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Just Outside Charleston

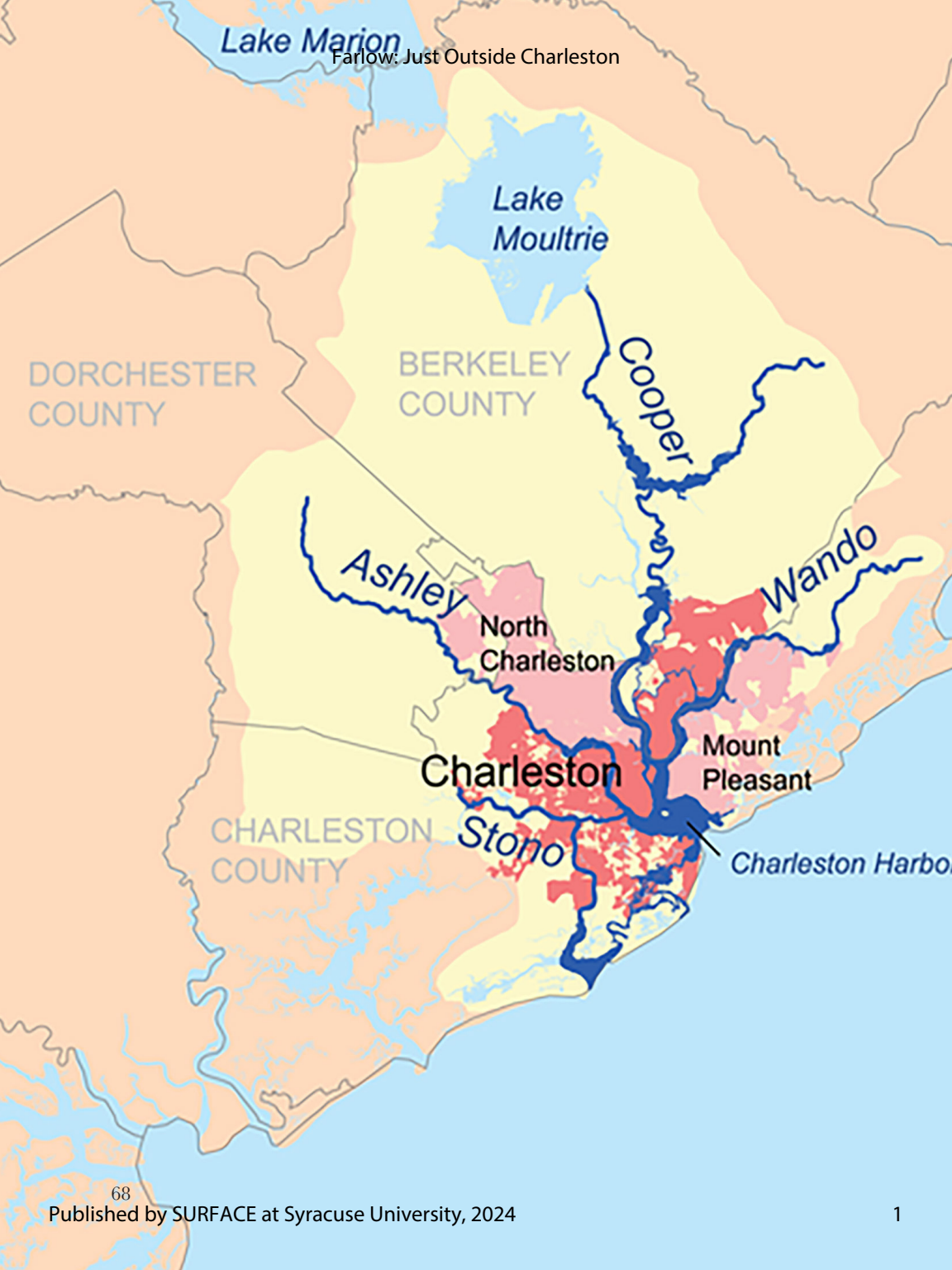
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Gary K. Farlow

*Atlantic
Ocean*

Layout by Michael J. Willacy. Map of the Charleston Harbor watershed showing Cooper River, Wikipedia.

Named after great rivers, important and legendary:
Edisto, Wando, Ashley, Cooper;
these names also identify prison cell blocks,
just 32 miles from Charleston's historic center,
but a world away from those genteel streets.
Instead of cobblestones and antebellum architecture,
there are ugly, utilitarian structures some claim
look like a college, but a college for the damned,
prefab buildings and asphalt instead of
graceful public squares and gardens,
barbed wire instead of Colonial-era iron railing,
guard towers replace the vista of church spires,
golf carts ferry officers on the grounds and
not the historic clop of horse-drawn carriages;
Inmates in stripes instead of brightly clad tourists,
the smell of institutional food assaults the senses,
and not the famous Lowcountry cuisine;
You cannot mistake one for the other,
just as Dorothy knew Oz wasn't Kansas.
There are no quaint inns here,
but it does house overnight guests who,
like at the Hotel California, check in but
seldom, if ever, will they check out;
For this is a man-made purgatory
just 32 miles from the Holy City.