Introduction

As part of a larger project that examines demographic and community-level changes in the Gulf of Mexico region, we reviewed racial and ethnicity literature for eight key groups with significant influence in part, or all, of the region. The Gulf of Mexico region is incredibly diverse – with more than 13.5 million residents who trace their origins to scores of places in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America (see Table 1).

Of these various groups, we focused our reviews on eight specific racial, ethnic and ancestry groups: African-Americans, Cajuns, Creoles, Croatians, Latinos, Native Americans, Vietnamese and Other Asians (not Vietnamese). Although some of these groups are small in numbers, their effects on the region has been substantial (see Table 2). For instance, although only about 7.8 percent of the residents in the region identify as Cajun/French, this group contributed significantly to the creation of the region. The Gulf of Mexico region has an incredibly diverse – with more than 13.5 million residents who trace their origins to scores of places in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America (see Table 1).

These eight groups emerged as significant through the existing literature that details their unique influences in building the culture, economic stability and political climate in the region, as well as their ties to the oil and gas industry operating in the Gulf of Mexico. For each group, we have focused our review on common elements such as the culture, history, immigration, ties to the oil and gas industry and economic standing of each group. In addition to these common elements, we examined other prominent themes that emerged for particular groups.

Below you will find the fourth in a series of reviews. This review discusses the experiences of Cajuns in the region. Acadians, or Cajuns, are a unique group of people who now reside primarily in 22 parishes in south Louisiana and are often characterized by their unique culture (Riviere 2009, see map next page).1

Cajuns

Table 1. Diversity in the Gulf of Mexico Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ancestry Category</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Population</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British</td>
<td>15.36</td>
<td>2,147,789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>7.81</td>
<td>1,092,377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>8.71</td>
<td>1,218,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>68,544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern/Eastern European</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>733,424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern European</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>432,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsaharan African/West Indian</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>170,670</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Data from ACS 5-year estimates.

Table 2. Groups of Interest in the Gulf of Mexico Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial/Ancestry Group</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Population</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>19.14</td>
<td>2,568,703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cajun</td>
<td>7.81</td>
<td>1,092,377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatian</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>6,422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>29.72</td>
<td>3,988,491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>85,455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>396,007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>154,669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>63.72</td>
<td>8,912,239</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Data from ACS 5-year estimates and 2010 U.S. Decennial Census. Numbers do not add to 100 percent because individuals can indicate more than one race, ethnicity or ancestry group. “Other Asian” refers to Asian groups other than Vietnamese.

1 While this report refers primarily to Cajuns, all charts and maps include people of French or French Canadian ancestry as well. We decided to do this because of measurement issues with the Cajun population in the Decennial Census that are detailed later in this report (see section titled Population).
and New Orleans, the Cajun people represented approximately 50 percent of the state’s white population in the early 1940s (Kollmorgen and Harrison 1946). More recently, there has been some dispute about the actual representation of Cajuns in the current Louisiana population (see Population below). Despite this, according to the 2010 American Community Survey, those of Cajun, French and French Canadian descent represent an estimated 17.3 percent of the state’s population.

After religious and political strife in their native Acadiana, a French-occupied colony in modern-day Nova Scotia, Canada, and expulsion from their homeland, the great diaspora of the Acadian people led them to settle on the land outside of New Orleans. This migration and resettlement shaped their culture as an insularly one focused on self-preservation. Cajun culture is famous in the United States today as one of spice and revelry, of Mardi Gras and Gumbo and in this paper, its shall be seen that Cajun culture has been shaped by its history, ties to the land, and non-Cajun cultural influences.

A Note about Terminology

Cajuns are referred to throughout historical and academic literature by several different names including, but not limited to, French Louisianans, Acadians, Cajuns and Coonasses. Originally called Acadians, especially before their settlement in Louisiana, the name was corrupted by the English speaking Anglo population who pronounced their title as A’cajun, which then morphed into Cajun (Sexton 2006). The two predominant titles for these people have been Acadian and Cajun. As will be addressed in the Culture section below, the label Acadian has not been associated with any negative stereotypes. Cajun, however, has been used as a negative identifier at times throughout Cajun history. For simplicity’s sake and as an attempt to maintain the language of the authors cited here, the terms Acadian and Cajun will be used interchangeably.

Similarly, the regions known as New Acadia, Acadiana, the Cajun Triangle, Cajun Country, the Bayou and other geographical references to the location of Cajuns in Louisiana will refer, unless otherwise specified, to the land in south Louisiana where the Cajun population first settled and remains today.

Origins and History

France and French Colonialism

Calvinism was introduced into France in the 1520s (Brasseaux 2005). Formerly a country composed of devout Roman Catholics, the number of French Calvinists, or Huguenots, rapidly grew throughout the 1550s and 1560s, and as religious tensions grew, a series of civil wars broke out in France in the later part of the 16th century (Brasseaux 2005). As a result of the civil and religious strife, Huguenots set out to find a religious haven (Brasseaux 2005). Since many Hu-
guenots were merchants, they had access to extensive maritime fleets and attempted to start colonies in several areas of the Americas, but those were unsuccessful (Brasseaux 2005). The French did find some success, however, in the establishment of Acadia in present day Nova Scotia, Canada, in 1604 (Gilmore 1933; Brasseaux 2005). As the Huguenots began to thrive as fur trappers and farmers, in 1632, the French Catholic government took over colonization and appointed new colonial leaders and encouraged the migration of French natives, including thieves, prostitutes and convicts to the new colonies (Aubert 2002; Brasseaux 2005). Over the next 50 years, French Catholic colonists continued to arrive in intervals to settle the newly founded American landscape known as Acadia (Gilmore 1933).

British Rule and the Acadian Exile

After many years of turmoil, not only between Protestant and Catholic factions, but also between the French and British governments fighting for colonial control, Acadia finally became the official property of Great Britain through the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 and was then renamed Nova Scotia (Begnaud 1964). English-French tensions were high as the British government wanted the fertile farmlands owed by the French and saw the economic and religious standing of the French upper class as a threat (Gilmore 2003). These factors, compounded in 1755 by the refusal of former Acadians to pledge an oath to support the British crown, the British government began the calculated removal of the French Acadians from Nova Scotia (Walsh and Wells 1978). Deportation tactics included the detaining of Acadian men and their relocation to various ports along the Atlantic Coast between Massachusetts and Georgia. Some who were denied entry into Virginia were sent as far away as England and France (Brasseaux 2005).

By the 1760s this forced deportation of Acadians resulted in approximately 6,000 individuals sent into exile (Brasseaux 2005). Newly settled Acadians attempted to escape their new placement, scattered around the various colonies, and return back home. During this time, they lost about half of the exiled Acadian population to malnourishment and disease (Brasseaux 2005). In all colonies, the exiles resisted assimilation into their new homes. Those Acadians who were concentrated in Halifax, after much oppression by the government there, were able to secure a ship’s passage to New Orleans where they intended to then sail up the Mississippi River and cross the land through Illinois to Quebec (Brasseaux 2005). Once in New Orleans, however, the Acadians ran out of funds and were unable to acquire any governmental assistance, so they remained in Louisiana and founded a settlement called New Acadia (Brasseaux 2005).

New Acadia

Knowledge about the Acadian’s uprisings throughout the colonies and in France worried the bankrupt New Orleans government enough that no trouble was directed at the new arrivals and they were allowed to settle in Louisiana without governmental protest (Brasseaux 2005; Voorhies 1976). Soon after, the Acadian migrants sent messages to their friends and families who were spread throughout the mid-Atlantic colonies and France to invite them to come to New Acadia to rebuild their culture and their people (Brasseaux 2005).

Over the 30-year period between 1760 and 1790, approximately 4,000 Acadians arrived in small groups to this new settlement (Davis 1988; Nash 1988). The first of these settlements outside of New Orleans was called the Attakapas Post and was located far enough away from the Mississippi River to avoid flooding (Voorhines 1976). Others settled on either side of the banks of the Mississippi River outside of New Orleans (Parenton 1938; Walsh and Wells 1978).

These French Acadian travelers were only one of many groups migrating to Louisiana at the time. Many immigrants of varying decent, especially European, were moving into the area (Davis 1988). As the Acadians and other migrants moved onto the land of Louisiana, they also interacted, traded and dealt with various tribes of Native Americans, such as the Choctaw, Chickasaw and Natchez, who already occupied much of the land in the Mississippi Valley (Bowie 1935; Woods 1978).

Now settled in their new land, traumatized by the mistreatment of their people and the forced removal from their homeland, the residents of New Acadia became a closed society, avoiding contact with outside groups, insulating their culture and protecting their society against the infiltration of outside fads and values, including the rise of capitalism and Protestantism (Brasseaux 2005). The New Acadians relied on their former Nova Scotian group identity to develop a self-contained society and were the first group of European decedents to develop a distinctly North American culture (Brasseaux 1987; Brasseaux 2005).

As the Acadians found their place in New Acadia, they began to accumulate wealth and became successfully self-sustaining (Arceneaux 1982; Brasseaux 2005). Given land and supplies by the French government, the Acadians settled in the rural lands outside of New Orleans and began sustenance farming (Gilmore 2003). In addition to small farming, many Acadians became hunters, fishermen and trappers (Brasseaux 2005; Trewartha 1938). Although slave ownership and marriage with non-Acadians was resisted, as time passed some Acadians...
Acadian or Cajun culture was so strong in Louisiana during this time that it influenced many European settlers, Native Americans and African slaves (Brasseaux 1986; Lubbers 1952; Marshall 2007). Moreover, it even successfully assimilated many German and other Anglo settlers that came to the region after the 1880s into the Cajun culture itself (Sexton 2006; Sexton 1996; Smith and Vernon 1938). Not replacing authentic Cajun surnames like Babineaux and Thibodeaux, but finding their place alongside them, Anglo surnames such as Ancelet, Clark, Romero and Veroni became prevalent in south Louisiana as Cajun women married non-Cajun men (Brasseaux 2004). Still, Cajun women were sure to keep the Cajun tradition alive with their children by enforcing the Catholic faith, ensuring they learned and spoke Cajun French and instilling in them the values of family and community (Brasseaux 2004; Smith and Vernon 1938). While some people viewed the early Acadian migrants as unfortunate exiles struggling in a new land, some outsiders who lived among them defended these settlers as honorable individuals whose ancestors helped shape the history of Louisiana (Uzee 1986).

**Oil and Gas**

**Overview**

The oil and gas industry has significantly influenced the Acadian or Cajun culture since the industry’s establishment in Louisiana in the early 1900s. Scholars agree that, for better or for worse, Cajun culture would look wholly different than it does today without the discovery of and sanctioned drilling for oil and gas in the bayou regions (Nash 1988).}

**The Entrance of the Oil and Gas Industry**

The first oil well was drilled in St. Mary Parish in 1896 (Gramling 1982) and oil was recognized as available in large quantities in Acadiana, or the Cajun bayou and surrounding areas, in 1901 (Broussard 1977). Morgan City, La., along with other Cajun towns, was a mega-center of the oil industry, especially in the 1930s and 1940s because of its location near the Gulf of Mexico’s oilfields (Peltier 1960). The oil industry lured Anglo-Americans (especially from Texas) to the region looking to extract oil and gas in hopes of making it rich (Bernard 2003).

Speeding up the pace of life, and changing the former agricultural towns of Acadiana to thriving cities of the “oil patch,” the oil industry and this new influx of non-Cajun individuals not only changed the cultural landscape of Cajun life, but also provided employment opportunities for many impoverished Cajun communities (Ancelet 1987; Bernard 2003). In fact, one scholar (White 1998) cites the development of the oil industry as the first major source of wage labor among Cajuns, aside from agriculture. Moreover, by the 1950s, Cajuns became the backbone of the Gulf Coast oil industry (Bernard 2003). The oil industry not only brought jobs to Cajun towns but also stores, theaters, hotels, restaurants, bakeries and automobile dealerships (Bernard 2003). One article notes that the Superior Oil Co., established in 1932 in Acadia Parish during the Great Depression, helped boost the local economy by employing Cajuns to build homes and open grocery stores and restaurants (Ancelet 1987). Moreover, the establishment of The Superior Oil Co. in this area brought in outsiders to work for the company who used these local services, bringing more money into the area (Ancelet 1987). In addition, with more Cajuns entering the academic world due to the GI Bill after World War II, schools taught math, science and engineering classes that formerly blue collar Cajuns needed to break into the white collar jobs found in the oil industry (Bernard 2003).

While there were economic opportunities to be had, however, many Cajuns found the oil industry had negative effects on their way of life, as well (Bernard 2003). The marsh dredging and waste dumping caused by the oil industry polluted the land Cajuns traditionally had used for hunting, fishing and trapping (Bernard 2003). Moreover, the influx of outsiders brought mainstream American culture with it, introducing new values from consumerism to Protestantism to new types of music, movies, entertainment and television that featured English, instead of the Cajun’s native French (Bernard 2003; see Americanization below).

**From Boom to Bust**

During the 1970s, while the rest of the United States was in the middle of an energy crisis, Cajun country was booming due to the large amounts of petroleum found there (Bernard 2003). More than 14 billion barrels were produced in Louisiana by 1979 (Ruston 1979). While the national economy was on the decline, Louisiana was attracting prospective workers from other states to fill the labor demands of the oil industry (Maruggi and Wartenberg 1996). Although the cost of oil was at an all-time high, however, in 1981, it then plummeted (Maruggi and Wartenberg 1996). This sudden glut of oil quickly changed the oil industry in Louisiana and caused oil companies to institute layoffs, not only affecting workers and their families but the economy of Louisiana as a whole (Maruggi and Wartenberg 1996; Bernard 2003). Cajuns, in particular, were affected when big oil companies left the region (Bernard 2003). Not only did they no longer have jobs with these
oil companies, but they could not go back to many of their traditional occupations of hunting, fishing and trapping because the waste left behind by oil drilling contaminated the land and waters where Cajuns once had found their livelihood (Bernard 2003). Some Cajuns left their homeland to find work elsewhere (see Reestablishment below).

The Oil Industry and Cajun Culture

After the oil industry established itself and became a thriving influence not only on the economic prosperity of some Cajuns but also on developing the region’s infrastructure – turning towns into cities – it additionally began to alter the Cajuns’ traditional culture (Bernard 2003). With the introduction of mainstream American media, including the television (and electricity), instead of going to traditional fais do-do, or communal dances usually held on Saturday nights, or gathering to have dinner, share stories and perhaps play or dance to music, Cajuns increasingly stayed home to watch TV (Bernard 2003). The addition of television in the home not only altered the traditional Cajun culture of communal dances and food but also decreased the value placed on the French language, since TV and other media was presented only in English (Ancelot 1987; Bernard 2003). The oil industry also attracted outsiders to the region. Many of these new “oil men” entering regions traditionally occupied by Cajuns maintained values and lifestyles that clashed with those of already established Cajuns (Savvels 1993). Most Cajun families felt new pressures to maintain their cultural traditions while also competing with these newly arrived workers for economic stability (Savvels 1993). Texans were a large group of individuals who moved east into Louisiana to settle and partake in the oil industry (Western 1973). These Texans, and other Anglophones who moved into Cajun, French-speaking areas, challenged the Francophone tradition. Not only was the Cajun language now in danger, but the Cajun religion, too. As Protestants moved into traditionally Catholic Cajun areas to work in oil refineries, establishing congregations and places of worship as they settled, evangelical religions were simultaneously experiencing a revival across America. These two factors led many Cajuns away from their Roman Catholic roots and into Protestant churches (Bernard 2003; Clarke 1985). The oil industry also began to change the family structure. While men went off to work on offshore oil drilling rigs hundreds of miles into the Gulf of Mexico and other places far from home for weeks at a time, women increasingly became in charge of handling the family’s economics and running all aspects of the home – in the absence of the traditionally male dominated family and home (Bernard 2003).

Offshore Oil Drilling

The first offshore oil well and drilling platform was installed off the shore of Louisiana outside of Morgan City in the Gulf of Mexico in the 1940s (LaBourde 1996; Peltier 1960). The offshore oil and gas industry brought jobs to Cajuns just as the onshore oil industry had. For example, many Cajuns previously had been building boats for personal fishing or for sale to commercial fishers. But that changed, and some builders began to build boats to accommodate the needs of incoming sports fishers and the demand for boats from the oil industry (Ancelot 1991). In Morgan City, La., alone, such oil companies as Kerr-McGee, Shell, Gulf, Phillips, Pure, Sinclair, Sun, Texaco, California Continental, Mobil and Humble all occupied office buildings and bases to support their offshore drilling activities (Broussard 1977). Although the oil industry brought jobs to some Cajuns, however, it also altered their ways of life. The artificial reefs created by the thousands of offshore oil rigs and production platforms have affected fishing, shrimping and other livelihood activities performed by Cajuns in the Gulf Region (Ruston 1979; Gramling 1982). The increased algae production on the artificial reefs has caused large numbers of inedible sports fish to thrive in the Gulf, complicating the ability of commercial and for-profit fisherman to operate (Ruston 1979). This has caused territory battles between commercial fishermen and sports fishers, often leading to lawsuits and the intervention of the wildlife and gaming commission (Ruston 1979). Moreover, offshore oil drilling has caused the erosion of the delta and the widening of marsh canals. Oil and gas extraction, along with the transportation methods used by the oil industry to install rigs, has caused severe land erosion (Ruston 1979). This land erosion, in turn, not only affects the land and waterway structures but also the lives of those in the areas. This erosion has altered the shrimp and fish populations that previously thrived in the now disappearing estuaries (Ruston 1979). Overall, the land, livelihood and food source alteration has caused many bayou Cajuns to move further inland away from their bayou homes (Ruston 1979).

Ecology

Land Structure

Historically, the land in Louisiana has sustained both plantation and family farming. Large commercial rice, cotton and sugar plantations dominated the south and central regions of the state along with fruit and vegetable farming around urban areas like New Orleans. The northern part of the state was populated by smaller family farms also growing cotton, fruits and vegetables (Bennett 1952; Bowie 1935; Ekberg 1996; Kollmorgen 1943).

The prairie of southern Louisiana was used by Cajuns as agricultural
land and is known as the Cajun Prairie. The Cajun Prairie is a long strip of grassland that, given the climate and soil composition, normally would foster the development of forestland (Fearn 1995). Due to poor naturally occurring drainage and soil that’s not drought resistant, however, the land is occupied by tall grass instead of the lush forest found in the northern part of the state and the Louisiana coastline (Fearn 1995).

The Louisiana coastline, occupied and used by many Cajun farmers, fishers, shrimpers, and oyster producers, is dominated by marshland, where exposed land often is altered by rising water levels and weather (Gilmore 1933). Along these marches and swamplands are found natural levees created by streams and bayous that have helped to form natural settlement and property boundaries among the Cajun people (Gilmore 1993). One particular area of Cajun settlement is along the Atchafalaya River system and the Atchafalaya Basin (Reilly 1997).

The dominance of water and waterways around southern Louisiana and Acadiana caused many Cajuns to use boats as their primary means of transportation (Gilmore 1933). For many reasons, roads were slow to develop in the bayou region—reducing exposure to commercial travelers by Cajuns overall. This lack of exposure to outside sources caused Cajuns to rely increasingly on the land for sustenance (Gilmore 1933; Reilly 1977). Using the resources that were found in the forests and the Gulf, such as trees for logging, Spanish moss, wildlife and fish, Cajuns established an economy based on the land on which they resided (Gilmore 1933; Kollmorgen and Harrison 1946). In addition, because the marshland often flooded, the land was fertile for growing fruits and vegetables year-round. Therefore, many Cajun families were able to sustain themselves by planting small home gardens (Gilmore 1933).

Moving away from the Cajun inland, the Cajun dominated bayou area consisted of long fingerlike strips of land that reached out into the Gulf of Mexico. Most Cajuns lived on the land near the coast that provided tillable soil for farming. But some Cajuns made their living by settling further out in marshes to take advantage of fishing and wood and moss gathering opportunities (Gilmore 1933).

**Land Possession**

Acadians in the 18th century were owners of small parcels of land, farming crops and ranching only to sustain their families and local communities. Acadian land holdings were generally too small to participate in commercial agriculture. Because inheritance laws and land prices inhibited them from acquiring more land, individual land ownership decreased among the population, and many landless Acadians became laborers in the sugar industry (Brasseaux 2005). Moreover, cultural, linguistic and geographic barriers caused many Cajun farmers to be isolated from national agricultural developments (Kollmorgen and Harrison 1946). Therefore, most of the Cajuns’ available farmlands were taken over by competing ethnic groups, the government or large-scale farmers within the first century of their migration to Louisiana (Kollmorgen and Harrison 1946). By the 19th century, the steady decrease in land possession and reliance on employment from outside groups caused many Acadians to lose their economic independence (Brasseaux 2005).

Toward the end of the 20th century, national historical preserves and historical parks were established in Louisiana. The Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, for example, was established in 1978 with the intention of preserving the resources of the Mississippi Delta region, a traditionally Cajun area of land (Brassieur 1988).

**Environmental Justice**

**Overview (also see Oil and Gas)**

During the 1960s, Louisiana’s oil industry was expanding at such a rapid pace that it followed closely on the heels of Texas, the top-ranked state for oil production (Bernard 2003). In addition, Cajun Country produced 60 percent of the total mineral wealth of Louisiana in 1965 (Bernard 2003). This added up to $1.7 billion in minerals such as clay, lime, salt, gravel, sulfur, sand and shell in addition to natural gas and petroleum (Bernard 2003).

With this extraction of mineral resources, however, Cajun lands were being destroyed. Pollution created by oil drilling and march dredging ruined lands formerly used by Cajuns for hunting, fishing and trapping (Bernard 2003). Such drilling byproducts as asbestos, carbolic acid, arsenic, barium, mercury, radioactive isotopes and other chemicals destroyed the land, and some argue it directly compromised the health of many Cajuns (Bernard 2003). Some scholars have implied that this increase of chemicals released into the land and water due to the industrialization of the area affected the health of those living in the area. For example, it has been found that between 1950 and 1969 those parishes that use Mississippi River water for drinking showed the highest mortality rate due to cancer in the country (White 1998).

In addition to the introduction of unnatural amounts of chemicals released into the environment in Acadiana, much of the land also was destroyed due to the intrusion of salt water (Bernard 2003). Oil canals that were dug into the marshlands brought in salt water that harmed the Cajun fishing industry and its grounds (Bernard 2003). While these canals damaged the
Environment, some scholars argue they actually increased the productivity of some fisheries by providing better human access to them (Gramling 1982). Other scholars blame the oil industry, in general, for the decline in the success of commercial agriculture in Louisiana. One author describes how the oil industry affected the production of local hot peppers, a tradition in Cajun cuisine (Schweid 1989). Claiming Louisiana as the top hot pepper producer in 1938, Schweid (1989) explains that due to the agricultural complications brought about by the development of the oil industry—including the loss of agricultural workers who left farms to work for big oil companies—Louisiana quickly became the lowest hot pepper producer among all of the other southern states by 1978 (Schweid 1989).

**Re-establishment**

**Overview**

Those of Acadian or Cajun decent have had a tumultuous history of movement. Beginning with their expulsion from their home in Acadia/Nova Scotia and resettlement in Louisiana to their continual wandering between their rural homes and the urban landscape in search of employment (Dormon 1984a), Cajuns have settled and resettled all over the country. As discussed in several sections of this paper, it can be seen that while Cajuns call the Louisiana bayou country their home, Cajun individuals and Cajun culture can be found across the United States. Outlined below are two examples of Cajun migration cited by scholars. One example is an illustration of rural to urban movement, and the other example shows the migrant patterns of Cajuns to locations outside of Louisiana (also see Origins and History, Oil and Gas, Ecology, and Culture).

**Post-1880 Movement**

After the Civil War, there were many African-American individuals looking to settle and obtain jobs in the South. This post-1880 wave of new entries into the paid workforce were unable to obtain jobs that would provide upward mobility. Therefore, they took jobs doing the most menial tasks in small towns and on farms (Sexton 2006). During this time, increasing mechanization on farms left farmhands with little to do except for the most basic and tedious of tasks. Although some Cajuns took jobs replacing the labor formerly performed by slaves on large crop plantations, many Cajuns began to move from their rural homes to more urban settings in search of better employment opportunities (Gilmore 1993; Sexton 2006).

**After the Oil Industry**

After the oil crash in 1981 and following the trend of many Louisianians (Marguggi and Wartenberg 1996), many unemployed Cajuns who formerly were employed with the oil industry left their homeland in search of employment opportunities in cities such as Nashville and Austin to places as far away as Chicago, Denver, New York City and San Francisco. Although this exodus separated Cajuns from their homes, it allowed the Cajun culture to spread increasingly throughout the country. Many Cajuns opened Cajun-style restaurants and organized Mardi Gras celebrations in their new communities (Bernard 2003).

**Primary Occupations**

**Late 1700s to Early 1900s**

Originally working as sustenance farmers on smaller plots of land and lacking the ability to increase their land holdings in the 18th and 19th centuries, many Acadians sought employment in the commercial agricultural industry as overseers and laborers with such crops as sugar cane and cotton (Cortez and Rubiski 1980; Tentchoff 1980; Ulmer 1949). Cajuns also were self-employed as boat builders, fishers, trappers and wood and moss gatherers using the wilderness that the bayou provided for sustainability (Bowie 1935; Gilmore 1933).

After the Civil War, what little land was held by the Acadians was ravaged and often unsalvageable. Yet individuals did not stray far from their homes and destroyed lands to provide for their families. For example, many Cajuns remained behind to barter their fish and fur or gather moss for sale to local shops (Jones 2004). Moreover, Cajun farm tenants began to replace labor formerly supplied by slaves on plantations (Gilmore 1933) — although most impoverished Cajuns sought work as lumberjacks, huntsmen, fishermen and trappers in the marshes of the Louisiana coast (Brasseaux 2005; Jones 2004). Meanwhile, those Cajuns who had upper-class status or education moved into more urban areas, seeking employment as attorneys, educators, clergymen and even factory workers (Brasseaux 2005).

In the years after the 1880s, rice farmers began to develop the land in south Louisiana. A few Cajun farmers took up the rice crop as landlords, but most Cajuns in the region worked digging irrigation canals or providing labor to tend and harvest the rice crops (Sexton 2006; Ulmer 1949).

Later, in the early 1900s through the Great Depression of the 1930s and beyond, the oil industry found its way to the bayou — providing employment for the local Cajun population (see Oil and Gas and Ecology).

**World War II and After**

During the late 1930s and into the 1940s, many Cajuns enlisted in the U.S. armed forces and served in World War II, some of them even fighting on the French shores from which their ancestors came hundreds of years before (Kube 1994).
During the war, many Cajuns served as interpreters due to their familiarity with the French language (Kube 1994). After WWII, Cajun veterans took advantage of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill, and enrolled in college, leaving former folk occupations such as farming, trapping, logging and fishing behind while seeking education and better employment opportunities (Bernard 2003; Theriot 2007).

During this time, many Cajuns, including those who were not college bound, began leaving rural areas and entered more urban settings in search of better paying blue-collar jobs such as carpenters, mechanics, butchers, grocers, electricians and oil field workers (Bernard 2003). Those Cajuns who remained behind to work the land predominantly participated in cotton farming and increasingly in rice and soybean production (Sexton 2006).

The Oil Industry (also see Oil and Gas)

During the 1970s, while the rest of the country was in a recession, the oil industry was booming in Louisiana. There was employment to be had with petroleum and gas companies looking to hire any people willing to work as pipe fitters, welders, drillers, mud engineers and the like (Brasseaux 2005). Responding immediately, many Cajun teens dropped out of school to pursue these high paying blue-color jobs (Brasseaux 2005).

Jobs in the oil industry were promising and lucrative for young Cajuns, but this lasted only as long as the oil and gas industry boomed. When the oil industry faltered in the early 1980s, many Cajuns were left unemployed and without high school diplomas because they had dropped out of school years earlier (Brasseaux 2005). Therefore, in the mid-1980s, many Cajuns moved by the tens of thousands to nearby states such as Florida, Georgia and Tennessee looking for occupational opportunities (Brasseaux 2005).

Today

Between the 1990s and 2000s, data shows many Cajuns still located in Louisiana have more working-class jobs than upper-class positions. For example, in both 1990 and 2000, it was found that a Cajun individual over the age of 16 was more likely to be employed in the transportation, manufacturing or construction industries and less likely to occupy a position as a manager or a professional person than any other non-Hispanic white ethnic group (Henry 2005).

In addition, during the past few decades, Cajuns have found economic opportunity in the tourism industry. Drawing from their long history as storytellers, raconteurs, and community entertainers, many Cajuns have used their skills to entertain tourists interested in witnessing Louisiana culture. The allure of “Cajun swamps” and “The Cajun Man” as part of Cajun folklore has drawn individuals to the region to take swamp tours and experience other Cajun performances (Wiley 2002). Many Cajuns have used their involvement in the tourism industry as a way to recover from the economic hardship brought on by the fall of the oil industry in the bayou (Wiley 2002).

Moreover, many Cajuns have opened successful Cajun-style restaurants and are producing frozen and precooked meals that are sold across the United States (Teneyck 2001). Promoting their unique culture and traditional food items, has led to the commodification of Cajun culture, however good or bad, so these Cajuns are not only entertaining those who want a bit of the Cajun experience but are feeding them, too (Jones 2004; Means 2003).

Culture

Overview

Much of Cajun culture developed out of the melding of the Acadian French customs that the Cajun migrants brought with them from their French homeland. These customs, combined with the culture of the natives and Europeans with whom they interacted once they were settled in Louisiana, created a culture unique to the United States. The opposing combination of being stereotyped as outcasts and the need to interact with individuals of outside cultures for work and economic stability caused Cajuns to develop a very eclectic and uniquely preserved, albeit endangered, culture (Brasseaux 2005; Deutsch and Peyton 1979; Dormon 1983; Jones 2004; LaPlante 2008). Estaville (1987) very aptly summarizes the history of the ever-changing Cajun culture this way: “In the 17th century they were becoming Acadians. In the 18th century they were becoming Cajuns. And in the 19th century they were becoming Americans.”

Population

Today there is some debate as to the exact number of self-identifying Cajuns living in Louisiana. The statistics published by the U.S. Census Bureau for the year 2000 reported about 42,000 individuals reported being of Cajun ancestry (Donato 2004). Experts, however, have estimated that there were between 500,000 and 700,000 Cajuns living in Louisiana at the turn of the century (Donato 2004). Yet another scholar offers that in the 1990s, about 10 percent of Louisiana’s population was of Francophone decent (Webre 1998). This would add up to approximately 400,000 individuals but would include not only self-identified Cajuns but also individuals of Spanish, German, African or Native American decent that might have married into the Acadian population (Webre 1998).
Some complexities lie in this self-identification as Cajun. For example, one researcher notes that some African-Americans who speak a dialect of Louisiana French, whether it be Cajun, Creole or other, self-identify as Cajun but that outsiders would not consider them so (Tentchoff 1975).

The confusion with population estimation using census data among self-identifying Cajuns has been discussed by several scholars. Researchers considered factors such as methodological issues with the census survey, higher death rates, outmigration of Cajuns from Louisiana, a cultural movement away from Cajun pride and the like as barriers to accurate estimation (Henry 2005).

One of the primary methodological problems with measuring “Cajuns” through the decennial census is what some scholars refer to as the “example effect.” It wasn’t until 1980 that the census began measuring ancestry with the open-ended question: “What is your ancestry?”, which was posed to a sample of 15 percent of the population (Henry 2005). After the question, a list of example ancestry groups was meant to aid in prompting people to think of their heritage. In 1980, the list included African-American, English, French, German, Honduran, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Jamaican, Korean, Lebanese, Mexican, Nigerian, Polish, Ukrainian and Venezuelan (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division). For the 1980 census, Cajuns were not considered a unique group but instead were reported as French.

The ancestry question was added to the entire census in 1990 in a slightly different form, and Cajun was listed as an example. As a result of “Cajun” being listed as an example in 1990, there was a surge of people reporting Cajun ancestry that year. When the 2000 census was constructed, Cajun was no longer listed as an example and resulted in a steep decline in the Cajun population when the report came out (Henry 2005, U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division). For example, in 1990, 431,651 individuals in Louisiana reported being of Cajun descent (Henry 2005). Remarkably, however, this number dove drastically to only 44,960 Louisiana Cajuns in 2000—a drop of about 90 percent (Henry 2005). In 2010, measurement of ancestry was transferred to the American community survey and removed from the decennial census, adding to the difficulty of accurately tracking the Cajun population across time. These methodological problems are evident when considering the presence of Cajuns in the Gulf of Mexico region, and in the nation, from 1980 on.

Despite significant methodological and measurement issues regarding Cajuns, some scholars suggest that this alone does not account for the decline in Cajuns in the United States. In the end, it has been determined the drop was a result of a

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**Cajun, French and French Canadians in the United States: 1980-2010**

Data from U.S. Decennial Census SF3 and 2010 ACS 5-year estimates. (Cajun, French and French Canadian population in millions in parentheses.)

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**Cajun, French and French Canadian Population of the United States and Gulf of Mexico Region: 1980-2010**

Data from U.S. Decennial Census SF3 and 2010 ACS 5-year estimates.
national and statewide shift toward identifying Cajuns as American—a surge of encouragement to reduce the importance of cultural uniqueness and identify as part of the general society (Henry 2005).

Family
By the early 1800s, Cajuns had become stable enough to increase family size and began to marry children off at earlier-than-average ages (Arceneaux 1982). Almost all Cajun children were married, and courtship was brief (Arceneaux 1982, Ruston 1979). Some interesting cultural notes include that women were allowed to refuse a marriage proposal from their suitors, sometimes by sending her suitor a cut out paper man in an envelope or that fathers could encourage suitors by whitewashing the top of the chimney, a sign that an eligible daughter was available in that home (Ruston 1979). Marriage was so prevalent and fertility rates were so high that by the 1820s there is evidence that birth limitation techniques were being practiced (Arceneaux 1982).

Regardless of family size, however, Cajun culture always has been one of a close-knit family structure based on a nuclear family and that family’s involvement with the local community. To illustrate just how important the idea of home and family interaction is to some Cajuns, one scholar who observed Cajun servicemen leaving their homes saw that they were very visibly emotionally disturbed by this act (Kollmorgen and Harrison 1946). This same scholar also noted that in the 1940s about 40 percent of Cajuns who left their families to join the Catholic priesthood left the seminary due to homesickness (Kollmorgen and Harrison 1946).

Perhaps it is this connection to family and the Cajun culture that causes Cajuns to maintain high rates of endogamy. Cajuns tend to marry within the Cajun ethnicity, despite the diverse ethnic groups found in Louisiana (Bankston III and Henry 1999). Although findings show that this in-group marriage may be related to socioeconomic homogamy (Bankston III and Henry 1999), it remains a demonstration of the interconnectedness of the Cajun family.

Also Known As Cajuns
The name Cajun came from the Anglo mispronunciation of their original clan name: Acadians. Acadians, or Cajuns, are the direct descendants of the group of French colonists who were deported from modern day Nova Scotia (under British Rule and Acadia under French rule) when Great Britain conquered the territory in the mid-1700s (Brasseaux 2004). By the 1880s Cajun became the common term for Acadians (Henry 1998).

At that time, there was an increasingly predominant separation between the rising of an Acadian upper class and lower class (Henry 1998). The lower class retained the label Cajun and from there the Cajun ethnicity carried with it a negative connotation (Henry 1998). Now, the term is used especially to describe individuals who live in Louisiana with a generally agrarian lifestyle and participate in the Cajun language and culturally identify as Cajun (Brasseaux 2005). While some scholars have shown that the Cajun ethnicity is still associated with lower socioeconomic status and lower-class jobs, namely those in the oil and textile industries (Henry and Bankston III 1999), they also have shown Cajuns have attempted to use this negative stereotype placed upon them by outsiders to rework their image and portray themselves in a more positive light (Henry and Bankston 2001).

One of the ways that outsiders created the public view of Cajuns as uneducated or backwards was through humor. Non-Cajun satirists used the Cajun dialect on the radio and in publications to ridicule Cajun politics and shape outsiders’ views of Cajun culture (Richardson 2007). In the 1960s, however, during the Cajun Renaissance (also see Cajun Renaissance), Cajuns attempted to claim this dialectical humor for themselves and to use it to redefine outsiders’ perceptions of the Cajun culture (Richardson 2007).

There are many misconceptions among the general public about what Cajun culture actually is. To remedy this issue, in the mid-1990s, a group of individuals sought to educate the population on what it means to be Cajun (Webre 1998). These Cajun cultural enthusiasts have composed a cluster of Web pages called Cyberacadiana, wherein they seek to define and promote Cajun culture and dispel any assumed negative stereotypes (Webre 1998). To illustrate how prevalent these websites were, one researcher cited that on a Web page called Cajuns of the Net, 236 links were provided to additional Cajun cites in 1998 (Webre 1998).

In addition to the names Acadian and Cajun, Cajuns also have come to be known as Coonasses. This term has been used to refer to Cajuns for more than 70 years, and while there has been much speculation by both Cajuns and non-Cajuns regarding the origin of this title, the origins are unverifiable (Sexton 2009).

Understood generally as an insult, Cajuns view the term in different ways, depending upon who is using it and in what context. It seems not all Cajuns feel the same way about being identified as a Coonass. For example, the term Coonass often is considered a vulgar name, but many Cajuns in Avoyelles Parish use it as a term of endearment when speaking to each other (Riviere 2009). Similarly, some Cajuns use the term with pride. These generally are individuals who are very involved in
the Cajun community, for example (Sexton 2009). Some older Cajuns with working class backgrounds use the term regularly without the intention of vulgarity (Sexton 2009). Yet some Cajun youth use the word for self-referral to distinguish themselves from their parents and grandparents who these youth would consider real Cajuns (Sexton 2009). Similarly, some Cajuns use the term for self-referral to distance themselves from their Acadian or French past (Sexton 2009). On the other hand, some Cajuns, regardless of age or even socioeconomic class, take offense to the title Coonass by anyone at all, but most especially non-Cajuns (Sexton 2009).

Although there are some shared labels applied to Cajuns and French-speaking Creoles, such as uncultivated, simple-minded, illiterate and lazy, Cajuns and Creoles are not one and the same (Dubois and Horvath 2003). Creoles (hailing from Afro-French descendants) were marginalized by society because of economic status and skin color. What they shared with Cajuns were this marginalization and the French language (Dubois and Horvath 2003; Hodges 1972). Since World War II, however, Louisianans have come to embrace the culture of both Cajuns and Creoles as uniquely Louisiana through music and food (Dubois and Horvath 2003).

Cajuns of Alabama

There is a small group of individuals who live on a strip of land only 9 miles wide about 30 miles north of Mobile County, Alabama (Bond 1931). Sometimes known as The Lost Tribe of Alabama, they are also called the Cajuns of Alabama. Although there is no known ancestral relationship with the Cajuns of Louisiana, like the Louisiana Cajuns, the term Cajun carries a derogatory connotation for the Alabama Cajuns (Bond 1931; Griessman and Henson 1975). The Cajuns of Alabama claim to have Native American heritage but have Scottish, Irish and English surnames (Bond 1931). The Cajuns of Alabama tend to be Methodist or Baptist, and the surrounding community considers them to be uncouth, unintelligent, backwoods, and poor (Bond 1931).

Trends Toward Americanization

During the Civil War, most Acadian farmers and landowners supported Cooperationist candidates, but as tensions rose, poor Acadians increasingly supported the separationist movement (Brasseaux 2005). After the Confederate government seized crops and livestock to sustain the Confederate Army, however, many Acadians welcomed the Union Army as liberators only to find they were no friendlier than Confederate soldiers (Brasseaux 2005).

During the Reconstruction period, amidst much political turmoil, many of the wealthier Acadians shunned their heritage and integrated into mainstream Louisiana culture. Meanwhile, poor Acadians were left economically devastated, and the stigma of being lower class became increasingly associated with the Cajun identity by outsiders (Dormon 1984a). Upper-class Acadians who moved to urban areas seeking assimilation into Anglo society disassociated themselves as Cajuns and began to speak English only and educate their children in English schools, leaving poor Cajuns with the stereotype of being poor and uneducated (Brasseaux 2005).

After WWII many Cajuns who had the opportunity to go to college due to the GI Bill, used the skills they learned in the military or in factories during WWII and therefore increased their opportunities for upward mobility (Tériot 2007). After WWII, the new Cajun generations of the 1950s and 1960s did not shun their Cajun ancestry like those a century before them. Instead, they embraced and promoted their Cajun identity (Brasseaux 2005). In fact, as the Cajun Renaissance (see Cajun Renaissance), or the revival of the Cajun ethnicity beginning in the 1960s, grew, some scholars saw the fascination of America with the Cajun festival of Mardi Gras and the increasing commodification of it as an example of the Americanization of the Cajun culture (Bankston III and Henry 2000). It has been shown that modern Cajuns are increasingly being assimilated into mainstream American society through economic and educational institutions, but many Cajuns still retain many cultural traits that uniquely identify them as Cajun (Clarke 1988; Green 2005). Yet, while some individuals today, even those of Cajun descent, revere the Cajun culture of their ancestors, many feel Cajuns have lost much of their Francophone uniqueness and have become steadfastly Americanized (Abbott 2006).

Language

Although the French only had control of Louisiana for a short period in Louisiana’s long history as a colony (Haggard 1945), the French language became a dominant language in the region and has continued to influence the languages of Louisiana today, including the English spoken in places such as New Orleans (Eble 2009). During the time when Acadians, or Cajuns, were settling in Louisiana, so too, were peoples of other ethnic origins. Germans, Spaniards and Italians were beginning to settle in the French colony (Kollmorgen and Harrison 1946). This variety of cultures caused the melding of languages and influenced the development of what is now known as Cajun French (Bodin 1990; Kollmorgen and Harrison 1946). Moreover, many Native Americans in the region adopted the French language, and as intermarrying occurred between the Native Americans and the Cajuns, Louisiana’s Francophone community became ever more complex (Dajko 2009).
Early on, Cajun French had been influenced by the English language, stemming from the Acadian's tumultuous history with the British colonizers in Canada and later the English living in Louisiana (Fortier 1891). Throughout Cajun history, the English and French languages have influenced each other. Moreover, informal speech between Cajuns increasingly incorporated words adopted from the European and Native American languages found in the variety of cultures around them (Kollmorgen and Harrison 1946). Although influenced by cultures outside of the Cajuns, this unique Cajun patois was not used for written communication and outsiders were not exposed to it, so few outside of the Cajun community understood it (Kollmorgen and Harrison 1946). As this distinctive language predominated in the Cajun community, it encouraged group cohesion and inhibited communication with the outside world (Kollmorgen and Harrison 1946).

Still, as Cajun French was, in fact, derived from the formal French language. There is evidence that it retains many similarities with the French spoken outside of the traditional Acadian territories (Johansson 1981; Lane 1934; Picone 2006). Some scholars have identified the similarities and differences found in these various Louisiana French dialects and argue the differences between them can be traced back to their ancestors’ heritage from even before the Acadian exodus from Canada to Louisiana (Rottet 2004).

The Cajun French language has been on the decline since the early 20th century (Sexton 2000; Trépanier 1988). In fact, as a wave of nationalism took over the United States, Louisiana legislators passed a ban on the French language in the classroom and in 1921 constructed a law in the state’s constitution to enforce the ban (Bernard 2003, Camp 2010, Riviere 2009, Wiley 2002).

This law prohibiting French from being spoken or taught in schools also brought with it a stigma that Louisianans who spoke French were uneducated and unintelligent (Camp 2010). Therefore, many parents stopped teaching their children French to avoid stigmatization (Camp 2010). Yet, before this law was passed, Cajun French was the primary language used in Cajun churches, in the home, at community events and in other social settings (Riviere 2009). Even today, reeling from statewide labeling and persecution decades before, many Cajuns and non-Cajuns still refer to Cajun French as Broken French, Bad French or Bayou French (Riviere 2009).

After World War I and the Red Scare, Cajun children were chastised additionally at school for speaking French. Just decades later, however, in the 1960s, during what was deemed the Cajun Renaissance, Cajun French had a revival in the culture, and the interest among Cajuns to learn and use the language grew (Camp 2010). There was such a renewed interest in teaching French in public schools during this time that French teachers from France and Belgium were brought in to support such efforts (Green 2004). Some scholars saw the beginnings of this revival of southern dialectical languages like Cajun French as incredibly important because the preservation of regional language is important for the retention of cultural heritage (Leich 1977).

Yet, Cajun youth in school today are reluctant to speak the language of their ancestors and report that the Cajun French spoken at home is very different from the French they learn at school (Camp 2010). Still, with lingering memories of the importance of language in their culture, older Cajuns have reported feeling sad and disappointed that younger generations are not learning Cajun French as part of their cultural heritage. They have said their language helped them define who they were as a Cajun people (Riviere 2009).

In 1941, it was estimated that about a half million whites and thousands of African-Americans living in Louisiana spoke a dialect of French (Meigs 1941). It was estimated in 1955 that approximately 40 to 50 percent of the Louisiana population was of French descent (Bertrand 1955). Today, approximately 250,000 individuals speak Cajun French (Ryon 2002). But this number is quickly declining as the Louisiana French dialects erode (Ryon 2002).

The transmission of Cajun French between generations is dependent upon assimilation of Cajuns to the non-Cajun culture around them (Bankston III and Henry 1998). For example, some scholars have found that since the Cajun ethnicity is associated with lower socioeconomic advantage, those individuals who identify with and maintain the traits of the Cajun ethnicity tend to be more disadvantaged because of this identification (Bankston III and Henry 1998). Therefore, Cajun parents are less likely to pass on these disadvantageous traits to their children, and ironically non-Cajun parents or parents living outside of traditional Cajun areas who are assimilating to non-Cajun culture are more likely to encourage identification with ethnic traits such as learning Cajun French (Bankston III and Henry 1998). Still, other scholars have found that the more an individual has access to the Cajun language, the more the individual comes to self-identify as Cajun (Dubreis and Melançon 1997).

Among all French dialects found in Louisiana today, Cajun French is the most commonly spoken and maintains the most prestige – even more than the Louisiana Creole that is said to have highly influenced

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many aspects of the language itself (Johansson 1981; Baronian 2005). In a study comparing Cajun French and Creole, it has been found that Cajun French is associated with values linked to females and the older generation as well as a sense of social superiority while Creole is conversely linked to values associated with males, the younger generation and social equality (Tentchoff 1977). Although some scholars believe the dialectic preservation of Cajun French is on the decline (Picone 1997), others have encountered encouragement in the academic system for the introduction and sensitization of various southern dialects, including Acadian French and Cajun English through literature for children in elementary school (Cross and Aldridge 1989).

In addition to forming their own unique dialect of French, the Cajun culture also has developed its own dialect of English known as Cajun English that is still spoken today (Riviere 2009). Mainly, this form of English is distinguished by a very particular accent used in word pronunciation (Dubois and Horvath 1998; Oetting and Garrity 2006). For example, pronouncing the word think as tink or that as dat (Dubois and Horvath 1998). Among Cajuns it has been shown the majority of individuals who tend to speak with this accent are the older and younger generations, while middle-aged Cajuns show less signs of speaking with the Cajun English accent overall (Dubois and Horvath 1998). Similarly, other scholars have found that not all Cajuns maintain an accent or are necessarily associated with the Cajun ethnicity because of their accent (Walton 1994). Other Cajuns use French inspired slang words in their everyday English. Using words such as beignet for fritter, pirogue for rowboat and kyyoodle for mutt, many Cajuns, particularly in the New Orleans area, prove their French heritance (Hall 2000).
was to design and sew the costumes and masks for the men and to cook the gumbo (Ware 2001). Now, however, women participate in Mardi Gras in many of the same ways men do (Ware 2001). Some women have worked to change rural Mardi Gras traditions to fulfill their own needs and tastes (Ware 1994). Some women, called Lady Mardi Gras, even ride, masked, through small towns entertaining for money or food, just as men traditionally have done (Ware 1994).

In smaller towns today, Mardi Gras celebrations have reduced in size and number. Many individuals are unable to attend due to modern-day work schedules or fear of injury and subsequent loss of income (Sawin 2001). But Mardi Gras still thrives in the larger southern Louisiana cities, most especially New Orleans (Ware 2003). The diverse group of Cajun individuals today who organize many of the Mardi Gras activities all agree Mardi Gras events should reflect and promote the Cajun ethnicity. Due to pressures to acculturate by the non-Cajun community, however, some disagree on exactly how this should be done (Esman 1982). Many Cajuns from older generations feel youngsters participating in Mardi Gras in modern times are not aware of the meaning of Mardi Gras, are not familiar with the traditions of Mardi Gras and are only interested in drinking and partying (Sawin 2001).

Some scholars link the public drunkenness and the misconduct that follows to the anonymity Mardi Gras costumes provide the participants (Sexton 2001). Perhaps the most notorious act of modern day Mardi Gras debauchery is the exposure of a woman’s breasts in exchange for beads. The origins of this practice, which began in the 1970s, cannot be concretely determined (Shrum 1996). Still, this act, along with many others, is an illustration the celebration of Mardi Gras continues to thrive and change over time.

Cuisine

The uniqueness of Cajun cuisine serves to unite the diverse Cajun population, providing them with a distinct culinary character. A national fad, perhaps replacing the French language as the most important element in Cajun culture (Trèpanier 1988), Cajun cuisine is popularly known as being spicy, fried, creative and innovative. But there are a variety of influences and techniques that have been incorporated over the years to make Cajun cuisine what it is today (Ten Eyck 2001).

Cajun cuisine began with the French and Acadian styles used by the original Acadian migrants, who used cooking techniques and ingredients that they brought them from their native France (Leistner 1986). Yet, once settled in their new home in Louisiana, many Cajuns interacted with the natives, who taught them unique cooking styles and food items (Mandelblatt 2003; Ten Eyck 2001). For example, natives taught the new migrants how to extract sugar from sugarcane, and crawfish was introduced to the new migrants’ diet (Ten Eyck 2001). Reciprocally, many French colonialists took Native American foods and demonstrated how they could be “civilized” by cooking them in the French fashion (Dawdy 2010). In addition to the Native American influence, Cajun cuisine has integrated various ingredients and styles from the German, Spanish, Irish, Italian, African and other cultures that also migrated into the Louisiana area (Hill and Barclay 2008; Mandelblatt 2003). Examples of this include the use of okra brought by Africans and the creation of jambalaya, which is similar to Spanish paella, without saffron (Hill and Barclay 2008).

The ability of Cajuns to adapt their cuisine to the unique Louisiana ecosystem and mesh of cultures around them has proven their environmental competence and ability to be innovative (Gutierrez 1983; Kniffen 1960). This ability has led to the diverse and even improvisational character of Cajun cuisine. Modern Cajun dishes start out with a basic foundation but then lend themselves to a variety of ingredients in the everything-in-the-kitchen style that has come to be known as uniquely Cajun (Ruston 1979).

Gumbo, jambalaya, sauce piquant and etouffee are three traditional and very popular food items made by Cajuns everywhere. To make gumbo, one always starts with a roux, which is flour slowly browned in butter or animal fat (Ruston 1979). Next, add onion, bell peppers and garlic, the trifecta of Cajun ingredients known as Mon Dieu (Ruston 1979). For the main ingredient, gumbo generally is made with any meat except beef; most traditionally a combination of oysters, shrimp, crabmeat, sausage or bacon is used (Ruston 1979). Gumbo is derived from an African word for okra, which also is included in the gumbo for flavor and sauce thickening (Ruston 1979). Jambalaya is a rice dish inspired by the early Spanish influence on the Cajuns (Ruston 1979). Jambalaya is a crawfish or meat roux cooked with rice and water, tomatoes, onions and whatever leftovers are around and need to be cooked (Ruston 1979). Sauce piquante is a dish that has a bullion base used in other dishes, but this one has pepper or spices and a variety of meats that could be added to it (Ruston 1979). Traditionally, sauce piquant is cooked with one or more of the following: squid, frog’s legs, turtles, quail, chicken, squirrel, rabbit or pigeon (Ruston 1979). Another popular meat used specifically in Cajun cuisine is crawfish. Cooked in many ways, one of the most delectable is
crawfish etouffée, which is a concoction of onions, garlic, celery, bell peppers and crawfish tails cooked in crawfish fat and served over rice (Ruston 1979).

Politics
While not widely discussed by scholars, one author did indicate that politically Acadians tended to remain apolitical during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. As universal suffrage was granted to males in Louisiana in 1845 and with Jacksonian politics on the rise, however, many individuals became interested in governmental politics, and by 1850s many Acadians supported the Democratic Party (Brasseaux 2005). Some scholars have measured the voting trends in Cajun parishes in Louisiana to better understand possible patterns of racism in elections. It was found that individuals in these areas tended to vote for the white candidate over any nonwhite candidate, regardless of political party association (Skinner and Klinkner 2004).

The Cajun Flag
The Cajun flag was adopted in 1965. Dean Thomas Arceneaux crafted a flag that illustrated three fleurs-de-lis harkening to the Cajun culture’s French roots, presented on a blue field with a gold castle on a red backdrop illustrating the settlement of the exiled Acadians in Spanish colonized Louisiana, and evoking the Cajun religiosity, a gold star with a white background for the patron saint of Acadians, Our Lady of the Assumption (Bernard 2003).

Music/Dance
Cajun music is diverse and versatile (Savoy 1984). Cajun folk musicians generally play all instruments in the band. When one puts an instrument down, he or she picks up the next along the way. Generally, the Cajun folk band consists of the accordion and the fiddle as the lead instruments, with the rhythm accompaniment of the bass, the triangle and the guitar.

The accordion is the main staple of Cajun folk music and was introduced into Cajun culture by the German migrants who came from the Midwest to Louisiana in the 1880s looking for work in the rice fields and laying railroads (Ruston 1979). Cajun music also has been heavily influenced by the French Creoles, who introduced western French folk music, and the Native Americans in south Louisiana, who contributed their unique wailing singing style (Ancelet 1991; Spitzer 1988). Later, black Creoles collaborated with Cajuns, lending new rhythms, percussion styles, improvisational techniques and even the blues from their own cultural music known as Zydeco to Cajun folk styling (Ancelet 1991; Jolly 2000).

During the 1930s and 1940s, amplification of electronic music altered the traditional Cajun folk sound, and Cajun music became increasingly recorded in studios and released for sale (Ancelet 1991). Cajun swing music became popular in the late 1930s and for the decade that followed (Brasseaux 2004). This particular style incorporated amplified orchestras along with traditional instruments like fiddles and drums (Brasseaux 2004). Starting after World War II and into the Cajun music of today, what is known as progressive Cajun music combines the traditional folk sound with a mixture of rock-n-roll, country, bluegrass and jazz (Ruston 1979). Cajun music is one way the Cajun culture and worldview is expressed (Brasseaux 2004). It promotes the living of a full life that may have struggles rather than a life where one simply exists. Cajun music tells its listeners that a full life is attainable and that one should laugh and sing loudly and love and trust rather than complain, fear or fight (Ruston 1979).

Cajun music, always joyous, lent itself easily to dance. Therefore, Cajun dances existed from the very origins of Cajun folk music. Each family member generally knew how to play at least one instrument, so large family gatherings often ended with music and dancing where all the furniture would be moved out of one room and gumbo and beer placed out while the adults danced and the children were put to bed (Ancelet 1991). Household dances that included friends and family and were held in the rural areas of Cajun country usually took place on Friday and Saturday evenings and featured socializing, alcohol consumption and gambling (Sexton 1990). Eventually, family gatherings evolved into community gatherings in halls where entrepreneurial Cajuns sometimes began to charge for admittance, especially after World War II (Ancelet 1991; Sexton 1990). With increased Americanization and the introduction of mainstream music and dance styles, the forms of Cajun dance has altered, but dance has remained an integral part of Cajun culture (Bernard 2003; Sexton 1990).

The Cajun Renaissance
The Cajun Renaissance began around 1964 during the civil rights movement in the United States and was supported by Cajuns who wanted a revitalization of Cajun food, music, and language (Dorman 1984b). Until the 1960s, the term Cajun was a derogatory term (Trépanier 1991), and Cajuns were working to remove the stigma of the Cajun identity as a negative one. In addition, the Cajun Renaissance served as an opportunity for Cajuns to reclaim French Cajun after it had been banned in schools earlier in the century (Bernard 2003; Brasseaux 2004). During this time, Cajun activists organized film festivals and founded radio and television programming in
which only Cajun French was used (Brasseaux 2004). Through the work of these activists, along with other community leaders, the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana, also known as CODOFIL, was founded to educate the public about Cajun culture. It also confronted the psychological and political ramifications of the negative stigma attached to Cajuns for so long (Brasseaux 2004; Durmon 1984a). Other formal organizations were formed in the late 1960s and 1970s to preserve and commemorate Cajun culture. For example, in 1968 the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana was established, along with the Center for Louisiana history and the Center for Acadian and Creole Folklore in the 1970s, which was spearheaded by the University of Southwestern Louisiana (Ancelet 1988). Some scholars argue, however, that this revitalization of French Louisiana culture is incomplete since it has only focused on the Cajun ethnicity and ignored the black Creoles and French-speaking Native Americans in the region (Trépanier 1991).

Food festivals and other community rituals (Gordon 1991) are examples of the many ways Cajuns have expressed their unity and cultural identity during this renaissance period. Adopting the crawfish from the Native Americans, the Cajuns have used the crawfish as a symbol to unite Cajuns with varying heritage and ideologies from across Louisiana (Esman 1981; Gutierrez 1983). The Crawfish Festival has become one of the largest and most predominant Cajun festivals in Louisiana and is an illustration of Cajun group solidarity (Esman 1981).

Still, even before the Cajun Renaissance, Cajuns expressed their ethnic pride in large social events similar to festivals like the Crawfish Festival. For example, in 1955 the Cajun community organized the Acadian Bicentennial Celebration to commemorate the Acadian exodus from Canada (Bernard 2000). The celebration featured a series of events that lasted almost a full year and honored the Cajun culture and its traditions (Bernard 2000). Due to the political climate in the United States at the time, however, at the height of the Cold War, and the celebration’s attempt to satisfy mainstream American values, it neglected to include the interests of many Louisiana Cajuns and therefore did not achieve the sense of ethnic solidarity that was its original goal (Bernard 2000).

**Housing**

One of the many housing features introduced to the Cajun lifestyle by their fellow migrants includes the Cajun barn (Comeaux 1989). Initially used by Germans, the barn structure was incorporated among Cajun farmers in the 18th century but has been replaced by newer architectural structures in recent years (Comeaux 1989). The shotgun style house was used by many Cajuns in coastal bayou areas, and various other styles, like the Midwestern style or open-passage type, were found predominantly in the prairie region (Kniffen 1936). Some unique features of Cajun houses include using the attic as a sleeping space and the outside porch as a gallery (Ostrom 2005). In the upper bayou area, Biloxi style houses were built by the Cajuns. These had a sloping roof from front to back (Bowie 1935). Often, Cajun homes were simple and had only two or three rooms (Bowie 1935).

**Literature**

Cajun culture has been immortalized in the literature of Acadian people. A few literary works composed in the late 1800s specifically depicted the Cajun culture and presented it to the nation. Evangeline, by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, told about the Acadians as an inherently American culture (Herbert-Leiter 2005). Bonaventure describes a time of national unity that occurred after the Civil War and features the story of the conversion of the Cajuns to speaking the English language (Herbert-Leiter 2005). Kate Chopin and other female writers have used the Cajun culture as an example of how female sexuality is controlled in literary portrayals by patriarchal controls (Herbert-Leiter 2005) and they have used Louisiana and its Catholic Cajun culture as a backdrop to illustrate the human, particularly feminine, experience of sacrifice for belonging and the role of women as in-group and out-group participants (Beard 2009; Simpore 2009). While these three works portray a more mythical, less tangible depiction of Cajun culture, other works of the 20th century present a more sincere representation of Acadian culture (Herbert-Leiter 2005). Authors like Ernest Gaines, James Lee Burke and Dave Robicheaux write about the racial status of Cajuns and their loss of innocence as Americanization crept into the culture (Herbert-Leiter 2005).

Plays also have been written in honor of the cultural dilemma of the Cajuns. Mille Miseres and Les Attakaps describe the assimilation, acculturation and Americanization of the Cajuns (Heylen 1994). Scholars have documented and examined the Cajun and Creole folktale tradition as one that is integral to understanding Cajun culture and have found that even modern day folktales align with their Cajun self identity (Deutsch and Peyton 1979; Eisenman 1995; Klesener 1988; Lopez 2010). Some scholars have looked at Cajun folktales to understand the culture from a sociopsychological perspective, analyzing Cajun values, and essentially have found that the Cajun worldview was accurately reflected in their folk stories (Mixon 2000). Presentations of Louisiana French in literature and expression through writing are illus-
Broad Conclusions

For many reasons, roads were slow to develop in the bayou areas. Similarly, many Cajuns are employed in the oil and gas industry or related industries such as fishing.

Conclusion

The Cajuns are a people who have maintained the integrity of their cultural heritage throughout the centuries. Despite hardship and discrimination forced upon them and their ancestors, they have proven to be a resilient people. There have been ebb and flows in their economic opportunities, ability to pass on their culture to their children and their overall well-being, but the Cajuns are a uniquely American culture that people from all over the nation have come to revere. Their relationship to the environment and struggles with the oil industry and the greater American culture, both supporting and posing threats to their ways of life, has altered their cultural construction and sustainability. Although it seems there is a trend among Cajuns to move out of Louisiana to seek employment and other opportunities and that some may reject their Cajun ethnicity, Cajuns have proven their resourcefulness and adaptability when faced with having to preserve their heritage.

Additional Reading

For more information on the overall history and culture of the Cajun people, a brief annotated bibliography has been presented below.

Ancelet et al. (1987) provides a deeply thorough account of Cajun history, starting from its roots in Canada, and follows the development and expansion of Cajun culture in Louisiana. This book highlights geographical settings, social organization, folk life, language and cultural resources and features interviews, oral histories and participant observation narratives.

Baker and Kreamer (1982) present a series of essays compiled by teachers and administrators in St. Landry Parish as part of an ethnicity curriculum used to help train teachers on how to teach to a multicultural classroom. Topics in this collection include essays on the history, ethnic traditions and culture of the various ethnic groups in St. Landry Parish, as well as teaching tips for multi-ethnic classrooms.

Brasseaux and Foret (1985) offers a comprehensive bibliography of historical, cultural and genealogical material referencing Acadian culture and features a collection of books, articles, photographic essays, art books and the like found between 1955 and 1985.

Conrad (1978) presents a collection of 12 essays each focused on a different aspect of the Cajun story. This collection addresses not only the historical Acadian exile but also acculturation, cultural traditions and the influence of Cajun culture in Louisiana today.

Conrad and Brasseaux (1982) offer a bibliography of collected literature that describes New France and colonial Louisiana. This bibliography features manuscripts, theses and dissertations, as well as articles and monographs.

Jumonville (2002) offers a compilation of more than 6,800 sources that have been arranged into a variety of categories. This bibliography organized the literature into categories such as environment, precolonial Louisiana, Civil War and Reconstruction, modern Louisiana, and the people of Louisiana. Louisiana Division of the Arts (1999) has developed a website (URL: http://www.louisianafolklife.org) that documents the folk cultural resources of Louisiana. This website presents literature and general information on folk life and how to conduct folk life projects in Louisiana. McKernan (2010) addresses the overall Cajun experience. Beginning with the arrival of the Cajuns in Louisiana, this article then discusses the Cajun landscape, demographic characteristics, cultural heritage, familial customs and the Cajun culture in today’s society.

Uzee (1985) presents a compilation of genealogies and life histories of individuals of Cajun descent living in the Lafourche region of Louisiana. The contents of the entries cover a wide range of topics including settlement in the area, land development and culture. Valdman 1997 offers a variety of perspectives on the development and change of the French language in Louisiana. A collection of authors have created chapters covering various topics, including the language shift among Cajuns, the language structure of Creole and French folklore.

**Works Cited**


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Acknowledgements

This research was funded in part by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management as part of a larger project studying ethnic groups and enclaves in the Gulf of Mexico region. We would like to acknowledge Harry Luton from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management for his feedback and encouragement throughout this project. We also would like to thank Diane Austin, Thomas McGuire, Britny Delp, Margaret Edgar, Lindsey Feldman, Brian Marks, Lauren Penney, Kelly McLain, Justinia Whalen, Devon Robbie, Monica Voge, Doug Welch and Victoria Phaneuf, from the University of Arizona, for providing a database of literature and support. Similarly, we would like to acknowledge Helen Phaneuf, from the University of Arizona, for providing a database of Cajun Swamp Tours.


