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## The pinnacle of recognition

Among LSU's many accomplished and highly respected faculty, the pinnacle of recognition is the Boyd Professorship. Established in 1953 and named for two brothers, David and Thomas Boyd, who were instrumental in setting LSU on a path toward acclaim, this professorship is unique in that it is conferred on the recipients for life. As of today, nearly 60 years since it was created, only 70 individuals have been named Boyd Professors.

LSU faculty are some of the finest researchers, educators and professionals in their fields. However, the Boyd Professors have set themselves apart, even among these elite academicians, through exceptional scholarship, service, and dedication to their fields, to the university, and to their students.

Those selected to be Boyd Professors come from diverse backgrounds, fields and academic settings. While many are natives of other states and other nations, several are native Louisianans – and some are LSU alumni. Boyd Professors have chosen to be at LSU, though they would be, and often have been, welcomed at even the most respected institutions in the world.

As a tribute to these professors, veteran LSU Communications & University Relations photographer Jim Zietz approached R. F. "Bob" O'Connell, the informal leader of the Boyd Professors, and then-Chancellor Bud Davis in 1992 about creating and maintaining a gallery of portraits of the Baton Rouge campus Boyd Professors.



*Veteran university photographer Jim Zietz with then-Provost William Jenkins at the October 1994 opening*

Zietz's idea was to photograph the current and future recipients of the professorship in their respective milieu, whether that was at a desk surrounded by books, like Lewis P. Simpson, who was a longtime editor of *The Southern Review*, or in front of the Mississippi River, as in the case of James Coleman, whose areas of expertise include deltaic sedimentation and riverine processes. For professors who were deceased, he proposed using the best possible portraits available.

*reception for the Boyd Professor gallery in Thomas Boyd Hall.*

O'Connell and Davis agreed, and in April 1993 – the 40th anniversary of the creation of the Boyd Professorship itself – the chancellor sent official letters to those faculty who would be photographed. The gallery opened in October 1994. Today, this touching and impressive collection of photographs fills a wall in one wing of Thomas Boyd Hall. From the very first Boyd Professors – Eric Voegelin, government; Philip West, chemistry; and T. Harry Williams, history, all appointed on June 1, 1953 – to the very latest to be appointed, all are represented.

To give readers an idea of the breadth and depth of the scholarly pursuits, high energy, and productivity of the Boyd professors, five of these highly accomplished faculty members are profiled below.

### **Meredith Blackwell** **Pathfinder for Life**

Having fun with your career can improve your odds for success, and it has the added advantage of drawing the interest of those around you. Generating that interest and excitement is especially beneficial if you are a teacher because your students learn better and are more likely to succeed themselves. Boyd Professor Meredith Blackwell's career story is one of finding the right path for her interests and then delighting in the journey that path affords, a philosophy of life everyone can embrace, including her students.

Blackwell, a faculty member in the Department of Biological Sciences, is a mycologist – she studies fungi, which, at first blush, may not seem all that attractive. Still, she finds ways to entice students to look at her field, if for only a semester, through some provocative and often humorous means. For example, in a course description from 2006 that was taught by several Boyd Professors, Blackwell's lecture was titled "How to Eat Wood," which was one of the most intriguing titles on the syllabus. Chances are, once those students are introduced to her field, they become hooked as well, especially if they love field work and research.

Her own fascination with biology came about gradually, beginning inauspiciously as a way to extend her time at a favorite vacation spot.

"I am an accidental mycologist," she explained. "Just before my junior year in college, I went deep sea fishing. That sparked my decision to spend all my time on the beach. To do that, encouraged by my father, I had to drop my succession of previous majors (architecture, political science, history, English), and take 12 hours of biology to apply to the Ocean Springs lab, where I eventually spent three summers to try to be a marine biologist so I could live on barrier islands and beaches studying fish."

She succeeded in that goal and received a master's degree in ichthyology. After a few false starts, she got a job in a mycology lab and worked with an expert in that field who encouraged her to return to school for a Ph.D. in botany and, specifically, mycology. The field satisfies her love of mysteries and gives her opportunities to solve some of those questions, such as "How do slime molds survive in the desert?" and "Why do yeasts live in the guts of beetles?" The latter of those, by the way, is the subject of her lecture on how to eat wood.

The research Blackwell does includes culturing fungi, observing their microscopic features, and sequencing their DNA, but, she added, "We get our best ideas for research by observing fungi in their natural habitats, among all the organisms with which they interact."

She frequently includes her students in this field research. They go on month-long trips to such places as Panama, Guatemala, Thailand and Australia, where they collect enough specimens to keep them busy for a year. Blackwell feels fortunate to be able to give students who get hooked on the research opportunities in her lab and to present their work at professional meetings, and several of those students have continued into graduate studies for their Ph.D.s or have gone on to medical school. Her success in research and teaching has also kept her work funded and allowed her to feel complete academic freedom during her more than 30 years on the faculty at LSU.



*Meredith Blackwell, biological sciences/planted pathology, was named a Boyd Professor in 1997.*

*Jim Zietz/University Relations*

Prior to being on the faculty, however, Blackwell already had a long history at the university. Her father was on the boxing team at LSU in the mid-1930s and remained a fan of all LSU athletics, so the family often attended football games on campus. Some of Blackwell's earliest LSU memories are of being a student at LSU Lab School, when she was in third and fourth grades. At the time, their classes were in Peabody Hall, and the children ate lunch in a dining room on the second floor of Foster Hall, above what is now the Natural Science Museum.

*Photo Gallery: LSU Boyd Professors*

"When we were finished eating," she recalled, "we would get a running start and slide across the long room. After school we could roller skate in the arcade, which had the smoothest concrete imaginable."

The family moved to Lafayette, La., but her parents returned to Baton Rouge after she had left home when her father accepted a position to teach education at LSU.

Blackwell herself returned to Baton Rouge and LSU in 1981.

"After a bit of a late start in an academic career, I was happy to leave my first job to come to LSU, where I could do more research," she recollected. "After the official interview, I spent the night with my parents, who lived in Baton Rouge. The department had actually made the decision to hire me before I left town. But I left Baton Rouge early the next morning and, with delayed flights, arrived home about midnight to answer the phone. It was my father who gave me the good news because the department could not find me to make the offer – \$18,000 a year without tenure. I had just received tenure at my other school a few days before the LSU interview and was already making the \$18,000, but even with the salary cut and having to start over for tenure, I never considered not taking the LSU job. It is a decision that paid off many times."

Then, in September 1997, Blackwell was selected as a Boyd Professor. She was working in a year-long appointment as a program director with the National Science Foundation, or NSF, in Arlington, Va., and recalls being awakened by a phone call from Peter Rabideau, the dean of her college at the time, early on a Saturday morning. In keeping with her unique style, she celebrated by walking to a nearby pancake house and having a waffle. She also remembers how grateful she was for the honor – and for the salary bump it provided. As a single parent, she often struggled to make ends meet, and the appointment allowed her to feel financially secure for the first time in her life.

That gratitude, along with her positive view of life and her delightful sense of humor, have certainly helped Blackwell along the path she has chosen. Beyond following her own path, however, she has shown others—her daughter, her students, and her colleagues – how to find their own way in the world with joy and brio.

### **J. Gerald Kennedy**

#### **Putting His "Towering Intellect" to Words**

Whether he is researching his next book, appearing as an expert commentator in a documentary film, presenting a collaborative effort to the LSU Board of Supervisors, or preparing to lead students on a summer trip to Paris, Jerry Kennedy always comes off as calm, cool and collected. While he juggles at least half a dozen projects at a time, he manages to keep his composure and wry sense of humor. The depth and variety of these projects would drive a lesser person to distraction, but in the hands of this highly productive and capable professor, everyone involved can rest assured that the end product will be one worthy of acclaim.

Kennedy was named a Boyd Professor in March 2011. Prior to becoming one of the most recently appointed Boyds, he was the William A. Read Professor of English, a title that is among the highest designated positions at LSU. Beyond professorial titles, Kennedy has also been recognized with other honors. He has won two of the university's highest awards for faculty: the LSU Foundation Distinguished Faculty Award (1993) and the LSU Distinguished Research Master Award (1999). Moreover, he was selected in April 2012 to receive the first-ever Southeastern Conference Faculty Achievement Award.

Beyond the university, like all of the Boyd Professors, Kennedy has garnered national and international recognition in his field. As one of the world's leading scholars of 19th and 20th century literature, he has edited a number of works, such as "The Life of Black Hawk," "The Portable Edgar Allan Poe" and "A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe." He has received several prestigious grants in support of work, most notably a Guggenheim Fellowship – of that honor, Kennedy remarked, "It was an out-of-body experience. It was better than winning the lottery!"



*J. Gerald Kennedy, English, was named a Boyd Professor in 2011.*

*Jim Zietz/University Relations*



His latest book, "Poe and the Remapping of Antebellum Print Culture," is just out from LSU Press. Others are currently in the works, including one that he has envisioned for years, "Strange Nation: Cultural Conflict and U.S. Literary Nationalism, 1820-1850," through Oxford University Press. Upcoming edited works are the first three volumes of the multi-volume "The Letters of Ernest Hemingway," and volume five of "The American Novel to 1870," with co-editor Leland S. Person, which is part of the 12-volume "Oxford History of the Novel in English."

Kennedy has also appeared as an expert commentator in several films, including "Paris: The Luminous Years," award-winning director Perry Miller Adato's 2010 film that explores the city's influential impact on art and culture from about 1890 to 1930. Yet another film project, "The Murder of Edgar Allan Poe," is in pre-production for PBS.

Just recently, yet another project has staked a claim on his time and expertise. Working with others at LSU and across the nation on an ambitious effort to digitize classic texts, Kennedy pitched the group's ideas to the LSU Board of Supervisors in early September 2012. The end product of this effort will allow anyone with access to the Internet to read materials from a variety of formats, ranging from newspapers preserved from past centuries to classic American novels.

In addition to his many professional projects, Kennedy is firmly committed to the university community, his department and, above all, his students. He led the Department of English as its chair from 1995 to 1998 and is one of the most popular teachers in the college. The three-part harmony of exceptional service to his field, to the university, and to his students epitomizes the spirit of the Boyd Professorship.

### **R. F. O'Connell**

#### **The Quiet Voice that Gets Attention**

Soft-spoken with a beguiling Irish lilt in his voice, R. F. "Bob" O'Connell would much prefer to concentrate on his research than to attend to the administrative side of academics, but he has a knack for getting people to follow him. Whether leading the Faculty Senate, as he has in the past, or organizing activities for the Boyd Professors, he manages to bring order to these faculty groups that are known for their independence. To play on a rather clichéd expression, he has a talent for herding cats.

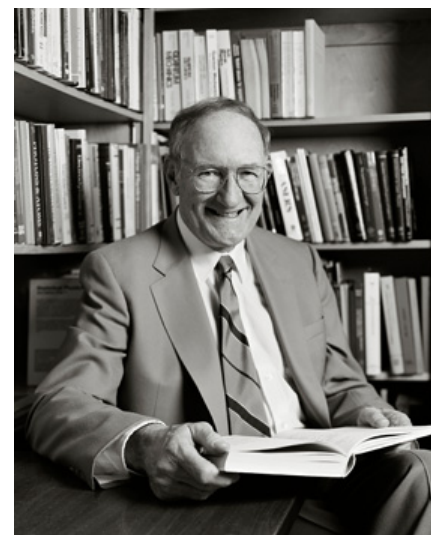
This talent may derive in part from the complexity of his chosen field: O'Connell's research is in theoretical physics, and he works with both general relativity and quantum mechanics. His past work in general relativity has recently garnered renewed attention, and he is currently busy both presenting elements of that research and producing new work that embraces frontier problems in quantum statistical mechanics and electrodynamics. In turn, his theoretical work in analyzing nano-systems using quantum equations feeds into the larger scientific community, with applications in a number of fields and solutions to a variety of problems in physics as a whole.

"My goal is to keep my research at a high level," he explained. "And so far, that's going well."

For several years, he has won funding from NSF to continue his research, an extraordinary feat in and of itself, considering the tough competition for such awards. In addition to his NSF funding, the stipend he receives from his Boyd Professorship enables him to have flexibility in areas that are not budgeted in his larger federal grants.

His success in winning research grants comes naturally after a lifetime of high academic achievement and professional experiences. O'Connell received his undergraduate degree from the National University of Ireland in 1953, when he also received the J. J. Larmor Prize in physics. He received a Ph.D. from Notre Dame in 1962 and a D.Sc. in 1975 from the National University of Ireland. Between receiving his degrees, he also worked four years as a telecommunications engineer, and afterward, he worked at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies and IBM (Ireland) before joining the faculty at LSU in 1964. Besides the recognition O'Connell has received nationally and internationally for his work, he has also received the Distinguished Research Master award from LSU (1975), and he has been a Boyd Professor since 1986.

Throughout his career, O'Connell has maintained a high profile among his peers, serving as a visiting scientist at such prestigious institutions as Oak Ridge National Laboratory; Lawrence Livermore Laboratory; Cambridge University; Oxford University; University of London; and University of Paris, Orsay. He also was invited to be a visiting scientist many times at the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies and the Max Planck Institute for Quantum



*Robert F. O'Connell, physics, was named a Boyd Professor in 1986.*

*Jim Zietz/University Relations*

**Photo Gallery: LSU Boyd Professors**

Optics in Munich, Germany, and the University of Ulm, Germany. In addition to his work at these institutions, he has also served as a board member for the journal *Physical Review A* and is currently on the advisory panel for *Journal of Physics A*, having served in that capacity since 2006. He has also been a Fellow of the American Physical Society since 1969.

While he relishes his many activities in theoretical physics, he recognizes that talent does not necessarily equal inclination in other areas. He served as the president of the LSU Faculty Senate in 1986, a role that convinced him that administration is not his calling. After nearly 50 years at LSU, however, he willingly uses his talent for organization to keep the Boyd Professors on track, serving as their de facto coordinator. His calm, quiet demeanor suits him well for the challenge of bringing together this group of exceptionally gifted, brilliant and busy people.

### **Jesse Walker**

#### **Yankee Doodle Renaissance Man**

Born on the Fourth of July, Harley Jesse Walker, Boyd Professor Emeritus in the Department of Geography and Anthropology, has all the spark and verve that his birth date implies. A member of the LSU Alumni Association's "21 Club," an affectionate reference to the year he was born, Walker is still active in his field at age 91, though not quite as active as this Renaissance man has been in the past.

A native of Michigan, Walker grew up in Colorado and California. In 1942, while he was attending the University of California, Berkeley, he joined the Naval Flight Program in response to the beginning of World War I and became part of that university's team of Flying Golden Bears I. He served with the U.S. Marine Corps as a transport pilot in the South Pacific between 1943 and 1945. He then returned to the university to complete his undergraduate and master's studies and later came to LSU for his Ph.D. because he wanted to work with Richard Russell and Fred Kniffen.

A quick tour of Walker's office and lab in the Howe-Russell-Kniffen Geoscience Complex reveals a lifetime of academic pursuit. Binders filled with nearly 100,000 slides from research sites around the world and technical papers gleaned from that research line the walls of his office, and his lab contains shelves full of film cylinders, field notes and reprints from his Arctic expeditions. A photo mosaic of the deltaic region in the Arctic, where he conducted research for many years, occupies prime real estate on the wall above his workstation.

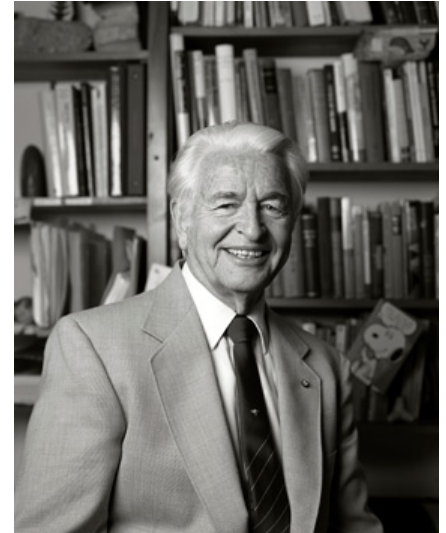
Long before climate change and melting ice at the top of the world were big news, Walker was documenting changes in the coastal geomorphology of the region. A founding editor of the journal *Polar Geography and Geology*, he continues to keep abreast of the latest research in the field. While the Arctic has staked its claim on much of his time in the profession, he has traveled extensively around the world, working in North and South America, Asia and Europe to study, document and promote coastal areas.

Amidst all of his travel and research, he still found time during the 1960s to chair his department at LSU. While chair, the department tripled its faculty and quadrupled its budget. Only an enticing sabbatical as liaison scientist with the Office of Naval Research in London could lure him away temporarily, and in the late 1960s, he left for Europe with his family for 15 months. When he returned to campus in late 1969, he encountered a bit of culture shock.

"Before we left, women on campus all wore dresses, and alcohol was forbidden," he said. "After I got back, I walked across the street to the Union to get my haircut and was surprised to see young women wearing shorts and a sign on the outside wall of the Student Union that read 'beer license applied for.' What a difference just a few months can make!"

His department at LSU was also home to some very special colleagues, particularly Fred Kniffen and Walker's mentor Richard Russell. Another of Walker's early influences at LSU was Cecil "Pete" Taylor, who was dean of the College of Arts & Sciences in 1960 when Walker first arrived and who became chancellor in 1965. Some of Walker's fondest memories of his early days at LSU are centered on his friendship with these men who helped shape his career.

Despite having officially retired in 1983, Walker continues his research and is still producing both volunteered and invited papers based on his work and presenting lectures at conferences and universities worldwide. He also continues to receive professional honors. The International Geographical Union presented him with the *Laureat d'honneur* in 2004, and in 2008, he was the recipient of the Royal



*Harley Jesse Walker, geography & anthropology, was named a Boyd Professor in 1977.*

*Jim Zietz/University Relations*

Geographical Society's Patron's Medal, one of the two most prestigious awards given by the society. This gold medal approved by the Queen of England has been awarded to such notables as Sir Edmund Hillary and Robert Peary, among others.

Throughout his long life, Walker has maintained his curiosity about the world around him and continues to explore, record and document whatever and wherever that curiosity takes him. Writer, photographer, researcher, teacher – he truly defines the modern Renaissance man and brings as much honor to the Boyd Professorship as it was intended to bring to him.

### **Isiah Warner Mentorship for Life**

When Isiah Warner was growing up in rural Bunkie, La., he had some help from his teachers, friends and family who served as mentors. Coming from a family in which no one around him had graduated from high school, let alone college, he needed this mentoring. However, he primarily credits his mother, grandmother, father and parish priest for their influence during his formative years.

When he received his Ph.D. in chemistry from the University of Washington in 1977, he was determined to pay his own mentoring forward to others who needed encouragement and direction. During his time as a professor, that is exactly what he has done, and his altruistic vision has led to one of the most successful mentoring programs in the U.S.

Warner always had an interest in science, even when he was very young. He relates that his first chemistry experiment – at 2-years old – taught him that tasting a chemical is not the best idea. Electricity in Bunkie was often unreliable, and Warner's mother and grandmother kept kerosene lanterns in a cabinet for those times when the lights went out. Always observant, the young Warner was fascinated by the lanterns, and one day pulled one out and tasted its contents. The experience nearly killed him but taught him respect for the materials with which he later came to work. It took 10 years before his mother felt safe giving him the chemistry set that he often begged to have – and even then, she trusted him and his brother only if they used the set outside the house.

That love for science continued in high school and made a distinct impression on his teachers. His school did not offer physics, a course Warner felt he needed to get into a good university. Therefore, his chemistry teacher, who also had a physics background, offered to teach the class if he could find four other people who wanted to take the course. Unfortunately, Warner's classmates thought he was nuts to want more science, so he didn't take physics until he was an undergraduate at Southern University.

Also during his high school years, Warner met a family that would have a lasting impact on his life. He often visited the high school in Dequincy, La., where his future father-in-law was the principal and his future mother-in-law taught chemistry. They saw the potential in the teenager and took time to encourage him. Their daughter, Della Blount, became his greatest supporter, and Warner credits her for being his greatest mentor for life. The two have been married for 45 years and have three grown sons who are professionals in their own right.

Before Warner even arrived at Southern University as a freshman, his high school English teacher took an interest in him and recommended him for a summer institute in chemistry at Southern, an experience that both set him on his career path and provided him with a template for helping students like himself. Today, Warner leads the LA-STEM, or Louisiana Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math, Research Scholars Program that introduces 25 students each year to intensive study in their chosen fields. This program, which includes a summer bridge opportunity for incoming students, has been in place at LSU for nearly 10 years and is funded by NSF, the Louisiana Board of Regents and LSU. With a 92 percent, six-year graduation rate – 93 percent among minority students – the program is one of the most successful of its kind in the nation.

This program is in addition to Warner's work as a Howard Hughes Medical Institute, or HHMI, professor, a prestigious designation that allows him to collaborate with HHMI faculty across the U.S. to improve science education. As a member, he has the opportunity to recommend students for summer institutes at other universities, including MIT and Harvard. In both of these programs, students are conducting real research with their professors.

"They aren't just washing the glassware," Warner quipped.



*Isiah Warner, chemistry, was named a Boyd Professor in 2000.*

*Jim Zietz/University Relations*

Former students still keep in touch with Warner.

“They’re like my children,” he explained. “Some of my students tell me I care as much about them as I do about the science. I guess that’s true.”

His love for his students does propel and inform his work as vice chancellor for strategic initiatives, but Warner is also the consummate scientific researcher. His most recent work in nano-materials has several applications in medicine, and for his lifetime body of research in analytical chemistry, Warner was recently selected as the 2013 recipient of the American Chemical Society’s Award in Analytical Chemistry, a prestigious honor awarded by the world’s largest scientific society and one of the world’s leading sources of authoritative scientific information.

Warner arrived at LSU in 1992 (“along with Hurricane Andrew,” he joked) and was appointed to his Boyd Professorship in 2000. His love for his students is palpable, and his commitment to education, science and service is obvious. The honors, awards and titles he has achieved pale, however, in comparison to the heart of this amazing mentor.

\*This story was originally featured in the Winter 2012 Edition of the LSU Alumni Magazine. To read more from past issues, visit [http://www.lsu.edu/alumni.org/?page\\_id=759](http://www.lsu.edu/alumni.org/?page_id=759).

### **Mathematician James Oxley Named LSU’s Newest Boyd Professor**

*Photo Gallery: LSU Boyd Professors*

(<http://www.lsu.edu/ur/ocur/lsunews/MediaCenter/News/2012/12/item55843.html>)

James Oxley, international expert on an intricate mathematical theory, which is used by electrical engineers to help computer networks run better, on Dec. 7 was unanimously awarded the rank of Boyd Professor by the LSU Board of Supervisors.

Oxley, a member of the LSU math faculty for more than 30 years, was awarded the professorship, the university system’s highest rank, for a career marked by outstanding research, teaching and creative achievement, particularly in the field of matroid theory. This complex area of mathematics merges geometry, graph theory and algebra, and points the way to solving everyday problems such as speeding up the Internet, monitoring product quality, implementing GPS technology, and constructing online web services for auctions and selling advertisements.

The author of nearly 140 peer-reviewed academic articles, Oxley, 59, last year published the second edition of “Matroid Theory,” which is widely regarded as the premier reference manual for the specialized mathematical field.

Oxley, a native of Australia, earned his doctoral degree from Oxford University and joined the LSU math faculty in 1982, where he was named the William E. “Bud” Davis Alumni Professor of Mathematics in 1999. He also was recognized in April 2000 as an LSU Distinguished Research Master of Engineering, Science and Technology. Over his career, Oxley also has been the recipient of prestigious visiting fellowships by the University of Oxford and the University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

A member of the editorial boards of several premier international mathematical journals, his research has been funded for more than three decades by a series of grants from NSF and the National Security Agency, a continuous record of federal support considered rare and impressive in the field of mathematics.

At LSU, Oxley has been cited for his “exemplary service” to the Baton Rouge campus, including the development of multiple advanced math courses, chairing 16 Ph.D. dissertations and serving on an additional 12 Ph.D. committees.

Oxley is the LSU System’s 70th Boyd Professor, the 45th from the LSU main campus, and the fourth in mathematics, joining Richard Anderson (1959); Pasquale Porcelli (1965) and Jimmie Lawson (1999) as LSU faculty members awarded the distinction.

To be named a Boyd Professor, a faculty member must have attained national and international distinction and be nominated by campus administrators. Nominations are reviewed by the LSU System Boyd Professor Review Committee, which seeks confidential evaluations from distinguished scholars in the candidate’s field of expertise. Once endorsed by the review committee, the nomination is forward to the LSU System

President and Board of Supervisors for approval.

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