



# **Beyond Control: The Mississippi River's New Channel to the Gulf of Mexico (America's Third Coast Series)**

*James F. Barnett*

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*Beyond Control* reveals the Mississippi as a waterway of change, unnaturally confined by ever-larger levees and control structures. During the great flood of 1973, the current scoured a hole beneath the main structure near Baton Rouge and enlarged a pre-existing football-field-size crater. That night the Mississippi River nearly changed its course for a shorter and steeper path to the sea. Such a map-changing reconfiguration of the country's largest river would bear national significance as well as disastrous consequences for New Orleans and towns like Morgan City, at the mouth of the Atchafalaya River. Since 1973, the US Army Corps of Engineers Control Complex at Old River has kept the Mississippi from jumping out of its historic channel and plunging through the Atchafalaya Basin to the Gulf of Mexico.

*Beyond Control* traces the history of this phenomenon, beginning with a major channel shift around 3,000 years ago. By the time European colonists began to explore the Lower Mississippi Valley, a unique confluence of waterways had formed where the Red River joined the Mississippi, and the Atchafalaya River flowed out into the Atchafalaya Basin. A series of human alterations to this potentially volatile web of rivers, starting with a bend cutoff in 1831 by Captain Henry Miller Shreve, set the forces in motion for the Mississippi's move into the Atchafalaya Basin.

Told against the backdrop of the Lower Mississippi River's impending diversion, the book's chapters chronicle historic floods, rising flood crests, a changing strategy for flood protection, and competing interests in the management of the Old River outlet. *Beyond Control* is both a history and a close look at an inexorable, living process happening now in the twenty-first century.

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