

## NEWS

# Two Southern States, Rediscovered at Kluge Center

By Jason Steinhauer

It's a two-hour drive from the western edge of Florida to the Louisiana border. Connected via Interstate 10, the two Southern states each have a distinct history, unique geography and their own particular place in America's popular imagination.

Now, two fellows at the Kluge Center are using the Library of Congress collections to recover lost stories of each state's past. They're each finding evidences of greater cross-cultural interconnectedness than was previously understood and enriching our understandings of each state's identity. Insights from their projects will be presented in back-to-back lectures hosted by the Kluge Center on April 23-24.

Researching the history of Florida in the Geography and Map Division, Michele Navakas, 2014 Kislak fellow and an assistant professor of English at Miami University of Ohio, explored the early cartographic idea of Florida as islands. Long thought to have originated with Europeans, the idea in fact may have resulted from an 18th-century encounter between a colonial agent from South Carolina and indigenous populations living in south Florida. This cartographic vision of Florida came to define not only how we think of the state but also how we perceive the American continent.

Joshua Caffery, the 2014 Alan Lomax fellow in Folklife Studies and fellow of the Center for Louisiana Studies at the University of Louisiana, has explored field recordings and lyrical evidence in the American Folklife Center of a character named Joe Féraille, who appears repeatedly in Louisiana Cajun and Creole music.

Based on evidence in the Library's collections, Caffery believes the Féraille protagonist has his roots as an African deity and is also linked to deities in Brazilian and Cuban music, bringing to light linkages among the cultures of the American South, the Caribbean, South America and Africa.

"People tend to think of Louisiana



Michele Navakas



Joshua Caffery

culture as being an isolated and indigenous cultural arena," Caffery said. "But it's important to show the transnational, trans-Atlantic interconnectedness of the culture. Particularly when considered against what's happening in Haiti and Brazil, these fibers of interconnection are illuminated in a pretty stark way."

For Navakas, her research also illuminates connections that heretofore were not fully acknowledged. "The early maps that depict south Florida as islands end up shaping both European and American maps of the country," she says. "Most people do not consider the strong possibility that this depiction originated in a specific, on-the-ground, native encounter."

The two scholars have uncovered surprising connections between their

projects as well, in addition to the connections unlocked in their distinct research. The two projects were proposed independently and the scholars are working toward separate books and articles. However, being under one roof at the Kluge Center for the past eight months has allowed them to discover commonalities and gain new insights from each other, as well as gain an appreciation for each other's work.

"I think what we're both trying to do is look more closely and in more historical terms," Caffery says. "It's not a demythologization. It's a more nuanced and historical consideration of approaching conditions on the ground, looking at the past, and opening a new window into it."

The two states have, perhaps, never felt closer. ♦

## Schedule

**April 23, 4 p.m.:** "Joe Féraille: Louisiana's Ogun and the Casey Jones of the North Caribbean" with Joshua Caffery, Lomax fellow (LJ 113). Co-hosted by the American Folklife Center.

**April 24, noon:** "The Edge of America: Landscape and National Identity in Early American Florida" with Michele Navakas, Kislak fellow (LJ 113).

More information is available at [www.loc.gov/kluge/news](http://www.loc.gov/kluge/news). Details about the Alan Lomax Fellowship or the Kislak Fellows program are available at [www.loc.gov/kluge/fellowships/fellows.html](http://www.loc.gov/kluge/fellowships/fellows.html).