all but two southern Jesuit colleges and a set of high schools.

Sacrifice and Survival explores the implications of the Galveston Hurricane of 1900, yellow fever, Georgia floods, devastating fires, the Civil War, the expansion of New Orleans due to the 1884 Cotton Centennial Exposition, and ties between town and gown, as well as anti-Catholic/anti-Jesuit sentiment as the Society of Jesus pushed forward to create a system of southern institutions. Ultimately, institutional identity and mission critically impacted the survival of Jesuit education in the American South.

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