

The Death of Cockfighting: How Society's Influence Dismantles Cultural Traditions

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Introduction

The battle against cockfighting in southern Louisiana from 1988 to 2008 shows how cultural traditions are dismantled as society advances and public opinions shift. Cockfighting in this region, which is the area of Louisiana that is south of Interstate 12, is closely tied to cultural identities and notions of tradition that were used to defend the sport in Louisiana courts for almost a decade. Cockfighting is a sport that involves pitting two roosters against each other in combat often to the death. The sport has been a part of southern culture since the Civil War, and Louisiana was the last of the 50 states to ban the practice. The battle against cockfighting is an ongoing conflict in American society as well as United States territories. The arguments against cockfighting always center on the moralistic principles of society. In the 1800s, ministers and church ladies objected the sport because of the sinful behavior, such as drinking and gambling, that accompanied it.¹ Modern arguments are directed at the cruelty toward chickens and the barbarity of the practice, an argument that was used in similar situations throughout western civilization. These were the same arguments that failed in Louisiana from 1988 to 2005. Major political opposition to the tradition in Louisiana began in 1998, but it was not until Hurricane Katrina in 2005 that arguments against cockfighting in the state gained traction. As American society focused on Louisiana following this catastrophe, anti-cockers were given a new tool to end the long-running tradition.

Cockfighting has been a part of American history as long as there has been an America, but in the 19th and 20th centuries the sport became associated with rural southern tradition. The

¹ "Rules for Preserving Liberty in a Republic," *New-Hampshire Gazette* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire) I, no. 51, February 9, 1779: [1], *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.unco.idm.oclc.org/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A103709D225B248A8%40EANX-103F0FBA78673165%402370866-103F0FBA8E591AFE%400-103F0FBB95D6DFE7%40Rules%2Bfor%2BPreserving%2BLiberty%2Bin%2Ba%2BRepublic>.

tradition of cockfighting in Louisiana began during French colonization and carried on after the Louisiana Purchase, but the sentimental connection to Louisiana cockers is largely a remnant from the Civil War and reconstruction eras.² To cockers, cockfighting is more than just a sport, it is a way to stay in touch with cultural roots and interact in a social environment with people of a like mind just as poor black sharecroppers did with their wealthy white landlords during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.³ As Joseph L. Price wrote, “cockfighting was, in significant respects, the quintessential antebellum southern sport... noted as early as 1724,” he also indicated that many southern states had some type of cockfighting literature in production by the .⁴ As evidence will later show, by the time of the Civil War, cockfighting had been banned or restricted in many northern states and was becoming looked at as a part of southern culture.

Opposition to cockfighting in Louisiana began during the late 1990s at a time when there were only three states left in the United States, the other two were New Mexico and Hawaii, to allow the practice of cockfighting. The political environment around cockfighting in Louisiana during this time was heavily divided. Conservatives within the state wanted to protect the rights of individuals and the traditional culture of the state.⁵ Liberal minded representatives wanted to improve the public image of the state and help remove the stigma that Louisiana was a “backwoods” state.⁶ As of 2005 Louisiana was the last state to allow the blood sport, and after

² Craig J. Forsyth, “A Pecking Disorder: Cockfighting in Louisiana,” *International Review of Modern Sociology* 26, no. 1 (1996): 15-25, Accessed October 6, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41421095>.

³ Doug Simpson, “Louisiana Last State Standing on Illegal Cockfighting Circuit,” In *Lawrence Journal*, (2007). Accessed on October 20, 2020.

<https://www2.ljworld.com/news/2007/apr/10/louisiana-last-state-standing-legal-cockfighting-c/> & Joseph L. Price, “Sports and Religion,” In *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 1: Religion*, edited by Hill Samuel S., by Wilson Charles Reagan, 147-148, University of North Carolina Press, 2006, Accessed October 6, 2020, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9780807877166_hill.37.

⁴ Joseph L. Price, “Sports and Religion,” 147-148.

⁵ Doug Simpson, “Louisiana Last State Standing on Illegal Cockfighting Circuit,”

⁶ Metairie City Business Staff, “Strain Determined to End Cockfighting in La.,” *New Orleans CityBusiness* (Jun 07, 2007): 1. <https://unco.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.unco.idm.oclc.org/docview/209568501?accountid=12832>.

the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in September of that same year the stage was set to end the battle against cockfighting in the country.

The battle against cockfighting in Louisiana is the perfect example of how changing public opinions and values lead to the destruction of traditional cultural and recreational practices. This same process has occurred throughout the history of western civilization and became more pronounced after the beginning of the 20th century. As public awareness grows, the views and opinions of the masses gain authority over the misunderstood or questionable practices of others regardless of the practice's previous popularity. These events played a significant role in the history of America, and as times continue to change these controversies are at the height of public attention. By studying the factors that led to the end of cockfighting in Louisiana, this paper highlights how changing opinions can not only alter traditions but alter society and views of personal identity.

Historiography

Cockfighting has been a controversial part of American history since the beginning of the colonial era. It has been a subject of dispute in debates for over 150 years, and because of the perceived cruelty associated with the sport. Historical works concerning cockfighting are primarily written from a viewpoint of opposition and based mainly on the immoral aspects in the colonial days and the actual fighting and animal cruelty aspects of today. Because of this focus, the nationalistic, rationalistic, and even masculine significance of cockfighting takes a backseat and is primarily glanced over in most writings on Louisiana cockfighting. Joseph L. Price writes about the battle between the cockfighting community, or cockers, and the various churches over the issue, arguing against the barbarity of the sport and the deviations that come with it, he

asserts that opposition was strongest from the women of the church.⁷ Even while viewing cockfighting from a biased perspective, many historians on cockfighting in southern Louisiana cannot avoid recognizing the strong cultural and historical connection that the cockers possess. Price even acknowledges the historical and cultural significance that is associated with cockfighting in the rural south. This is a common trend that is found throughout most writings on cockfighting in the United States. Studies on Cockfighting in Hawaii as well as the American territories do a better job at capturing how cockfighting is a part of how people define their identities. Kathryne M. Young writes about cockfighting in Hawaii and how it is associated with traditional associations to masculine identity.⁸ Cockfighting is perceived by participants to be a connection to their past and culture and these people would consider the label of cocker part of their personal identity. Modern cockers relate cockfighting to many different aspects of their historical culture. The writings of Marko Maunula speak to the historical significance of the early settlers of the south, and how cockfighting was a significant tool in aiding the development of the creole culture that is celebrated in southern Louisiana. The historical culture of cockfighting puts people of differing social classes or races on an even field and signifies the joining of the different influences in the area. The southern ideas of rebellion, resistance to external control, and tradition are all represented by cockfighting in Louisiana, but it also embodies the tradition of regional unity through a shared interest.

The cultural significance of cockfighting may fall second only to the sense of southern masculinity that is represented by the fighting cocks. Maunula's article states the cocks represent the "go-getter" attitude of the southern man, while Price would say it is a

⁷ Joseph L. Price, "Sports and Religion," 147-151.

⁸ Kathryne M. Young, "Masculine Compensation and Masculine Balance: Notes on the Hawaiian Cockfight," *Social Forces* 95, no. 4 (2017): 1344-1360.

representation of southern honor. Though Young is writing about the cockfighting culture of Hawaii, she says that many of the participants see victory in the cock-pit as a way of showing their warrior spirit. Over the years, different southern idioms or sayings have been derived from the cock ring representing both positive and negative male attributes. These sayings such as “strutting like a prize cock” or “showing your (white) feathers”, have been used in southern slang to address aspects of masculinity such as courage and vigor. Craig J. Forsythe reveals these trends as well as commenting on sheriff’s elections that were decided in back room deals between cockers and law personnel to show how ingrained the culture is in southern Louisiana. John Griffin Donlon writes of this relation to masculine identity and how cockers assign these traits to their birds and then themselves through translation. Even though he does not use the term, Donlon is addressing the anthropomorphic tendencies that are associated with cockfighting and how these relate to the masculine identities of the participants. While the writings tend to address cockfighting in a negative light, when viewed from the southern participants perspective, cockfighting becomes an intricate cultural performance that is at the center of their historical and regional identity. The writings of Donlon, Forsythe, Maunula, and Price mention the association between the cockers and their game fowl to some degree, these ties transcend the normal relations between humans and animals and can blur the lines between the two by assigning the traits of one to the other. This allows for a more complete history to be observed, not one that looks at the sport and questions the morality of it, but rather one that observes the connections between the people, animals, times, and region and shows the cultural significance of the battles.

Early Opposition and Tactics

The moral arguments against cockfighting began as a campaign against the lascivious acts that accompanied such sporting events before the U.S. War for Independence. The original

arguments against cockfighting condemned the gambling, drinking, and prostitution that accompanied the blood sport.⁹ These arguments were primarily presented by Quakers and Christian women and were circulated by newspapers in articles throughout the colonies and England. During the U.S. War for Independence, arguments against cockfighting penetrated the military camps of the Continental Army, these arguments centered on preserving the honor and virtue of the soldiers.¹⁰ Following the American Revolution, New York and Pennsylvania were the first states to enact rules that restricted the practices of cockfighting by restricting gambling and alcohol from places that sponsored cockfights. Laws were placed on taverns and inns that specified all events such as "horse racing, cockfighting, and other events that promoted drinking, gambling, and lascivious acts" were prohibited from these types of public establishments.¹¹ These arguments were centered on the moralistic views presented by Christianity and were centered on the human participants actions rather than the animals. These arguments spread throughout the states as varying restrictions were placed on the sport.¹² Having exhausted these moralistic arguments, activists against cockfighting shifted their tactics.

⁹ "London, October 1," *Boston Post-Boy* (Boston, Massachusetts), no. 19, December 26, 1757: [1]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.unco.idm.oclc.org/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A1089C7C672FD2D48%40EANX-108D815674842EF0%402363151-108D8156837D3BF8%400-108D815707BA8400%40London.%2BOctober%2B1>.

¹⁰ "Rules for Preserving Liberty in a Republic," *New-Hampshire Gazette* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire) I, no. 51, February 9, 1779: [1]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.unco.idm.oclc.org/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A103709D225B248A8%40EANX-103F0FBA78673165%402370866-103F0FBA8E591AFE%400-103F0FBB95D6DFE7%40Rules%2Bfor%2BPreserving%2BLiberty%2Bin%2Ba%2BRepublic>.

¹¹ "Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings," *New-York Journal and Patriotic Register* (New York, New York) XLII, no. 73, March 27, 1788: [2]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.unco.idm.oclc.org/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A10DBE0D2462CD750%40EANX-10DE9EA5618AF1D0%402374200-10DE9EA5ACDBE300%401-10DE9EA6AD7C3DC8%40Legislative%2BActs%252FLegal%2BProceedings>.

¹² "Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings," *National Intelligencer* (Washington (DC), District of Columbia), May 11, 1804: [3]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.unco.idm.oclc.org/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A1022477FF1D68B80%40EAN>

Early 20th century arguments against cockfighting began to associate the sport with the slavery of the southern states. Arguments claimed the cockfighting practices of wealthy southerners stemmed from the abundance of time they had because slaves did all of their work.¹³ This new argument utilized the growing disparities between the citizens of northern and southern states in the country. Through these arguments, cockfighting became associated with southern culture and began to imbed itself in southern tradition. During the Civil War, cockfights frequently took place in Confederate camps, this contributed to the view by southern whites that the event represents their roots in southern rebellion and independence.¹⁴ The result of this argument was that many of the northern states enacted laws prohibiting cockfighting by the end of the war, while the practice was common throughout the south.¹⁵ Beginning in 1866, animal rights activists started to make arguments against cockfighting on the moralistic grounds of animal treatment and preventing cruelty towards animals, in this case the gamecock.¹⁶

The fact that the argument against cockfighting evolved to become an issue of animal cruelty shows how the morality of civilization changes and that these changes often lead to the

X-1038C56CA5683221%402380088-1038C56D0A11ED47%402-1038C56DEA523600%40Legislative%2BActs%252FLegal%2BProceedings.

¹³ "From the Montpelier (Vt.) Watchman. Sketches of Virginia Character," *Salem Gazette*(Salem, Massachusetts) XXXV, no. 43, May 29, 1821: [1]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.unco.idm.oclc.org/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A1080E7A4DF561C28%40EANX-10C2A0BEF125A658%402386315-10C2A0BF0F0D1A88%400-10C2A0C065D011A8%40From%2Bthe%2BMontpelier%2B%2528Vt.%2529%2BWatchman.%2BSketches%2Bof%2BVirginia%2BCharacter>.

¹⁴ Doug Simpson, "La. Finally Quits Cockfights, Last State to Ban It," In NBC News, (August 10, 2008), Accessed on November 4, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna26123404>.

¹⁵ "To the Citizens of the United States of America," *Commercial Advertiser* (New York, New York) VI, no. 1687, March 17, 1803: [2]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.unco.idm.oclc.org/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A1044E924036998A0%40EANX-106D239259EE1280%402379667-106D23929F2E3FA7%401-106D2394031DEE68%40To%2Bthe%2BCitizens%2Bof%2Bthe%2BUnited%2BStates%2Bof%2BAmerica>.

¹⁶ Janet M. Davis, "Cockfight Nationalism: Blood Sport and the Moral Politics of American Empire and Nation Building," *American Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (2013): 561-564.

end of practices that some, typically a minority of the population, considerer part of their cultural traditions. This is demonstrated in *Savage Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* by showing how the traditional exotic displays of the past were developed into the zoos we know today because of new understandings of humane treatment.¹⁷ As with many other aspects of history, eventually the views of the majority win and force change onto the minority.

Cockfighting Culture

Cockfighting in Louisiana is more than just a barbaric blood-sport. To the cockers that participate in the activity, it represents a connection to their personal identity, traditional past, and their rich creole culture. This region of Louisiana is known as a mixing pot of cultures and has historically been a place where different cultures have interacted to develop a common culture that is unique to the area. “Today, as in the past, Creole transcends racial boundaries. It connects people to their colonial roots, be they descendants of European settlers, enslaved Africans, or those of mixed heritage, which may include African, French, Spanish, and American Indian influences.”¹⁸ Cockers provide arguments against claims of “backwards practices” and the lack of values as they provide their views on the sport.¹⁹ In the south, and Louisiana in particular, there are strong traditional ties to the Civil War era, and much like southerners at the time, view their fighting-cocks as an extension of their masculinity, prowess, and equality. While animal activists and nonparticipants disregard the cultural and historical significance of cockfighting, cockers and their political supporters maintain that the sport is a family friendly

¹⁷ Rothfels, Nigel and ProQuest (Firm), *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo*, Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

¹⁸ “Creole History and Culture,” National Park Service, (January 9,2018): Accessed on December 8,2020, <https://www.nps.gov/cari/learn/historyculture/creole-history-and-culture.htm#:~:text=Today%2C%20as%20in%20the%20past,Spanish%2C%20and%20American%20Indian%20influences.>

¹⁹ Janet M. Davis, "Cockfight Nationalism: Blood Sport and the Moral Politics of American Empire and Nation Building," 563.

activity that provides participants with an environment to mingle with like-minded persons which is in line with the state's image of being a mixing pot within the country.²⁰

Arguments in favor of cockfighting find their roots in the historical traditions of the south as well as the popularity of the sport throughout western culture and civilization. These arguments are based in a view of nationalism and that cockfighting has been a tradition within the United States that dates back to the founding of the country. These notions of nationalism are then further augmented to notions of regional history and validate the ties of cockfighting to the Revolutionary and Civil Wars.²¹ To the cockers, the sport is not about the blood, gore, and gambling that is often the focus of opposition, but rather it is about the traditional ritual and the display masculine of skill that is associated with training a "prized cock."²²

Cockfighting is also a representation of the mixing of cultures that is a trademark of the state. Cockfighting allows for people of different races, creeds, and backgrounds to be placed on an even field and allows cultural barriers to be circumvented allowing for the blending of these cultures into something that is distinctly creole.²³ This is a tradition of blending cultures in Louisiana that has been recognized as something unique to the area and has allowed different cultures to blend into a rich blended culture that has become known as creole or Cajun. The tradition of blending cultures began after the Civil War when slaves of the south found common ground with poor white farmers and began to form a culture that incorporated the practices and traditions of both backgrounds. To many in the cockfighting community, this blending is

²⁰ Craig J. Forsyth, "A Pecking Disorder," 20.

²¹ Janet M. Davis, "Cockfight Nationalism: Blood Sport and the Moral Politics of American Empire and Nation Building," 552.

²² Janet M. Davis, "Cockfight Nationalism," 553.

²³ Marko Maunula, "Of Chickens and Men: Cockfighting and Equality in the South," *Southern Cultures* 13, no. 4 (2007): 76-79, muse.jhu.edu/article/224065.

considered part of their cultural identity and history and is a central reason as to why they continue to participate.²⁴

Modern Arguments Against Cockfighting

Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo, relates to the battle against cockfighting by showing how humans applied costumes and accentuated specific features of animals, or in the case of Hagenbeck exotic people that were brought to Europe, to suit their entertainment purposes. In cockfighting, cockers cut the cock's comb, the red skin that is on top of the rooster's head, and attach metal gaffs or razors to his leg spurs to make the cocks look more aggressive and lethal. This is very similar to what Hagenbeck did with the Laplanders and "Intuits" by placing the people in a staged environment that did not reflect their actual living habitats.²⁵ This form of physical manipulation is common throughout history and shows how western culture has enforced their will onto those they view as inferior. The exhibitors in both events asserted their will over the exhibits and conformed them to the role they wished them to play.

In much the same sense, the argument is made by cockers that fighting cocks are naturally driven to fight and kill those cocks that encroach on their territory, so then cockfighting is a natural thing. This argument is reflected in the way that people observe animals at a zoo or exhibition and perceive their actions as natural occurring behavior. Even if fighting is a part of game-cock nature, the type of fighting that occurs in the sport is the result of months of training, and is only focusing on one aspect of the rooster. This was the same scenario with the exotic peoples exhibits that were seen as a valid anthropological representation of the people and their cultures. The manipulated environments distorted the overall understanding of the people

²⁴ Marko Maunula, "Of Chickens and Men: Cockfighting and Equality in the South," 81.

²⁵ Rothfels, Nigel and ProQuest (Firm), *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo*, 82-85.

exhibited in the shows. This manipulation is only known to those who have actually observed the subjects in their natural environment, to others, the scene shown is what they conceive as the real image. When game-cocks are in their natural environment they are intolerant of other males, but usually disputes are settled with minimal fighting between the two male roosters who instead puff their feathers and chests in a display of dominance that is known as showing their white feathers. With fighting game-cocks, the fact that the roosters are trained to be more aggressive and are then put in a confined arena contributes greatly to the way they behave and the views of inhumanity.²⁶

Both zoos and cockfighting show how people manipulate the environments and conditions of other living things to create the behaviors they wish for them to exhibit. The fact that zoos have changed so much from the morally questionable exotic peoples exhibits, shows how as people began to better understand the value in the humane treatment of others, practices changed to meet the acceptable standards that society sets forth. This can also be seen in the changes that happened throughout most of western society in the form of animal rights movements and the condemning of the blood sport of cockfighting.

The previous example shows how the arguments by animal rights and advocate groups gain the support of the public and have the power to greatly contribute to the evolution of practices. These views never enact change on their own, but they help draw the support of the public and elected officials. The views of animal cruelty in the cock arena spread throughout the nation from the mid 1800s and by the late 1980s and resulted in 44 states passing laws that made cockfighting one hundred percent illegal. In the early 1990s, there were only five states that still allowed cockfighting, but those few states attracted cockers from across the country.²⁷ In 1993,

²⁶ Craig J. Forsyth, "A Pecking Disorder," 16-18.

²⁷ Marko Maunula, "Of Chickens and Men: Cockfighting and Equality in the South," 76-77.

gamecock fights were still popular among many people, not just southerners. These people would travel hundreds or even thousands of miles to attend legal cockfighting events. Because of this, cockfighting raids became a regular practice in states like North Carolina who bordered states that still had legal fights.²⁸ These situations led to increased opposition from activist groups. By 1996, Kentucky and Nevada had outlawed the practice leaving only New Mexico, Hawaii, and Louisiana as the only states to allow the sport. Hawaii would be the next state to ban the practice in 2003 followed by New Mexico in 2006. The law in New Mexico passed after state politicians saw the signs that Louisiana was about to ban the sport.

The battle against cockfighting in Louisiana was an ongoing conflict from 1998 until 2007 when the state enacted laws against cockfighting. For almost ten years, Louisiana politicians sided with the cockers and defended cockfighting as a part of Louisiana culture and tradition that should be left up to local jurisdictions to decide.²⁹ Beginning in 1998, published articles against cockfighting appeared in news articles, state reports, and scholarly papers.³⁰ These pieces of literature often featured the opinions of both participants and opposition to cockfighting. Descriptions by the opposition centered on the morality and barbarity of the sport such as, “The cruelties of the cocking are too sickening for modern sensibilities,” while the cockers defended their sport with arguments such as, “condemners are hypocrites, the long history of the sport, cockfighters are respectable citizens, it preserves traditional values, and the self-actualization of an animal who was born to fight.”³¹ The arguments from both sides had support from various politicians. As more conservative representatives sided with the cockers

²⁸ "Signs Of The Times," *Appalachian Journal* 20, no. 4 (1993): 336-55 Accessed November 25, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40933550>.

²⁹ Metairie City Business Staff, “Strain Determined to End Cockfighting in La.” & Doug Simpson, “Louisiana Last State Standing on Illegal Cockfighting Circuit.”

³⁰ Forsyth, Craig J. "A Pecking Disorder," 16.

³¹ Forsyth, Craig J. "A Pecking Disorder," 17-18.

and their traditions, some politicians within the state started making arguments that focused on the reputation of the state and removing the stain of “this barbarous act” from the portrayed image of Louisiana.³² The opposition presented legislature aimed at limiting and banning the practice in Louisiana from 1998-2005 to no avail, but the catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina in late August of 2005 reinvigorated the opposition and provided them with the arguments that would finally ban the practice within the state.

On August 31, 2005 Hurricane Katrina made landfall in New Orleans, Louisiana and devastated the Gulf Coast from Lake Charles, Louisiana to Biloxi, Mississippi. The storm devastated the economy of Louisiana by destroying many of its tourist attracting casinos and the city of New Orleans. Because of the devastation, national attention was focused on the Gulf Coast and Louisiana as these areas called for help from the nation. At that time, opposition to cockfighting used the condition of the state to argue against cockfighting on the grounds that the state could not expect to receive national support as long as it protected the “backwoods” behaviors that were practiced throughout the state.³³ This argument was augmented by the fact that in early 2006 State Representative Mike Strain (Republican) presented an argument against cockfighting that focused on the economical impact that the sport had on Louisiana’s poultry business and increased the chance of disease developing among livestock.³⁴

In 2006, the opponents against cockfighting began to see success. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, state politicians against cockfighting were able to get a “phase-out plan” approved that would gradually ban the practice of cockfighting, but the opposition did not feel satisfied by this action.³⁵ Rather, opposition took the approval of this plan as an opening to fight

³² Forsyth, Craig J. "A Pecking Disorder," 18.

³³ Metairie City Business Staff, “Strain Determined to End Cockfighting in La.”

³⁴ Metairie City Business Staff, “Strain Determined to End Cockfighting in La.”

³⁵ Krista Schultz, "Louisiana Legislation Takes Aim at Cockfighting," 35.

for a more immediate ban rather than a “phase-out” method over a couple of years.³⁶ Opposition against cockfighting argued that, “phasing out the practice, rather than immediately making it illegal statewide, will harm the state's image,” maintaining that the majority view was against cockfighting. In 2007, while facing state legislature deadlines, opponents of cockfighting again put forth a bill that would call for the immediate ban of cockfighting practices including raising gamecocks. At this same time, politicians were trying to devise ways to help the state recover from Hurricane Katrina and the two agendas found justifiable overlap.³⁷ The compounding factors of correcting the state’s image and promoting economic growth and success led to a narrow majority favoring the immediate ban of cockfighting and measures against the sport being signed into state law to take effect in 2008.

The Last Days of Cockfighting

As the era of cockfighting in Louisiana came to a close, the practice of cockfighting was still common across the state in 2007 and early 2008. The legal battle against cockfighting in Louisiana had been a long road that was finally coming to a close. Despite the fact that “pro-cockfighting politicians have blocked the animal rights movement for years,” the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina caused some politicians to change their stance on the issue.³⁸ Politicians used the justification that, “Because of the hurricanes, Louisiana relies on money from Washington to rebuild New Orleans and other areas,” and Congress would not likely send billions of dollars in aid to a state that allowed animal blood sports.³⁹ After these arguments

³⁶ CityBusiness, Staff Report, "Animal Welfare Groups Call for Louisiana Cockfighting Ban," *New Orleans CityBusiness* (Mar 21, 2007): 1. <https://unco.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.unco.idm.oclc.org/docview/209587075?accountid=12832>.

³⁷ CityBusiness, Staff Report, "Animal Welfare Groups Call for Louisiana Cockfighting Ban,"

³⁸ Doug Simpson, “Louisiana Last State Standing on Illegal Cockfighting Circuit,” In *Lawrence Journal*, (2007). Accessed on October 20, 2020.

https://www2.ljworld.com/news/2007/apr/10/louisiana_last_state_standing_legal_cockfighting_c/

³⁹ Doug Simpson, “Louisiana Last State Standing on Illegal Cockfighting Circuit,”

prevailed in the State Legislature, cockers in the state prepared for the ban. The month before the law took effect in 2008, there were multiple events hosted in cockfighting arenas throughout the state in preparation of the ban. Many cockers continue to profess that cockfighting is their cultural right and continue to practice the sport through private illegal cock rings.⁴⁰

Conclusion

As Simpson's article shows, the moralistic and economic arguments against cockfighting were able to triumph over arguments of cultural significance and tradition. By observing and analyzing the battle against cockfighting in Louisiana between 1988 and 2008 it becomes clear how public opinions and societal values can lead to the destruction of cultural practices as society progresses. Analysis of the evidence provided, shows how Louisiana's politicians used the attention that the devastation of Hurricane Katrina brought the state to win the legal battle to ban cockfighting after years of failure. This paper revealed that society and opinions of decency and morality have the power to limit the traditional practices of historical cultures by placing legal barriers on activities that are distasteful to the public. This paper underlines a pattern that exists within modern society to destroy the things that the masses do not understand through the lens of cockfighting in Louisiana. Although there had been a legal battle against cockfighting in Louisiana for almost a decade, it was not until national attention was focused on the state and the financial support of the nation was crucial that the argument was able to persuade Louisiana officials to ban the sport.

⁴⁰ Doug Simpson, "La. Finally Quits Cockfights, Last State to Ban It,"

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