The Marketable Swamp People:

The Effects of Commodification on Louisiana's Cajun Culture

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CHAPTER 1-INTRODUCTION

The remnants of experience, that still live in the warmth of tradition, in the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral, have been displaced under the pressure of a fundamentally historical sensibility. We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left.[1] *–Pierre Nora*

Two years ago, I took a class at Mount Holyoke entitled Memory, Identity, and Politics in Latin America. The class was a seminar setting and with only seven women in the class, it was a very active participant atmosphere. The goal of the class was to look at approaches to memory studies in Latin America and how memory connects to politics and identity. We looked at how indigenous people, slaves and African descendants, women, political prisoners, the poor and the dominant classes constructed their identities based on fluid and interactive visions of their pasts. We began the class with the most acclaimed names in cultural identity memory studies-Pierre Nora. In his work *"Between*

[1]Nora, Pierre. "Between History and Memory: Les Lieux de Mémoire" 26 *Representations* (1989): p. 1.

History and Memory: Les Lieux de Mémoire" Nora recognizes two types of memory: milieux de mémoire and lieux de mémoire.

The milieux de mémoire memory is seen as 'living.' Milieux de mémoire is a living memory where day-to-day actions represent a clear symbolic action or tradition that gets passed down over generations. It usually is referred to as "real environments of memory".[2] Although this type of memory has symbolic meaning to an outsider observing, to the one living in the milieux de mémoire, it is simply the environment of daily life and having to rally behind an ethnic identity does not mean much to them. As a class we saw this type of memory recorded in Thomas Abercrombie's *Pathways of Memory and Power: Ethnography and History Among an Andean People*. In this piece, Abercrombie observes the K'ulta, an ethnic group located in Bolivia that has retained a specific culture identity apart from the larger Bolivian national identity. Abercrombie spent time to understand the K'ulta's culture traditions and what these traditions, in the form of festivals, meant for the larger community constantly reenacting them. He observed that their way of life is drenched in traditions and meaning; however, the individuals participating in the events or simply living their life within the community do not recognize

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[2] Nora, "Between History and Memory:" P. 7.

their actions as symbolic pieces of their past, but as a way to pass on their culture to ensure their survival into the future.[3]

The other form of memory, the lieux de mémoire, is a type of memory that only employs a specific set of memories. These memories can range from objects to archival documents, as long as they hold some sort of symbolic meaning to the person remembering. We argued in class that these memories were created because history made groups forget their memories (milieux de mémoire) by asserting a collective memory or national history. This type of memory appears in such forms of society as: Archive memory (documents and papers), duty-memory (obligated to remember who we are and the past), distance and memory (a person's origins or their society's ¨birth¨ story). Although something may appear to represent a milieux de mémoire, if it no longer holds some sort of symbolic meaning then it loses its status as a memory preserver. Usually lieux de mémoire appears in modern societies as a form of remembering

[3] Abercrombie, Thomas, *Pathways of Memory and Power: Ethnography and History Among an Andean People.* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

a past, rallying behind an identity to distinguish itself from others, or in the form of historical sites such as museums.[4]

As we argued about what was a 'true' memory and what was just a historically construed idea that eventually was molded, over time, into a memory, I could not help but consider all the deaths of societies that had long assured the transmission and conservation of collectively remembered values, whether through churches or schools, the family or the state; the end of ideologies that prepared a smooth passage from the past to the future or that had indicated what the future should keep from the past. I began to contemplate what was history and what was this "real memory" that Nora said was in such high demand, yet almost extinct. I began to understand the stark realization of the difference between real memory, social and un-violated, but also retained in the so-called primitive or archaic societies, and history, which is how our modern societies propel themselves with change and organize and conceptualize the past.

On the one hand, one can find an integrated, dictatorial, memory that is unself-conscious, commanding, all powerful, a memory without a past that ceaselessly reinvents traditions, linking the history of its

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[4] Nora, "Between History and Memory:" P. 7-24

ancestors to the undifferentiated times of heroes, origins, and myths, as we saw in Abercrombie's research. On the other hand, there is progressive and civilized memory, which is nothing more than sifted and sorted historical traces. I felt that the gulf between the two was deepening in modern times as the belief grew that, in order to be 'civilized' and modern, a society must have the capacity and even a duty to change and forget, but never remember.

But my pessimistic view was not completely true, for I began to realize that there are as many memories as there are groups and that memory is blind to all but the group it binds. One such group that kept floating in my thoughts was my own cultural group: Cajun.

I grew up in Southeast Texas, only about three hours from the Louisiana border and the hometown of the rest of my mom's family. My grandparents were from the bayous of Louisiana and despite my mom growing up in Connecticut, her first language was Cajun French. My dad traveled internationally for most of my early childhood years, which left only my mom and I at home, resulting in my fluent comprehension of Cajun French.

While sitting in my Memory of Latin American class, I reflected upon my first language and culture, and realized that there was, in fact, only

one word designated for both the lived history and the intellectual operation that renders it intelligible. This made me begin to question why there was not an additionally, distinguishable word or phrase that separates these two profoundly different words in English. Nora argues that if we were able to live within a memory, we would not have needed to consecrate milieux de mémoire in its name. Each gesture down to the most everyday, would be experienced as the ritual repetition of a timeless practice in a primordial identification of act and meaning. Could my family's culture be such a civilization that lives inside the lieux de mémoire? And if so, what contributing factors caused this particular cultural heritage to hold on to such everyday rituals? I decided to write my final paper about Cajun Identity and Memory.

My original research paper took oral history accounts from three generations of family members living in the New Orleans and Baton Rouge area of Louisiana. These oral history accounts represented milieux de mémoire as they were recorded with such everyday themes like food, chores, traditions, and language. Additionally, I spent my spring break traveling around the state visiting museums, tourist attractions, and state monuments, which were the lieux de mémoire components. My final paper reflected major themes that could be found in almost any culture,

such as religious holidays, traditional food dishes, and superstitions.[5] These themes were compared to the state's representation of the culture through such mediums as museum exhibits and state monuments. The end result found that such lieux de mémoire components were altered and changed from the original milieux de mémoire that my family spoke of. For example, state monuments celebrated fictional Cajun heroes, while the heroes my family spoke of were absent in all documented sources. This contradiction allowed the state to mold and shape the minority Cajun population in a way that was acceptable to the state, yet also could be presented as an exotic, indigenous people; thus turning such traditions as alligator hunting and Mardi Gras into profitable tourist markets.

Over the following summer, the research paper still haunted me. I realized that there was a vast array of topics that I did not have a chance to explore with just one semester of research. I continued to collect oral histories from family members when we gathered, not quite sure of what I would do with this wide-ranging information. As a senior at Mount

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[5] Most superstitions were a mix of religion and agrarian work. One such superstition is when it is sunny and raining, all Cajuns say the devil is beating his wife. Another one is were all farmers do not work on Good Friday because it is said that if you do, you will find nothing but Jesus's hair, blood and teeth in the soil. Obviously the former superstition is to allow for a day of rest, while the latter one is just a way to explain an unusual natural phenomenon.

Holyoke, I chose to begin an Independent Study on Cajun Culture and Identity. During this fall semester I gathered academic research on everything from hurricane reports to studies by anthropologists on similar themes I had originally identified as a sophomore. This new research departed from my original research topic in that I began to move away from such thing as, state monuments and museums, to concentrate on the traditional themes, but from an outsider/insider perspective. How did outsiders perceive the Cajun culture and how had their opinions changed through time? If/How did these outside opinions reflect themselves within the Cajun community?

I realized that I was in a unique position. Although I grew up speaking Cajun French, and living in the Cajun culture and the traditions that surround it, I was not born in nor have I ever lived in Louisiana. I had the fundamental milieux de mémoire memories, but was studying such memories from a lieux de mémoire perspective. From this unique perspective I noticed that much of the academic research was based on cemented or published historical "facts" yet many of the same events and traditions I was reading about, were practiced or performed differently or for different reasons, than what the historic documentation I was reading claimed. I began to see a pattern of changes in Cajun traditions after specific historic events or stories were cemented into official history; that

once something was published or written down, it trumped generations of Cajun oral recordings of traditions, myths, or superstitions. I began to understand that the Cajun culture and people, who as a “people of memory”, were found to be of little use for historians until their deeper engagement by the modern state of Louisiana at the beginning of the 20th century.

Methodology

Many different methods were used to gather the information documented in this paper. I took over a hundred hours of oral testimony from three generations on the Cajun side of my family. I then took these testimonies and compared them to the various research sources, such as over fifty academic sources, a variety of media articles, cookbooks and weather channel documentaries, in order to explore the effects that cemented, documented history has on the memories and practice of the Cajun culture. The following were all considered while gathering research and interpreting it.

Interviews:

The oral history path was chosen because of the original course, Memory, Identity, and Politics in Latin America. This class revealed the importance of oral history in cultures that either did not use writing as a

way to record their history and beliefs, or were not accepted into mainstream history recording. The class demonstrated that, while the historical academic perspective may allow a reader to analyze a culture in explaining why certain beliefs are held, oral history emphasizes the more powerful importance of the past because it is more readily recognizable; oral histories link the past to the future providing a template for understanding where one came from, but also where they are going.

In addition to Nora and Abercrombie, I used Oscar Lewis, an American anthropologist, who for his time tried to give a voice to people rarely heard and provided the reader with an insider view of a lifestyle common in many marginal groups in society, ignored by or inaccessible to most middle-class readers. I also used Joanne Rappaport, an anthropologist at Georgetown University, who concentrates on the politics of memory in Latin American cultures that do not use script as a prominent feature to create historical tradition. Both of these authors target a culture/people who are not in the mainstream view, a culture that is either isolated geographically or ignored.

Both these authors concentrated on oral history accounts because there was little published in mainstream sources to sustain their research. I also faced this problem. Because of both geographic and

culture isolation there has not been a great deal of publication on the Cajun culture, and what little attention they have received, is usually by a complete cultural outsider. As a result of this, I chose to interview three generations of my family, all of whom grew up in Louisiana, speaking Cajun French, and identifying as Cajun.

Interviews serve the purpose of understanding how generations view their identity compared to others. As seen in situations of immigration, first generation families will view their heritage, culture, and country of origin differently from their grandchildren or the third generation. This occurs as each generation slowly separates itself from the origin.[6] In the case of Cajun identity, some families were still in their state or place of origin, but there was a location change from rural farm life to a more urban community in East Baton Rouge Parish. Other families had moved from their original state of origin but still had family located in Louisiana and strong family attachments. The purpose of the interviews was to gather the information from family members to explore the central question that was asked at the start of each interview, "What does it mean to be a Cajun?"

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[6] Michael Hanchard, "Black Memory versus State Memory: Notes toward a Method," *Small Axe 26* (2008): 45-62.

All the interviews were done with family members, which has its advantages. Family members were chosen because of the close connection I had with them and the prior knowledge I had of each person's past. In this regard, it helped the interview travel down a certain path and allowed the ones interviewed to feel comfortable because they knew the interviewer. Additionally, having prior knowledge of family member's pasts, I was able to pursue and direct specific questions related to this known past. [7]

Every individual interviewed was either from Baton Rouge or the surrounding parishes (counties). While Baton Rouge is the state capital, it is still a rural farming community. Baton Rouge is thought to be the "birthplace of Cajuns" as this is where the original Cajun communities settled. Today, one can find Cajuns across the state, the country, in swamplands and in reality TV shows, but this expansion did not occur on

[7] If further research were undertaken on the topic, individuals outside of the family unit would be interviewed to see what it means to be a Cajun for them. It would be more structured rather than open conversation, meaning a set of questions would be followed more rather than the open dialogue that occurred in the family interviews. As well, to gather a greater context of what Cajun culture means, outsiders within Louisiana as out of state individuals would be interviewed to gain a greater perspective on how individuals not exposed to the Cajun culture view themselves and how those individuals view Cajun identity.

a mass scale until the 1980's, therefore the oral history accounts are taken from individuals who grew up in this isolated, 'pure', Cajun culture.

Academic Research:

A variety of different sources were used as academic or historical research in addition to my independent, oral history accounts. Newspapers, cookbooks, other documented oral histories, scholarly research, weather magazines, and a CNBC special documentary from the 1955 Acadian Bicentennial Celebration. *The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* was the most useful academic source, a quarterly publication, where historians published on different subjects from varying points of view, yet all are related to the State of Louisiana. Because Louisiana is such a cultural diverse state, this journal provided a variety of cultural studies that put me in a unique position to take my insider perspective of the Cajun culture and compare and contrast it with an outsider perspective. This journal prides itself on preserving the historic aspects of Louisiana, but again this put me in the position of comparing my oral history accounts, my "memories," with their published, preserved histories. I found that history and memory are far from being synonymous.

Memory is life, borne by living societies, not by preserved historic

publications. Memories remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. Documented history is the events that have been offcialized or commodified, either by state and federal governments or by corporations and private interests. Commodified events have long been lifted from the Cajun culture and used as a marketing strategy. Many academics argue that cultural commodification can stimulate a revival of outside interest in traditional cultural forms, yet, few consider whether cultures are able to continually distinguish across generations between what is 'sacred,' and therefore not open to commodification for cultural preservation, and what is 'profane,' hence open to commodification.[8] What effect does this commodification have on the Cajun culture?

I argue that the commodified events are the only events that outside populations come to envision in the Cajun culture. In addition, I challenge the academic argument "…the more involved in tourism do local residents become, the less genuine do their cultural practices become and hence the less desirable they are as tourist objects."[9] I argue

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[8] Shepard, Richard. "Commodification, Culture, and Tourism." *Tourist Studies*. 2.183 (2002): 184.
[9] Shepard, Richard. "Commodification, Culture, and Tourism." *Tourist Studies*. 2.183 (2002): 186.

that for Cajun culture, commodification's greatest sin has not been making "them more like us," and in the process less desirable, as Cajun characteristics are still in high demand, but in its creation of a fictitious culture that Cajuns' themselves will one day come to believe is an accurate representation of themselves. Furthermore, when (grand)parents generations are no longer able to reinforce the communal traditions, will the Cajun population be able to recognize itself compared to the commodified economy based cultural performances?

Contrary to Shepard and other tourism studies academics, Cajun commodification was not pushed forward or uniformly approved by the entire community,[10] but was instigated by outside forces such as the tourist capital of Louisiana-New Orleans, the state and federal government, and aristocratic non-Cajun community members who sought to benefit in the surrounding area. As Cajun fever spread, the minimal involvement of Cajun community members, either through Mom and Pop restaurants or performing the Cajun stereotype in swamp tours, this only increased external commodfication as more and more corporations cashed in by selling Cajun cultural characteristics. As commodification grew, the tourists and others who had experienced "commodified Cajun

[10] Shepard. "Commodification…" 190

culture" began to consume and monetarily support the new, if fictitious culture over "real" Cajun culture, with Cajuns themselves having to choose between their own authentic culture and a commodified, yet profitable version of it.

The organization of this work is broken into five chapters. Each chapter will include a combination of the oral history testimonies that I collected, as well as academic sources, such as scholarly journals. Each chapter considers a specific, "representation of" Cajun characteristics and demonstrates how change has occurred, as seen through oral history accounts compared to specific commodified aspects dominant today. Chapter 2 describes Cajun history and geography in he Louisiana bayous. Chapter 3 shows the conflictive history and images of the 'primitive' Cajun Language and use. Chapter 4 uses foodways as a window on the world of Cajun commodification. Chapter 5 employs Mardi Gras festive traditions to similar ends.

CHAPTER 2- CAJUN HISTORY;

DISPLACED AND REINVENTED FROM ACADIA TO THE BAYOU

The 700,000 Cajuns who today live in South/Southwestern Louisiana[11] are an ethnic group whose ancestors are tied to French Canadians. In 1604, French-speaking Catholics from across France established the colony in now Nova Scotia, Canada. The colony of Acadia was established sixteen years before the Mayflower landed at Plymouth Rock. [12]

Acadia was the original American home of Cajun ancestors. It was a colony of New France that included parts of eastern Quebec, the Maritime Provinces, and modern-day Maine.[13] The colony was established by Pierre du Guast, Sieur de Monts, a French solider who fought on the Protestant side during the French Wars of religion (1562-1598.) King Henry IV, rewarded de Monts for his service with a trade monopoly in

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[11] It is not known how many Cajuns have dispersed out of Louisiana. The 1990 US Census was the last report to document Cajun percentages in the US and the census only tracked Cajuns in the state of Louisiana. http://www.census.gov/prod/cen1990/cp3/cp-3-2.pdf. p. 635-648.

[12] Herbert, Tim. "Acadian-Cajun Genealogy and History." *Cajuns in the 18th Century*. N.p., 2009. Web. <http://www.acadian-cajun.com/hiscaj2b.htm>.

[13] Williamson, William. *This History of the State of Maine.* Vol. 2. Glazer Master & Co. District Court of Maine,1832. p. 27

New France (Canada). In 1604, de Monts sailed to Acadia with seventy-nine men where he established the first capital of Acadia on Saint Croix Island. The following year the settlement was moved across the Bay of Fundy to Port Royal after a difficult winter on the islands and numerous deaths from scurvy.[14]

In 1607 the colony received bad news. King Henry had revoked Sieur de Monts royal fur monopoly, citing insufficient income to justify supplying the colony further. Thus recalled, the last of the Acadians left Port Royal in August 1607. Their allies, the native Mi'kmaq nation, kept careful watch over their possessions. When the former Lieutenant Governor, Jean de Biencourt de Poutrincourt, returned in 1610, he found Port Royal just as it had been left.[15]

Once the French settlers returned to Acadia, the land had became hostile territory. There were everyday battles with the English, Scottish, and Dutch over possession of the territory. The French government and its Acadian subjects were able to defend themselves and defeat the Scottish, Dutch, and English armed forces, but it was the New English

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[14] Wallace, Stewart, ed., "Pierre du Gua or Guast, Sieur de Monts", in *The Encyclopedia of Canada*, Vol. IV, Toronto: University Associates of Canada. 1948. p. 331.
[15] Faragher, John Mack. *A Great and Noble Scheme*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 2005. p. 17–19

armies that proved to be the strongest, continuing threat. Over the next seventy-four years, there were six colonial wars, in which New England tried to capture Acadia, starting with King William's War in 1689.

Colonial Wars: Prelude to Expulsion

King William's War was the first of six colonial wars fought between New France and New England. King William's War coincided with the Nine Years' War taking place on European soil. As a result, neither France nor England sent soldiers to aide in the battle in North America. The end result of King William's War was that New France and the Wabanaki Confederacy, a Native American confederacy located in the Quebec area, defeated New England and established the Acadian border as the Kennebec River in southern Maine.[16]

But the Acadian victory did not last. From 1702-1713, Queen Anne's war raged in the North America between New England and New France. Multiple attacks were targeted against Quebec, but never successfully reached, although the Acadian capital, Port Royal, was taken in 1710. The Treaty of Utrecht ended the war in 1713. It resulted in the French cession of claims to the territories of the Hudson Bay, Acadia and Newfoundland

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[16] Griffiths, E. *From Migrant to Acadian*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press. 2005. p.61

to Britain. On June 23, 1713, the Acadian residents were given one year to declare allegiance to Britain or they would be forced to leave the region.[17]

The Acadians refused to swear unconditional oaths of allegiance to the British crown resulting in the French and Indian War erupting in 1754. British Lieuntenant-Colonel Monkton and his men captured Fort Beausejour, which was in the heart of Acadian territory, on June 4, 1755. With this victory, Monkton began the expulsion of the Acadians with the Bay of Fundy Campaign.[18]

During the next five months, one in three Acadian men were imprisoned in either Fort Cumberland (former Fort Beausejour) or Fort Lawrence, which was a British fort built for their imprisonment.

Le Grand Dérangement

This Le Grand Dérangement, or the Great Expulsion, was a cruel even that forced separation of families that had to flee with only the possessions they could carry. Half of the total Acadian population was

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[17] Samuel Adams, David. *The Border Wars of New England.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 2009. p. 132-147.
[18] Herbert, Tim. "Acadian-Cajun Genealogy and History." *Cajuns in the 18th Century*. N.p., 2009. Web. <http://www.acadian-cajun.com/hiscaj2b.htm>.

killed and over 11,500 Acadians were deported back to France.[19]

The Expulsion of the Acadians was one of many military operations during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The French had carried out their own imperialistic expulsion in Newfoundland in 1697 when they occupied the entire English portion of Newfoundland and burned every English settlement and exiled all the surviving English inhabitants.[20] Additionally, the Africans and Native Americans were slaughtered during Euro-American colonization of the Caribbean throughout the sixteen-century. Similar to the Cajuns, these ethnic groups were established essentially for survival and self-defense purposes against Euro-Americans.[21] Finally, these military operations were not just imperialistic measures, but also occurred within European nation states such as the Highland Clearances in Scotland between 1762 and 1886.[22]

The Acadian survivors were expelled to other British colonies along

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[19] Bernard, Shane. *Cajuns and Their Acadian Ancestors.* Jackson: University of Mississippi. 2008. p. 75-76.
[20] Reid, John G. "1686-1720 Imperial Intrusions" In Phillip Buckner and John Reid (eds.) *The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1994. p. 8
[21] Bateman, Rebecca B. "Africans And Indians: A Comparative Study Of The Black Carib And Black Seminole." Ethnohistory 37.1 (1990): 1. America: History & Life. Web. 8 Mar. 2012.

[22] Johnson, John. "French Attitude Toward the Acadians." *Du Grand Derangment a la Deportations."* Biblio-Ebook. p. 221.

the U.S. eastern seaboard, mostly in Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut.[23] In general, they refused to stay where they were sent; a large number migrated to the colonial port cities, where they gathered in isolated, impoverished French-speaking Catholic neighborhoods.[24]

In 1784, the King of Spain allowed the exiled Acadians to settle in South Louisiana, through the Treat of Paris between French to Spanish rule in 1763. Spain provided ships in 1785 to carry some 1,600 Acadians to Louisiana, partly to be a buffer of Catholic subjects against Anglo-American expansion.[25] Most Acadians followed the coastline that led to New Orleans yet the Acadians received a hostile greeting from the urban settlers in New Orleans. As a result, they continued west into unsettled territory.[26]

Cultural icon, Joseph Broussard, the Cajun equivalent of George

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[23] Herbert, Tim. "Acadian-Cajun Genealogy and History." *Cajuns in the 18th Century*. N.p., 2009. Web. <http://www.acadian-cajun.com/hiscaj2b.htm>.
[24] Brasseaux, Carl. *Acadiana: Louisiana's Historic Cajun Country,* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. 2011. p. 34
[25] Texas State Historical Association. *Cajun Texans.* Dallas: University of North Texas. 1996.<http://www.texasalmanac.com/topics/culture/cajun-texans>
[26] Bernard, Shane. *The Cajuns; Americanization of a People.* Jackson: University of Mississippi Press. 2010. p 18.

Washington in Patriot American eyes, led the first 200 Acadians into present day Baton Rouge. They settled along the unsettled bayous of south central and southwestern Louisiana where in isolation they could practice their own beliefs and customs.[27]

Swamp Land Act

The first congressional legislature to impact Cajun culture was passed in 1849, the first Swamp Land Act. This act was limited to the state of Louisiana, with two other Swamp Land Acts enacted in 1850 and 1860 applicable to twelve other states around the United States. The original purpose of the act was to enable Louisiana to reclaim their wetlands with the construction of levees and drains. Louisiana was supposed to carry out a program of reclamation that would not only lessen destruction caused by extensive flooding, but also eliminate mosquito-breeding swamps throughout the western part of the state.[28]

Yet the state of Louisiana was not so much interested in the swamplands of Baton Rouge and other Western Parishes, as in using this grant for work on the booming port of New Orleans. By 1840, New

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[27] Bernard, Shane. *The Cajuns.* p. 25
[28] National Research Council. *Wetlands: Characteristics and Boundaries*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 1995. p. 44.

Orleans was the fourth largest city in the United States, with population increasing rapidly.[29] The state government was more worried about the over one hundred thousand person population of the port area than the swampland population inhabited by the Cajuns. The grant went to building levees surrounding New Orleans and gathering dirt and marshes to build up the city, so that it might reach sea level.[30]

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[29] Colten, Craig E. "Reintroducing Nature To The City." *Environmental History* 7.2 (2002): p. 226.

[30] National Research Council. "3 WETLAND DEFINITIONS: HISTORY AND SCIENTIFIC BASIS." *Wetlands: Characteristics and Boundaries*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 1995. 1. Print. 45 Much of the city is located below sea level because New Orleans has been built up on marshy swampland via the Swamp Land Act. Today, many of the 1900 neighborhoods are below sea level due to the city slowly sinking back into the marsh. "Through the Eye of Katrina: The Past as Prologue?" *Journal of American History,* 94 (December 2007), p. 693–876.

Figure 1: New Orleans Levee System 2010
Source: Zdon, Jennifer. *New York Times*, August 2010. New Orleans Levee System

This concentration on New Orleans left the western part of the state, including Baton Rouge, the Cajun Capital, with over nine million acres of undisturbed swamplands, a proven benefit decades down the road, but for the time being a dangerous hazard. Some of the largest hurricanes in recorded history would strike here during the first half of the twentieth century.[31]

[31] Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center. *Wetlands of the United States.* US Department of the Interior/US Geological Survey. 3, August 2006.

Living with Hurricanes

This isolation led to an economy of subsistence farming. Because of the rising and falling level of the swamps, urban development was limited, resulting in smaller communities with fewer buildings. Because of the lack of desire and need to travel to the western swamps, Cajuns, from the time of their arrival in 1775 up until the early 20th century, were remarkable isolated from other cultural influences, beyond limited contact with migrating Native American tribes.[32] This allowed for 'pure' preservation of cultural traditions and beliefs that could have easily been erased by a more powerful mainstream culture. In addition, this isolated environment allowed Cajuns to create their own beliefs, origin myths and historical background from each another and from their new homelands; the swamps.

Much of Cajun identity comes from the swamplands, the isolated geography of their original homeland. Everything, from the strong sense of community that was created as a survival strategy, to agrarian traditions that go back a century, to the unique foods, such as boiled crawfish, fried alligator, and smoked nutria has its origins there. Yet the

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[32] Sexton, Rocky. "French, Cajun, Creole, Houma: A Primer On Francophone Louisiana." *Journal Of American Ethnic History* 25.2/3 (2006): 326-327.

Cajun's isolated existence was eventually impacted by a surge of visitors beginning at the turn of the 20th century that would forever change the way Cajuns saw themselves and how the outside world viewed them and their culture.

Over the first half of the 20th century, automobiles became the preferred means of transportation. Americans of all sorts could now travel the geographic extent of our immense nation. Beginning in 1939 and completed in 1957, the East/West Interstate 10 was built through Louisiana.[33] For the first time since settlement in Louisiana, the Cajuns were brought into with contact from the outside, urban world.

When both Louisiana natives and non-natives 'discovered' the Cajun population in Southern Louisiana, Cajuns were seen as exotic, yet white, in segregated racial terms. This categorizes Cajuns as a unique ethnic group because, although they were seen as backward, they were white and therefore they could be 'civilized.' Many elite individuals and state legislators took it upon themselves to civilize this disadvantaged, white ethnic group through a variety of work programs. These programs were offered to Cajuns if they left their isolated geographic location and went

[33] Eventually Interstate 10 connected California to Florida, further encouraging popular movements.

to live in the large cities like New Orleans, yet very few Cajuns ever left the bayous to take up the elite offer in New Orleans. This further deepened a sense of community and close ties amongst those living in the bayous, and the related sense of rejection and backwardness by the state's urban population.[34]

As a result of the Cajun population remaining geographically isolated, stereotypes and mythical stories were created about these seemingly mysterious swamp inhabitants. Just how exotic and peculiar a people was suggested by a famous song during this time period entitled "Amos Moses, "about a one-armed Cajun…who lived by himself in the swamp and hunted alligators for a living."[35] The song further reiterates the dangerousness of the swamplands with the lyrics,

> *…well the sheriff got wind that Amos was in the swamp tracking alligator skins, so he snuck in the swamp, gonna get that boy, but he never came out again…well I wonder where the Louisiana sheriff went to? Well you can so get lost in the Louisiana Bayou!* [36]

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[34] McKinney, Louise. *New Orleans: A Cultural History.* New York. Oxford University Press, 2006.
[35] Jerry Reed. "Amos Moses." *Georgia Sunshine.* BGM, 1970. MP3
[36] Jerry Reed. "Amos Moses."

The song epitomizes how some in the outside world viewed Cajuns, as unlawful people, yet fully not civilized enough to be considered citizens, who lived in the wild, swamplands of Western Louisiana. The alligator factor further affirms the uncivilized and raw methods needed to survive in the swamp. While the "outsider" sheriff demonstrates that civilized populations could not survive the swamplands and should not dare to enter, as they might be eaten by an alligator or other wild beasts, they might run into primitive individuals like Cajun Amos or they might never find their way out; simply put, they should not wander into the Cajun swamplands.

Figure 2: Cajun stereotyped by outside community as wild swamp dweller

Source: Lewis, Henry Clay. The Swamp Doctor's Adventures.1858. Call number PS22. L36 S9 1858 (Rare Book Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.)

Such stereotypes continued to appear throughout the mid 20th century, especially in 1957 when a Category 4 Hurricane, Audrey, devastated the Southwestern Louisiana coast. Some 425 people died in just one overwhelmingly Cajun Parish (county), with 154 of those deaths

being infants and children.[37] Various newspaper articles attributed this vast death toll to the immaturity of the Cajun population. "A number of residents of the area speak French, but not English and quite probably had not heard the storm was coming."[38] Such quotes assumed an extreme isolation from the modern world and portrayed the Cajuns as uncivilized for not knowing English and not having the proper modern conveniences, such as television, radio, or weather reports, to know when such a natural disaster is coming. As if only the outside population's means of access to information were the only possible route for the survival of the primitive swamp dwellers.

Earlier, natural ways to predict weather, such as the ones the Cajuns, Native Americans, and many other marginalized ethnic groups used, were dismissed as prehistoric and useless, compared to the new scientific, modern techniques. Newspaper articles tended to ignore the fact that ever since 1849 the state government had chosen to protect its important economic port from hurricanes and high winds with the protection of levees, instead of the stated goals of the grant from the Swamp Land Act.

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[37] Tisdale, John. "Observation Reporting as Oral History: How Journalists Interpreted the Death and Destruction of Hurricane Audrey." *The Oral History Review.* 27.2 (1957): p. 48.
[38] Tisdale. "Observation…." p. 57.

The bayous of the Cajun homelands were left unprotected from the high rainfall and destructive winds that characterize hurricanes. With Louisiana the second most affected state by hurricanes, following Florida,[39] there was no doubt that the Cajun population would be affected by these natural goliaths.

Hurricane Audrey was an important event for the Cajun culture because it was the first hurricane to affect basically only the Cajun homeland. Therefore, in an era of increasingly modern technologies, such as live reporting news teams, and daily newspaper publications, Cajuns were presented not only to the rest of the state of Louisiana but also to the entire nation, as an uniquely backward, uncivilized ethnic population, incapable of preparing their families or communities for a natural disaster in a state where the rest of its citizens were better prepared.[40]

In a journal article that compiled newspaper articles from throughout the nation about Hurricane Audrey, author John Tisdale demonstrates the effect that these mainstream, "official histories" had on

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[39] Blake, Eric, and Edward Rappaport. United States. National Weather Service. *US Mainland Hurricanes: 1851-2004*. Miami: NOAA/NWS/ Tropical Prediction Center, 2011. <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/paststate.shtml>.

[40] Hackler, MB. *Culture After Hurricanes: The Rhetoric and Reinvention of the Gulf Coast*. Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2010. p. 138.

the Cajun population. Tisdale noted that, despite publishing dozens of newspaper articles, few if any bothered to speak to or interview members of the devastated Cajun community. "The significant event received saturation coverage in newspapers, where none exists in the oral history archives."[41] Journalists wanted only to accumulate the statistical data, while ignoring the effect the hurricane had on the Cajun culture and population. This allowed journalists to construct and create their own situations and stories about the devastated community.

Because of the mass destruction of Hurricane Audrey, most of the swamplands were completely under ten or twenty feet of water. This prevented journalists from reaching the worst affected areas by land. Therefore, reporters could only report based on what they could observe from the air. Reporters would hire single-engine plane pilots to fly them low over the most devastated area, or they would catch rides with tugboat captains in the New Orleans port. The inability to reach the area to interview the Cajun residents further supports the argument that these media publications provided essentially the point of view and beliefs of the journalist about what their readers would find of interest.[42]

[41] Tisdale. "Observation…" p. 45.
[42] Tisdale. "Observation… " p. 54.

Figure 3: Hurricane Audrey 1957, Southwest Louisiana
Source: "Natural Disasters." *Encyclopedia of Death and Dying. 2012.*

Although television news and other electronic media newsgathering technologies were in their infancies, the visual impact of these reports replaced the need for descriptive adjectives and adverbs. Such images showing destroyed Cajun communities and impoverished families after the hurricane, reflected a type of domestic, material Third World to the viewers, without giving the Cajun individuals a chance to speak or explain

their cultural differences in their ideal, now inundated homesteads. [43] These images were usually of shanty homes or of young girls with babes in their arms, with no parents, or elders, in sight. In almost all the photographs of persons, their clothes were out of date, faded, and most were without shoes. These pictures eagerly depicted a simple, primal civilization.

A similar theme among all the journalists' reports depicted the flooded Cajun communities as an exotic, underdeveloped territory. In the words of one journalist "…I was fresh out of the army in Korea and had never seen anything there (Cameron, a Cajun Parish hardest hit by Hurricane Audrey) that was comparable."[44]

Once the flood waters subsided, some journalists tried to speak with members of the affected community. Most found that the community members would not speak to them, nor even acknowledge their presence. As one journalist noted, " A jean-clad woman holding a babe in her arms stood alone. When spoken to, she appeared not to hear. Mostly she just stared."[45] The author does not say why the woman did not respond, suggesting either she was ignorant or that she did not know English, "as a

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[43] Tisdale. "Observation..." p. 47.
[44]Tisdale. "Observation…" p. 55.
[45] Tisdale. "Observation..." p. 56.

number of the residents in the area speak French, not English."[46] This overarching issue of the Cajun community's inability to speak to the journalists was portrayed as a competency issue.

There was one author who took seriously the Cajun culture and the relationship the Cajun community had with one another and with nature. Dick Weber, a journalist for *The Sunday Enterprise*, based in Beaumont Texas, was one of the very few journalists to note the cultural characteristics that the Cajun community exhibited; one such characteristics was the strong sense of community. He noted, "While the sun beats down on the dusty, trash-heaped street, they (Cajun community) work quietly, pulling out things they can use, sweeping the mud to the doorway…."[47] For the first time, this sense of community in Cajun areas was given a name, printed in the newspapers following Hurricane Audrey.

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[46] Tisdale. "Observation…" p. 57.
[47] Weber, Dick. "Tenacious Cameron Residents Rebuild Shattered Town with Faith in Future," *The Sunday Enterprise,* [Beaumont] 7 July 1957.

Figure 4: Coups de Mains
Source: "Hurricane Audrey Damage in Louisiana." *These Americans.* 2011.

"Coups de Mains" was printed in reports after journalists visited the destroyed swamplands of Southwest LA. The term "Coups de Mains" is French wording that could be translated as community joining together to help one another. Following the Hurricane's destruction, this Coups de Mains could be seen by neighbors helping neighbors. Although the newspapers congratulated themselves on noticing this unique characteristic, the Cajun culture had embraced this idea for almost a century. Since the Cajuns were the first settled population in the bayous,

they learned to have to depend on one another, as one no single family could survive the traitorous swamplands.

The origin of the Coups de Mains is unknown, but the Cajun community believes that it has always existed, coming with their ancestors from Acadia. This pact allows for every individual inside the community to receive free communal help from their neighbors in times of turmoil. If a family member were sick, the community would join together and, despite extreme poverty, donate meals. If a home were destroyed by fire or lightening, the community would gather building supplies and together build a new home. The only expectation of those receiving help was that as part of the community, you would return the favor or the support when another one of your community neighbors was in trouble.[48]

English Only American Culture in the French Quarter State

As early as the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, English-speaking Americans had begun to worry about the "integrity" of their nation and began passing laws and regulations privileging English; thus beginning, perhaps, the first legislative "English-only" movement in the United

[48] Oral History Account-James Ray Chutz. Baton Rouge, Louisiana, April 2010.

States.

Throughout the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century US state governments passed multiple laws forbidding public instruction in any language but English. In 1868, the Indian Peace Commission recommended English-only schooling for the Native Americans. In 1878–79, the California constitution was rewritten: "All laws of the State of California, and all official writings, and the executive, legislative, and judicial proceedings shall be conducted, preserved, and published in no other than the English language." In the late 1880s, Wisconsin and Illinois passed English-only instruction laws for their public schools. In 1896, under the Republic of Hawaii government, English became the primary medium of public schooling for Hawaiian children.[49]

In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt made clear the US Federal Government's stance on bi or multilingualism, "We have room for but one language in this country, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American

[49] Baron, Dennis. *The English Only Movement.* London: Yale University Press. 1999.
P.247.

nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house."[50] Not long after Theodore Roosevelt's famous speech, the Cajuns felt the might of US federal regulation regarding their native language and culture.

In 1916, the Louisiana State Board of Education suppressed the use of Cajun French in Louisiana's schools, with the passage of legislation Act 27 that stated that all classrooms had to be taught in English and not the language the student population was most fluent in. Several years later, the Louisiana State constitution of 1921, established English as the official state language, thereby discouraging any outside participation in any other language besides English. [51]

Discovered Wilderness

Cajun isolation was further shattered with the "discovery" of the Cajun population and culture when automobiles became widely available. Roads, highways, and bridges were constructed during the mid-20th century. Construction began on Interstate 10 in 1939 and was completed in 1957. IH 10 ran straight through the swampland and marshes that the Cajuns consider their homeland. Formerly separate cultures and ethnic

[50] Bernard, Shane. *The Cajuns.* p. 54
[51] Natsis, James L. "Legislation and Language: The Politics of Speaking French in
Louisiana." *The French Review*. 73.2. 1999. p. 326.

groups, in particular, wealthier, Anglo groups, 'discovered' the Cajun population and came to see them as a white, yet backwards and primitive people. Cajun culture needed to be civilized in this view and this began to heavily stigmatize expressions of their distinctive traditional culture.

The larger society's view of Cajuns began to change during the middle of the 20th century as rapid growth occurred across the United States during the baby boom years. With the rapidly increasing population, came growing urban sprawl. Rural farmland began to disappear and elements of the urban elite began to embrace the previously backward, Cajun, rural community because they were seen as a unique, traditional culture amidst an industrial, urban society. Cajuns began to use their isolated geographic location to their own benefit, by marketing tourist attractions, like alligator tours.

An alligator to a Cajun is like the buffalo is to Native Americans; both animals are seen as fundamental historical mascots that allowed for settlements to survive. Alligators can be spotted everywhere around their homesteads. They can be boiled, fried, sautéed, made into sausage, gumbo or jambalaya, making sure that not an ounce of meat is wasted. And by the late twentieth century, they became a way for Cajuns to show the outside population a glimmer of their world.

Alligator tours can be found throughout the Louisiana coastline, bring in 60-70 million dollars a year, and are gaining in popularity annually.[52] This fascination with the "uncivilized swamplands" does not have an exact date of origin, but the outdoor wonders have been drawing visitors for decades, if not centuries-the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone National Park, and Niagara Falls- are classic American tourism magnets. But, environmental tourism was enjoying an early surge in popularity, as urban, modern society advanced at mid-century. The first swamp tour company was founded in 1979 by Annie Miller, aka "Alligator Annie," in Terrebone Parish. Currently there are over fifty alligator tour businesses located in just the Baton Rouge area.[53] These tours are offered everywhere, with some 'companies' having boats that can fit twenty, with others only able to hold four. But no matter how large they are, they are usually located next to a Cajun restaurant, where souvenirs, such as alligator heads or snakes in a jar, are sold. Depending on the size of the company, multiple daily tours a day can be made into the swampland wilderness.

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[52] Louisiana Alligator Advisory Council. "Alligator mississippiensis." 2008 Louisiana Fur Advisory Council and Alligator Advisory Council. http://alligatorfur.com/alligator/alligator.htm
[53] Wiley, Eric. "Wilderness Theatre: Environmental Tourism and Cajun Swamp Tours." *The Drama Review*. 46.3. (2002). p. 126.

But despite all of the added bonuses of the tour, such as authentic food and the Cajun history lessons that come along with the tours, the real attraction is the swamps. People from around the world are fascinated with the archaic, “survival of the fittest” atmosphere that they imagine the swamp represents.

Tour operators understand what the tourists are hoping to experience and have learned not only how to frame the wetlands experience, but also establish, through advertisements, visitors expectations. These advertisements most often take the form of brochures, and are displayed and distributed in high traffic tourist areas like airports, hotels, and tourists centers throughout the state of Louisiana. The brochure displays a complex set of representations of swamplands, the most recurrent themes of which in order of prominence, are wilderness, natural purity, scenic beauty and danger.[54]

The “wilderness theme” defines the swamplands in fundamental opposition to civilization. One persistent claim of the brochures is “natural purity,” giving the exaggerated impression that tourists may actually be among the first to enter the secluded, backwater environment.

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[54] Wiley, Eric. “Wilderness Theatre…” p. 118-120

With phrasing such as “truly pristine,”[55] “untamed wilderness”[56] and “primitive splendor”[57] brochures seek to awaken expectations of a place beyond the reach of human influence. The implication is that tourists, who have already left their home, can completely leave all that is familiar, all that is known, all that is modernity

[55] Munson’s Swamp Tours, Schriever, LA.
[56] Cajun Encounters, Slidell, LA.
[57] Louisiana Tour Company. Crown, Point, LA

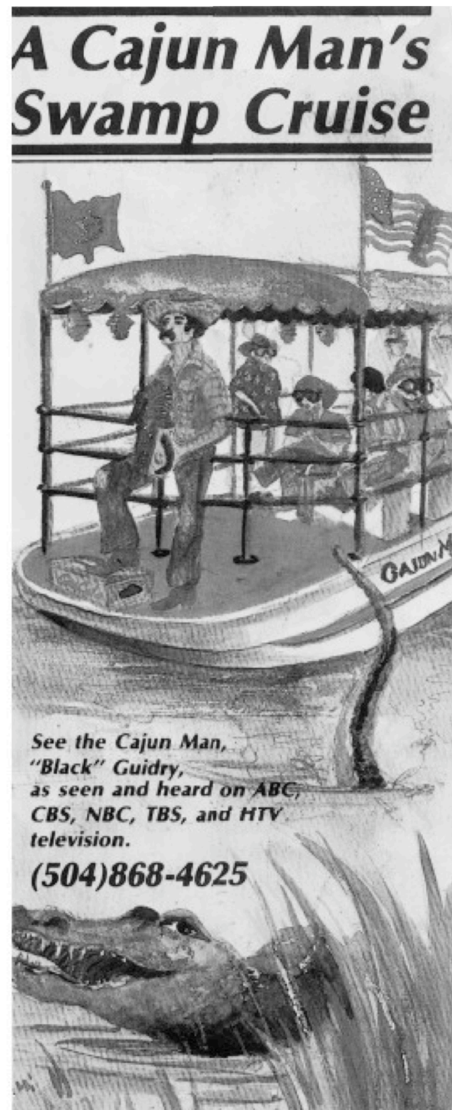

Figure 5: Tour Brochures from early 1980's
Source: Wiley, Eric. "Wilderness Theatre: Environmental Tourism and Cajun Swamp Tours." *The Drama Review*. 46.3. 2002.

Tourists overwhelmingly prefer the swamp tours that present nature through the hermeneutic of Cajun culture. Tourists are enticed not

by your average swamp, but by "Cajun Swamps." "Alligator Annie, "The Cajun Man," and "Cajun Jack" are famous figures who interpret the wetlands through the medium of Cajun folk culture.[58] This intervening personification is the key to transforming the wetlands themselves into a cultural experience. Swamp tourism in other states, such as in Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida, lacking anything comparable to a Cajun community, have not enjoyed the booming business of the Louisiana tours, although the Seminole-themes, now open in Florida, show some of the same promise. [59]

During the course of a tour, the guides integrate the swamps into their performance of Cajun culture. Their regional accent and figures of speech sustain this Cajunization. The tour boat itself is a symbol of everything that is Cajun, complete with such cultural markings as snake skins nailed to the canopy supporters, laminated alligator heads prominently displayed; in one tour a box for tips posted Cajun bumper stickers, and folksy names for the boats, such as "Gumbo" and "gator Bait."[60]

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[58] Wiley, Eric. "Wilderness Theatre…" p. 223
[59] Wiley. "Wilderness Theatre…" p. 125
[60] Wiley. "Wilderness Theatre…" p. 126

The swamp tours highlight the "swamp Cajun" whose lifestyle allegedly results from a long interrelationship with the swamp environment. The brochures present Cajun guides chiefly as swamp dwellers with little knowledge of the outside world; one invites visitors to meet "Cajuns who have never lived in a town."[61]

"Native" people frequently have been put on display for tourists interested in their "exoticism," and the Cajun guides operate partially in this tradition. Due to their French origins, however, Cajun guides are spared some of the more racist and colonial overtones associated with the display of non-Europeans "natives." The Cajun swamp dweller is framed really more as a Tarzan figure, a European who has become semi-wild due to an unfortunate overexposure to wilderness and native cultures.[62]

Celebrations and Council Committees

1955 served as the bicentennial year of the Acadian expulsion from Nova Scotia. Louisiana politicians and state legislators teamed up with the American Broadcasting Company to document a nearly yearlong event commemorating the event, the Acadian Bicentennial Celebration.

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[61] Alligator Annie and Son's Alligator Tours. Houma, LA.
[62] Wiley, Eric. "Wilderness Theatre…" p. 127

The celebration was broadcasted nationwide, yet ironically it also created a completely new and different stereotype.[63]

The bicentennial celebration marketed a 'rebranded' Cajun culture as sophisticated, virtually Parisian with prestigious European roots. This event tried to change the perspective of the outside community, away from seeing Cajuns as backward and uncivilized. However, the celebration of Cajun culture involved few or no Cajuns, not really changing their identity or perception of self.[64]

In 1968, near the end of a decade of much greater cultural acceptance, the state created the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana or CODOFIL. This state agency was created to "do any and all things necessary to accomplish the development, utilization, and preservation of the French language as found in Louisiana for the cultural, economic and touristic benefit of the state."[65]

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[63] Bernard, Shane K. "Acadian Pride, Anglo-Conformism: The Acadian Bicentennial Celebration Of 1955." *Louisiana History* 41.2 (2000): p. 161-174.
[64] Bernard. *The Cajuns.* p. 62.
[65] Dunn, Joseph. *Conseil ppour le development de fracais en Louisiane.* Lafayette: Louisiana State Government. 2010. <http://www.codofil.org/english/index.html>

Resource Rich Cajuns: The Oil Boom and Beyond

The 1970's was a period in which the major industrial countries of the world, particularly the United States, faced substantial shortages, both perceived and real, of petroleum. The two deepest crises of this period were the 1973 oil crisis, caused by the Arab oil embargo of OPEC, and the 1979 energy crisis caused by the Iranian Revolution. Petroleum production in the United States peaked, as did world oil production per capita. The major industrial centers of the world were forced to contend with escalating prices amid a smaller petroleum supply.[66]

A booming oil industry fueled an expansion in the Louisiana state economy during the 1970s, which ended in the 1980s.The oil crash occurred in two stages; one from 1981 to 1983, with a steady comeback until the crash in 1986. Faced with declining world oil demand and increasing non-OPEC production, OPEC cut output significantly in the first half of the 1980s to defend its official price. Saudi Arabia, which played the role of swing producer in the cartel, bore most of the production cuts. Saudi Arabia's crude oil product, which peaked at over 10 million barrels per day for the period October 1980 through August 1981, fell to just 2.3

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[66] Carroll, Peter. *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened; America in the 1970's.* Rutgers University Press, Newark, New Jersey. 2004. p. 113-122

million barrels per day by August 1985. In late 1985, Saudi Arabia abandoned its swing-producer role, increased production, and aggressively moved to increase market share. Saudi Arabia tried a netback-pricing concept, which tied crude oil prices to the value of refined petroleum products. This reversed traditional economic relationships by guaranteeing specific margins to refiners, thereby transferring risk from the crude oil purchaser to the producer.

In response, other OPEC members also increased production and offered netback-pricing arrangements to maintain market share and to offset declining revenues. These actions resulted in a glut of crude oil in world markets, and crude oil prices fell sharply in early 1986**.**

The collapse of crude oil prices in 1986 reversed the upward trend in U.S. production of the first half of the decade. Many high-cost wells, which became productive after the oil crisis of 1978-1980, became unprofitable in 1986 and were shut down. Domestic crude oil production began dropping in early 1986. After the world price fell more than 50 percent between January and March 1986, drilling plummeted.[67]

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[67] "Oil Hits $100 a Barrel." *BBC News*. MMIX, 2 Jan 2008. Web. 10 Mar 2012. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/7083015.stm>.

Louisiana Employment in oil and gas extraction dropped from 100,000 to 55,000 in the 1980's. The crash in the oil industry created a ripple effect throughout the state's employment; restaurant businesses, hotel companies, and metal industries plunged. A quick and easy way for the state to bounce back was to invest in its tourism industry and Cajuns were to be one of the main attractions. [68]

The state government realized it could market "Cajunism" as an exotic, primitive culture that the modern world rarely has a chance to view. The 1980's and early 1990's were feverish marketing decades. All of a sudden there was a staged frenzy where everything Cajun, food, culture, tradition, and language was highlighted and pitched by surrounding communities to tourists.

Conclusion

This history of the Cajun culture illustrates a heavy influence of exclusion and isolation. Originally colonized in modern day Nova Scotia, the Acadians were expelled from their homeland and forced to resettle. After settling in the western Louisiana, the Cajun culture fully emerged and separated from the previous Acadian background and traditions.

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[68] Falgoux, Woody. *Rise of the Cajun Mariner; The Race for Big Oil.* Stockard James, Nashville, TN. 2009.

Such natural disasters, like hurricanes, that continuously struck the Louisiana's coast established a sense of fear among the dominant Anglo-Saxon population, as the Cajuns were portrayed, by most newspaper journalists, as a backward, primitive backwoods population. This, in turn, created a sense of fear among the dominant Anglo-Saxon population, thus laws and cultural regulations were established in order to marginalize the Cajun culture.

But with the 1960's inspiring a generation of cultural acceptance, the Cajun culture went through a beautification process that allowed certain traditions to be accepted and comodified. Many of the first Cajun characteristics to be uplifted dealt with the swampy homelands, as that was the base for many of the first stereotypes surrounding Cajuns.

Chapter 3-Language

When someone discovers that my first language is not English, they are extremely curious about what language a blonde-hair, blue-eyed American girl would speak. They are usually a bit astonished and even more confused when I say Cajun French.

Usually the first reaction I get is a bewildered look and then the question, “what is Cajun French?” Most do not seem to think of Cajun French as another language. I always have to explain that it is similar to French, just as Spanish and Italian are. Cajun French is not the slurred and watered-down French most believe it is. It is its own language with its own verb conjugations and tenses. Yes, its roots are in Acadia, France, but just as with every language it has evolved into its own, different language with characteristics that can be found in no other.

Through the Acadian French language, Cajun French is originally descended from the dialects of Anjou, a former province in western France, and Poitou, a center-west province. Over time, through contact between groups, including a high rate of intermarriage, the dialects would mix, to produce Acadian French, which is still spoken in Acadia or Nova Scotia, Canada. When the Cajuns were exiled from Acadia and eventually made their passage to the Louisiana coast, decades and

generations of isolation led to an entirely different language,-Cajun French.

The native language of the Cajuns has had the same ups and downs as their geography. Currently a venerated, even if dying language, Cajun French was once targeted for elimination. Although the Acadians arrived in the United States as early as the 1760s exiled from Canada, they were able to preserve their culture and language and maintain a nearly homogenous community. However, 1921 was a turning point in the Cajun history and community when the state of Louisiana took a new stand in education policy.

Cajuns in the Classroom

In 1916 the Louisiana State Board of Education voted to suppress the use of Cajun French in Louisiana's schools. With the passage of legislation Act 27, all classrooms had to be taught in English rather than the language the student population was most fluent in.[69] Several years later, the Louisiana State constitution of 1921, established English as the official state language, thereby discouraging the use of any other language than English.

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[69] Natsis, James L. "Legislation and Language: The Politics of Speaking French in Louisiana." *The French Review*. 73.2. (1999). 326.

The state of Louisiana chose to ban Cajun French from its public school system for that same reason, the then current sense of Americanism. The United States was at the height of its first "English Only" movement and all cultures that were not cookie-cutter American, i.e. white, protestant, and English speaking, were essentially to be eliminated from the classroom via legislative restrictions. Cajuns were no exception.

Figure 6: Rural Louisiana One-Room Schoolhouse, 1936
Source: State Library of Louisiana. Baton Rouge, LA. 1936.

Teachers were imported from around the state to implement the 1921 Education's Compulsory Act, which stated that every child was legally obligated to attend some type of education. Teachers were strictly instructed to teach only in English. Total immersion strategies were used, including physical beatings if Cajun was used in the classroom; derogatory name-calling and social stigmatizing were used in order to intimidate the school-aged children against using their native language.

Memory of this physical and mental abuse against Cajun French is still fresh for individuals living in the Cajun community. My great step-uncle can remember being put on his knees on grains of corn in the hallway at school because he spoke Cajun French in the playground and was caught. "Cajun French was viewed as a language spoken by ignorant people and so if we (Cajuns) chose to speak it, we were told we would be treated like it."[70]

Although these children still used Cajun at home, the social stigma that they were subjected to in school restricted their use of Cajun in the home and socially. Not only were these Cajun school children embarrassed to use their native language thanks to public school teachers, but they were also were ashamed of their parents who knew no English and spoke only

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[70] Louis Drouant. July 2010. Gulfport, Mississippi.

Cajun French.

As a result, many of those who grew up during this era taught their own children nothing but English and ignored the customs and traditions of their parents. Whether they firmly believed that their Cajun culture was backward, or only that in order to be accepted by society and advance in the job market an individual must be fluent in English, the result has been the same. Entire generations have lost their ability to speak or comprehend Cajun.

When officials compared literacy rates between the Cajun French speaking region and the rest of the state, they asserted that the educational level among the Cajun French speakers in Louisiana was inferior due to the natural differences in languages between them and the English speakers in the rest of the United States.[71] Although this information reinforced the stereotype that Cajuns had a low intelligence level, an insider prospective can reveal other possible causes for the low attendance and graduation rates of Cajuns in school.

In the years when English only movements were in full force, the state hired teachers who were sent specifically to instruct in English only, with a sink or swim, total immersion mentality. Naturally, these teachers

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[71] Natsis. "Legislation and Language…" 326.

were seen as outsiders because they had no personal connection with a Cajun community united by decades of isolation. These new teachers, from New Orleans and other parts of the state, were often rejected by the Cajun community. As a result, the students often would not attend class or not participate fully, either because they could not understand English, or they did not want to interact with such 'outsiders'.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the Cajun community was rurally isolated and most were subsistence farmers. What good would world geography and algebra do for them? Although legally ordered to attend schools, many Cajuns had no desire or need to attend the one-room schoolhouses that were offered by the state. Even today, one hears jokes about the lack of schooling Cajuns have received because of the language barriers, such as the following:

> My father sent me to school in the first grade and I came home after only 20 minutes. When my father asked me why I wasn't in school, I told him, "I came home because that's all there was. The teacher said everybody had to talk only in English. There were a few who understood but most of us didn't know what she was saying. Then she said something about numbers and said, 'Say one'. A few people around the classroom said 'One.' Than she said 'Say two.' So

we all got up and left.[72]

The punch line, based on the confusion between the bilingual homonyms 'say two' and 'c'est tout' (that's all), highlights the assumed eagerness of the Cajuns to be rid of schooling as soon as possible and reflects the functional bilingualism which the educational system failed to alter.

Cajuns continued to reject such formal education and non-Cajuns often deemed the entire cultural, ethnic group as ignorant before WWII. For the first time during the war, however, Cajuns had become a proven benefit for the United States as they had worked as translators with the allied French. Instead of the Cajun's French being associated with the swamps of Southwest Louisiana, it suddenly was viewed as European and sophisticated, beyond what other Americans could claim. When Cajuns returned home, they were viewed with some pride by non-Cajun Americans for their newly sophisticated, bilingual talent.[73] The language and culture the Cajuns had been told to forget proved to be a valuable asset and this began to have a snowball effect on the way outside populations viewed Cajun culture over the next two decades.

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[72] Keith Drouant. December 2009. Brookshire, Texas.
[73] Natis. "Legislation and Language…" 326

The 1955 Acadian Bicentennial Celebration

1955 marked the bicentennial year of the Acadian expulsion from Nova Scotia. Louisiana politicians and state legislators teamed up with the American Broadcasting Company to document a nearly year long series of events commemorating the expulsion and arrival in Louisiana.

To say that the Bicentennial Celebration genuinely celebrated "Cajun" culture is inaccurate, for what it actually celebrated was a mythical "Acadian" culture drawn from the flowery hexameters of Henry Longfellow's 1847 epic poem "Evangeline." The bicentennial leaders found Evangeline enticing because it provided an idyllic alternative to the "stereotype of the drunken, indolent, swamp-dwelling Cajun."[74] After all, Evangeline had been written in English, by a Anglo-Protestant educator from Harvard University, another elite Anglo-Saxon institution.

The Bicentennial Celebration also employed the term "Acadian" instead of "Cajun," no doubt because the well-educated elite in charge of the celebration regarded the latter as lower class slang, a corruption of the proper term "Acadian."[75] This was also the creation of a fictitious

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[74] Bernard, Shane. "The Acadian Bicentennial Celebration of 1955. *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association.*41.2.(Spring 2000) 162.
[75] Bernard, Shane. "Acadian Bicentennial Celebration..." 163.

ethnic group because the Cajuns who lived in Louisiana had evolved into a completely different culture from the Acadians who were still living in Nova Scotia. To refer to Cajuns as Acadians sought to have viewers or observers believe the two were synonymous, when in reality it is like saying that Americans share the same culture, beliefs, and traditions as the British.

Cajun culture was once again misrepresented when the bicentennial leaders and ABC chose to characterize the Acadians' mass exile as a "migration" because they believed that "expulsion" sounded too negative. The leaders of the celebration realized that it would be difficult to attract free-spending tourists if the event were perceived as a somber memorial. Additionally, the organizers feared that "expulsion" would embarrass or offend Anglo-Protestants in both the United States and Canada, as it was their ancestors who carried out the removal of the Acadians.[76] Thus, the bicentennial leaders and ABC deemed "migration" a most suitable euphemism for the brutal Acadian exile.

ABC began filming the Bicentennial Celebration on January 13, 1955 when 135 French-Canadians arrived by train from Ontario, Quebec and the Maritime Providences to observe the Acadian celebration. They

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[76] Bernard, Shane. "Acadian Bicentennial Celebration..." 163.

disembarked just outside of Cajun Louisiana at Alexandria, were they were escorted south into bayou country. Along the way, they received honorary citizenships and were greeted by Cajun women dressed "like Evangeline," in historically inaccurate Norman milkmaid costumes which became omnipresent that year thanks in part to Costumes of Acadia, an instructional booklet published for the commemoration by the state of Louisiana. [77]

[77] Dabney, Edith. *Costumes of Acadia: A "how to' booklet for use in fashioning Acadians costumes for all age groups.* Department of Commerce and Industry. 1954. A state government publication that described the appropriate attire for "Acadians." Was distributed to Cajun communities during preparation for the celebration, but since out of print.

Figure 7: Bicentennial Celebration
Source: *Bicentenary Celebrations. 1955.*Université de Moncton, Montreal.

At each stop, French-speaking 'natives' turned out to meet the visitors. Even schoolchildren displayed their French-speaking skills, despite decades-old practices of punishing Cajun children for speaking Cajun French at school.[78] They evidently had been coached on Parisian French, as one French Canadian noted, "…what zest they have in pronunciation…what pure language in the little Acadian girls and the latter dressed like Evangeline to wish us welcome. We are all of the same

[78] Chaillot, Bernard. "Speaking French in Class Once Taboo: Big Trouble for Students." *Daily Advertiser.* [Lafayette] 19 May 1996.

kindred."[79]

When the Acadian Bicentennial Celebration ended on October 30, 1955 its organizers congratulated themselves on what appeared to be an unqualified success. The event spurred the Department of Education to place more emphasis on Parisian, not Cajun, French education in high schools and to publish a remarkably open-minded teacher's guide entitled *Our Acadian Heritage: Let's Keep It!* Finally, it boosted the commercialization of Cajun culture, especially Cajun cuisine as will been seen in Chapter Five, with its promotion of cookbooks, doubloons, and other memorabilia.[80]

Yet because of its jumbled theme of "Acadian" pride, upper-class elitism, and undistinguished Anglophilia, the Acadian Bicentennial Celebration made no lasting impression on most Cajuns. The Bicentennial message was particularly lost on the mass of ordinary Cajuns who had never identified with, or perhaps never heard of, Longfellow's fictional heroine.[81] The deference that was given to all things Anglo-Saxon demonstrated that, beneath the surface, the Acadian Bicentennial Celebration was less about celebrating Cajun culture than the validation

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[79] Bernard, Shane. "Acadian Bicentennial..." 166.
[80] Bernard, Shane. "Acadian Bicentennial..." 170-174.
[81] Louis Drouant, Beryl Neyrey, and Dick Neyrey. April 2010. New Orleans.

of Anglo-Protestant leadership in mainstream America.

CODOFIL

In the 1960's a revival swept through many ethnic communities nationwide. In 1968 the Louisiana state legislature created CODOFIL, the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana. CODOFIL was an organization that the legislators thought would revitalize Cajun culture and encourage Cajun to be spoken freely in the state. CODOFIL tried to project an image of Cajuns not as backward hillbillies who spoke an unsophisticated dialect of French, but as white, European descendents who spoke French. CODOFIL's main purpose was to "…do any and all things necessary to accomplish the development, utilization, and preservation of the French language as found in Louisiana for the cultural, economic and touristic benefit of the state."[82] CODOFIL therefore, embellished Cajun people and culture to mainstream American making them exotic and sophisticated for knowing a second language, regardless of the earlier, negative cultural traits they had to overcome.

The CODOFIL was known for trying to encourage Cajun populations to reintegrate Cajun French into their everyday lives and cultures, but in

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[82] Council for the Development of French In Louisiana. http://www.codofil.org/english/index.html. Home web page. No author, or date. Approved by Louisiana government.

many aspects CODOFIL further abandoned Cajun culture. For instance, in 1967 state legislation passed Act 409 which made all public schools offer French in elementary and junior/senior high schools.[83] Yet this had no direct impact on the Cajun community. Students were still not allowed to speak Cajun French in the classroom without punishments, the language immersion program was still a sink or swim method, and this mandating of French in the academic curriculum had no correspondence with Cajun French. Only the more prestigious 'French' would be taught.

Another major problem with CODOFIL was that, as they tried to encourage Cajuns to re-embrace their heritage and language, they imported French teachers and professors to work in the schools. When these foreign French specialists from Belgium and France tried to re-teach the Cajun population they found they spoke two completely different languages and shared no close customs or traditions.[84] Once again, this sense of pushing an elitist Anglo-Saxon, European culture onto a distinctively different ethnic group offered no benefits, as the Cajun community had no desire to learn Parisian French or to "re-embrace" a culture other than their own.

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[83] Natis. "Legislation and Language…" 327.
[84] Natis. "Legislation and Language…" 327.

And yet, despite all of the misrepresentations of the Cajun community, they began to be recognized and put on a pedestal for their ethnic uniqueness. In 1977, Louisiana State University professor Ulysee Ricard taught the first collegiate level class on the Cajun population and culture, and a Cajun French language class. In 1998, Louisiana State University continued this recognition of the Cajun language and created an entire department and area of study in Cajun French; to this day, they are the only United States institution to have a department based on Cajun French.[85]

Is a Cajun still a Cajun?

Today Cajun culture is alive and vibrant, despite all of the distortions of outside communities' representations of the Cajun population. The real question is whether a culture can survive without its distinctive language, as many people question whether the Cajun language will survive another generation.[86] The number of people who speak Cajun has declined dramatically over the last fifty years. Over seventy-five percent of Cajun children spoke Cajun French, as their first language, before the Second World War. Yet within a decade the proportion had dropped below forty percent, and by 1970 just twelve

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[85] http://www.codofil.org/english/lafrenchhistory.html
[86] Language and Labels, Tulane University,

percent of children grew up speaking Cajun French in the home.[87]

Many parents intentionally did not teach their children the Cajun language because they themselves were criticized for using their native language and wanted to spare their children the same ridicule. However, many of these grandparents are discovering that their grandchildren are studying and trying to learn the language, as new generations struggle to remember their culture and origins. Currently, websites are being used to learn the dialect of the Cajun language. If one googles “Cajun French” multiple blogs, dictionaries, and translators will appear. Some culinary words and terms of endearment, such as "cher" (dear) and "nonc" (uncle) are still heard among otherwise English-speaking Cajuns proving that some remnants of the language will continue to exist, but whether many people will be able to conduct a full and fluent conversation in the language is still uncertain.

During the early years of the twentieth century the United States positioned itself as an “English only” country. In order to be an American, citizens had to become Anglo-Saxon in culture and speak English. As a result of such policies, US federal and state governments began establishing laws to pursue such beliefs. With the passing of laws such as

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[87] Jobb, Dean. *The Cajuns: a People’s Story of Exile and Triumph.* Wiley Publishing, NJ. 2005. Pg. 227.

Louisiana's in 1916 and 1921 to establish an English only state, Cajun children became the victims of this policy. Completely submerged in an English classroom, with punishment for speaking Cajun, many Cajun children were instructed in the ignorance of Cajun French. As a result, these same children became ashamed of their language, their culture, and their heritage, severing the culture's language from future generations.

Views of the Cajun population began to change with the 1955 Bicentennial Celebration. While completely ignoring virtually all authentic Cajun traditions and heritage this celebration advanced the notion that because Cajuns came from Acadia France, they were no longer the uncivilized, swamp residents many believed them to be; instead they were a sophisticated, European people who spoke Parisian French. The celebration did nothing for the Cajun population itself, however, but they were now accepted and glorified by the outside population.

Even in the 1960's, at the height of ethnic revival, the Cajun community was again misrepresented. With the creation of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana, paradoxes continued to entrap the Cajun population, such as the import of professors from Belgium and France to re-teach Cajuns their ethnicity and language. But the Bicentennial Celebration did begin the glorification of a white, ethnic

group in the United States, which spurred interest and support from both government officials and tourists' dollars.

CHAPTER 4

ALLIGATOR GUMBO, CRAWFISH PIE AND CAYENNE PEPPER

AUTHENTIC CAJUN FOOD AND THE MASS MARKET

Crawfish and Cajuns

A mother crawfish calms her offspring's fears of horses and cows, but tells them to run away quickly when they see a Cajun because "they'll eat anything!!!!!"

Before the 1960's Cajuns were ridiculed and looked down upon, as seen in the above joke, for eating crawfish. The Cajun meal then was like someone eating a grasshopper or a cockroach today, a primitive, backward food eaten only by individuals who knew no modernity. Crawfish was seen as a low-status food, a dirty, lowly crustacean better used for bait, not yet a symbol of Cajun pride.

Yet, with the ethnic revival of the 1960's, the eating of crawfish, like other aspects of Cajun culture, enjoyed a radical change in status. Like being Cajun, eating crawfish is no longer something to be ashamed of and can even be found in most seafood restaurants today, at $12-20 a pound! Today, crawfish is an expensive item and is served as a gourmet food in

some contexts. An elderly woman living in Beaux Bridge, Louisiana said, "Now the big shots eat crawfish and the poor can't afford to. I wish I had eaten more back then; now I can't afford to buy them.[88]"

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[88] Gutierrez, Paige. *Cajun Foodways.* University of Mississippi. 1992. Pg. 45.

Figure 8: The Original Crawfish Boil **Figure 9: 2010 New Orleans**

Source: Gutierrez, Barbara. *The Morning Star.* 1954. Layette, LA.

Source: 2010 City of New Orleans Annual Crawfish Boil. New Orleans, LA. March 2010. Personal Photograph.

Examples of crawfish symbolizing Cajun culture have proliferated in the regional and national media and mass marketing. There are no indications in historical sources, oral folklore, or oral history that the crawfish was a recognized symbol of ethnic pride for Cajuns in earlier

times.[89] So how did these food symbols, like crawfish, come to be recognized and embraced as Cajun? What happened to the original/traditional Cajun food symbols? What other effects did food commercialization have on Cajun culture?

This chapter will explore the effect that food commercialization had on the Cajun population. The chapter will first track traditional food recipes and entrees as seen in past generations. Next, I will show how the tourist industry affected the traditional authenticity of Cajun entrees before the 1960's. With the wave of ethnic revival during the second half of the twentieth century, Cajun food was indentified uniquely with the Cajun community where restaurants, cooking shows, and certain spices were embraced as authentic Cajun. Finally, after Cajuns began to stake claims to authenticity, large corporations took traditional Cajun recipes and mass-produced them on a commercialized assembly line, once again producing a foggy representation of Cajuns.

Traditional Foodways

I was taught with the same cooking recipes as my grandmother, who got them from her grandmother, so when my friends ask me to make a gumbo or other Cajun meal or dinner, they do not understand that one

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[89] Gutierrez, Paige. *Cajun Foodways.* pg. *45.*

portion of a meal can take six or seven hours to prepare. For example, my grandmother out of habit makes red beans and rice on Mondays because to her, it is still "wash day." "Since Red Beans take most of the day to cook, you just put them on in the morning, stir them every now and then, then they were ready after you finished with your laundry (washing, hanging them out to dry, and folding them and putting them away.)"[90] Traditional Cajun recipes use the same ingredients as two centuries ago, which as a result, take the time to create and make as it did all of those generations ago.

The standard of survival includes eating to live, but many Cajuns see things in reverse: they live to eat. Food is the center of Cajun culture, as a way to unite communities, draw families together, and the basis of four hundred festivals held across the state that celebrate everything that walks, crawls, or moves. For Cajuns, food is not important because of its exotic ingredients, or the dedication to the stove for hours on end, but because of the strong family ties connected to generations-old recipes and traditions. In the words of my grandmother, "Yes, we have very basic ingredients that just happen to be the best damn in the world and if you throw them all in a pot, they are going to make the best gumbo or

[90] Beryl Neyrey. April 2012. New Orleans, Louisiana.

jambalaya. But we combine our ingredients with the strong foundation of the past, the strong pride in the history of the cultures that grew up here, you are going to have what was in your grandmother's pot."[91]

Yet anyone who has attempted to cook a meal knows that buying products and throwing them in a pot is not a guarantee that a tasty dish will emerge. It is the combination of available ingredients, and the idea that the same recipes and family cooking secrets are passed down from generation to generation, that keeps the recipes authentic and true to their rural roots no matter where you might be cooking.

Traditional Cajun dishes are created from the same agriculture that surrounds the Cajun's original homeland in the swampy bayous of southeast Louisiana. Because the bayous were always flooded, rice became the fundamental ingredient in almost every meal. Additionally, the poverty-stricken Cajun community found that rice was a way to stretch meals a little further, and so the heavy starch aspect can be found in all of the day's meals.

Beyond the rice, original Cajun entrees used to include mostly vegetables, as meat was sparse. Fish became a crucial part of Cajun foodways, especially after 1876, when the first icehouse opened to buy

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[91] Beryl Neyrey. December 2009, Brookshire Texas.

ice and store perishables. Most of these icehouses began as community holdings, but by the mid-20th century, many families built their own ice building.[92] My grandfather remembers that even up until he got married, "there was no refrigerator, just an ice box and an ice man would come a few times a week and deliver a 25 or 50 pound block of ice. Obviously, no frozen food."[93]

The result of the pre-refrigeration age, which lasted longer for the Cajun community than the majority of the US due to their extreme poverty, was a heavy rice and starch diet with hearty vegetables with few meat or fish products. Times got even tougher during the great depression with Cajuns resorting to the dirty and risky food of crawfish, oysters, and ouaouaron (frog legs), eliciting further criticism and marginalization of Cajun culture.

Cajun cookery was kept strictly in the home or within the Cajun community until the 1960's, an era of vast commercialization and mass production of every food item thought or perceived to be Cajun. The commercialization occurred in waves. First state agencies and tourist businesses realized that they could market an "exotic" flavor to tourists in

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[92]Gutierrez, Paige. *Cajun Foodways.* 3-4.
[93] Richard Neyrey. April 2010. New Orleans, Louisiana.

New Orleans. As the demand for authentic cuisine increased, Cajun communities began to open their own 'mom and pop' restaurants. Finally, large corporations jumped on the money bandwagon and began opening restaurant chains that can now be found region and nationwide.

New Orleans Flavor- Establishing Commercial Authenticity

The Louisiana state government realized there were potentially huge tourism profits to be made from Cajun food products because cultural difference is thought to be the basis for uniqueness. Those involved in the exporting aspects of Cajun culture had only to give names to a cuisine that sounded exotic and authentic to capture tourist dollars.

In 1906, the Central Grocery located in the Italian section of New Orleans created a sandwich store then well known in the Italian community. The most famous sandwich at Central Grocery was made of ham, salami, and cheese dressed with an olive salad mix.[94] Yet during the turn of the twentieth century, Italians were seen as a racial minority and New Orleans witnessed the largest mass Italian lynching in American history.[95] As a result, in such an anti-Italian context, this uniquely

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[94] Mercuri, Becky. *American Sandwich*. Gibbs Smith Publishing. Salt Lake City. 2004.
[95] Postman, Sheryl. *The 1891 New Orleans Lynching and US-Italian Relations.* Pater Lang Publishing. New York. 1992. 5.

designed sandwich never succeeded in the commercialized food industry.

However, during the 1960's this sandwich reappeared, now with a Cajun label and price tag slapped on the side. This once Italian sandwich is now known as the Cajun Muffulettas.[96] These sandwiches can most often be found in the New Orleans tourist circuit, yet nowhere outside nor in Cajun communities.

The Muffeletta is a prime example of the state government's policy of taking their marginalized ethnic groups and manipulating their supposed cultural heritage into a profitable product for market. Italians then were seen as a lesser race, while Cajuns, although backward, were still a bit more phenotypically Caucasian. By giving the Italian sub a Cajun name and claiming it as a Cajun heritage product, the tourist industry was able to give the sub an exotic, yet white meaning, attracting white tourist dollars.

Consuming Authenticity

Yet, as elements of genuine Cajun culture began to emerge and gain visibility in the following decades, tourists would inevitably realize that what they were consuming was not truly Cajun despite the label.

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[96] Eyck, Toby. "Managining Food: Cajun Cuisine in Economic and Cultural Terms." *Rural Sociology* 2001. 229.

Authenticity, symbolism and performance of the food culture is what began to attract visitors. It is not enough to change the original ingredients into some finished product, as seen with the muffulettas, but this must be done in a specific way, and it helps to be able to symbolize the process. As tourist industries everywhere soon discovered, Italian food made by Italians in a historically Italian area seems to be more authentic that the Italian food made by Mexicans, even if both groups follow the same recipes and use the same ingredients. As a result, this commercialized food process slowly crept back toward the Cajun community, in search of a more authentic performance and "feel."

With the demand for "true" and authentic Cajun food, Cajun communities soon realized that they could handsomely profit from their grandmother's recipes. During this era, Cajun restaurants sprouted up on every corner. Even today, Lafayette, a heavily Cajun area of Louisiana, is said to have more restaurants per capita than any other city in the United States.[97] These restaurants were similar to German beer gardens in that they became folk dinner theaters that encouraged guests to interact with local culture by dancing to live Cajun music and eating 'traditional'

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[97] Guiterrez, Paige. *Cajun Foodways*. 103.

meals.[98]

Yet despite the outside population's craving authenticity, some found that when they truly "discovered" it, it was too authentic and preferred the commercial, branded authentic. For example, a family moved from the East Coast to Lafayette Louisiana. Unfamiliar with Cajun customs, they decided to attend the Grand Boucherie des Cajuns in St. Martinville, Louisiana. The new Louisiana resident stated,

> The newspaper advertised it [The Grande Boucherie des Cajuns] as a family event, so we decided to bring our five-year-old daughter. We did not know what a 'boucherie' was-we didn't know that it was a hogkilling…It was barbaric. I don't want my daughter exposed to things like that. They should ban the Boucherie, or they should at least be forced to advertise for what it is-a savage custom.[99]

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[98] Eyck, Toby. 240.
[99] Gutierrez, Paige. *Cajun Foodways.* 99

Figure 10: The Savage Boucherie
Source: "La Grande Boucherie des Cajuns." *St. Martinville Louisiana Today Newspaper.* 2008.

The boucherie is an ancient tradition in the Cajun community. It was a way for the poor community to gather together and support one another with the slaughter of one pig. Every part of the animal was made edible and every member of the community was allowed to benefit by obtaining meat. Although no longer a starving community, the Cajun population still practices such rituals, not only to encourage community gathering amidst a thinly, populated area, but also as a reminder of where they came from. This reminder appeared to the viewer as too extremely

authentic, and preferring the “Disney” version of the Cajun marketed in New Orleans.

This was a major setback for Cajun communities who hoped to benefit from the monetary gain of the food frenzy. I argue that it was with these misunderstandings that the communities began to realize they would forever win a loosing battle against the restaurant marking techniques.

Copyrighted Cajun

In 1984 a simple publication would transform Cajun cooking into a documented history and commercial success; Paul Prudhomme published the first Cajun Kitchen Louisiana Cookbook.

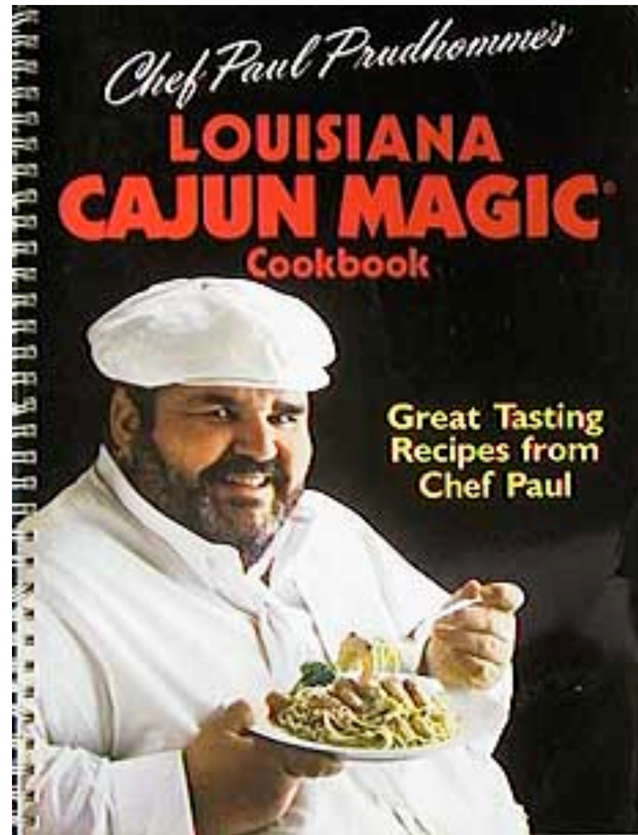

Figure 11: Chef Prudhoumme
Source: Prudhomme, Paul. *The Prudhomme Family Cookbook: Old-Time Louisiana Recipes by Eleven Prudhomme Brothers and Sisters.* William Morrow & Co. 1987.

Chef Prudhomme is now the proprietor of the famous K-Paul's restaurant in New Orleans's French Quarter, but he originally grew up in Southwestern Louisiana. The youngest of thirteen children, he learned all of his cooking techniques from his mother, as he helped her in the kitchen. He received no official training and entered the restaurant business at just the right time. After cooking Cajun meals throughout the US, he and his wife opened an authentic Cajun restaurant, K-Paul's, in the

heart of New Orleans's French Quarter where he debuted his most famous entrée-blackened redfish. He devised his blackening method of quickly cooking fish at very high temperatures in order to achieve the taste of fish cooked over a fire, with his seasonings coming from his grandmother's recipes. [100] The restaurant was immediately successful, as it was ethnic authentic, but also a top dollar, five-star restaurant. This allowed for authentic Cajun cuisine to be consumed in the comforts of elegance.

Chef Prudhomme went on to have five different television cooking shows[101] in addition to dozens of awards, including "Restaurateur of the Year" award in 1983 from the Louisiana State Restaurant Association. He was the first American to win the French Merite' Agricole in 1986, and was honored as "Culinarian of the Year" the same year.[102]

This new way of cooking, heavy on seasoning and tradition, gained national attention amongst food critics. The most famous of these food

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[100] Prudhomme, Paul. *The Prudhomme Family Cookbook: Old-Time Louisiana Recipes by Eleven Prudhomme Brothers and Sisters.* William Morrow & Co. 1987.
[101] *Fork in the Road* (1995), *Fiery Foods* (1996), *Kitchen Expedition*(1997), *Louisiana Kitchen*(1998) and *Always Cooking*(2007). Hosted on PBS affiliate WYES.
[102] Prudhomme, Paul. "Biography." *K-Paul's Louisiana Kitchen*. Firefly Digital, 2008.
Web. 8 Mar 2012. <http://www.chefpaul.com/site301.php>.

critics, Calvin Trillin, devoted an entire chapter of his book *American Fried* to Cajun Louisiana food. He appeared twice on "The Tonight Show" where he championed traditional Cajun food and spice.[103] The newly flattering attention given to Cajun cuisine by outsiders encouraged large corporations to seek to profit from Cajun food culture, both in fast food and full service restaurant menus, as well as with pre-packaged spices.

Cajun McChicken Please

Mass media and its food obsessions forever changed the cultural landscape in Southern Louisiana. Newspapers, cookbooks, and TV cooking programs opened communication channels across previous racial and cultural boundaries. Even though Louisiana newspapers publishing recipes as early as 1877, the 1980's marked the first real mass demand for authentic, yet easy, Cajun recipes.

After Chef Paul Prudhomme's debut with Cajun cooking, a multitude of Cajun chefs and seasoning companies sprung from the woodwork. Slap Ya Momma,[104] Louisiana Fish Fry,[105] and Tony Chachere[106] are just a few

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[103] Gutierrez, Paige. *Cajun Foodways.* 103
[104] http://www.slapyamama.com/who.php. No other information such as author or copyright date available on official website.
[105] 2008. http://www.louisianafishfry.com/. No publishing information available.

of the most famous Cajun seasoning companies that were established less that five years after Prudhomme's cooking debut. All of these seasoning companies, as well as Chef Prudhomme's seasoning packets, can be found in the prepackaged aisle in almost any supermarket.[107]

Figure 12: Modern Cajun Pantry

Sources: Ragin' Cajun Seasoning Website.
http://www.ragincajunfoods.com/cajun_seasonings.htm
Tony Charchere Seasoning. Tendenci Management Software.
http://www.tonychachere.com/history/. No copyright date available.
Slap Your Momma Seasoning. http://www.slapyamama.com/who.php. No other information such as author or copyright date available on official website.
Prudhomme, Paul. *The Prudhomme Family Cookbook: Old-Time Louisiana Recipes by Eleven Prudhomme Brothers and Sisters.* William Morrow & Co. 1987.
Cajun Sparkle. Flickr. http://www.flickr.com/photos/pyxopotamus/3679829582/
Kernel Season's Website.
http://www.kernelseasons.com/shop_product_detail.php?pid=9&action=1

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[106] Tendenci Management Software. http://www.tonychachere.com/history/. No copyright date available.
[107] Eych, Toby. 235.

Once Cajun seasoning became available nationwide, anyone could be a Cajun chef. Although the traditional seasonings are there, the lack of tradition and family knowledge on exactly how to prepare specific dishes means that much is being lost as Cajun food aesthetics are reduced to a single dimension: very hot with pepper!

The ability to package and sell "Cajun flavor" has become financially rewarding for some fast-food companies. In 1988, the ever-expanding McDonalds released their first sandwich that varied from their traditional menu-the Cajun McChicken. It was first introduced in Louisiana and, other than having a cayenne, pepper crust, it was no different from their other chicken sandwiches. Yet in the midst of the Cajun frenzy, McDonalds released the Cajun sandwich nationwide and it remained on the menu until 2000.

Figure 13: McChicken
McDonald's website. http://www.mcdonalds.com/us/en/food/full_menu/chicken.html. 2012.

Figure 14: Houston Pappadeaux
Source: Trout, Karen. Pappadeaux's Restaurant Huston, TX storefront. 2012.

Not to be outdone, in 1993 two Greek brothers started a restaurant chain named Pappadeaux in the Houston, Texas area. The restaurant chain now has over sixty different locations in Texas, Colorado, Arizona, Illinois, Ohio, New Mexico and Georgia. This restaurant chain boasts of its authentic "Cajun flavor," with recipes from "Cookin' on the Bayou." They even have a "Cajun Translator[108]" on their website. Yet the menu mostly consists of blackened fish and other heavy, peppery flavor entrees. The original Greek immigrant founders most likely obtained their recipes not

[108] 2012. PRI. http://www.pappadeaux.com/french-quarter-flavors/

from authentic Cajuns, but from culinary chefs who believe they can imitate the bold Cajun flavor.

The Pappadeaux's restaurant chain, gained success, not because their audience were Cajuns away from home, but because they targeted a non-Cajun population who was curious about the unique and popular Cajun food. A restaurant's existence is based on the popular demand for a specific food. Therefore, with such sprawling geographic locations, Cajun migrants could not be the base audience for the restaurants. Howevere, there was at the creation time of the Pappadeaux's chain, a demanding outside audience for Cajun cuisine. Therefore the Pappa brother's created a menu reflected on the peppery, popular demand, and not on authenticity.

Conclusion

As seen in the beginning section of the chapter with the crawfish, Cajun cuisine, once shunned, is now a massive, high-demand market. This market is not the result of an outside audience applauding a cultural group, but of corporations and restaurant chains recognizing that this particular aspect of a formerly marginalized culture was extremely commodifiable.

This commodification began in the middle of the twentieth century, with the formerly Italian sub re-racialized and re-marketed as a Cajun product to exhibit exoticness and boost white tourist dollars to the New Orleans area. The Muffeletta sub became extremely popular demand grew for more 'authentic' Cajun cuisine.

At this time, the Cajun community saw a wave of tourists interested in their cuisine and culture. Mom and Pop restaurants sprouted throughout the swamplands. These restaurants were proud to serve entrées made with their grandmother's recipes. In addition to serving food, these restaurants would have dances and other Cajun traditions that they would open up to visitors, as a way to make a few extra bucks. But the outside population's involvement with Cajun cuisine traditions, such as the Grand Boucherie, could turn sour, as many visitors did not want to see where their slaughtered dinner came from.

This, along with Cajun cookery media, shows becoming popular, placed the cuisine commodification demand back to the corporate restaurant chains, as there was still a high demand from non-Cajuns. Fast food corporations like McDonalds, and casual dining restaurant chains took what they viewed on Cajun cookery shows and their chefs and turned the Cajun cuisine into one-dimensional heavy spices. This sparked

a public interest in Cajun spices, resulting in packaged Cajun cooking spices for at home use.

The restaurant industry took a multi-dimensional ethnic foodway and boiled it down to a lowest common denominator. The corporations did not take the full-bodied Cajun cuisine, or its lengthy preparation, because that was not commodifiable. These outside actors took only what they believed could be profitable and left the carcass of anything with cultural depth back in Louisiana, for the Cajun community to sort out. Restaurants and corporations flattened Cajun cuisine and into an one-dimensional spicy pepper for profit.

Chapter 5-

Courir De Mardi Gras (The Mardi Gras Run)

From The Run for Survival to Assimilation

> At first sight, there is only misrule and disorder. Swarms of masked men, so thoroughly disguised that their mothers would not know them, break the boundaries of an ordered environment. They spill into the farmer's year, charge his house, intimidate his family, grab his wife and force her to dance. They run off with bicycles, wheelbarrows, food, and anything else they can find. Their breath, voices, and lurching motions feed suspicions-sometimes founded-that they have been drinking for days…[109]

[109] Lindhal, Carl. "The Presence of the Past in the Cajun Country Mardi Gras." *Journal of Folklore Research,* Vol. 33, No. 2, 1996. p.132

Figure 15: Mardi Gras Traditional Costume
Source: Simpon, David. *Courir,' costume and chickens mark Cajun Mardi Gras. 2008. The Atlanta Journal- Constitution*

These are the descriptive words of a Louisiana newspaper reporter trying to adequately describe the chaotic Courir de Mardi Gras that is occurring around him. What he is trying to do is more difficult than one might imagine, as the historical roots that could be used as a basis for explanation are unclear. The origin and meaning of The Mardi Gras is debatable. Some argue that it dates back to prehistoric rites of fertility, death, and resurrection. Others argue it is a chaotic celebration that has no single background. What is clear is that there are two well-known forms of Mardi Gras in Louisiana: the famed New Orleans celebration and the "rural" or "country" Mardi Gras, also known as the Courir de Mardi

Gras. The latter celebration is now widely recognized as a uniquely Cajun culture symbol.

Yes, the Mardi Gras is just as drunkenly chaotic as described by the journalist, but according to my grandfather, "it is a chaotic drunkenness with a tradition."[110] Dating back to the Acadians' arrival to the swamplands of Louisiana, the Courir de Mardi Gras was also part of a communal strategy created so that the Cajun could survive the droughts and famines that plagued the Louisiana swamplands by modeling sociability and generosity. It became a way for the community to band together and provide a communal meal. The goal of the Courir de Mardi Gras was to solicit a charitable run or contributions of money or food to provide a communal gumbo supper and dance.

The First Courir de Mardi Gras

First documented in the early twentieth century, the Courir de Mardi Gras coincided with the religious holiday, the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. The Cajun community would have one last rowdy party and gathering before giving up a sinful item for Lent, on what came to be known as "Fat Tuesday," because of the excessive amount of food and liquor consumed. The main characters of the Mardi Gras are bands of

[110] Richard Neyrey. March 2010, New Orleans, Louisiana.

mounted men, known individually and collectively as “The Mardi Gras,” disguised in clown-like suits, masks, and “capuchons” (tall peaked hats).

“The Mardi Gras” was lead by an uncostumed captain. He was chosen by the community and, as a result, was always a well-respected community member. The captain’s job was to be a mediator between the rambunctious band of Mardi Gras men and the public. He was suppose to make sure the Mardi Gras men offered an entertaining show without seriously offending their hosts or damaging their property.

The actual Courir was literally a run. The Mardi Gras men would run from one house in the Cajun community to another, either on foot or horseback, depending on how much they had had to drink. At each house, the Mardi Gras men would either perform a skit or a silly prank to make the occupants laugh and feel bad enough for them that they donate any ingredient they could afford to give for the community gumbo that was held at the end of the Courir de Mardi Gras.

The biggest prize in the Courir was the chicken, the core ingredient for gumbo. The chicken was usually the last ingredient that was obtained because the family who donates the chicken makes the Mardi Gras men catch a loose chicken flying around their yard. The Courir is complete when the Mardi Gras men catch the live chicken and obtain every

ingredient. The community then gathered after a long day of running around, pranks, and laughter to enjoy the smoldering pot of gumbo, called the "bal masqué."

Figure 16: The Run
Source: Simpon, David. *Courir,' costume and chickens mark Cajun Mardi Gras. 2008. The Atlanta Journal- Constitution.*

The Courir de Mardi Gras was a tradition that modeled a deeper survival technique. Famine, poverty, and hunger constantly plagued the early Cajun community. The Courir was a way for the community to all join together as one, reaffirming the common culture and ethnic

background that brought them all to Louisiana in the first place. Additionally, amid the poverty, the communal gumbo was a way for the Cajun community to have a large "left-over" dinner, where everyone would donate whatever they had left over from their winter food supply. The original Courir de Mardi Gras was a model for communal survival that would soon prove to be a strategy critical for cultural survival as well.

The Courir for Existence

By the early to mid twentieth century the Courir de Mardi Gras was no longer literally a survival method, but had come to represent cultural survival during the high point of the "American melting pot" years of cultural assimilation. While the Cajun language was being forced out of school systems, and before Cajun food was 'discovered', Cajuns continued to practice their Courir de Mardi Gras, culturally construed as excluding any and all outsiders from the run or consuming any of the community food.

The route of the run corresponded to the perceived geographical and social boundaries of each neighborhood. The Mardi Gras men would only "run" to Cajun community dwellings. Additionally, all those who contributed to the charity and attended the following supper were

members of the same close-knit social network.[111] Thus Courir de Mardi Gras helped to promote a local sense of community and ethnic pride in an era when the outside world criticized their every cultural practice.

During the first half of the twentieth century, as the forces of assimilation impacted Cajun culture, the Courir de Mardi Gras became a very exclusionary celebration. Many Cajun Mardi Gras participants were arrested outside of their communities for disturbance and local non-Cajun club owners refused to host the Mardi Gras dance.[112] As a result, the audience for the Courir de Mardi Gras was restricted to the dedicated members to the Cajun community. The Mardi Gras men began skipping the houses of Protestants, African Americans, and new arrivals in town, affirming its longstanding ties to older, Catholic Cajuns.[113] Although this would lead to complaints of exclusion and civil rights lawsuits decades later, it was one of the few ways that Cajuns could hold onto their unique, cultural practices.

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[111] Sexton, Rocky. *Cajuns, Germans, and Les Americains. A Historical Anthropology of Cultural and Demographic Transformation in Southwest Louisiana 1880 to Present.* Ph. D. Dissertation. University of Iowa, Iowa City. 1996.
[112] Ware, Carolyn. "Heritage Tourism in Rural Acadiana." *Western Folklore,* Vol. 62, No. 3 (Summer, 2003). p.160
[113] Sexton, Rocky. "Cajun Mardi Gras: Cultural Objectification and Symbolic Appropriation in a French Tradition." Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois. 2001. Pg. 302.

After the "English Only" movements of the early twentieth century, the Cajuns continued to struggle throughout the 1930's and 1940's. During these decades, non-Cajun communities recognized in the Couir de Mardi Gras Runs only drunkenness and fighting, which for them held no positive cultural importance or significance.

The town of Mamou was the first to self-consciously refashion its Mardi Gras identity in the 1950's. A group of local cultural activists, led by merchants and white-collar workers who were often the more Americanized children of rural neighborhood inhabitants, decided to revive and rehabilitate Cajun tradition.[114] These activists "began to manifest their concern for retaining the most valued elements of cultural difference between them and the Americans."[115] Thus, selected cultural elements that revival leaders labeled as Cajun were objectified[116] as elements to be used in the promotion of a new Cajun ethnicity. As a result, cultural revival actually entailed the reinvention of culture and tradition, at least partly along American assimilated lines, rather than the simple preservation of an enduring, traditional cultural pattern.

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[114] Ware. "Heritage Tourism…" p.160
[115] Gold, Gerald. "The French Frontier of Settlement in Louisiana: Some Observations on Culture Change in Mamou Prairie." *Cahiers de géographie du Québec*, vol. 23. 1979, p. 273
[116] Selectively extracted from a traditional milieu

One of the earliest priorities of Mamou's cultural revival activists was marketing the Cajun Mardi Gras. Theft, vandalism, and fighting, which had usually plagued past Mardi Gras runs, were discouraged in order to lend respectability to the event and regain the support of the surrounding area's public, not just the Cajun community.[117] It has been claimed that the Mamou Mardi Gras group served as the model for other cultural activists who wanted to stage the Cajun Mardi Gras as still authentic, but with a more appropriate, more inclusive atmosphere. Thus, the Mamou style activists can be said to have led to the marketing of Cajun Mardi Gras, starting in the early 1960's on a state-wide level.

Marketing Mardi Gras

With the cultural explosion of the 1960's, the Cajun Mardi Gras was one of the many aspects of the former marginalized culture whose visibility exploded. Just as in the town of Mamou example, other towns' officials began to realize that there was a popular demand among outsiders to participate in something so strange and primitive as the Courir de Mardi Gras. Yet, as the demand rose for performance and participation, the atmosphere surrounding the traditions of the Courir de Mardi Gras began to change. The impetus for tourism often comes from

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[117] Sexton, Rocky. "Cajun Mardi Gras: Cultural Objectification." p. 303.

town officials and entrepreneurs, rather than the Mardi Gras maskers and captains.[118] As tourism introduced Mardi Gras runs to a new audience, issues of public presentation, cultural conservation, and guardianship of tradition inevitably surfaced. Overall, tradition was and is still being redefined, for the stated purpose of building the tourist market.

The town of Eunice in Southwestern Louisiana borrowed the cleaned-up tourist strategies from the town of Mamou in the 1950's and dramatically escalated them. Not only did they attempt to contain the rowdy, violent drunkenness, but they advertised the once all male Mardi Gras as a "family oriented" event with less drinking, more law enforcement, and greater safety.[119] In addition, the town of Eunice created a walking parade for children and mothers.

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[118] Ware, Carolyn. "Heritage Tourism in Rural Acadiana." p.158
[119] Ware. p.167

Figure 17: Eunice LA Children's Parade
Source: City of Eunice. 1996. www.eunice-la.com/festivals.htm.

The mayor of Eunice defended these changes as necessary for marketing and bringing tax revenues into the isolated city. He also claimed that an added benefit was to "create a different image of Mardi Gras and Cajun culture."[120] He wanted to correct negative publicity and stereotypes. The city's new concept of a family-centered event filled a void for out of town visitors, blurring the stark lines between insiders and outsiders. Out-of-town visitors were no longer to be excluded; they should be welcomed and even courted!

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[120] Ware. "Heritage Tourism…"p.167

If the mayor believed that by creating a more "normal" and American family-oriented activity he could prove to outsiders that Cajuns were not the negative stereotypes surrounding them, he tuned a unique cultural tradition into a cultural performance that could be viewed and criticized by everyone. The once community-based survival strategy was turning into a tourist attraction for people from around the world to watch Cajuns perform a popular, appealing version of their cultural authenticity.

The involvement of outsiders knew no limits when the town of Eunice opened the run itself to anyone who wore a masked costume and paid association fees. A 1994 flyer states "Tourists are encouraged to participate in all events" and adds that costumes are available for sale locally, or for an additional fee runners can rent "authentic," handmade costumes from Cajun community members.[121]

Opening up the Mardi Gras run to everyone, allowed for a form of mass education about Cajun culture, but similar to the Grand Boucherie in St. Martinville,[122] it also allowed outside criticism to shape and mold Cajun cultural tradition. With visiting "runners" able to buy or rent authenticity via the costumes, future authenticity came to rest on tourist

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[121] Ware. "Heritage Tourism…" Pg.168
[122] Chapter 5

outsiders and their funds. Like it or not, outsiders will have the power to decide what aspects will continue to be represented in the Cajun Mardi Gras.

Marche de Mardi Gras (The Mardi Gras Walk)

"I really love the Mardi Gras Run, regardless of the changes."[123] My cousin's comment suggests some ambivalence though as he commented, "The unfortunate part of all this is we are losing some of what we wanted to preserve."[124] The number of riders makes it impossible for everyone to dismount, sing, dance, chase chickens, and clown at houses, so most remain on the wagons pulled not by horses, but by motorized horsepower. Additionally, the traditional dozen or so house visits has been changed to only one or two stops at selected houses. The majority of the "performance" is staged in front of crowds gathered around the path; the Mardi Gras run is becoming more like a trail ride than a run.

Most tourists involved in the Mardi Gras Run have little understanding of the custom, and the group's commercially-oriented performance, for the unfamiliar outsiders, suffers as a consequence.[125] For example, as the Mardi Gras group runs from house to house, or now

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[123] Keith Drouant. Summer 2010. Lafayette.
[124] Keith Drouant. Summer 2010. Lafayette.
[125] Ware. "Heritage Tourism..." p.172

from audience to audience, they sing the Mardi Gras Song, or the "La Danse de Mardi Gras." The Mardi Gras Song is not the only song played, but it is an important musical component to a celebration that has traditional roots. The lyrics are as follows:

Cajun French:

Les Mardi Gras s'en vient de tout partout,
Tout alentour le tour du moyeu,
Ça passe une fois par an, demandé la charité,
Quand-même ça c'est une patate, une patate ou des gratons

Les Mardi Gras sont dessus un grand voyage,
Tout alentour le tour du moyeu,
Ça passe une fois par an, demandé la charité,
Quand-même ça c'est un poule maigre, ou trois ou quatre coton maïs.

Capitaine, capitaine, voyage ton flag,
Allons chez un autre voisin,
Demandé la charité pour les autres qui viennent nous rejoindre,
Les autres qui viennent nous rejoindre,
Ouais, au gombo ce soir!

Translation:

The Mardi Gras come from all around,
all around the center of town.
They come by once per year, asking for charity.
Sometimes it's a sweet potato, a sweet potato or pork rinds.

The Mardi Gras are on a great journey,
all around the center of town.
They come by once per year, asking for charity.
Sometimes it's a skinny chicken, or three or four corn cobs.

Captain, captain, wave your flag, let's go to another neighbor's.
Asking for charity for everyone who'll come join us later,
Everyone who'll come join us later at the gumbo tonight

The boldfaced text is the "sing along" parts where the musicians and the crowd alike traditionally sang. The sing along lyrics, “center of town,” are there to affirm their sense of community. And yet, the outsiders who want to participate in the Courir de Mardi Gras, rarely know the tradition and most definitely do not know Cajun French, or the lyrics to this age-old revelry song.

As a result, the Cajun French version of the song has been completely eliminated from any town that markets their Mardi Gras. Even if they distributed lyrical sheets, the majority of people would not know how to pronounce the heavily accented words. Some towns still sing the English version of the Mardi Gras Song with lyrical flyers available to their guests, but as inevitably as ironically, the traditional authenticity of the Cajun Mardi Gras, the very thing these towns originally tried to market as tradition disappears as it is reinvented.

Ultimately, the greatest and most detrimental change is that, owing to the large crowds, the once community-based gumbo dinner is no more. The ‘tourist friendly’ dinner provided now is a catered event with fair-like food vendors selling hot dogs and beer.[126] The elimination of the community dinner completely destroys the fundamental basis of the

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[126] Lindhal, Carl. “The Presence of the Past in the Cajun Country Mardi Gras.” p. 132.

tradition. The Mardi Gras runners no longer have any real reason to run or joke with the community. The parade of comical acts was designed to obtain ingredients symbolizing the survival of the community. Now the runners appear to be performing only for the comic relief of the outsiders.

The specific characteristics that made the Mardi Gras Run a symbol of community survival tradition are slowly being buried, so that soon all that will be left will be an empty shell of a cultural tradition, staged in search of outside funding. Losing the community dinner finale has completely redefined the purpose of the Mardi Gras Run. Without a community dinner, the Cajun population has no reason to join together; the inter-dependency and dedication to the community are being lost, and more than just symbolically. Instead of joining together for a community- donated dinner, the "minority for a day" Cajun population loses itself among outsiders from around the world, performing a ritualized cultural tradition that is slowly being changed before their eyes. The open to the public Mardi Gras Run has become a profitable performance for visitors first and foremost, and only secondarily a community event.

Mardi Gras Memory

One might assume that as the game has changed so fundamentally, few deep historical memories must endure. But for the Cajun who has never left the bayou and has participated in the Courir over a lifetime and not just as a cultural experience for sale, memories have maintained remarkable stability. A boy is very likely to play the same tricks, in the same way, as his Mardi Gras father or grandfather. Grandparents and parents are old enough to have viewed the Courir de Mardi Gras as a 'milieux de mémoire' or a living memory. Grandparents and parents can remember a time when the Mardi Gras Run was solely an isolated, community gathering. The principles and traditions of those times still run deep in their memory today.

Parent generations stand on the horizon between the past and the uncertain future. They can remember a time when the Mardi Gras was only for the exiled, Cajun French, but they have lived through the cultural revival and tourist fascination with their culture. As a result they are what bridges the gap between the remembered and the lived.

My generation, or the third generation, is where Cajun identity is most in danger. In the comforts of my home and amidst my Cajun family and community, Mardi Gras was always very traditional and

participatory. Yet the older I get, and the more time 'spent away' from the secluded Cajun community as part of the college generation, the fewer traditions I practice. This could be for a variety of reasons, but I believe that it is because Mardi Gras, as a commercial destination, is beginning to affect the group that it was originally supposed to favor. For my generation, the marketing aspects of Mardi Gras are becoming so strong that they are erasing the Cajun traditions. The Courir is beginning to lose its character as an identity marker to new Cajun generations as it becomes a commercial performance for outsiders.

As part of the ethnic revival of Cajunism, the Mardi Gras was a way for Cajuns to claim their worth in the modern world. But along with this process of beautification, came a process of cleansing the Mardi Gras Run, turning it into a civilized, yet authentic, traditional ritual. Theft, vandalism, and fighting which occasionally plagued past Mardi Gras Runs, were repressed in order to lend respectability to the event and to gain outsider tourist favor and funds. Mardi Gras Runs have opened both the viewing and the participation in this cultural performance to outsiders who are willing to pay membership dues. They can further "live the life of a Cajun for a day" by renting authentic, homemade costumes during their participation in the Mardi Gras.

This is having a profound effect on Cajun generations that have known nothing but a commodified Mardi Gras. For these generations, myself included, have grown up in a Cajun community with all of the strong community ties and very different "authentic" memories of our parents and grandparents. Survival has given way to profits. Can (grand) parents effectively "bridge" such a chasm of lived experience in the name of living memory?

CONCLUSION: CAJUNS AND COMMODIFICATION

Two years ago, I embarked on a project to discover not only more about myself, but also about the culture that inhabits the entire swampy coast of Louisiana. Throughout 2010, I interviewed various members of my family and collect oral histories that reflected a common theme of change based on commdification. Businesses, cultural groups, and local and federal governments at the height of popularity among the outside population snatched these commodified cultural aspects.

The first Cajun feature that was popularized was the swampy, geographic location in Southeast Louisiana, where the Acadians resettled after expulsion. After the Spanish crown provided ships for the Acadians to relocate in Louisiana, the group was able to live and culturally develop in relative isolation. The Cajun culture emerged after almost a century of limited outside interaction, as can been seen where New Orleans' political leaders ignored the undeveloped coast with investing the funds from the Swamp Land Act of 1849.

These national media 'discovered' the Cajun community after the devastating 1957 Hurricane Audrey. The deplorable conditions that Cajuns were living in were the result of a lack of protection from the

Hurricane winds and wave surges, yet the media depicted them as an uncivilized, semi-savage, ethnic group. They confused a lack of familiarity with the media as a sign of ignorance and lack of understanding the English language. Finally, the media negatively portrayed this isolated culture as unwelcoming and shunning of outside support. Only one journalist was able to see beyond his own ignorance and recognize the communal impulse of members of the Cajun culture, which he called "Coups de Mains."

With this foreign sounding label, more and more tourists came to observe and interact with the seemingly primitive cultural group of the swamplands offered to them by so many journalists. Cajuns were, surprisingly, modern enough to recognize that there was money to be made in performing the roles that the tourist community sought to experience. Alligator and Swamp Tours appeared to fit the stereotype, of 'danger' at a safe distance that proved lucrative.

Outside visitors continued to spend money to view Cajun culture, molding their own ideas of what a Cajun should be. In terms of language, state political leaders demanded that Cajuns speak English. If they had any desire to be multilingual they should only speak Parisian French, not the jumbled Cajun French that had emerged from generations removed

from Acadia. This idea was imposed beginning in the early twentieth century with such “English Only” movements supported by both the state and federal governments. Legislation such as Act 21 and the Education Compulsory Act of 1921 forced all Cajun children to attend public school taught in English. The government imported “qualified” teachers from New Orleans to teach the Cajun community English and Parisian French. These teacher’s methods resembled the “sink or swim” method of total immersion of the children in English; if they could not comprehend, they were humiliated in front of their classmates. This shame, indentified in the imported teachers, radiated throughout the Cajun community. Children became ashamed of their parents and of their heritage, and most chose not to teach their children their native language, whether for fear of their children also being humiliated or the desire for them to be successful, which they were taught to believe depended on speaking only English. This contributed to generations unable to speak or understand their grandparents or their cultural heritage.

With this gap in knowledge within Cajun generations, the outside media considered this not only the perfect time to “re-educate” the Cajun population but also to reimagine their ancestors, the Acadians. Louisiana politicians and the American Broadcasting Company teamed up in 1955 to celebrate the bicentennial year of the Acadian expulsion from Nova

Scotia. They decided to hold a yearlong celebration uplifting the Cajun past. Yet, not surprisingly, various historical facts were blurred in order to make the celebration a successful commodifed event. Such reinvention included highlighting a Cajun “migration” instead of an expulsion, and relying heavily on Henry Lonfellow’s fictional poem *Evangeline* for historical and cultural accuracy.

Although this “celebration” had no lasting impact on the Louisiana Cajun population, it did spur further efforts to define a more sophisticated Cajun culture. Reversing it’s earlier “English Only” policies, in 1968, the state government created the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL). The organization’s goal was to revitalize the Cajun culture with Cajuns encouraged to speak their native language freely throughout the state. Yet the newly acceptable language was not to be Cajun French, but Parisian French, taught in all Southeast Louisiana schools under Act 409. Teachers were brought in from Belgium and France to ”educate” the Cajun community with French language lessons. Yet to their surprise, those who spoke Cajun French could not communicate with these teachers as the languages were radically different.

Despite the repeated failure of the Louisiana government to reinvent Cajun culture as something more sophisticated and Parisian, that same Cajun culture began to gain popularity among the outsiders. As a result of this increased popularity, Cajuns began to market certain aspects of their culture, long before outside vendors came to get involved.

First to be marketed was Cajun cuisine. "Mom and Pop" restaurants began to sprout up during the Bicentennial Celebration as a way for these small communities to feed the wave of tourists. The food was branded as similar to the culture-exotic and unique.

Decades before the bicentennial celebration and outside of Cajun country itself, the tourists industries in New Orleans had recognized a market for a unique cuisine. That had to be different and exotic, yet somehow tied to the state of Louisiana. "Cajun" food appeared to be the right label. As seen with the Italian turned Cajun muffuletta, tourist markets began to trademark also every unique food item as "Cajun." As tourism grew, tourists began to want these "Cajun" products cooked and created by actual Cajuns in their "natural environment." In their minds, Cajun food in or from 'Cajun country' increased the authenticity of the product and experience.

As the demand for authentic Cajun cuisine increased, the number of restaurants in the Cajun swampland soared. These restaurants, in the heartland of the 'wild' swamp, magnified the cultural performance aspects. However, for some outsiders, as in the Grande Boucherie example, Cajun cuisine was still seen as barbaric. To be "culturally accepted," Cajun cuisine had to walk a fine line between 'close doors to outsiders' and performed authenticity.

As public demand for authentic, yet wholesome and civilized Cajun cuisine grew, commercialized Cajun chefs gained entry to millions of American's home via television sets. Most famous was Chef Purdhomme who not only cooked with his grandmother's recipes, but also commercialized his own "Cajun spices." Soon, Cajun cuisine was identified with heavy spices. In order to be a modern Cajun chef your pantry had to be filled with these potent seasonings.

As outside marketing companies began to commodify specific Cajun ingredients, others realized they could commercialize the entire Cajun cuisine. McDonalds is the most recognizable brand name that marketed a "Cajun" product. The Cajun Chicken Sandwich was introduced in 1988 and remained on the nationwide menu until 2000. This "Cajun-approved" sandwich was nothing more than their regular chicken sandwich, but the

chicken patty was infused with supposedly "Cajun flavors"-cayenne and pepper. Other chain restaurants, such as Pappadeaux's also had a model of offering a so-called Cajun menu for its non-Cajun customers. Pappadeaux used a menu strategy similar to McDonalds. Their Cajun menu consisted of nothing but their normal, everyday entrees subjected to heavy seasoning.

The final Cajun cultural aspect to be commodified was the Courir de Mardi Gras. Originally shunned because it was viewed as particularly primitive and uncivilized, the Cajun celebration began to attract tourist visitors after commercialized Cajun cuisine became available nationwide. Originally visitors were only allowed to watch the Courir because of the event's dedication to close-knit community values. But, profits loomed from outsides, who craved to participate. As a result, some Cajun communities, sometimes forced by their local governments, opened participation to outsiders. As more and more tourists were willing to pay to participate, the greater the role they had in shaping the Courir. Over the past two generations the Cajun population has begun to lose their traditional holiday to a commodified tourist attraction. The traditional Courir was not seen as appropriate by the outside population, particularly for children. Therefore many Cajun towns now host children and family walking parades in place of the original Courir. As tourist

participants came to outnumber the small community members, the Cajun community no longer has the capacity to host a gumbo dinner after the Courir. They have replaced the community-donated dinner with cheap, fair food, most with no relation to Cajun culture.

From geographic location to traditional holidays, nearly everything has been torn from Cajun communities to be consumed as commodities. Outsiders still deem certain aspects of Cajun culture inappropriate and primitive, all the while monetarily benefitting from the Cajun label. Cajun culture is being changed and modified without much regard for the individuals who practice the culture themselves. There are still Cajuns with the memory of the pre-commodifcation era, such as my grandparents, who hold on to the traditions and originality of Cajun culture, unique within the American melting pot. What will happen to this unique tradition after this generation is no longer able to remember the culture before the commodification process is a question for generations to come.

Appendix A
Selected Interview Materials

Richard Neyrey: *Richard Neyrey is my grandfather. He and his family, who can trace their heritage back to the expulsion, lived in Louisiana, between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, all of their lives. He attended Tulane University and was the only member of his family to ever leave the state of Louisiana. We had multiple formal interviews from December 2009 to April 2010, from New Orleans, LA to Brookshire, TX. The following are selected excerpts from the interviews.*

…your life through elementary school evolved around your neighborhood. Everything was within walking distance - grocery, drugstore, school, church, playground, etc. No one worried about young children out playing or walking to school or on errands. I'd had never heard about such a thing as child abuse. Of course, I knew about spanking! I knew all the families within a five house radius of ours, often stopping to visit with them sitting on their porches in the evening. Entertainment was bike riding, skating in the street, playing make believe (cowboys and Indians, soldiers -WWII was going on- or anything else your imagination could create), and listening to the radio at night (no

such thing as TV). Toys consisted of yo-yo, tops, props for make believe (guns e.g.). The radio is as close as we got to anything electronic.

…There was no refrigerator just an ice box and an ice man would come a few times a week and deliver a 25 or 50 pound block of ice. Obviously, no frozen food. There was no AC. I can remember when I was about 10 we got a central fan, which sucked air in thru slightly opened windows and gave you a breeze. I thought that was the most wonderful thing that had ever happened. Before that sleeping in the summer was like taking a bath. You'd wake up in a puddle of water and that was after I was potty trained. Speaking of sleeping, there was only 2 bedrooms, so my brother and I had to share it and the bed.

…Cleaning was done with a mop and broom. No vacuum cleaners…

Weekly a man in a mule pulled wagon would come thru the neighborhood yelling "watermelon lady." He would sell all kinds of fruit and vegetables. Also, every few months a man would come thru pushing a big grinding wheel in a sort of wheel barrel to sharpen kitchen knives.

Nearly all my clothes were hand me downs from my brother, who shouldn't have taken such good care of his clothes that they could be used again. In the winter, it was not pants, but knickers. I was the last generation that had to suffer thru those…

Beryl Neyrey: *Beryl Neyrey is my grandmother. She met her husband, Richard Neyrey, at age 14 and was married the summer after she graduated high school. She never was allowed to attend college, but in the same scenario as her husband, is the only individual from her family who ever left the state, even if it was for a short vacation. I conducted more interviews with my grandmother than any other individual because I spent the most time with her. We would talk and record while we were cooking or folding clothes, often discussing similar subject matter. The following excerpts are from interviews ranging from December 2009 to April 2010.*

Red Beans were always cooked on Mondays. The reason for this – Monday was "Wash" day and since Red Beans take most of the day to cook, you just put them on in the morning, stirred them every now and then, then they were ready after you finished with your laundry (Washing, hanging them out to dry, and folding them and putting them away. In just about every restaurant in New Orleans today, you will still find Red Beans on the Monday menu. My gumbo is made from Mama Neyrey's recipe, but, as a rule, I add more crabmeat.

The very first thing that comes to mind is Thanksgiving Day dinners. Eunie (great-grandmother) cooked for the entire family (and anyone that

she met who had no place to go on Thanksgiving). Mama and Papa Neyrey and Gramps and Grandma Rachael also came. Eunie was never quite sure just how many people would show up, but every time, there was plenty to eat…

…Mardi Gras has changed drastically since we were young….the other big difference is in the "Throws". Way back when we were young, there was no such thing as Mardi Gras beads. Mardi Gras was about joining together as a family and supporting the community and not about catching the most beads. Mardi Gras was about isolation and community gathering and not about a bunch of drunken strangers coming into town for the Mardi Gras….All of the riders in the parades wore face masks, and if they removed their mask, they were thrown out of the run. They were much stricter then than now. Back when I was growing up, despite having appreciation for women, they were never allowed to be apart of the Mardi Gras. But we were okay with it; we did not see it as sexist or exclusionist because that was the way it was back than. And to be honest, I think I liked it more back then than how it is today. Today everyone can be apart of the Mardi Gras. Yet they have no idea what they are celebrating besides for getting drunk. They have no respect for family or community traditions….It was also much safer. Now, I am told that police departments come to Louisiana during Mardi Gras to see how the police

handle crowd control. It was fun back then, like now, only different. Hope this gives you some kind of idea of the changes over a 60 year period.

James Ray Chutz: *Mr. Chutz and I are not related by blood, but because he was so close to my family, I have also seen him as a great-uncle figure. He grew up in New Roads which, according to tourist maps, is in the heartland of Acadia. He can also trace his heritage back to the expulsion from Nova Scotia. He never completed high school because his family had a modest plot of land that grew enough vegetables and raised enough livestock to feed him and his eight siblings. He still lives in the same house that he grew up in and still lives off the land selling whatever is leftover in the local farmer's market. We had a couple of interviews during my spring break vacation in April 2010.*

Back in the 40s, say 44-45, is when everything when the war was going, the light change, everything. Some of the refrigeration got popular, and all that. Course then you made do with what you had. The woman in the house got up in the morning and cooked breakfast and washed cloths with a washboard. Well, wasn't no dryer so we put them on a clothes line. I can remember my mama, she was kind of a heavy set person a lot of

times when she had a special chair she would fold on and she would fold the pants on the cresses and she would put them on the chair and sit on them all night while she sewed. That is how she folds. They had the old time irons and you would spit on it to see how hot it was, but you had three different irons, one warm and it would cool down, then you would get another one off the stove. But the woman's day started from daylight till dark cause she did the laundry and the cooking, and the housework, she might have a little time off, but then she had to cook a big meal for supper because people ate a lot after the farming. People ate three meals a day. Not like a bowl of cereal for breakfast or a sandwich for super. A big breakfast, then the main course was dinner or lunch, and then at night we would eat leftovers from lunch or cornbread or biscuits with a lot of milk, syrup, and dessert. We always canned a lot of vegetables and fruits.

[Who cooked? Your mom, so did she teach you?] I started cooking after I got out of the service. I would get up early, usually around 4 in the morning and would work till around 1 or whenever it got too hot to farm anymore. Jenny [his wife] would go to work at 8 or 9 in the morning she worked in an office and wouldn't get home till five. So when I would get in at 1 I would start cooking. [So you cook Jambalaya and stuff like that did you learn that?] No, you just put it together in your mind. [What about a roux?] Well a roux is something you make. You gotta cook it slow, and

fragile. Gotta have that texture, but it can burn if you cook it too long. [So when you were a kid did you eat Jambalaya and stuff like that?] At that particular time jambalaya wasn't a big thing, mama would make, what we call now a day, a dirty water Jambalaya make it with bacon, onions, and rice or salt meat, or with weenies, and it was good. But the texture is nothing like it is now, didn't use that many onions, didn't have that many available. You couldn't go to the store and buy a bag; it was whatever you had on the farm.

Louis Drouant: *Louis Drouant is my step-uncle. He grew up in the Baton Rouge area of Louisiana where most of his relatives still live. He graduated high school and even received a scholarship to Louisiana State University, but joined the US Navy during WWII as a translator. He also has six siblings and seven children of his own, all of whom live within a 10mile radius. The following interview took place in July 2010.*

…in regards to the language most the families that were adults spoke Cajun French. A lot of the families spoke Cajun all the time. Now a day's most of my family and relatives and stuff they speak and talk English today. But I had some neighbors who couldn't speak a word of English. [Was the majority Cajun?] Oh yea, in the schools they spoke all Cajun French, but teachers

didn't talk to the students in Cajun French or nothing, it was all English. If you got caught speaking Cajun in class there was hell to pay...When I was growing up if you spoke Cajun, it was strictly to your parents at home…After the war though things changed. I came back and there was no one speaking Cajun, even to their parents. Everything was in English. Even in the little schools, the only French was the real French, and no Cajun….

Education wise my dad never went to school but was a good man. My dad was illiterate; he couldn't write his own name. But my mother I think she went to 5th grade. Two of my brothers went to sixth. My oldest sister went to the tenth grade, oldest brother went to I think the 7th, but he had to stop to work. My other brother went to maybe the 9th grade. I was the only one who went to high school, I had a four year scholarship to go to LSU which was in Baton Rouge, but the Second World War hit and so I joined the Army. So I got a scholarship sitting around still. When we was in school I was in the livestock judging and meat identification. In 1936 that is where I won my scholarship, I won in the state and then went to nationals in Kansas City and placed first in Kansas City. I came in first place in meat identification. I got $450 for one, and another of the same amount and boy was I rich. I graduated, and then I joined the army in 1939. We only had 11 years of school, so if you missed that year then you had to wait another two years before you would graduate. So if you didn't

make the 1939 year then you had to wait until 1942. So I finished school at 16.

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