

L'ÉCORCE GROSSIÈRE, L'ÂME ARISTOCRATE:

LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF CAJUNS IN FRANCOPHONE LOUISIANA,
NINETEENTH CENTURY TO PRESENT

A Dissertation

presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

SCOTT GOSSETT

Dr. Carol Lazzaro-Weis, Dissertation Supervisor

DECEMBER 2015

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

L'ÉCORCE GROSSIÈRE, L'ÂME ARISTOCRATE:
LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF CAJUNS IN FRANCOPHONE LOUISIANA,
NINETEENTH CENTURY TO PRESENT

presented by Scott Gossett,

a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy of French Language and Literature,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Carol Lazzaro-Weis

Professor Richard Bienvenu

Professor Flore Zéphir

Professor Valerie Kaussen

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

« Un livre est un tel agencement, comme tel inattribuable. C'est une multiplicité... »

-Deleuze and Guattari

Many thanks, first and foremost, go to my advisor and dissertation director, Dr. Carol Lazzaro-Weis, whose patience and confidence were ever-unwavering.

A debt of gratitude is also owed to Dr. Richard Bienvenu, who, in addition to his extensive historical expertise, also provided me access to his personal library. Both proved integral to the success of this study.

And of course, thank you to Dr. Flore Zéphir and the department of Romance Languages at the University of Missouri for providing me refuge from Hurricane Katrina my first semester of graduate school. A decade later, this study is a product of your kindness and assistance during a time of upheaval.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
THE PITFALLS OF ‘AUTHENTICITY’	4
SYMBOLIC STEREOTYPING	6
CONVERSING WITH ENGLISH STEREOTYPES	10
THE FULL PICTURE	15
MYTHOLOGIES	19
NOT YET CAJUN, NO LONGER ACADIAN: ETHNIC ADOPTION IN EVANGELINE AND POUPONNE ET BALTHAZAR.....	24
THE BREAUX MANUSCRIPT AND THE GENTEEL ACADIANS	35
HISTOIRE	37
PERSONNAGES.....	39
SUBJECTS OF DISPUTE.....	44
ACADIANS IN CREOLE SOCIETY:.....	49
ASSIMILATION OR INTEGRATION?.....	49
PAROISSES RIVERAINES ET D’ANCIENNES PRAIRIES	59
VIGILANTES ON THE PRAIRIE	83
LES COMITÉS DE VIGILANCE.....	86
THE LASH.....	89
BARDE’S TALE	96
ACADIAN PARTICIPATION IN CIVIL WAR	106
GUDBEER AND COCO	116
THE VIGILANTE CAUSE.....	124
REENACTING HISTORY: BELIZAIRE THE CAJUN, CAJUN VICTIMIZATION AND THE CAJUN RENAISSANCE	134
ETHNIC (RE)NAISSANCE	134
CAJUN CINEMA	142
THE INTERSECTION OF MYTH AND HISTORY.....	150
HISTORY CONTRADICTS ITSELF	153
CONCLUSION:	159
WORKS CITED.....	169
VITA	175

INTRODUCTION

“Quand nous pensons sur nous, quand nous essayons de nous connaître au fond nous usons des connaissances que les autres ont déjà sur nous, nous nous jugeons avec les moyens que les autres nous ont donné de nous juger. Quoi que je dise sur moi, toujours le jugement d’autrui entre dedans.” (Sartre, Extraits)

I grew up in Southern Louisiana living Cajun culture and carrying on Cajun traditions. At the same time, I enjoyed American music, sports, television and cinema. While I was a true American child of the nineteen eighties and nineties, my family heritage is Catholic with Cajun French-speaking grandparents from the “Cajun heartland” on both paternal and maternal sides. We *pâcqued* eggs at Easter; we fished and hunted; we enjoyed crawfish boils, étouffée, gumbo, jamabalaya and the like. I attended “cochon de laits” and danced at “fais do-dos.” I never doubted my Cajun heritage.

As native Francophones from the prairies of Eunice, my grandparents learned in school that they were different and it was there that they learned to be American and to speak English. For myself, the opposite occurred: school is where I learned what it meant to be Cajun. It’s where I learned that Cajuns were the descendants of the Acadians, French settlers of present-day Nova Scotia (formerly *Acadie*) who were exiled from their settlement by the British in 1755, an episode referred to as the *Grand Dérangement*. According to the myth—which, like most good myths, does have its basis in history—many of these Acadians then sought refuge in Louisiana because they believed the territory to be French and they could rebuild. These Acadians became known as the Cajuns. The connection of the Cajuns to Acadians is strengthened by the assertion that the term *Cajun* is

an Anglicized corruption of the French *Acadien*. The myth accentuates the transplanted nature of the Cajuns, having white European roots, and is a myth canonized by stories such as the poem *Evangeline* written by the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

In reality, despite my thorough ‘cajun-ness,’ my family never spoke of ‘ancestors’ or ‘bloodlines’ or ‘Acadie/Acadian.’ They never spoke of exile; Louisiana was their home, and many of my family do not even know what brought them there. When asked why they were Cajun, like many members of the oldest generations, they simply respond that they just are and that they always have been. That was good enough at the time, but it became a very difficult question to answer as I grew older.

If it was in school where I learned what Cajun meant, it was also through education—in college—where I was taught that I was, in fact, *not* a Cajun; neither my surname, Gossett, nor my mother’s maiden name, Andrepont, were considered *Cajun* because they were not descended from the displaced Acadians. Like many Cajuns do, I pored over family trees and Acadian genealogy websites until I found ‘true’ Acadian surnames, like Richard, in my mother’s bloodlines and Breaux in my father’s. This, however, gave me little solace. Must every Cajun prove their authenticity through an exhaustive research into an ever-increasingly inaccessible, tenuous past? If so, why stop at Acadie¹? After all, if bloodlines are a

¹ Contrary to popular belief that Cajun identity began in Acadie, there is historical evidence that suggests that Acadian customs were much closer to their French origins than to what we now consider to be Cajun. (Mouhot, *Les réfugiés acadiens en France, 1758-1785: L'impossible réintégration?*)

concern, what difference is there between a ‘pure’ Cajun/Acadian and ‘pure’ French? Do the Acadians not share the same bloodlines as the French from whence they originate?

Table 1: Liste des familles acadiennes réfugiées en Louisiane (Ditchy, 226)

Liste des familles acadiennes réfugiées en Louisiane		
Allain	Deveau	Leblanc
Arseneau	Douaron ou Doiron	Lejeune
Aucoin	Doucet Laverdure	Lemaire
Babin	Dugas ou Dugast	Lomeron
Babineau	Dupuis	Martin
Bayot	Gaudet	Mélanson ou Mélençon
Belliveau	Gautreau	Mirande
Benoit	Girouard	Naquin
Bernard	Godin	Pelletret
Blanchard	Grandclaude	Peseley
Boudrot ou Boudreau	Guérin	Petitpas
Bourc	Guilbaut	Pinet ou Pisnet
Bourq	Guy	Pitre
Bourgeois	Guyon	Poirier
Brossard ou Broussard	Haché-Galand	Poitevin
Brot ou Breau	Hébert	Richard
Brun	Joffriau	Robicheau
Brunet	Kuessy	Robineau
Charet	Labauve	Sauliner
Comeau	Landry	Savoie ou Sçavoie
Cormier	Lapierre	Sire
Daigle	La Rozette	Terriau ou Thériot
Damour	Latour	Thibodeau ou Thibaudeau

The Pitfalls of 'Authenticity'

There are many problems with the assertion that Cajuns today are descendants from Acadians, and the ramifications of this myth affect all facets of Cajun identity. For starters, even some of the highest estimates put the number of Acadians arriving in Louisiana between 1764 and 1785 at only about 3,000. In 1788, however, the total population of Louisiana had grown to 42,621 and “in the years 1809-1810 alone, more than 10,000 persons—approximately one third of them slaves, one-third free people of color, and one third Whites—arrived in New Orleans from former St. Domingue via Cuba” (Klingler 93). The Acadians, despite purportedly living in isolated, tight-knit communities and being particularly culturally influential by having numerous offspring and assimilating other groups into their own, were greatly outnumbered by at least two other francophone populations.

In general, Louisianians today understand that not all people who call themselves 'Cajun' are descendants of Acadians, but the common assumption is that this is because the Cajuns integrated other groups who then donned the badge of the Cajun and wore it with pride. For example, Vaughn Baker sums this assumption up well:

But despite the total democracy of the Cajun frontier, where all were economically and socially equal, and where all the evidence attests to cultural and genetic inbreeding, the strength of the Acadian tradition of independence within a tight system of

communal integration maintained Cajun ethnic integrity. The Cajun cultural pattern remained dominant and tended to accept outside influences only to absorb them in Cajun folkways” (Baker, “In and Out the Mainstream” 104)

Perry H. Howard repeats this claim in “The Politics of the Acadian Parishes:” “We should not be surprised to find French influence persisting, for, as we have been told, Acadians have assimilated foreign elements in the southern part of the state, infecting all with their *joie de vivre*” (175).²

The reality is that until about the last half-century, those called ‘Cajun’ were ascribed this term indiscriminate of their actual heritage and from the outside as a pejorative marker for the mixture of several groups, who were culturally and linguistically distinct but who shared a similar socio-economic status (Dormon). Yet still today, many Cajuns maintain their Cajun-ness by bloodline ties to Acadian exiles, which has become more and more problematic.

So what’s in a name? When identity is so intrinsically tied to bloodlines, quite a lot. In 2014, I conducted a survey of people with family ties to Louisiana. Of the eighty participants, fifty-two considered themselves to be Cajun. Of those fifty-two respondents, twenty-five (48%) referred to genealogy as the answer to why they considered themselves Cajun. Even my own sisters, all three of them independently, responded that their family name was Andrepont, my mother’s maiden name. When I asked them why it was that they chose Andrepont over

² Both authors cite as their source T. Lynn Smith and Vernon J. Parenton, “Acculturation Among the Louisiana French,” *American Journal of Sociology*, XLIV (1938). 355-364.

Gossett, though their answers varied slightly, it all came down to bloodline. Although a name is but a signifier, what it signifies is indicative of the entire mythos of identity construction. In the current *Cajun* construction, certain signs carry much more value than others. How did Cajuns go from something no one wanted to be to something on which people conduct extensive research to prove that they are? And what role did/does the threat of Americanization/modernization play?

Symbolic Stereotyping

Every ethnic identity, to some extent, is a construction. Attempts to define an ethnicity inevitably resort to some type of essentialist approach, which may omit or marginalize certain members of that community. And yet, for the sake of preservation and valorization, ethnic groups—in particular marginalized ethnic groups—may be able to use strategic essentialism³ to give voice and expression to a subaltern people. In the face of Americanization, the Cajun Renaissance of the 1960s made such an attempt to essentialize and revitalize the dying, marginalized Cajun ethnicity in Southern Louisiana. By synthesizing many different francophone groups under the banner of ‘the Cajun,’ the state of Louisiana has reaped the benefits of a boom in tourism and commercialization focused on its indigenous ethnic population. In this primarily political act initiated and

³ Strategic essentialism is a term coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and is frequently used in Postcolonial Studies. See “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg, eds. *Marxism and the interpretation of Culture*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988: 271-313.

implemented by politicians and academics, ‘the Cajun’ was officially defined both historically and culturally, while an idyllic, atavistic standard of authenticity has been established.

What exactly is an “authentic Cajun?” Before the mid-twentieth century, we have no record of a definition of Cajuns by Cajuns themselves, as there exists virtually no literature produced by Cajuns. The simplest reason is that most Cajuns were illiterate. But this explanation leads to yet another, more complicated problem which is more of a chicken-or-the-egg type of question: Is it that Cajuns were uneducated and illiterate or is it that people who were uneducated and illiterate were Cajuns? Those Acadians who climbed the social ladder and did learn to read and write ‘proper’ French no longer fit the label, and were thus no longer considered Cajuns. Joseph Arsenne Breaux of the aforementioned “Breaux Manuscript” is one such example, and his work will be discussed in further detail in chapter 2.

Because of their illiteracy, almost everything we know about the Cajuns until the early twentieth century comes to us from outside the population (historical accounts, literary representations, newspaper and magazine articles, etc.), and much of the popular literature seeks to root their heritage firmly in white, Euro-centric Acadian-ness. Yet the only remnants of Cajun identity produced from within the community—e.g. folktales, music, cuisine, language—all contain major influences from a plethora of diverse cultures: French, Spanish, American, Irish, German, African, and Native American. These non-Acadian influences are typically recognized today only in their contributions to these compartmental categories, but are vastly under-attributed as being a part of the

overall ethnic identity, in part, because of the Acadian origin myths that have come to be associated with Cajuns, thereby whitewashing the truly creolized and diverse components of Cajun ethnicity.

Jacques Henry and Carl Bankston have studied the contributions of outsiders on the ethnic self-identification of Cajuns in their article “Ethnic Self-Identification and Symbolic Stereotyping: the Portrayal of Louisiana Cajuns.” In their analysis, they stress the “transactional nature of ethnicity” using prevailing views in their field. They cite Nagel’s (1994, p. 154) definition of ethnicity as “the result of a dialectical process involving internal and external opinions and processes as well as the individual’s self-identification and outsiders’ ethnic designations” (1020). But what Henry and Bankston believe to be lacking in studying ethnicity and group identity in general, and Cajun ethnicity specifically, is the unaddressed influence of ‘others’ on identity formation:

Our analysis suggests that the basis for contemporary ethnics’ self-identification is rooted in a stereotyped depiction constructed by outsiders over the past two centuries...Our findings indicate that symbolic ethnicity is not simply a matter of group members’ subjective identification with symbols of ethnicity but that it involves the participation of group members in ideas of ethnicity based in part on received historical images constructed by outsiders.
(1021)

Henry and Bankston conclude that “...ethnicity can be seen as two interlinked dialogues: one between the accounts of insiders and the accounts of outsiders and the other between historical portrayals and contemporary conditions” (1040).

This dialogue between insiders and outsiders is beginning to be recognized and more deeply explored.⁴ However, part of the difficulty where the Cajuns are concerned is that there is a certain slippage in identifying ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders.’ Furthermore, the ‘outsider’ group can be divided into many groups, particularly anglo- and francophone.

In forming the Cajun stereotype that Bankston and Henry refer to as a symbolic marker, more emphasis has been placed on anglophone representations than francophone. There is a certain irony in this, as Cajuns are supposedly descendants of Acadian French settlers in Canada. This can be explained by using Bankston and Henry’s model:

In the past, ethnicity was usually defined by contrast to dominant cultural and linguistic groups. Members of the dominant groups shaped the images of minorities in what might be considered the narrative hegemony of outsiders. However, the increasing flow of information in modern society means that the subjects of ethnic descriptions not only have access to accounts about themselves, they can also produce accounts. These self-descriptions cannot simply discard the received historical imagery of the outsiders because ethnicity is constructed from relations between insiders and outsiders. As insiders begin to describe themselves, they enter into a dialogue with the portrayals of the outsiders. (1040)

⁴ Thomas Klinger, Eric Waddell, Cécyle Trépanier to name a few.

In the modern era, the dialogue that was needed to construct a francophone ethnicity was flawed. By the time modern Cajuns began to describe themselves as such, French was neither the dominant language in Louisiana nor was it even so among Cajuns. Because the most popular accounts about Cajuns are all in English, the accounts produced by modern Cajuns are in dialogue with English accounts and informed by those stereotypes.

Conversing with English Stereotypes

I have mentioned briefly that the dialogue between insiders and outsiders in the formation of Cajun ethnicity has begun to be recognized. One such study by Shane Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, approaches the Cajun identity historically in terms of its confrontation with Americanization. In the preface to his 2003 book, Bernard describes himself as a “descendant of Acadian exiles who settled in Louisiana in the eighteenth century, who intermarried with other ethnic groups on the semitropical frontier, and who in the process became a new ethnic group—the Cajuns” (xi). He goes on to say that he is, however, an “Americanized Cajun”—despite his origins in the “heart of Cajun country,” his mother is not Cajun but Anglo-American; he was baptized Protestant and “what little French” he speaks is not Cajun but rather standard French, which was learned in school. Yet Bernard, even while prefacing a book on the Americanization of the Cajuns and himself, begins it by claiming his descent from Acadian exiles.

While attempting to explain modern Cajuns and their dialectic with outsiders, Bernard and others continually disseminate references to the

internalized stereotypes. The inclusion of these stereotypes, even while attempting to debunk them, still manages to perpetuate the traditional image:

The ubiquity of historical reminders definitely contributes to keep pivotal dimensions of the traditional image alive. The pioneer spirit of the early Acadians, their deportation from Canada, the hardship faced in colonial Louisiana, the stigma endured until the 1960s are mentioned to emphasize the Cajuns' resilience and adaptability.

While these mentions highlight the scope of the achievement, **they also reproduce the stereotype.** (Bankston and Henry 1036; my emphasis)

While the appropriation of outside stereotypes has led to a valuation of Cajun ethnicity, the dialogue with those images has become increasingly difficult to maintain while stymieing any break from tradition.

The symbolic stereotyping model proposed by Henry and Bankston suggests that, for the Cajuns, what is being symbolized is an idealization of the past. However, with the ever-increasing distance from this idealized past via the passage of time and the homogenization of American culture, "the greater the emphasis is placed on ethnic activities they engage in only ceremonially, such as week-end festivals, on the French language that is rapidly, and on an Acadian origin that is increasingly distant and difficult to establish" (1038-9).

Furthermore, in their study of accounts of Acadian exiles and their Cajun descendants, Henry and Bankston found that among the writers,

There is therefore a fascination with agrarian ways of life and a sense that 'authentic' identities and ways of life must all be linked

with agrarian settings. For both Cajuns and non-Cajuns, then, the stereotypical Cajuns may very well serve as symbols of rootedness in a society in which many people feel themselves to be uprooted. Thus the image is symbolic because it stands for an idealized vision of the past, an increasingly important domain (the Acadian origin) in the representation of Cajuns. (1039)

For many Cajuns, however, the stereotypes are more than just symbolic.

Many scholars like Bernard who take on a study of Cajuns customarily begin their work with either a qualifier or disclaimer—a short, personal introduction qualifying themselves as Cajun and thereby justifying their views on the matter, or an apology of sorts excusing their lack of “Cajun heritage” as if either would make them any more or less authoritative. Maria Hebert-Leiter begins her “Acknowledgements” portion of her literary study *Becoming Cajun, Becoming American...* by stating, “This project stems from my own Cajun identity and my interest in researching the Cajun narrative that arose once I left Louisiana” (ix). Hebert-Leiter is acknowledging that despite the fact that she carries a hyphenated Cajun-German surname and left Louisiana to pursue a PhD in North Carolina, she is, indeed, an authentic Cajun.

In a similar manner, the back cover of J.J. Reneaux’s *Cajun Folktales* establishes the authenticity of her tales: “Nationally acclaimed storyteller J.J. Reneaux grew up Cajun for true, surrounded by the stories, music, food and culture of rural communities in Southeastern Texas and southern Louisiana.” This echoes her introduction where she says, “Like any good raconteur, I have told the tales for true as I heard them...” and that these stories reflect the “joie de

vivre...that is the essence of Cajun culture” (13). The repetition of the phrase “for true” serves the purpose of assuring the reader that they can trust in the authenticity of the tales because their teller uses phrases like “for true.” At the same time, the need for such an assurance also suggests a fear of *inauthenticity*.

This perceived need for qualification or apology comes from insecurity among individuals who belong to a strained ethnic community based on stereotypes while they are finding that, like much of the Deep South, the lines of demarcation between them and the rest of “mainstream” America have blurred. Bernard admits, “I grew up in suburbia, read comic books, built model airplanes, played Little League ball, and watched many of the same TV shows and movies that other budding Generation Xers watched throughout America” (xi). With modernization comes homogenization and Cajuns are being forced to reevaluate what it means to be Cajun while also being American. While the agrarian authenticity and the Acadian origin may provide the kind of rootedness that Bankston and Henry suggest, those roots can become petrifying in a modernized American society.

By constantly entrenching Cajun identity in an Acadian past, the threat of outside influence and fear of modernization have forced the ethnicity into ever-stricter definitions of authenticity. Bernard attempts to rectify the present condition of Cajun ethnicity by a form of strategic essentialism—asserting that the modern, Americanized Cajuns are a distinct transformation from their ethnic predecessors while still maintaining their *Cajun-ness*:

My goal this time, however, is more ambitious: to examine the sweep of Cajun history during the last six decades of the twentieth

century—for beginning in 1941 the Cajuns underwent a transformation so dramatic as to fundamentally alter their ethnic identity. In doing so, they redefined the meaning of the word *Cajun*. They were still Cajuns, but not the same kind: they were Americanized Cajuns. (xii)

Bernard, like many scholars, chooses World War II as the onset of modernization and points to the twentieth-century notions of progress such as consumerism, industrialization, mass communication, and educational improvements that led to the Cajuns' Americanization.

While all of these things are true and unquestionably had a profound effect on every ethnicity—Cajun or otherwise—, this process of assimilation and confrontation with 'Others' was not unprecedented. Yet Bernard still stresses the Acadian origins while he himself recognizes that the Acadians

...intermarried with other ethnic groups...including French, Spanish, and German settlers and even a small number of Anglo-Americans and Native Americans. They were also influenced by Afro-Caribbean slaves and their descendants, who, like the Cajuns, shared a French-Catholic heritage. (xix)

He even uses the term “cross-cultural pollination” to describe how these separate white ethnic groups “transformed” into the Cajuns. And yet after listing all the various Spanish, German, Scotch-Irish, and Anglo-American surnames of Cajuns, he maintains that the “Acadian culture remained the predominant influence. This is demonstrated by the persistence of French as south Louisiana’s primary language until the mid-twentieth century” (xix).

While the Cajuns may not have been “Americanized” per se before World War II, the Cajun identity was a fluid one in constant contact with other ethnic groups. If they were, in fact, transformed by Americanization after 1941, it is not a coincidence that this was also the beginning of their identity construction, a time when Cajuns actually began defining themselves as such and valorizing the ethnicity. So in addition to Bernard, writing in 2003, recognizing a need to redefine Cajuns by pointing to a time in history when they “transformed” or “fundamentally altered” their identity, it must also be recognized that the identity as we now know it was constantly in flux long before the mid-twentieth century and from outside influences other than American or English.

The Full Picture

This study is a literary attempt to correct what Henry and Bankston have noticed in their field, namely to recognize and provide some of those “historical images constructed by outsiders” and to show how they’ve been adopted into self-identification of Cajuns. While a few studies have approached the Cajun identity in terms of its confrontation with Americanization (e.g. Shane Bernard’s *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, and Maria Hebert-Leiter’s 2009 literary study, *Becoming Cajun, Becoming American: The Acadian in American Literature from Longfellow to James Lee Burke*), this study seeks to show how the transformation of ‘the Cajun’ began long before Americanization; it will demonstrate the similarly, yet dually problematic, attempt at ‘Frenchification,’ past and present. This will be done through the lens of francophone literature produced in the state about the Cajuns in the nineteenth century by which I

address the question of identity through representations of the Cajun culture as it has been constructed from the nineteenth century to the present.

A study of this nature will demonstrate how identity is a construct in dialogue with outsiders, through contact with the 'Other,' and how modern attempts at reprising the Cajun identity have, themselves, been fraught with complex and problematic pitfalls. The Renaissance of the late twentieth century of Cajun culture has been a process of re-appropriation by a different 'Other,' reproducing many of the same problems and prejudices and stereotypes as in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through a close examination of the francophone literature produced at first about the Cajuns, then later by those who consider themselves Cajun, we see how the Cajun identity as it is known today has been manufactured from the outside in, by both Anglophones and Francophones alike, past and present.

Through the modern self-identifying construction of Cajun ethnicity with Anglophone stereotypes, this evolution followed the Americanization of Louisiana, and was influenced by the American racial divisions post-Civil War (Dormon). Instead of situating Cajun-ness firmly in an Acadian past, I will show how the two groups, Cajun and Acadian, were synthesized in an attempt to establish themselves as American after World War I, to regain a lost heritage and distinguish themselves from an American homogenization after World War II, as well as to resist the modernization of the twentieth century. Finally, I will demonstrate how, in the aftermath and confusion—or ignorance—of origins, this construction of a defined Cajun ethnicity would ultimately have the ironic effect

of homogenizing a culturally, linguistically, and even racially diverse francophone community under the flag of Acadiana.

From a historical perspective, this study does not assume the Acadian-ness of Cajuns. As the identity is currently constructed, it is generally accepted—by Cajuns themselves and others—that ‘Cajun’ comes from ‘Acadian’. However, historical context and sociocultural factors found in literature such as the “Breux Manuscript” indicate that the Cajun identity began as an ascribed categorization to identify a population recognized not by their genealogical roots, but primarily by their socioeconomic status. This is the basis of stereotypes that evolved to become internalized as Cajun self-identification. Even if it is true that Cajun is an Anglicized corruption of *Acadien*, this only serves only to reinforce the fact that this identity was formed from without, not within, and is thus problematic as an a priori basis of ascription.

From a literary perspective, this work will explore the mythology of the Cajun: the foundation of the mythical Cajun and its construction, its origins as well as its evolution through major periods in Louisiana history, its synthesis with other francophone groups, and the paradoxically destabilizing dialectic of stringent identification with the essentialist myth. I will do this by examining Cajun identification through literature, folklore, film, and music produced by and about, both from inside and outside, the target population. As is often the case, this ‘target population’ is difficult if not impossible to identify with a high level of certainty; this difficulty is part of the process itself that illuminates the complexities involved in this endeavor.

Through examining Cajun mythology and comparing with literary representations of Cajuns, we will see in what ways this essentialist myth—like symbolic stereotyping—has valorized, given means of self-expression to, and provided preservation for some Louisianians and in what ways this myth has excluded and marginalized others. By studying their representation in French literature specifically, and in contrast with the more common Anglophone representations, a more nuanced picture of the Cajun comes into focus.

Our starting point will be a consideration of the francophone literature produced in Louisiana at a time when ‘Acadian’ and ‘Cajun’ were distinct monikers. In particular, we will consider the francophone versions of two of the most popular and influential Cajun myths: *Evangeline* and *Belizaire the Cajun*. First will be Sidonie de la Houssaye’s *Pouponne et Balthazar* (1888), a “creole” retelling of the definitive Acadian odyssey, *Evangeline* written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. This will be followed by the “Breaux Manuscript”—a recording of Acadian life, customs, and language as remembered by the author from as early as the 1840s—as it appeared in edited form in *Les Acadiens louisianais et leur parler* by Jay K. Ditchy in 1932. From there we are led to a historical chronicle upon which the popular story of *Belizaire the Cajun* is based—*Histoire de comités de vigilance aux Attakapas* (1861)—the writer of which, Alexandre Barde, is considered to have written the first Louisiana novel, *Mademoiselle de Montblancard* in 1843. This carries us into the twentieth century where we will delve into the modern literature of the post-Cajun Renaissance era.

The reader might well recognize these texts; they have all been reproduced in English and studied by other academics. In that regard, this is not a textual discovery that unravels the mystery of the Cajun. Rather, what follows is an alternative consideration of these texts in their socio-historical context, an attempt to converse with them in their original language and without the influence of stereotypes that have formed modern conceptions of 'Cajun ethnicity,' which must be deconstructed into fundamental elements like a Cartesian search for genuine knowledge. These texts and their reception demonstrate the reductive manner of identity construction and, like Henry and Bankston suggest, the influence of the 'Other' on this process.

Mythologies

The role of myth in the construction of identity is fairly straightforward. A myth provides a common origin story or a heroic idol to rally behind while identifying valued traits and characteristics as representative of the people who ascribe to it. The myth itself, however, is a complicated symbol of charged imagery and connotations. Myths usually provide some basis in historical truth, but once recognized as such, are also known to contain errors or manipulated facts. The problem is that the consumer of the myth who buys into its charged meaning does not see its construction, only its essence, and therefore only its positive value, ignorant of its ideology or its exclusions. I am here speaking of myth in Barthesian terms. According to Roland Barthes, « Le mythe prive l'objet dont il parle de toute Histoire » (*Mythologies* 260). For Barthes, myths are dominant ideologies that transform history into nature.

En passant de l'histoire à la nature, le mythe fait une économie: il abolit la complexité des actes humains, leur donne la simplicité des essences, il supprime toute dialectique, toute remontée au delà du visible immédiat, il organise un monde sans contradictions parce que sans profondeur, un monde étalé dans l'évidence, il fonde une clarté heureuse : les choses ont l'air de signifier toutes seules. (252)

Of this, the *Evangeline* epic poem is a prime example. Although it is generally understood to be a mythical representation of the Acadian dispersal, it has nonetheless influenced the imagery associated with Acadians, and therefore Cajuns, from both inside and outside the population.

It is difficult to appraise the impact of Longfellow's poem in creating an enduring image, real or imagined, of the Acadians in Nova Scotia or Louisiana. If, however, citations to the poem in scholarly and popular works are an indication of the epic's influence, then it has played an important role in shaping the ideas of generations of Americans concerning the Acadians. The significance of the poem as an image-maker can be appreciated when it is understood that by 1980 there had been 290 printings of the work and over 250 books and articles dealing with the subject. (Conrad, "The Acadians" 2)

Glenn Conrad cites Alcée Fortier, George P. Bible, James Maxwell, and Bern Keating as examples of writers who have explicitly expressed the poem's influence on their study (2). Even despite the relatively recent scholarship that calls into question the 'Acadian-ness' of Cajun culture (Tom Klingler 2009,

Louder and Waddell 1993, Bankston and Henry 2001, to name a few), the Acadian/Cajun homogenized myth has been generally reinforced and legitimated in the works of many writers, filmmakers, and scholars alike.

In her M.A. thesis, “A Fractured Foundation: Discontinuities in Acadian Resettlement, 1755-1803,” Leanna Thomas questions the continuity of the supposed Acadian social, cultural, and political values once they arrive in Louisiana after *Le Grand Dérangement*. In deconstructing the ‘Evangeline’ myth, she finds that Historians who draw attention to Acadian preservation of cultural and social attributes “have inadvertently mythologized the preservation of the Acadians’ pre-dispersal identity” (iii). She maintains that their resettlement and subsequent need to adapt to a new environment necessarily resulted in “a new definition of what it meant to be ‘Acadian’” (iii). She points to evidence of their willing participation in the military, their fears of Native American tribes, their owning of slaves, and increased dependence on the government as examples of this “fracture.” Many of these aspects of post-dispersal Acadian life are on full display in the francophone literature examined later in this study.

An example of recent work deconstructing Cajun identity while mythologizing their Acadian pre-dispersal identity is a 2009 book, *Becoming Cajun, Becoming American*, written by Maria Hebert-Leiter. This book traces depictions of Cajuns and Acadians in American literature through the works of such writers as Longfellow, George Washington Cable, Kate Chopin, and James Lee Burke. Through these American authors, she explains how Acadians became not just Cajun but also American. She describes the Cajuns as a postcolonial, interstitial people who “attempt to establish a literature for and about themselves

by adopting and adapting previously established literary techniques and genres to fit their own conditions and situations in life” (10). She describes the plight of the Cajun by asserting their ‘Otherness’ and by referencing Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*; she uses hybridity theory and cites Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*.

Hebert-Leiter’s basis for this type of postcolonial analysis hinges on the Cajuns’ mythical roots in Acadian origins. She claims that Cajuns are stuck between an Acadian past and an American present:

Ironically, Cajuns take pride in an American-corrupted term used to label themselves, an excellent example of cultural recovery. Like present Cajun identity, the term’s origin lies in the Acadian past. Cajun is a powerful example of the double bind in which contemporary Cajuns find themselves, tied to an American present and an Acadian past. (4)

I use Hebert-Leiter as an example here because I follow a similar approach. However, the “double bind” to which she refers is a bind that the community places on itself by choosing to reinforce the connection. This relationship with the Acadian past should not be taken for granted nor perpetuated without question because, as Louder and Waddell have found, “by focusing almost exclusively on the Acadian aspect of the history, settlement, and culture of French Louisiana and by constantly interchanging the terms *Cajun* and *Acadian*” scholars and consumers of the myth have rendered the two synonymous (239).

This work, like Hebert-Leiter’s, is influenced by postcolonial theory to address the problems involved in identity construction. It does not, however,

consider Cajuns to be postcolonial subjects primarily because while “the outsiders’ conceptual systems [have] made their way into the ethnics’ consciousness...the evolution of the Cajuns’ portrayal...[took] place within the dominant racial group and in the absence of outright subjugation” (Henry and Bankston, 1038). In addition, the label ‘Cajun’—despite its pejorative connotation—could easily be shed at any point in their history, along with their “Acadian past.” This is something that most postcolonial subjects are not able to so easily escape. In fact, I argue that if anything, this “double bind” is a relatively recent development, a direct result of the Cajun Renaissance. This will be thoroughly evident throughout our study of francophone Louisiana literature.

NOT YET CAJUN, NO LONGER ACADIAN: ETHNIC ADOPTION IN *EVANGELINE AND POUPONNE ET BALTHAZAR*

« *Nous sommes ici au principe même du mythe: il transforme l'histoire en nature.* » (Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* 237)

Since it is commonly held in Cajun mythos that Cajuns descended from Acadians, let us begin with the latter's arrival to the Louisiana territory. The Acadians arrived in Louisiana in 1764 after having been exiled from their community in Acadie by the British in 1755. The most famous account of this dispersal is the epic poem *Evangeline* written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in 1847. In this story, two betrothed, Evangeline and Gabriel, are separated during the 'Great Upheaval' or *Grand Dérangement*. The poem then follows Evangeline across the landscapes of America as she spends years in search for Gabriel. Finally, she settles in Philadelphia and, as an old woman, works as a Sister of Mercy among the poor. While tending to the dying during an epidemic she finds Gabriel among the sick, and he dies in her arms.

Despite its being fiction written by an American who had never so much as visited Louisiana, the *Evangeline* myth is far and away the most popular and well-known literature about Acadians. There is a parish named after the epic poem and a "Longfellow-Evangeline State Historical Site" located in St. Martinville along with an *Evangeline Oak* (Figure 1).

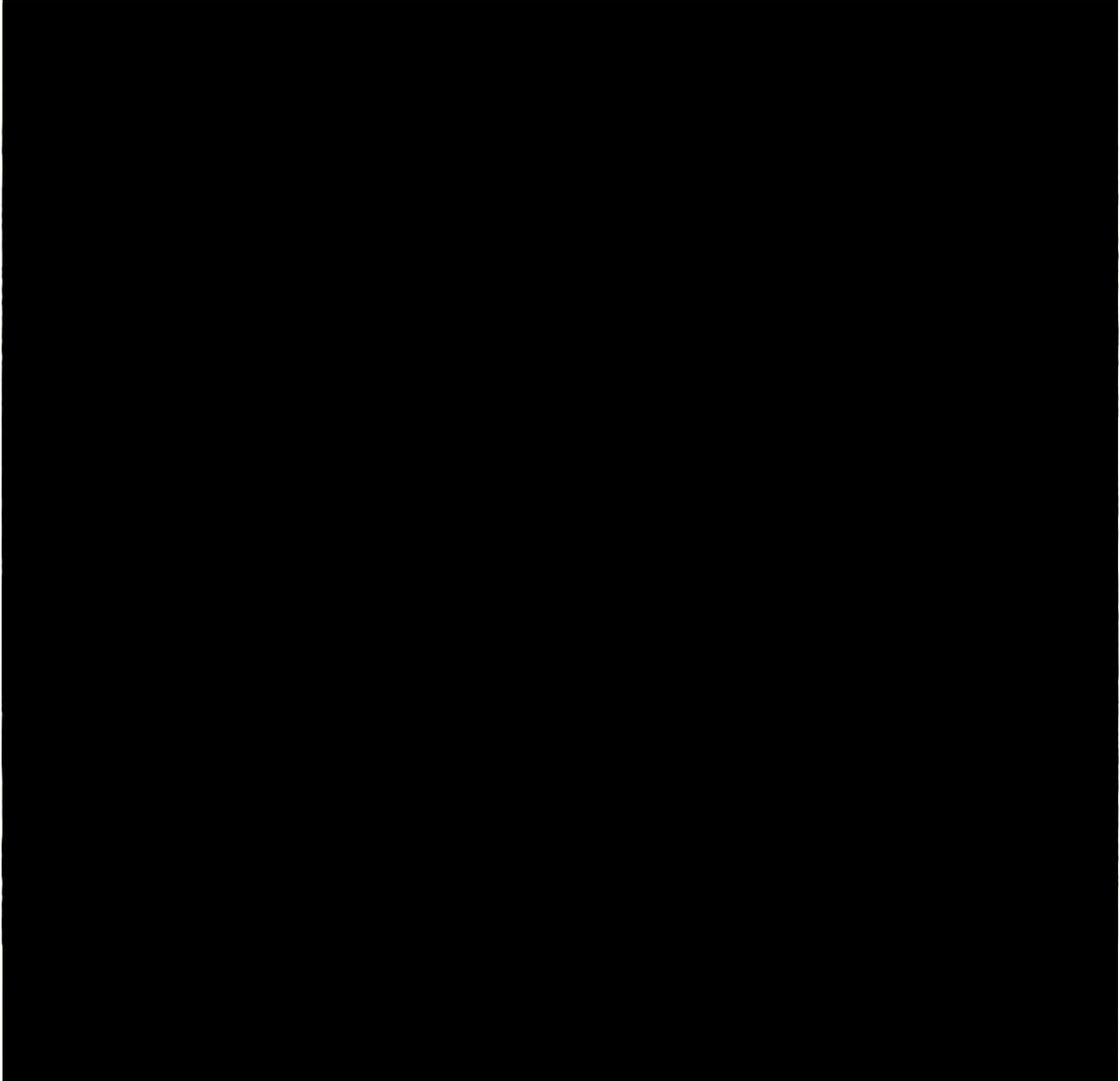


Figure 1: Evangeline Oak. Joe L. Cash, “Evangeline: Legend of Acadian Culture”

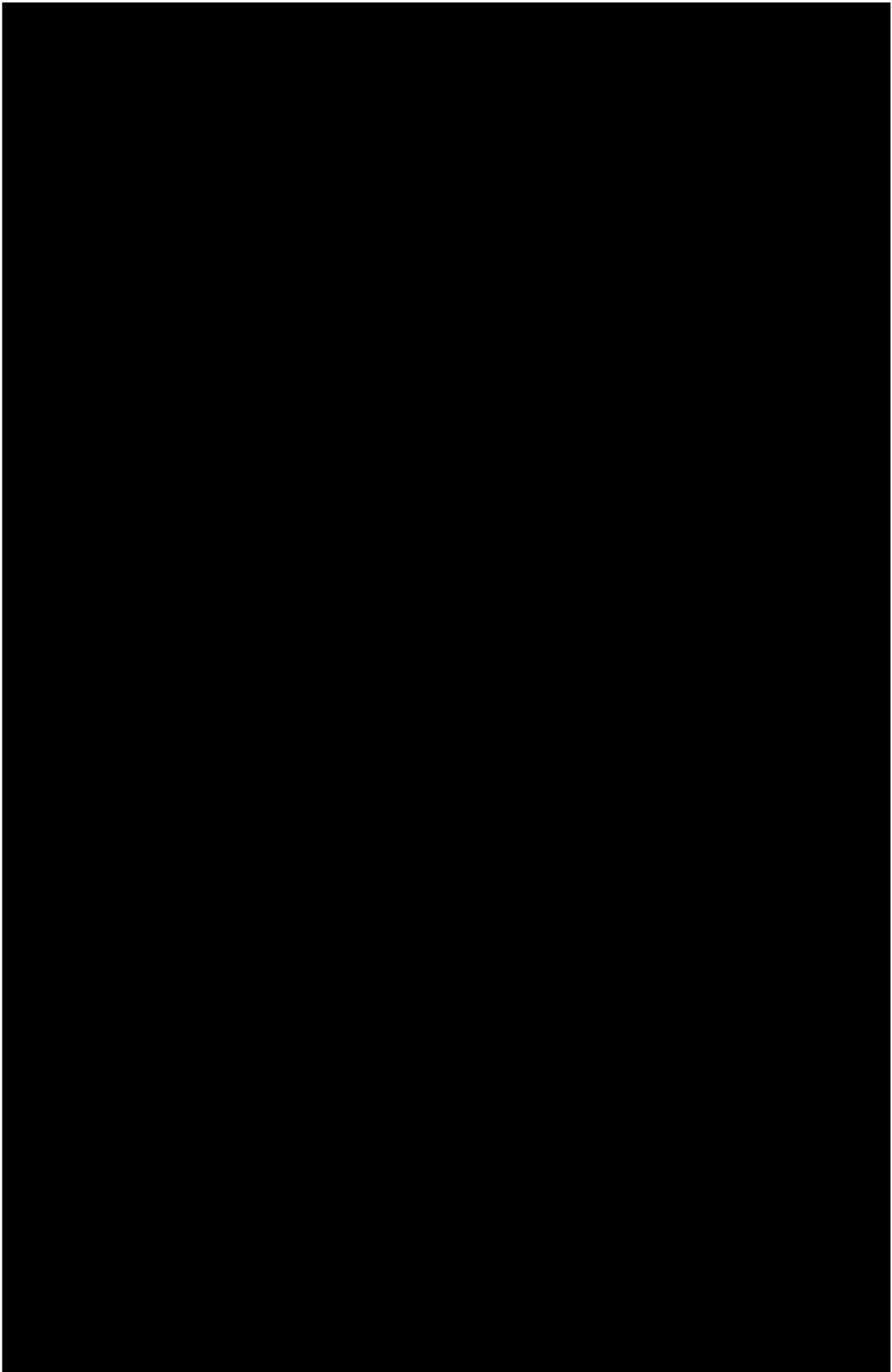


Figure 2: Statue of Evangeline. Joe L. Cash, "Evangeline: Legend of Acadian Culture"

Maria Hebert-Leiter, in her work on the Americanization of the Cajuns titled, *Becoming Cajun, Becoming American*, outlines Longfellow's use of "imaginative geography" in *Evangeline*.

Edward Said discusses imaginative geography as a process by which an outside imperial power assumes geographical knowledge of a culture or a place in order to control the colony, regardless of real distance between the colonizer and the colonized, by naming the indigenous population as Other to claim superiority over the colonized and to maintain boundaries of difference. Through the presence of this distance, the 'mind's geography' can create its own meaning for the foreign place it has chosen to study. (27)

Hebert-Leiter goes on to say that "Longfellow's *Evangeline* uses a form of imaginative geography, not to set aside Acadians and their lands as strange and different, but to claim this people and their lands as American" (27). This analysis is based on the United States' desire during the 19th century to Americanize, or rather homogenize, a country of discrete immigrant groups of various origins into one unified nation. Hebert-Leiter's claim is that this can be achieved, in part, through literature:

While the factual evidence points away from ethnic purity, Longfellow's poem, which dominated American notions of Acadian identity, enforces the claim of whiteness thus allowing for the possibility that a French-Catholic Other can become American, making her folktale and history part of a national consciousness. (22)

What Longfellow accomplished with *Evangeline* was to provide the Acadians with a North American, euro-centric origin myth with which to adopt them as American.

If it is thus that “literature becomes the vehicle [...] for the Americanization of the Cajun ethnic minority” (13), then language, in addition to literature, is the vehicle for their attempted Frenchification in Louisiana in the fallout of the Civil War. In much the same way that Longfellow used the Acadians to show that this ‘Other’ can become American, Sidonie de la Houssaye wrote her own version of this epic called *Pouponne et Balthazar: Nouvelle Acadienne* (1888) to show the regenerative capabilities of Acadians and their ability to integrate into Creole society. In her version—purportedly a story told to her by her grandmother involving her own family—Pouponne, the heroine, is separated from her lover, Balthazar, during the deportation. Pouponne settles in Louisiana where a Creole woman, Charlotte Bossier, befriends her and transforms her into a Creole Lady. Balthazar returns and reunites with Pouponne.

In alluding to *Pouponne et Balthazar* during her discussion of *Evangeline*, Hebert-Leiter describes De la Houssaye’s version as a “less than flattering portrayal of Cajuns” told from “a perspective of Creole superiority” in which the eponymous characters “dismiss their Acadian past and accept the more elevated Creole way of life” (30). In dismissing the work, she does not give it the same critical lens through which she reads Longfellow. However, Hebert-Leiter is not alone in her offense taken by *Pouponne et Balthazar*. May Waggoner, in her introduction to the 1983 edition, expresses her view that De la Houssaye « ...manifeste de profonds préjugés contre les Acadiens eux-mêmes. Comme la

majorité des Créoles, elle traite de haut ces créatures simples et frustrées » (xi). In Waggoner's estimation, the real value of this work lies in the detailed, documentary aspect of Louisiana customs, both Creole and Cajun. Despite their seeming frustration with the negative portrayals of Cajuns, neither Waggoner nor Hebert-Leiter refute these descriptions—they are, after all, consistent with most other accounts—nor do they offer any alternative reading or motive. But if Longfellow's version of this tale was created as a way to Americanize an 'Other,' what did De la Houssaye seek to accomplish by retelling it from a Creole perspective?

It has been suggested that the Acadians “were also an important ‘source of mass political effort to perpetuate French culture and French institutions in Louisiana’ against encroaching American culture” (Dargo qtd. in Gossett 304). While it is true that some of her descriptions of Cajuns are not exactly favorable, it is likely that Sidonie de la Houssaye had more profound intentions than simply establishing Creole superiority. I argue that her intention was to bring these Acadians into the francophone Louisiana fold in order to strengthen a culture under the threat of the very type of Americanization utilized by Longfellow's *Evangeline*.

Let us begin with this “less than flattering portrayal of Cajuns.” In *Pouponne et Balthazar* the Acadians are frequently described as dirty, poor, and vulgar. Their speech is reviled by the Creoles. However, De la Houssaye often makes a direct effort to either excuse this behavior or to offer other redeeming qualities. Waggoner admits, « Mais l'auteur éprouve tout de même une certaine affection envers eux; elle souligne leur honnêteté, leur simplicité, la force de leurs

liens familiaux, leur courage dans l'adversité » (xi). Indeed, De la Houssaye goes to great lengths, from the very beginning of her tale, to suggest that the Acadians in many aspects are, in essence, on equal footing with the Creoles: « si l'Acadien est grossier et vulgaire au dehors, sachons bien qu'au fond de l'âme, il a toute la fierté de l'aristocratie » (5).

De la Houssaye contrasts the Acadians' exterior, skin-deep qualities with their interior virtues while placing these essential qualities on par with the aristocracy. In a historically stratified society dealing with the democratization of post-civil war Louisiana, that is a particularly bold statement. She even prides herself on the fact that her family was able to look past their faults and recognize these virtues:

Les Acadiens se sont liés avec toutes les familles qui s'étaient fixées autour de leur établissement : la mienne fut la première qui leur tendit une main amie et j'en suis fière, car ces braves gens n'ont apporté sur le sol qui les a reçus, que les traditions de l'honneur le plus pur, le plus rigoureux et des vertus les plus sublimes, les plus robustes. (3)

In this introduction of the Acadians in her first chapter, De la Houssaye's description both dispels modern notions that the Acadians were isolated from their Creole neighbors and showers them with superlatives.

This is but one of her numerous attempts to highlight these virtues appealing to honor, purity, loyalty, and even a zealous allegiance to France: « Pour les Acadiens de cette époque, l'Amérique, c'était des colonies anglaises; leur pays à eux, c'était la Louisiane puisqu'elle appartenait à la France » (48).

These are all qualities to which other Creoles, the literate audience, might relate. This allegiance to France, which De la Houssaye uses to distinguish Louisiana from the rest of America, is further represented by le père Landry who « avait toujours nourri une haine profonde contre l'Angleterre. » It is also implied in the text that his “profound” hatred is derived from “son amour national” (52).

This defining of the Acadians’ patriotism is an overt attempt to pander to the literate Creole audience. In designating the American colonies as English and the Acadians as essentially French in their virtues and allegiances—indeed, Balthazar fought against the English and learned proper French while imprisoned until the end of the war—De la Houssaye is attempting to appeal to the French Creoles in Louisiana to adopt these francophone ‘Others’ into the Louisiana francophone ‘nation.’

In much the same way that Hebert-Leiter describes George Washington Cable’s *Bonaventure* (36), Sidonie de la Houssaye even offers a method for achieving this objective of integration: education, specifically French education. This should come as no surprise as De la Houssaye had a close working relationship with Cable and was, herself, an educator. In 1849, De la Houssaye founded the Young Ladies Academy in Franklin, LA and even after it closed during the Civil War, she continued her role of educator in the community (Waggoner ix). After her daughter’s death in 1875, she transferred her pedagogical abilities to literature, writing educational stories for her grandchildren: « elle trouva le temps de leur écrire des petits contes pour préserver leur français et pour leur apprendre la morale: par exemple, dans un de ses contes elle prévient les mères créoles contre les garçons américains »

(Wagonner ix-x). These themes of language preservation, creole morality, and a distrust of Anglos are central to De la Houssaye's retelling of *Evangeline* and lend a certain educational aspect to her story.

Pouponne's ascendance into educated, refined Creole society mimics that of the other main female character, Charlotte Bossier, who had come from Vienna to Louisiana to meet her father—her only parent—who, it turns out, has died days before her arrival. She was « sans amis; sans argent sur une terre étrangère dont elle ne comprenait même pas la langue » (4). Charlotte, like Pouponne, was equally unrefined when she married Pierre Bossier, the grandfather of De la Houssaye. « Si Charlotte n'avait pas les brillants avantages de l'éducation, si elle n'avait pas les manières élégantes des belles dames de l'époque, elle devint la compagne fidèle et dévouée de celui qu'elle aimait... » (4). But in much the same way Charlotte would later educate Pouponne, « grâce aux leçons de son mari, à sa grande application à elle, elle apprit vite le français qu'elle avait étudié avec Pierre qui le parlait de la manière la plus pure, la plus chaste, et dans des livres destinés à lui faire mieux apprécier encore la langue de son mari » (5). Through her main female characters, Charlotte and Pouponne, De la Houssaye not only stresses the importance of literacy and proper, pure French speech, but she also demonstrates the ability and willingness of these characters to transform themselves into proper, distinguished Francophones and members of Creole society.

Far from taking a superior perspective distancing Creoles from Acadians, *Pouponne et Balthazar* closes their societal gap, levels the geographical space, and democratizes their political goals. In fact, in this version of *Evangeline* where

the lovers are happily reunited, the ultimate form of Creole and Acadian integration, the act of marriage, plays a prominent role.

In the Longfellow version, Evangeline and Gabriel are reunited years after their separation, in Philadelphia, where Gabriel dies in Evangeline's arms. Longfellow chooses to end their tragedy not in Louisiana or Canada, but in a city associated with American independence, known as "The Birthplace of America." In De la Houssaye's version, the lovers are not only reunited and married in Louisiana, they move onto the Bossier plantation where Balthazar takes over the job of *économe de l'habitation*—supervisor, steward (62). The young lovers' marriage, however, is not where Sidonie de la Houssaye ends her story.

In another key departure from the Evangeline myth, De la Houssaye takes the story one step further. After becoming integrated societally and with the commercial processes of the *habitation*, the Bossier/Landry, Creole/Acadian bloodlines are officially unified through marriage. The Creole integration is complete: « ...un autre mariage avait lieu à l'habitation Bossier: c'était celui de la gentille Marie Bossier, cinquième fille de Charlotte, avec Louis, fils aîné du juge Balthazar Landry. » Lest the reader worry that this liaison would damage the integrity of the Bossier family, the author quickly assuages any such concern: « Ajoutons qu'en ce moment, notre Balthazar était non seulement juge, mais encore un des plus riches habitants sucriers de la paroisse Saint-Jacques » (70). Through marriage and their successes, Acadian and Creole are now equal in every possible regard.

This is where one would expect the story to end, with the eponymous young lovers' fate fully realized. In her final chapter, however, De la Houssaye

offers one final example of Acadian education, redemption, and marriage. « Avant de terminer cette histoire, nous allons retourner en arrière et nous occuper de notre jeune ami Placide... » (71). Charlotte's brother, Placide, returns from college and the next day is sent to deliver books to Péricchon, Pouponne's brother, who is now in charge of the successful Acadian school. Placide encounters Timine, a young, uneducated Acadienne with whom he frequently visited before he was sent away to avoid scandal. While Placide thinks to himself that this poor girl must be heartbroken that he had left her, Timine proudly informs him that she is now married to Péricchon, « l'plus brave et l'plus vaillant garçon qu'la terre a jamais porté » and a few lines later says, « c'est un trésor d'mare qué l'Bon Dié m'a donné là! » (74). The story essentially ends there, with even the meekest specimen of Acadian ascending to respectable status through education and marriage.

In adapting the American version of the Acadian origin myth, Sidonie de la Houssaye's version of the Evangeline story encourages unity among the different francophone populations of Southern Louisiana. *Pouponne et Balthazar* provides a French alternative to the American stereotypes represented in the Longfellow version. While it may have been too late in the Americanization process of Louisiana to overtake the popularity of Longfellow's version, it still provides a glimpse into how the Acadians fit into the Creole society of the day and their ability to adapt to the societies in which they found themselves.

THE BREAUX MANUSCRIPT AND THE GENTEEL ACADIANS

Through *Pouponne et Balthazar*, Sidonie de la Houssaye depicted a scenario in which Acadians could become Creoles. While certainly many Acadians became Cajuns by nature of their rank in society, there was nothing to keep them from joining other francophone populations at the top of the social

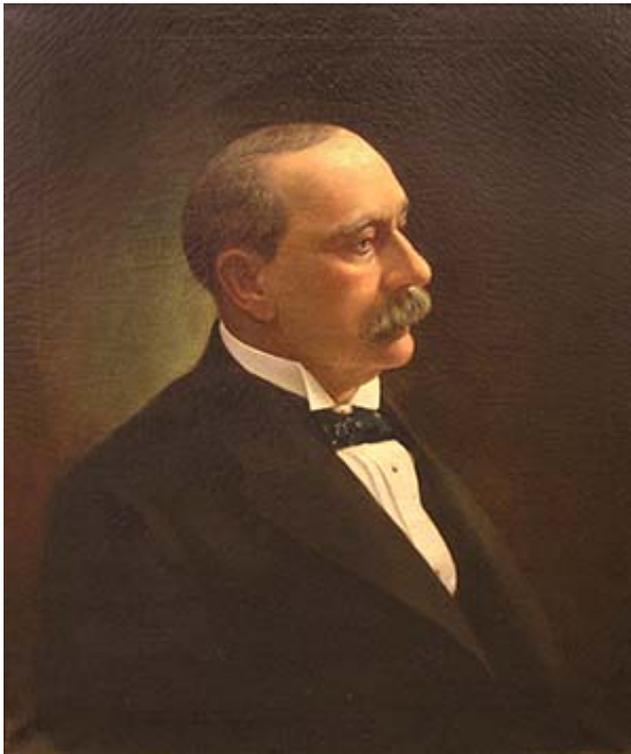


Figure 3: Joseph Arsenne Breaux (1838-1926)

Portrait painted by Andres Molinary. *Louisiana Supreme Court Justices 1813-Present*. LASC.org

ranks, particularly before the Civil War. Hebert-Leiter and Carl Brasseaux claim that Acadians who climbed the social ladder became Creole by ridding themselves of their Acadian past, and those who did not remained true to their Acadian culture and became Cajuns.⁵ However, ethnographer James H. Dormon, in his 1983 study, *The People Called Cajuns: An Introduction to an Ethnohistory*, describes the

fluidity of Acadian identity as being representative of the social frameworks of the time:

⁵ See for example, M. Hebert-Letier, 30 and C. Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun* 8

The Acadian people of Acadia/Nova Scotia were, of course, not Cajuns. They were not even, in any meaningful sense, an ethnic group. They *became* an ethnic group—indeed they became several different ethnic groups, including the group known as Cajuns—only after their fateful exile and diaspora took them to assorted farflung places, including Louisiana, where they found themselves regrouped into contrast situations within larger social frameworks. Only then, following their dispersal and relocation, could the ascriptive process begin and the boundaries form. (7)

Whether or not they carried cultural baggage, once they entered Louisiana, Acadians adapted according to where they settled and many became prominent members of the existing Creole social structure. One such example is Joseph Arsenne Breaux (1838-1926), a descendant of the Acadians who became Chief Justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court and one of the more prominent members of a Louisiana society that allowed Breaux and other ambitious Acadians to climb the social ladder to a level of prominence not often associated with the ancestral myth of the Cajuns. The manuscript attributed to him would later form the basis for *Les Acadiens louisianais et leur parler*, a study of Acadian customs and language from the late nineteenth century.

The “Breaux Manuscript,” as it is often called, gives us a glimpse into the relative fluidity of the social system of the period that allowed Breaux’s ascension through the societal ranks, thus illustrating these larger social frameworks and how Acadians fit into them. It also demonstrates how modern notions of Cajun ethnicity often distort historical contexts in order to better fit the myth.

Histoire

In 1926, a manuscript was left to the Louisiana State Museum by Judge Joseph Arsenne Breaux at the time of his death. Often attributed to its donor despite its anonymity, the “Breaux Manuscript” as it has come to be called, is a study of the language and customs of the Louisiana Acadians in the nineteenth century, from roughly 1840 to 1901. This manuscript was originally written in French and first published in 1932 by Tulane University professor Jay K. Ditchy who edited the manuscript and published it as *Les Acadiens Louisianais et Leur Parler*. Later, in 1966, when the original had since been lost, Ditchy’s version was edited and translated into English.

In Ditchy’s introduction to the 1932 publication, he describes the linguistic situation in Louisiana past and present:

Le français de la Louisiane se présente sous deux formes: le créole, qui, à part certains changements, ne diffère essentiellement ni par la prononciation ou la syntaxe ni par le vocabulaire du français général et littéraire et qui ne nous concerne pas ici, et l’acadien, ou *cadien* (pron. cadjen), qui offre beaucoup de particularités à tous les égards. (10)

Ditchy goes on to explain that this *acadien* language originates from Canada where it had undergone certain modifications. When it later arrived in Louisiana, this evolution continued in order to adapt new vocabulary to the new territory, most notably incorporating English vocabulary.

Like his more modern counterparts decades after, Ditchy was concerned that the essential characteristics of Acadians were weakening and disappearing in the face of modernity and that the language was devolving as a result:

« ...les Acadiens n'ont pu se soustraire entièrement aux influences environnantes et que sous l'action de la vie moderne leurs caractéristiques essentielles tendent de plus en plus à s'atténuer.

Leur parler, en particulier, est en train d'évoluer... » (9)

By his own admission, Ditchy's publishing of this manuscript was an attempt to preserve the language and customs of Louisiana Acadians. Thus, he writes,

« Nous avons donc affaire à un document présentant un tableau des Acadiens Louisianais à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle qui sera utile à ceux qui, nous l'espérons, établiront prochainement l'état actuel de leur langue et de leurs coutumes » (10).

In a similar fashion, the manuscript's author himself sensed the same danger decades earlier and designates the Civil War as the point in which the Acadian language began to rapidly disappear.

Avant 1861, le dialecte acadien était la langue des trois quarts des habitants du sud de la Louisiane. Les meilleures familles parlaient créole et français entre elles. Mais les quatre années de guerre ont *anglicisé* le soldat laboureur et artisan ; la population s'est considérablement accrue dans ces dernières années ; les grandes industries du pays ont attiré un certain nombre d'ouvriers du nord des États-Unis ; l'armée des employés et des fonctionnaires s'est recrutée hors de la Louisiane ; les relations avec les états du nord se

sont multipliées ; l’instruction du peuple a fait des progrès rapides.
Il en résulte une véritable révolution dans le langage et il se fait
grandement temps de reproduire ses traits et de tracer son histoire.

(17)

The manuscript’s author could see that the Acadian language was changing, and with it, the Acadian customs. It is a recurring concern for Louisiana Francophones throughout their history. Whereas these concerns have today led to a revalorization of symbolic stereotypes, the goal in both instances of the production of this manuscript—Ditchy’s and the original author’s—seems simply to preserve for future generations the customs and language of a people they feared would otherwise be irrevocably changed without record.

Personnages

Because of the lack of clarity on the subject—the numerous contradictions and the assumptions made from them—the “Breaux Manuscript” merits an in-depth discussion on authorship before delving too deeply into the text itself. The website “Folklife in Louisiana” (www.louisianafolklife.org), a website maintained by the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development, hosts a copy of the English translation along with a brief introduction and background to the text. It states, “...internal evidence suggests that the author was probably Judge Breaux himself, a native of Iberville Parish who later lived in the Attakapas District.”⁶ This statement is echoed in many discussions of this text. For example, in Glenn

⁶ http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/the_breaux_manuscript.html

Conrad's "A Biographical Sketch of Joseph A. Breaux," he very specifically states that Breaux wrote the manuscript during his retirement:

Throughout his lifetime, Judge Breaux, always proud of his Acadian heritage, had sought to learn more about Acadia and the people who had lived there. As a young man he had spent a month in Nova Scotia piecing together the history of his family and the story of the Acadians. Now, in retirement, he was able to spend the necessary time to compile a book-length manuscript on the customs of the Louisiana Acadians as practiced in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. (151)

Conrad does not divulge his source for this information, but it seems to contradict something Jay K. Ditchy wrote in the published text. Conrad dates Breaux's retirement as beginning in 1914. However, in Ditchy's introduction he writes, « Nous savons cependant, par une note manuscrite, que le travail fut terminé en 1901 » (Ditchy 10). Without Conrad's sources, it is difficult to determine whether the work was completed in 1901, as Ditchy suggests, or compiled during Breaux's retirement in 1914. It is also unclear as to what exactly Conrad means by "compiled?" Is Breaux the author, editor, or a contributor of which there are many?

Edward Laroque Tinker suggests that a Frenchman of France more likely wrote the "Breaux Manuscript" and not an "Acadian born" (Tinker Rev. of *Les Acadiens Louisianais*). He attributes this belief to the author's thorough knowledge of grammar, spelling, and pronunciation and suggests that "he was one of the young Frenchmen, who, after being exiled for their political opinions

by Napoleon III in 1848-51, found refuge in Louisiana and became school teachers and journalists in the Parishes” (188).

On authorship, Ditchy explains in his introduction, « Toutes les recherches pour découvrir le nom de ce travailleur inconnu sont restées vaines. Le nom du juge Breaux...paraît dans le manuscrit comme celui qui a encouragé et aidé notre auteur dans son labeur » (10). Indeed, in the *avant-propos* of the published manuscript, the original author (O.A.) writes about the judge in the third person and of themselves in first person plural: « Cependant, cédant aux vœux du juge A. J. Breaux⁷ et aux sollicitations de plusieurs éminents Louisianais, nous nous sommes résolument jetés dans les hasards de cette publication » (17). If, for whatever reason, Breaux did not wish to attribute this work to himself and instead wanted to distance himself from it and remain anonymous, it seems odd that he would reference himself in the text as one who “solicited” it.

From textual evidence alone, it is difficult to see why the manuscript is considered to be authored by Breaux himself. There is, for example, one instance in particular where at least a portion of the text is attributed to someone else. At the end of the section concerning commerce, the name E. Dumez appears (244). In his English translation of this section of the text, George Reinecke interjects with:

...[The entire section on rural business seems to have been written not by the anonymous author but by one E. Dumez, otherwise

⁷ This is the only instance I have seen where the initials appear in the order A. J. instead of J. A. However, it is likely still the same person, Joseph Arsenne Breaux.

unknown. The periods at the end indicate an omission by the translator due to the fact that the remaining matter in no way touches on Louisiana's past and folkways.—R.]

More will be written about Reinecke and his translation in a moment, but for now I will say that the “otherwise unknown” E. Dumez is most likely Eugène Dumez, a Frenchman of France who became a journalist, just as Larocque Tinker would suggest. While he may have been unknown to Reinecke, Dumez was likely well known to the « plusieurs éminents Louisianais » and the Creole upper class of the time. Dumez was pro-confederacy and the editor of the French newspapers, *Le Meschacébé* and *L'Avant-Coureur*. The latter published *Histoire des Comités de Vigilance* in 1861, written by Alexandre Barde, another of those Frenchmen of France of the type Larocque Tinker described. It was also E. Dumez who wrote the introduction to Barde's work, about which more will be written in a subsequent chapter.

When considering the full, original French text and the evidence therein, we can safely say that Breaux did not author the manuscript on his own. At the very least, it does appear as though one or two other people were consulted or involved in this writing. Furthermore, this manuscript was the product of, or commissioned by prominent Louisianians of the time of both Acadian and French backgrounds.

The prominence of the author(s) is a major factor to consider. Whether our author was Acadian or French—or one or two of each—it is unclear if they perceived themselves as part of the community they studied. Perhaps this is another reason to believe that the manuscript was penned by numerous authors

of differing levels of subjectivity. However, because it is often attributed to Joseph A. Breaux, and because he is of Acadian descent, the dots are connected so that this work is often considered to be written *by* a Cajun, *about* Cajuns. For example, the website “Acadian-Cajun Genealogy and History” says of the “Breaux Manuscript,” “This document is supposed to have been written about 1901 and contained memories of a Cajun back to the 1840s” (<http://www.acadian-cajun.com/breauxman.htm>). In addition, the aforementioned louisianafolklife.org states that it is “a recording of Cajun folkways, life, and character as remembered by the author from as early as the 1840s” (http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/the_breaux_manuscript.html). By linking Breaux to authorship and his Acadian heritage to cajun-ness, the myth establishes first-hand Cajun authenticity to the “Breaux Manuscript.”

Even if he were the only author, if we take away Joseph A. Breaux’s surname we could not consider him to be *cajun* in the traditional sense; his personal history rather sounds not unlike a story Sidonie de la Houssaye might recount. While Breaux’s grandfather was one of the Acadian exiles, his mother, Margaret Walsh was Irish—the daughter of Michael Walsh and Eugenia McNally. Joseph grew up on a sugar plantation, had a private-school education, and earned a baccalaureate degree at Georgetown College in Kentucky and a law degree from the University of Louisiana, which would later become Tulane University in New Orleans. In 1861, he married Eugenia Mille, an accomplished musician and daughter of Pauline Dupuy and Thomas Mille—a planter and businessman in Iberville Parish. His sister-in-law, Emma, was married to a doctor in New Iberia, Dr. Alfred Duperier (Conrad, 150).

Where the “Breux Manuscript” is concerned, even the simple question of authorship cannot be considered without demanding a greater consideration of the complexities of the society from which the issue originates. And yet that complexity seems to have been neutralized, smoothed over by Cajun myth. What is true is that Joseph A. Breux was of Acadian descent, a prominent member of Louisiana society, and he did possess and donate this manuscript to be published after his death. What is unclear is who actually wrote it and whether or not they considered themselves a member or members of the target population. Did their prominence remove them from that particular culture? One thing is clear upon close examination of the “Breux Manuscript”: neither Breux nor the writers themselves would have considered either themselves or the target population to be ‘Cajun’ or *Cadien*.

Subjects of Dispute

If this manuscript is representative of « un certain moment dans l'évolution d'un peuple et d'un parler » (Ditchy 12), is the text being regarded in a similar way today, with the same understanding and intentions? Or is it being used to make broader assumptions out of context about a people in a different moment of evolution? In addition, whom exactly is portrayed by this snapshot in Louisiana's history? With the modern understanding that *cajun* comes from *acadien* or *cadien*, one is led to assume that those people must have been Cajuns. However, that definition of ‘Cajun’ also comes from a modern perspective. Like the designation of authorship, the actual situation is much more complex.

In studying Ditchy's introduction to his publication of the manuscript and the published version of the manuscript itself, along with the later English translation, the influence of the editor or translator in determining the identity of the subjects being studied becomes apparent. In his introduction, Ditchy calls the language « acadien, ou *cadien* » essentially equating the two. As language is so intimately tied to identity, and as modern notions of identity are not what they were in the 19th century, we are thus wont to call the people *cadien*. However, the manuscript's author would certainly disagree, at least where the terms are used to identify people.

In his definition of “*Cadien*,” the author is very explicit in distinguishing *Cadien* from *Acadien*, saying that the one has nothing to do with the other and that *cadien* is used indiscriminately to designate every creole peasant, *no matter the origin*:

Cadien (pron. Cadjen), campagnard. Air cadien. Habitude cadienne ; à la cadienne ; à la manière des Cadiens. Ce nom est quelquefois donné dans le sens d'ironie, mais le plus souvent dans celui de mépris. Il ne semble pas du tout l'abrégé de *Acadien* ; **car on l'applique indistinctement à tout créole, quelle que soit son origine**, qui sent la campagne et qui a l'air d'un paysan. C'est un Cadien ! (65 ; my emphasis)

This is remarkable for three reasons in particular: First, it is a definition of *Cadien* written by someone thought to be Acadian and who is, today, also frequently described as Cajun. Second, it directly disputes the Acadian origin that we have come to adopt of those people defined as Cajun, that is one of direct

lineage to the Acadian people and direct connection to Acadie; the O.A.'s definition is much more of a socioeconomic one. And finally, our author has a broad definition of the term *créole*.

Whoever wrote the 'Breaux Manuscript,' for whatever reason, felt the explicit need to point out that *cadien* is not at all an abbreviated form of *Acadien*. Granted, the reason his definition is so explicitly different from what is now practically common knowledge is unclear. It could be that our author's purpose was, in one breath, to both acknowledge and then refute the idea that *cadien* is considered derivative of *acadien*. Or perhaps he saw the similarity of the two terms and wanted to ensure against the very derivative relationship of the terms that has become common in Cajun lore. While his motives are unclear and assumptions should not be made, two things are clear: One is that *cadien* was not something that our author wanted to be related with *acadien*. Another is that the author's definition has largely gone unrecognized, even by Ditchy himself in his use of the term in the introduction. Even in a 1997 Comeau & Nadeau edition of the French text—which includes this definition—editor Jean-François Nadeau writes on the back cover copy, « Ce livre constitue un document indispensable pour quiconque s'intéresse à la culture **cadienne** » (my emphasis).

While we may never know the author's motives for his or her choice of words, those words cannot be dismissed or ignored. A full recognition of terms merits consideration here where it was eschewed in publication. Other than *acadien*, the preferred term used universally by the author is *créole*. "Creole" is a complicated term all its own with variations in meaning according not just to historical context, but also to geographical location. In the historical context of

this manuscript and in the definition supplied by the O.A. himself, « Créole, en Louisiane, ce nom n'est appliqué qu'aux descendants français et espagnols » (84). So while *créole* is often used to refer to Louisiana citizens of French descent, the O.A. refers to *all* francophone Louisianians of as *Créole*—as is also exemplified in his definition of *Cadien*. This includes Acadians in particular.

If the manuscript's original author sought to maintain a difference of identifying terms, we shall seek to do the same. Where the translator has eschewed such maintenance, so have other researchers who followed. And thus, a comparison of the translation is, here, indicative of Reinecke's influence, and being 65 years later, also indicates a cultural shift that affects translation choices and our modern views about Acadians in Creole society.

George F. Reinecke was, in 1966, a professor of English at University of New Orleans and Editor of *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany* where his translation was published. In his translation of J. K. Ditchy's publication, Reinecke did not seek to preserve the original intent of the manuscript and Ditchy's publication; he concerned himself only with the portions of the text dealing with folklore and folk life. He thus omitted the dictionary portion of the manuscript's original translation made by Ditchy. This fact makes a few of his translation choices somewhat questionable.

For example, Reinecke translates « Les Créoles autrefois se battaient beaucoup » (Ditchy 249) as “The Creoles [the author applies the word to all Louisianians of Latin origin but especially to Acadians. In the 19th century Cadien had a pejorative connotation.—R.] enjoy fighting.” Reinecke's bracketed editorial adds information that is not in the original text. By adding “...Cadien

had a pejorative connotation,” he is suggesting that the O.A. was avoiding saying “Cadien” when referring to Acadians, whom the O.A. actually called “Créoles,” presumably for a reason. However, we know from the O.A.’s definition that they would not have equated *Acadien* with *Cadien*. This editorial is informed by Reinecke’s more modern perspective and his own notion of what a Cajun is and demonstrates forced imposition of that term out of its original context with the effect of equating Cajun and Acadian.

An additional effect of this editorializing is that some of the scholarship that follows that is not familiar with the French version of the text must take Reinecke at his word. In one particularly recent case, Reinecke’s editorial comment is echoed by Catharine Savage Brosman in *Louisiana Creole Literature: A Historical Study* when she writes, “The author of the ‘Breux manuscript’ (1901) called all Louisianans of French (or other “Latin” origin) *Creoles*; the word *Acadien* was still viewed as pejorative” (Footnote #8, 190). Notice the liberties taken by Brosman with the term *Acadien*. This term is neither the one that Reinecke uses nor is it a term that the O.A. would have used. However, because the terms *cadien* and *acadien* have essentially been equated by the time Brosman writes her note in the year 2013, the originally intended meaning has long since been forgotten and distorted. Furthermore, the original text in no way indicates that the term *acadien* was pejorative. Brosman’s imposition lends further credence to Creole superiority that was not originally expressed. Perhaps Brosman is also influenced by contemporary scholarly work that maintains the Creole superiority over Acadians. In any case, no distinction of

terms is maintained—and Brosman’s is a scholarly, historical study. These distinctions are surely less rigorous in more quotidian contexts.

Acadians in Creole Society: Assimilation or Integration?

There were divisions in the Acadian population that must be noted.

Historians and ethnographers like James Dormon had noted one such rift among the Louisiana/Acadian population in the nineteenth century:

by the mid-nineteenth century there had come to be two clearly discernible population elements deriving from the same original descent group: Folklorist Patricia K. Rickels has aptly termed them “Genteel Acadians” and just plain “Cajuns” (Dormon 30).

According to Dormon, evidence suggests that there was “considerable inter-marriage between Acadians and Creoles; that is to say, at the upper reaches of the francophone social spectrum” (46). Dormon gives the impression of social mobility as long as an Acadian was willing to assimilate into the dominant class:

It was essentially a class division: Those who remained on their landholdings to acculturate to the norms of the socially and economically dominant Anglo/Creole planter/bourgeoisie constituted one part, the smaller part of the original Acadian immigration. Those who continued to work their farms and ranches, along with those who gravitated to the isolation of their interior, marginal enclaves constituted the other. (Dormon 30)

The extent of this assimilation is unclear. Included in the definition of “Cajun” found in *Stir the Pot: The History of Cajun Cuisine* is the statement that “Although the term ‘Cajun’ is an English corruption of Acadian...the two words are by no means synonymous” (Bienvenu, C. Brasseaux, & R. Brasseaux 180). In this, Breaux would have agreed. The definition continues, though, by suggesting that Acadians fully assimilated into the dominant class with little to no room for shades of integration:

Upwardly mobile Acadians quickly divested themselves of their cultural baggage as they crossed class lines, identifying themselves first as Creoles in the early nineteenth century and later as simply Americans, when Anglos emerged as the local economic kingpins in the late antebellum period (182).

This was all made possible by “the essentially fluid socio-economic system of the period and the place [and] is evidenced by the early life-histories of those who ‘made it big’” (Dormon 31). The “Breux Manuscript” is written from that creole/bourgeoisie perspective, viewing the Acadian population as its object of study. Whatever J. A. Breux’s role was in the production of this manuscript, it is clear to which population he belonged given both his social status and on which side of the study he fell, that is the subjective side. This social mobility, along with the fact that Acadians often claimed to be Creole, is evidenced here in our francophone literature of the period and is reason enough to believe that Breux would not have considered himself Cajun. The authors, whomever they may be, never identifies themselves as Acadian or otherwise. If these are indeed Breux’s words written in the manuscript, and if Dormon and Brasseaux et al.’s claims

hold up, it is unclear that he would have even considered himself Acadian, but rather Creole—despite Conrad’s championing of Breaux’s Acadian pride.

However, a complete divestment of Acadian heritage this manuscript is not. It seems likely that as an “upwardly mobile Acadian,” Breaux would have referred to himself as Creole, as Brasseaux and others have suggested. However, because the O.A. of the manuscript seems to identify *every* francophone fairly democratically as Creole, this does cast Brasseaux et al.’s statement in a different, much more sympathetic light. The manuscript’s mere existence—whatever Breaux’s involvement—casts doubt on the notion that Creoles/Genteel Acadians were entirely dismissive of the lower-class Acadians. As with Sidonie de la Houssaye’s supposed mistreatment of the Acadian image, the text tells a different, more nuanced story.

Nowhere does the intersection of myth and history and the high wire act that is the modern consideration of the “Breaux Manuscript” as a Cajun-written-study-of-Cajuns feel more tenuous than through the lens of education. For Breaux’s part, in addition to his successes, “One of Breaux’s most ardent interests was the education of young people. He was a particularly strong advocate of public education” (Conrad, “A Biographical Sketch” 151)—that very institution that has frequently been blamed as one of the culprits responsible for the disappearance of Cajun ethnicity. As an example, we again return to Brasseaux et al.’s definition of “Cajun”:

Those impoverished Cajuns who remained in Louisiana found themselves besieged by the **forces of intolerance**. Fired by the prevailing Progressivism of the age, the state government mandated

compulsory education in 1916 and compulsory English education in 1921. (Bienvenu, C. Brasseaux, and R. Brasseaux 182; my emphasis)

Conrad credits Breaux with first establishing a “flourishing primary school system” in Iberia Parish alongside Anglos W. R. Burke, James A. Lee, and C. T. Cade: “Throughout the 1870s...he, together with other interested individuals worked untiringly to establish a public elementary school” (Conrad, “A Biographical Sketch” 151). He was elected president of the school board in 1887 and became the first state superintendent of public education in 1888. Conrad’s side of history would have you believe that Breaux was proud of his Acadian heritage, that he “should be labeled one of New Iberia’s unsung heroes,” and that “Even in the end, this quiet, unassuming, dignified man thought of the education of children” (151-152). But on Brasseaux’s side, Breaux might well be considered one of those aforementioned “forces of intolerance.”

Where Carl Brasseaux’s lambasting of public education is elaborated upon in another article, “Acadian Education: From Cultural Isolation to Mainstream America,” the blame is more squarely placed on Anglo-Americans who made an educational system “in their own image:”

Although the mandatory school attendance act was a blatant form of cultural imperialism, the measure met with remarkably little opposition from the Acadians. Their tractability was produced by initial lax enforcement of the law, the widespread use of Americanized upper-class Acadian teachers... (“Acadian Education” 136)

According to Brasseaux, “From the time of the Louisiana Purchase to approximately the mid-twentieth century,” Acadians like Breaux had been besieged by the influence of American cultural values and concepts of “a formal educational system as had developed in the Western World during the nineteenth century” (133). The language of “cultural imperialism” and situational opposition against the Western World implies a kind of colonial power struggle, positioning Acadians for a postcolonial treatment in the manner of Maria Hebert-Leiter. And yet, Conrad states that it was Breaux who did the influencing: “...their pleas for a public high school went unheeded by most of the members of the school board; that is until Joseph Breaux was elected president of the board in July 1887...Urged on by him, the school board agreed to establish a secondary school” (151).

Conrad’s account appears to match the O.A.’s side of the story from the “Breaux Manuscript:”

L’instruction publique a été extrêmement négligée in Louisiane. L’insouciance des habitants des campagnes, la longue distance de l’école publique que doivent parcourir les enfants, le peu d’instruction des instituteurs, le peu de confiance qu’ils inspirent, la modicité de leur salaire, le défaut de local, sont les causes qui se sont opposées jusqu’à présent (1875) à l’établissement des écoles primaires. (Ditchy 245)

While the author of this passage remains anonymous, it certainly sounds like a man who would eventually become superintendent. The O.A. goes on to provide more details. Before 1850, there was not much emphasis placed on reading and

writing so that « plus de trois quarts des habitants ne pouvaient pas lire couramment l'écriture manuscrite, et un certain nombre, surtout parmi les femmes, ne savaient ni lire ni écrire » (246).

But just as echoes of Conrad are found in the manuscript, so too are the echoes of Brasseaux. The O.A. follows the list of problems with a list of corrections, including what Brasseaux is likely referencing as “the widespread use of Americanized upper-class Acadian teachers:”

Depuis quelques années on remarque une notable amélioration dans l'instruction publique. Les maîtres d'école sont mieux choisis ; ils passent un examen ; on érige des maisons d'école ; on les inspecte ; la méthode qu'on y enseigne n'est plus de fantaisie comme autrefois mais un système uniforme, nouveau. (Ditchy 246)

Still, Brasseaux pits Anglos and Acadians in an ideological battle over education that reflects cultural values:

...Anglo-American fathers easily recognized the need for formal education. Being shrewd businessmen, however, they also recognized that private formal education was expensive and not always readily available. There is no reason to wonder, then, why this commercial-industrial class so eagerly accepted Horace Mann's theories of publicly supported education. According to Mann's theories, the agrarian majority (which at the time saw little need for formal education to pursue its life style) was capable of making a sizable contribution to public education. Acadian farmers, possessing a far different set of cultural values, viewed formal

education as having no practical value for their sons' pursuit of the good life. ("Acadian Education" 134)

The O.A. does also indicate that English was a part of the curriculum and acknowledges a lack of motivation among the *habitants*.

La moitié de la jeune génération sait lire et écrire plus ou moins correctement l'anglais et quelque peu le français. Cependant, bien peu de personnes possèdent assez d'instruction pour pouvoir tenir en ordre la comptabilité de la ferme, écrire convenablement une lettre ou une narration quelconque. Cela tient à l'inaptitude de l'individu ou à sa négligence ou au peu de goût que les parents ont eux-mêmes pour l'instruction. (246)

However, the O.A. does not draw cultural conclusions or express class superiority. And where Brasseaux attempts to link agrarian lifestyle to an intrinsic Acadian culture, suggesting that Acadian farmers possessed a "far different set of cultural values" and did not wish to pursue the life style attached to formal education, the O.A. suggests the utility of education on the farm, in their current lifestyle without expressing a desire or need to change that lifestyle. Where Brasseaux expresses a cultural takeover at the hands of Anglo-Americans, he is relying on symbolic stereotypes that even in the nineteenth century were over-simplified. What about these values are culturally "Acadian?" Why "Acadian farmers" and not just simply "farmers?" Were there no Anglo famers who also shared these values? Or German farmers? Or Irish?

Where myth and stereotype seek to simplify, the "Breux Manuscript" muddies the waters. In a comment relegated to a footnote, Dormon explains the

confusion over the scholarly consideration of the Cajuns' Civil War loyalties—an explanation that is applicable to the “Breux Manuscript” as well: “The problem at the base of conflicting viewpoints seems to be one of terminology compounded by the traditional failure to distinguish between classes of the Acadian descent groups” (footnote #90, 51). The “Breux Manuscript” is situated in an important historical moment in the formation of Cajun ethnicity, which Dormon explains:

Socioeconomic class division operated to *decrease* ethnic distinctions among the elite “Genteel Acadians” (who readily acculturated to the dominant Anglo/bourgeois hegemonic structure), while *sharpening* such distinctions among the emergent ‘Cajuns.’ As the Anglo-Creole planter/bourgeois material values attracted the upwardly mobile Acadian descendants, the line between classes sharpened and ethnic distinctions were similarly clarified. For the emergent Cajun rural/folk element, ethnic distinctions reinforced the boundary separating the groups, marking the unassimilated marginal group as separate and distinct; *i. e.*, as a true ethnic group, tightly bounded and thoroughly imbued with essentially ethnic values. (52)

While Dormon’s explanation both stands on its own and fits well within the context of the “Breux Manuscript,” it still does not account for all the other different groups of Acadians described therein. However, it at least leaves room for an alternative understanding compared to another of Carl Brasseaux writings:

in postbellum Acadiana...the language of business was English, and the Acadian social climbers who had formerly aspired to the social

heights of Creole society now moved rapidly into the Anglo-American mainstream. Because of the social stigma now associated with less affluent Acadians, the Acadian gentry made every effort to disassociate itself from its heritage, initially wrapping itself instead in the ennobling mantle of the Evangeline legend and ultimately identifying itself as simply “American.” (*French, Cajun, Creole, Houma* 75)

Both of these passages describe the formative period of Cajun ethnicity. In Dormon’s account, the language is more passive and distanced with the acting forces being “class division,” “material values,” “ethnic distinctions;” all of which can be seen in the “Breux Manuscript.” In Brasseaux’s writing, the language is much more emotional, anti-Anglo-American, and anti-Genteel-Acadian. The acting forces are “Acadian social climbers” and “Acadian gentry.” Dormon’s passage describes processes and social systems; it assigns no blame while Brasseaux’s points a disparaging finger that does not hold up against the “Breux Manuscript.”

Again, let us use education as a *point de repère*. Brasseaux writes that because Acadians were disinterested in the Anglo-American sense of classical education, “It is thus hardly surprising that the establishment of a statewide, public school system in 1845 elicited an unenthusiastic response from Louisiana’s Acadian population” (“Acadian Education” 135). What Joseph A. Breux and the “Breux Manuscript” demonstrate, though, is that the push for education was not just an Anglo-American initiative; it involved many French Creole and Genteel Acadians who were responding *against* American influence.

In fact, the Constitution of 1845 sought to establish public education in Louisiana “In an effort to combat abolitionist views.” Amy Gossett reminds us that

...delegates argued that the only way for Louisiana children to have a proper understanding of the institution of slavery was to be educated within the state. The consensus was that ‘Southern men should have Southern heads and hearts,’ and therefore a system of free public schools, funded with property taxes, must be created” (Gossett 310).

Public education was, in fact, explicitly *anti-American*. It also did not seek to take advantage of the “sizable contribution” of the “agrarian majority,” but rather sought funding from landowners.

The author(s) of the “Breaux Manuscript,” like Sidonie de la Houssaye, whether influenced by Horace Mann or not, did not wish to leave the Acadians behind and, doubtless, did not wish to Americanize them, at least not in the modern sense. They had a different view of what America would become. Whatever the origin of the anonymous author(s)—Acadian, Creole, Cajun—it did not matter; the “Breaux Manuscript” was a product of the francophone society intended for a culturally francophone audience. Eugène Dumez, for example, was demonstrably pro-Confederacy and was still publishing in French even after the Civil War despite this business being negatively affected by carpetbaggers.⁸

⁸ See correspondence with Henry Vignaud. LSU Libraries Special Collections: <http://www.lib.lsu.edu/special/findaid/1281.pdf>

The O.A.'s goal was neither to adopt nor to fight against modernization. Neither was it an adoption of the ennobling *Evangeline* myth in an effort to Americanize nor was it a political valuation of Acadian-ness. It was simply a historical recording. Whatever conclusions are to be drawn from the fact that the O.A., himself, cites education as a reason for the disappearance of Acadian language (Ditchy 17), while Breaux was one of the more prominent leaders and promoters of public education, we must bear in mind that being ethnic or maintaining ethnicity was not the same concern in the nineteenth century as it is today. This lack of context makes Brasseaux's comments ("forces of intolerance," "blatant form of cultural imperialism") and tone unnecessarily harsh. If that type of modern historical perspective and opinion toward people like Breaux were to be considered, one would expect that he would have divested himself entirely of his Acadian heritage and never would have associated with these lowly Acadians.

Paroisses Riveraines et d'anciennes Prairies

The translator's interjecting of a modern understanding of terms and applying it to the nineteenth century context of the "Breaux Manuscript" confuses the author's naming conventions and implies intentions that were never there to begin with. The result transforms a class distinction among Acadians into a distinction more fitting to our modern myth of "the Cajun." A second, similar occurrence appears during the O.A.'s descriptions of two distinct geographical populations of Acadians. It begins with a seemingly innocuous editorial on the term *habitant*. This curious interjection takes place in Reinecke's translation of the "character and customs" portion of the manuscript. Reinecke writes:

The character and customs of the *habitants* or farmers of South Louisiana (**the word "paysan" does not exist**)⁹ are rather clearly distinguishable according to which of the two chief divisions of that area one studies.

The original French in Ditchy's version reads: « Le caractère, les mœurs des habitants de la Basse-Louisiane sont assez fortement dessinés dans chacune des deux grandes divisions de cette province » (248). Reinecke's designation of *habitants* as "farmers" provides an imposed clarity that the O.A. did not provide. Furthermore, by adding "the word "paysan" does not exist" he also suggests that the O.A. would have used that word had it been available to him, thereby equating *habitant* with *paysan*. This is an assumption made in error, however, as in his definition of *habitant*¹⁰, the O.A. demonstrates that this is not the case:

HABITANT, cultivateur, homme des champs, **paysan**. Ce dernier nom n'existe pas en Louisiane ni au Canada ; faire l'habitant ou le métier d'habitant, s'occuper de la culture de la terre ; (can.), campagnard. Maman ne veut pas que je vas aux noces chez les *habitants*. (128. My emphasis)

While the term *paysan* may not have existed in Louisiana at the time of the O.A.'s writing, he was nonetheless familiar with the term and context indicates that his readership would be as well. In Reinecke's translation, his additions inform the reader to draw the conclusion that these people are somewhat equivalent to

⁹ Emphasis added to designate Reinecke's voice

¹⁰ Not included in Reinecke's translation

paysans. But the O.A. does not make this as clear and uses the term *habitant* quite freely throughout the text.

Where Reinecke first places *habitant* in italics, later in that same paragraph and elsewhere in the text he translates *habitant* as “inhabitant.” So in a section of the text where the O.A. distinguishes between two groups of Acadians—an interesting bit of information to which we shall return—he uses the same innocuous term to label all of them before elaborating on specific differences. Through Reinecke’s translation choices, however, he essentially labels both groups as “*paysan*.” Where the O.A. was demonstrably aware of an alternative word to use, he chose not to. However, Reinecke again provides editorial that is not originally there. Intentional or not, this leads his reader to draw a subtle yet different conclusion than may have been originally intended.

So what did the O.A. intend by his use of the word *habitant*? Perhaps simply “inhabitant,” as Reinecke translates elsewhere. If he wanted to call them “*paysan*” or “*campagnard*,” for example, it was not for lack of vocabulary. And indeed he does use *campagnard* later on in the text. In a section subtitled “LA CÔTE,” the O.A. uses the term “*campagnard*” to contrast what the Acadians were in the past with what they have become at the time of his writing:

Tout ce qui a été fait depuis la guerre, dans le but de civiliser et éclairer le peuple, n’a pas été sans influence sur ce caractère de la nouvelle génération. L’extension donnée aux relations des hommes entre eux a augmenté dans de fortes proportions depuis quarante ans. Il y a moins de rusticité, mais la grossièreté du **campagnard** fait place à une espèce de fierté bien accusé chez un certain nombre,

et qui est tout l'opposé de la bonne franchise d'autrefois. (270. My emphasis)

By comparison, Reinecke does not account for the particular word *campagnard*, leaving it out of his translation: “There is less peasant rusticity and coarseness; it yields to a sort of pride, strongly marked in some, which is quite the opposite of the early character.”

The translation of *habitant* becomes even more problematic in the context of education. In the French, the O.A. writes « Les jeunes filles lisent beaucoup plus que les jeunes gens; mais la plupart n'écrivent pas. Une fois mariées, elles disent adieu à la plume et n'écrivent presque jamais, surtout quand elles sont femmes *d'habitants* » (247). Remarkably, Ditchy italicizes *habitant* here where it is not italicized in some other places. Perhaps this is because the O.A. was using his Acadian definition of *habitant* here and not elsewhere. If that is the case, Reinecke's translation of that same passage matches up: “Once married, they say farewell to the pen and almost never use one again, especially when they become **farmers' wives**” (my emphasis).

There are other instances of this italicizing as well. In the CARACTÈRE portion, after using “habitant” without italics, Ditchy italicizes it again where he speaks of « les mœurs primitives: »

Les mœurs des campagnes sont assez primitives. Un *habitant* arrivant dans un cercle de vingt-cinq autres *habitants*, où il comptera trois connaissances, se croira obligé d'aller leur donner à tous indistinctement une poignée de main (249).

For reference, Reinecke leaves “habitant” untranslated. It seems to be the case that when a word is italicized, it is indicating the O.A.’s use of the word as it is defined in his Acadian dictionary portion of the manuscript.

The O.A. made no bones about using Acadian vocabulary in his manuscript and in his definitions in particular. He says, « Souvent, en effet, ces provincialismes suppléent à l’insuffisance du vocabulaire français et remplacent avantageusement de longues périphrases » (Ditchy 34). This method is used numerous times in the dictionary portion of the text, where he avoids redefining terms within definitions of other terms and instead italicizes the Acadian term. It stands to reason that the same is being done in the customs portion of the manuscript.

One instance of this that is particularly convincing is where the O.A. writes, « Le dimanche suivant, il retrouva au sortir de l’église le même homme qui était son voisin et il l’invita à boire *la magnage* à une *barre* (*sic, bar* au glossaire) voisine » (Ditchy 237). The parenthetical appears to be written by Ditchy, who corrects “*barre*” as “*bar*.” However, both “*bar*” and “*barre*” are included in the glossary portion—with *barre* carrying the “(can.)” tag distinguishing it as Canadian, and meaning something altogether different from “*bar*.” In any case, the glossary reference is here indicative of the possible meaning of this usage of italicization—that the italicized word is referring to its “glossaire” counterpart, thus its Acadian definition.

And so it stands to reason that if the italicized version is non-standard use on the part of the author, then the same word written in standard script should be considered standard use. Granted, we do not have access to the O.A.’s

manuscript; all we have to reference is Ditchy's publication. However, Ditchy does state, « Nous avons tenu à reproduire ces notes telles qu'elles sont; » (12). There is no reason to assume and no indication on Ditchy's part if he made any script choices in publication that were not indicated in the manuscript. At the very least, the translator's choice not to maintain the distinction is clearly his own and does have a tangible effect on the message being conveyed.

So why dwell on this word *habitant*? I mentioned earlier that this translation choice takes place in a section of the text where the O.A. distinguishes between two groups of Acadians. It is in the introductory sentence to this section that Reinecke writes, "The character and customs of the *habitants* or farmers of South Louisiana (the word "paysan" does not exist) ..." With this translation and the accompanying parenthetical, Reinecke paints all the inhabitants that follow with the same brush: that all inhabitants, and doubtless Acadian inhabitants, are equivalent to "paysans"—which makes the further step to Cajun even simpler. However, the discussion that follows in the text clearly demonstrates that the actual situation was much more complex. This is translation doing the work of myth, that is, it couches the difference that follows in a more familiar sameness provided by myth that is pre-established for Reinecke's audience: that Acadians are equivalent to Cajuns and that the subjects of this study are all Cajuns and all "paysan" farmers.

The complete, original opening sentence reads as follows: « Le caractère, les mœurs des habitants de la Basse-Louisiane sont assez fortement dessinés dans chacune des deux grandes divisions de cette province » (Ditchy 248). The main essence of this statement is striking—that there are two large divisions of

Acadians with strongly distinct character and customs. This is not something typically associated with the modern, unified Cajun ethnicity that supposedly follows from Acadians.

The O.A. mainly attributes these differences to geography and the amount of contact with the surrounding populations:

Dans la première, formée des paroisses riveraines du fleuve Mississippi, pays de plaines et de riches cultures, les mœurs sont plus douces et plus polies que dans l'autre. On y remarque une civilisation généralement plus avancée due à l'ancienneté de la population, à un commerce plus étendu, à des rapports plus fréquents avec les étrangers, à l'agglomération des habitants autour des églises, à des communications plus faciles et plus nombreuses avec la Nouvelle-Orléans. (Ditchy 248)

In one division, the Mississippi river Acadians, he finds the inhabitants to be more advanced, participating in commerce with outsiders and in frequent communication with the big city of New Orleans. This is not a description typically associated with Cajuns who are often described as being isolated, subsistence farmers—a conflicting image with what is implied by Reinecke's translation.

The O.A. describes the inhabitants of the other division of the Attakapas and Opelousas region in the following manner:

Dans la seconde partie à laquelle appartiennent les contrées des Attacapas et des Opelousas, région d'anciennes prairies, séjour où l'hiver fait plus vivement et plus longuement éprouver ses rigueurs,

les habitants sont plus actifs, plus industriels et plus aptes à l'étude des arts mécaniques. Leur caractère a quelque chose de la sévérité du climat voisin de la mer. (Ditchy 248)

While this description differs from the first, we still see adjectives not typically associated with Cajuns, and certainly not in such flattering language: active, industrious, apt in the study of mechanical arts. Again, this treatment is reminiscent of de la Houssaye's despite being written from an upper-class, Creole perspective. It seems difficult to believe that a reader with no preconceived idea of the subject (Acadian or Cajun) would call the population "paysan" after reading these two descriptions. However, because of the added context in the English translation, the same cannot as easily be said of Reineke's version.

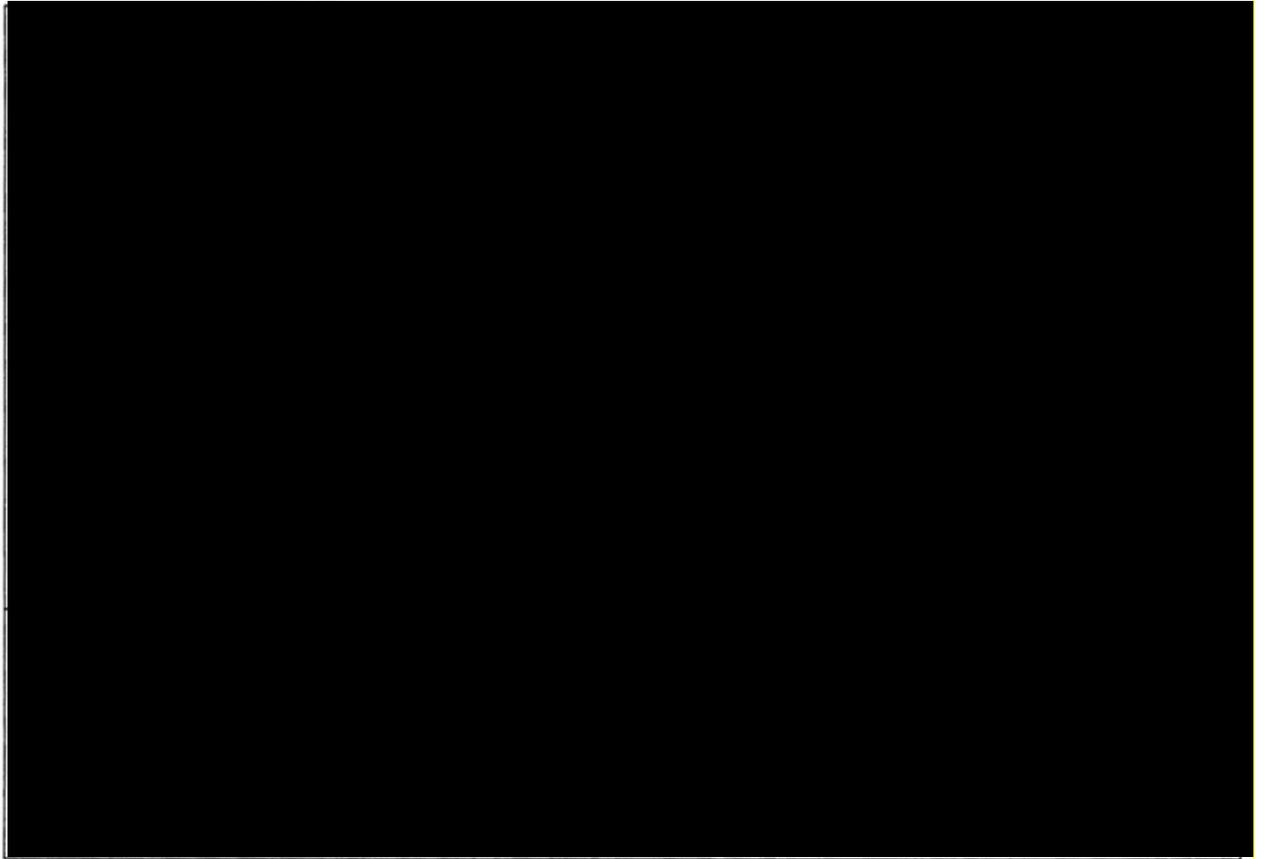


Figure 4: Natural Environments of South Louisiana. The two divisions are essentially divided by the Atchafalaya River, with the Prairie Acadians to the West and River Acadians to East. Source: Trépanier, “Cajunization of French LA” 163.

Despite the “Breux Manuscript” supposedly being written by an insider of the community, these descriptions are rarely used to describe these communities. Instead, English accounts are referenced much more frequently. In the essay titled “The Acadians: Myths and Realities” Glenn Conrad—the same historian who wrote about Joseph Breux’s Acadian pride—opines that

The Cajun is usually cast in one of two lights. He is either depicted as an ignorant, cunning, superstitious swamp dweller, living in squalor in a moss-draped reptile-infested wilderness...or, he is interpreted as being a creature of simple virtue, somewhat religious, easily amused by bouree, beer, and quaint music and who

occasionally blurts out (in his “unusual patois”) the unexpected words of wisdom. Regardless of the vision, the backdrop is always the timeless, changeless, “mysterious” bayou country of Louisiana.

(1)

It is thus surprising that Conrad does not reference the “Breaux Manuscript” which relies on first-hand knowledge and methodical, academic linguistic inquiry.

Instead, Conrad focuses on outside stereotypes in a confusing mix of spurn and support. In one instance, Conrad cites Charles Dudley Warner’s “The Acadian Land” as “an early example of the distorted view of the Louisiana Cajun” (footnote #4). However, later in the same essay, Conrad chooses to cite Warner in order to support his assertion that “Geography, language and occupation tended to reinforce the social isolation of these people and to protect their culture from changes introduced from the outside” (12). In the footnote attached to that claim Conrad adds,

Warner, visiting Louisiana in the 1880s, wrote: “They came into a land...which [has] enabled them to preserve their primitive traits.

In a comparative isolation from the disturbing currents of modern life, they have preserved the habits and customs of the eighteenth century.” (footnote #25).

The manuscript attributed to J. A. Breaux directly refutes all of these outside observations, describing the inhabitants as industrious, advanced, apt in the mechanical arts, practiced in commerce and trade, and in frequent contact with outsiders. And yet, in an article meant to demystify what has become, in Conrad’s words, “a focal point of popular and scholarly misconception and preconception”

the author ignores a work of which he is demonstrably aware while relying on preconceptions of outsiders to both refute and support preconceptions of outsiders.

This phenomenon is particularly mind-boggling when considering that, in addition to these cultural differences already evident among populations of Acadians associated with these different geographical groups, there were also linguistic differences made apparent in the manuscript. The treatment of the language here is done in an astutely detailed, and strictly academic manner—a manner in direct contrast to the Anglo descriptions of “unusual patois” referenced by Conrad. However, these differences were noted in the part of the text omitted from the English translation. These linguistic differences coincide with the aforementioned geographical distinctions. In footnote #2 in the section on the grammar of the Acadian dialect, the O.A. distinguishes between different ways of pronouncing “moi” according to geographical location: « Se prononce moan aux Attacapas, moè, toè dans la section du Bayou Lafourche » (Ditchy 21). These geographical locations correspond with the two groups mentioned in the cultural section, Lafourche being the *région riveraine du Mississippi*.

This dialectical identification of the Acadian populations is further reinforced in the introduction to the GLOSSAIRE. Here, the O.A. discusses the method of and difficulties in creating a glossary, a process he calls « une affaire assez délicate » (Ditchy 33). In addition to the constant evolution of popular language, the author faced variations according to location; many terms used in the country were unknown in the cities and vice versa. Even in rural areas, there was the type of variation consistent with the two aforementioned regions:

Le vocabulaire n'est pas non plus identique à lui-même dans les districts ruraux ; et, j'ai pu me convaincre qu'un certain nombre d'expressions employées dans les régions de Lafourche et du Fleuve sont inconnues aux Attacapas où existent des mots inusités dans les Paroisses voisines de la Nouvelle-Orléans. (Ditchy 33)

Here we see a direct connection between the Mississippi River region and the Lafourche region discussed elsewhere as, again, being separate from the Attacapas region. This finding makes sense from a linguistic point of view: "...Louisiana French is the heterogeneous result of a complex process of language contact that had many components, only one of which was the French of the Acadian exiles" (Klingler 103). Viewed in this way, the population was much more diverse, even among Acadian communities, than the myth is able to support.

From Plantations to Vacheries

The class and geographical divisions among Acadians that are exemplified in the "Breaux Manuscript" are both recognized today.¹¹ However, any divergence from the mythical agrarian "Cajun" is often attributed to Anglo and Creole influence. The (over-)insistence of the dominant influence of Anglos and Creoles on Acadians is supported by the most prominent members of the academic community. Dormon's explanation as to how the class split in the Acadian

¹¹ Malcolm Comeaux recognizes four unique subcultures of Cajuns dependent upon four distinct environments: levee lands, prairies, swamps, and marshes. "Louisiana's Acadians: The Environmental Impact" in Conrad *The Cajuns: Essays on their History and Culture*, 109-126.

population happened is two-fold. The first reason is contextual: that it is due to the “essentially fluid socio-economic system of the period” (30). The other reason relies much more on supposition. He describes these Acadians’ ascent as a rags-to-riches success story reminiscent of the type “for which the United States has been at least mythically renowned.” He explains that

...in the South Louisiana setting of the early nineteenth century, that process necessitated joining ranks with the Anglo-Creole dominant class and acquiring land, slaves, and the full panoply of planter/bourgeoisie values, including some degree of acculturation to the linguistic and cultural hallmarks of the dominant class. That meant a clear shift from the value system and status associated with the early Acadian immigration. (30)

This reasoning lumps Anglos and Creoles together as sharing similar values, or perhaps Creoles adopting American values, that are somehow intrinsically different from those of original Acadians—a theme we noted earlier in this chapter. He also references a late 19th century, typically American Horatio Alger myth and applies it to a time that began before the Louisiana Purchase and spans all the way until after the Civil War. Dormon even attributes the Mouton family’s “refinement” to the fact that their mother was half-French: “Under the cultivated influence of their half-French mother, the Mouton family acquired a degree of refinement and sophistication rare to the region of the period” (31). He may be echoing an unnamed source here, but in any case, that is a highly subjective and suggestive claim. It is interesting that as we peel off the errant Acadians, the pure and moral Cajun survives.

A problematic byproduct of this Cajun subjugation to the dominant Anglo/Creole class are the parallels frequently made between Cajuns and other subjugated races. For example, in explaining how early Acadians learned to be apolitical, Glenn Conrad adds, “Thus as with the Jews in Hitler’s Germany and Southern Negroes of the first half of the twentieth century, Acadians became apolitical and thus gave their social isolation a political dimension” (“The Acadians” 10). Where the Jews’ enemy was Hitler and the “Southern Negroes” fought, in a word, racism, the Cajun/Acadian enemy is not so easily identifiable.

It is easy to blame a nebulous Anglo-American presence on all that has befallen the Cajun, especially when linking Cajuns to Acadians and Americans to their British forebears. Even when Acadians were, themselves, the perpetrators of marginalization¹², many historians blame, by proxy, the ethnic values associated with Americanism. In this scenario, Anglos and Creoles are practically one and the same and Acadians were just adopting the Anglo-Creole values of the dominant class. This theory is often used not only to explain the formation of the Genteel Acadian class but also the particular practice of owning slaves. It is difficult to believe that there was something inherently different about Acadians that would not allow them to be wealthy unless they were corrupted by or forced to adapt to an American model of commerce. This theory also denies them the type of agency and self-determination that myth so often attributes to them.

¹² Examples of this will be discussed in the following chapter.

The reality is even more complex. For starters, Acadians began owning slaves and amassing fortune long before Louisiana became “Americanized.”

Dormon himself notes,

The process appears to have begun early on. In 1803, for example, the traveller/observer Calude C. Robin noted of the Acadians in the Attakapas District: “Among them are some who have become extremely rich, who have amassed herds of several thousand head of cattle.” Robin, *Voyage to Louisiana, 1803-1805*, trans. by Stuart O. Landry, Jr. (New Orleans, 1966), pp. 190-191. (Dormon, footnote #49, 31)

As we have seen, social ascension was not forbidden to those of Acadian descent: “There can be no doubt that a sizeable minority of the Louisiana/Acadian population rose to positions of prestige and consequence in the first half of the nineteenth century, producing (in addition to the redoubtable Mouton) another governor and a lieutenant governor between 1830 and 1860”¹³ (32). Alexandre Mouton, whom James Dormon calls the “nonpareil Genteel Acadian,” owned the largest number of slaves—ninety-one—in Lafayette Parish (footnote #88, 50). In a study of the Seventh Census of the United States, Vaughan Baker found, “Of 374 slave owners in Lafayette Parish in 1850, 269—a startling 68%—were Acadian” (“Patterns of Acadian Slave Ownership in Lafayette Parish” 145). To this,

¹³ From Dormon: “The other governor was Paul O. Hébert (1853-1857). Jacques Dupré of St. Landry Parish served briefly as governor during his tenure as state senator in 1830-1831. Other notable politicians of the pre-Civil War period to claim “Acadian” connections would include Trasimond Landry, Jean-Baptiste Plauché, and Homère Mouton.” (footnote 55, p. 32)

Baker added, “A survey of the evidence in only one of Louisiana's Acadian parishes is an insufficient base from which to challenge strongly the orthodox interpretation of the Cajuns as a non-slaveholding population.” The point is well made that this is only one parish; however, this parish was among the most “Acadian” and at a time before there was a great Anglo-American influence.

Leanna Thomas argues that when Acadians moved south, they entered a plantation society during a transitional period to Spanish control in which racial power relations were being redefined. The Acadians were presented with an “opportunity to define their position on the social ladder” (50). From this opportunity, a class difference emerged. This began well before the period of Baker’s study.

Another change in Acadian society came as they adopted slaveholding as part of their daily lives. When they lived in the North, the Acadians did not become slaveholders largely due to their location. Their environment did not lend itself to a type of plantation society, and they lived far from a port city where they might easily trade or purchase slaves. Through their exile experiences in more southern British and French colonies, the Acadians became far more aware of the institution of slavery. In settling in a southern society where slave owning was common, many of them became slaveholders by the early 1800s. (9)

Thomas provides evidence that Acadians’ relationships with other ethnic groups shifted as they “adopted an imperialistic approach when it came to securing their safety and acquiring new lands from the neighboring tribes” and began to

participate in slave owning. She ascertains that, “Their growing involvement in slaveholding indicates that class stratification in Louisiana’s Acadian society started taking shape before the nineteenth century” (33).

This shift began as early as the 1760s, when Acadian settlers began acquiring property, entering into conflict with the local Native Americans, and relying on Spanish military for defense (33-44). Thomas finds that “many of the Acadians in the east joined with Spain’s military to guard and protect their families, while others in the west adopted an imperial approach when it came to land acquisition” (44). This is in contrast “to the pre-dispersal Acadians whose culture developed in the midst of their reliance on aid and land provisions from the Mi’kmaq” (42).

While Carl Brasseaux, James Dormon, and others blame Anglo-Creole influence for Acadian stratification, imperialism, and involvement in 19th century commerce and slaveholding, other studies contradict this view¹⁴. Because imperialism and capitalism are often associated with Anglo-American values of the period, when these attributes began to appear in Acadian Louisiana communities, direct associations are typically made with Americanization. However, evidence to the contrary bears this out to be an oversimplification. At the very least there are other explanations that deserve study.

¹⁴ Thomas references William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1980); Kenneth Donovan, “Slaves In Île Royale, 1713-1758” *French Colonial History* 5 (2004): 27-8; Basque, “Political Adaptation and Societal Change,” 162; and Kenneth Donovan, “Slaves and Their Owners in Ile Royale, 1713- 1760,” *Acadiensis*, XXV, no. 1 (Autumn 1995): 16.

Thomas cites Brasseaux (*The Founding of New Acadia*, 90) as saying “most Acadians initially regarded blacks and mulattoes as their social equals,” (qtd. in Thomas 44). Elsewhere he claims, “slavery was unknown” in Acadia, and that when they arrived in Louisiana “Negro slavery was a well-established institution” (*Acadian to Cajun*, 4; qtd. in Thomas 45). Thomas takes umbrage with these statements, citing studies that show the development of racism in France as early as the mid-1500s through the popularity of travel accounts. The French settlers of Acadie would have been aware of these prejudices. Further, she finds, “This racial prejudice is fully evident in a letter the Acadians sent to the governor of New France as early as 1710. In the letter, the Acadians complained that through imposing levies, Englishman Samuel Vetch was treating them ‘like the negroes’” (45). In addition, there is evidence of a “society of slaves” on Île Royale—a trade partner with the Acadians and a place in which “a large number of Nova Scotia Acadians had at least one blood relative or an in-law living in Cape Breton” (qtd. in Thomas 46). She even provides evidence that some Acadians who lived there owned slaves well before moving to Louisiana.

In his study, Donovan also explains how Acadians Joseph and Marguerite Dugas from Minas Basin moved to Louisbourg in 1722 and purchased their slave Pierre Josselin in the 1730s. In explaining this purchase, Donovan observes, “perhaps they felt some social pressure, since six of the 10 households within their block had slaves.” (46)

Thomas does argue that while Acadians were aware of black subjugation and while their neighbors owned slaves, those in the Minas Basin, Grand-Pré, or

Chignecto regions did not. Significantly, however, the difference was not ideological. It was geographical.

Unlike in the more southern colonies, the Acadians' methods of marshland agriculture, as well as the seasonal weather only allowed limited space and limited time for land harvesting. These factors simply did not make it feasible for individuals to adopt a type of monocrop production. In addition, the trade ships that carried slaves to the North American colonies often stopped at the major Louisbourg fortress on Île Royale, but not at the small ports along the inner Baie Française/Bay of Fundy waterway. (46-47)

The Acadians of Acadie may not have acquired slaves to labor in their society; however, it was not because they were unaware of other societies who did. Evidence shows that they would have had direct interactions with these neighboring societies—societies who, furthermore, were not Anglo-American.



Figure 5: États-Unis de l'Amérique septentrionale avec les Isles Royale, de Terre Neuve, de St. Jean, l'Acadie &c. Map. Paris, Chés Boudet: 1785. Lib. of Cong. Web. 17 Feb. 2015. <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3700.ar076100>>

While Dormon believes that acquiring land and slaves “meant a clear shift from the value system and status associated with the early Acadian immigration” (30), these associations appear to be misleading, or at least not quite as clear as he attests. As Thomas notes,

Instead, as they arrived in Louisiana after being uprooted from their northern communities, some Acadians found isolation from imperial societies on a western frontier to be a new, viable option. Meanwhile, other Acadians recognized the potential of social elevation by means of economic success in southern trade and agriculture. (Thomas 55)

In addition to Carl Brasseaux, Thomas references Vaughn B. Baker as historians who assert that Acadian class stratification did not begin until the nineteenth

century in Louisiana, “but the Acadians’ choices in where to settle, and their involvement in slaveholding indicate that it began to evolve as early as the mid-1700s” (55).

This is highly important for Carl Brasseaux because he points to the adoption of slavery and the plantation system in Louisiana as the point in which the once unified Acadian population became fragmented, which then led to the birth of the Cajun population (*Acadian to Cajun* 4-5). Brasseaux has remarked that slavery was an “anathema” to the original Acadians; this is not wholly true nor is it indicative of ideology and was more likely indicative of geography. Brasseaux’s own research shows this to be the case in Louisiana as well.

Like Breaux, Brasseaux differentiates between geographical populations of Acadians, with the “Acadian bourgeoisie [being] confined geographically to the fertile water-bottom parishes bordering the Mississippi River and bayous Lafourche, Teche, and Vermilion” (9). He correlates Acadian participation in the plantation system of these areas as completely “divesting themselves of their cultural baggage” and assuming the culture of their new economic class (8). However, Brasseaux also notes that even members of “the more tradition-bound Acadian yeomanry” who “maintained the mores of their late colonial era forebears, continu[ed] to produce small agricultural surpluses with the assistance of their sons and **two or three slaves**” (10, emphasis mine). In that case, even low-class, tradition-bound Acadians were not ideologically opposed to slavery.

In addition, Brasseaux would have his reader believe that “some *petits habitants* were undoubtedly dissatisfied with the changes wrought in their community by the emergence of the plantation system and sought to relocate in

more isolated regions where more traditional Acadian values still held sway” (11). Brasseaux connects migration patterns with slaveholding patterns and makes cultural value judgments based on this incomplete picture. However, just as Leanna Thomas found with the Acadians in Acadie, it is far more likely that geography played the largest role in slaveholding, not the maintenance of traditional Acadian values. In the river parishes and areas where cotton and sugar were grown—crops that depended upon slave labor—Acadian slaveholding was prevalent (12-15). However, in the Attakapas and Opelousas regions where the soil was not as rich and where “the prairies possessed thick sod and a very shallow clay pan, which mitigated against agriculture,” livestock became the popular Acadian livelihood (16). This had the added bonus of not requiring slave labor and was, therefore, cheaper. The conclusion that Brasseaux draws is that the transplanted bayou Acadians chose this option because it was “much more compatible with their ancestors’ nonmaterialistic values” (17).

Brasseaux’s conclusion is problematic for a number of reasons. The first is that their ancestors’ values were not as clear and universal as is popularly believed. The second is that Brasseaux also cites the following reasons for the Acadian migrations, none of which had to do with traditional values and had very much to do with opportunism: “the ease with which cattle could be raised on open prairies as well as the availability of unclaimed land” in addition to the Acadians being squeezed out of the plantation system by more successful planters—who were also Acadian. The final reason that the statement of “nonmaterialistic values” being the motivator for migration is that these livestock were produced commercially not for subsistence, but for surplus, with many of

these *vacheries* becoming highly prosperous (16-18).¹⁵ The fact that they became so prosperous without slave labor is simply good business practice and indicates nothing about cultural values or morals.

In conclusion, there is no evidence that Acadian slaveholding depended upon anything but the type of commerce or crop being produced, which, in turn, depended upon geography. In other words, the absence of slaves indicates nothing more than circumstance, especially when the economies from which they were absent were those in which they were considered an unneeded overhead expense. On the contrary, the presence of slaves in yeomanry indicates far more about the Acadians' feelings toward slavery than does the absence of slaves in the *vacheries*.

In modern consideration, there is a tension between, on the one hand, the way in which historians have written about the (Genteel) Acadians' role in the formation of the Cajun ethnicity—their adopting of American values or their Americanization—and on the other hand the romanticization of the “Breux Manuscript” and its being commonly regarded as a record of Cajuns by a Cajun. Myth is required in order to ease this tension. Breux is Cajun because he has an Acadian last name, and thus for the myth's sake, his past and social prominence must be ignored along with his involvement in establishing public education in Louisiana; the involvement of other Creole authors is forgotten and authorship is attributed entirely to Breux; definitions from the original manuscript are

¹⁵ For example, “Median livestock production among Calcasieu's Acadian ranches totaled 589 head of cattle (1850 agricultural census, Calcasieu Parish)” from note 37, page 191.

ignored in later English publication and editorials are made to connect the dots and fit the preconceived ideas of an English-speaking audience. Where Americanization or, more directly, Anglo-Americans are blamed for the social situation that created the Cajun ethnic group in the nineteenth century, the myth is thereby strengthened, as History, then, repeats itself and the events of *Le Grand Dérangement* are recreated and the circle is neatly closed. Even where (Genteel) Acadians are considered as agents of marginalization, it is because they have been poisoned by Americanization. And yet the “Breaux Manuscript” stands alone, the original copy lost, its French version forgotten in all its complexity, and the misrepresented English translation remains referenced in footnotes, where applicable, as the sole literary contribution of a Cajun about Cajuns.

VIGILANTES ON THE PRAIRIE

« Le mythe ne nie pas les choses, sa fonction est au contraire d'en parler ; simplement, il les purifie, les innocente, les fonde en nature et en éternité, il leur donne une clarté qui n'est pas celle de l'explication, mais celle du constat. (Barthes, *Mythologies* 252)

As I have argued, a major consequence of the mythologizing of the Cajuns is that the predominant myth fails to account for these various ethnic groups and the “larger social frameworks” that spawned them. The myth that “the Cajun” is a natural descendant of the Acadian makes the connection seem obvious, self-evident, and absolute. Another consequence is that it also reinforces the assumption that all Acadians continued on as a united community when they arrived in Louisiana. But as we saw with the Breaux Manuscript, there were multiple communities with different attributes, and—as evidenced by Breaux himself—a number of Acadians who did not become “Cajun.” These Acadians do not fit the myth because they were not marginalized by either the French Creole or Anglo population. In fact, many of these Acadians who did not become Cajun instead contributed to the marginalization that further cemented the Cajun identity.

In the previous chapter, we identified two geographical regions where plantations dominated the economy of the river parishes and the prairies where the *vacheries* were popular. This chapter will concentrate on the prairies of the Attakapas region and provide a counter to the myth that the prairies Acadians moved there to maintain their traditional Acadian values.

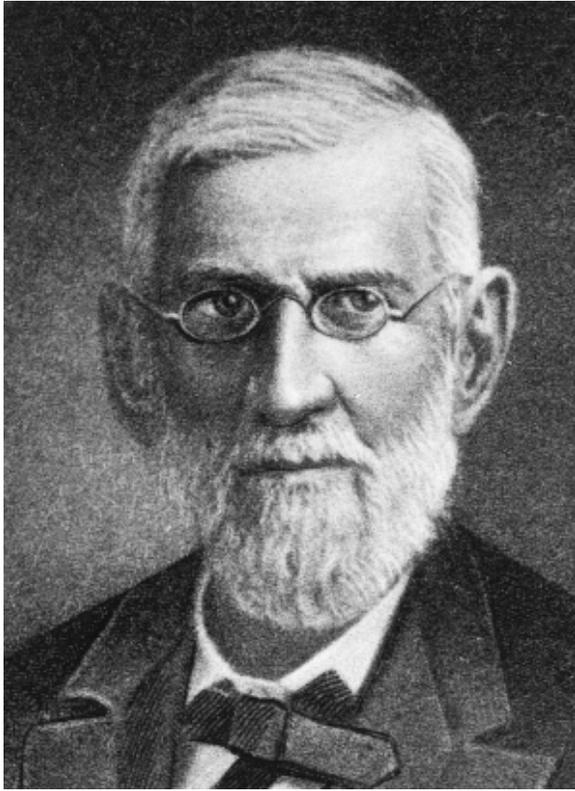


Figure 6: Alexandre Mouton (1804-1885)

Lithograph by Alcee Fortier. 1904. Center for Louisiana Studies at The University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

One of these most prominent Acadians was Alexandre Mouton. The Mouton family of the Attakapas region was one of the earliest Acadian families to arrive in South Louisiana after the *Grand Dérangement*, possibly as early as 1756. Much of their family's prominence can be attributed to Jean Mouton, who was exiled as a child from Nova Scotia to Louisiana, eventually settling in the Attakapas after acquiring a land grant on Bayou Carencro. Jean continued acquiring land, becoming "a planter

of some considerable wealth, consolidating his own property holding and subdividing and selling town lots in the village of Vermilionville (later Lafayette) which he had founded in 1824" (Dormon 31). The Mouton Dynasty collected much wealth and prestige and "ultimately produced a United States senator and state governor, two lieutenant governors, several district judges, and a Confederate general among many other later eminences" (31).

Of the Mouton clan, Alexandre Mouton was the most successful and influential; his "life and distinguished career represent the epitome of Acadian gentility" (32). Like Breaux, he received a private education by tutors before attending Georgetown College in Washington, D. C., which led to a practice in law.

He then entered politics where he found success serving in the Louisiana House of Representatives from 1826-1837, followed by an appointment as a U. S. senator from 1837 until his election as governor of the state of Louisiana from 1842-1846.

Membership in the “Acadian gentility” was not exclusive nor was it geographically restricted. As Dormon writes, “The Moutons might well be considered the nonpareil Genteel Acadian family of the region, but other Louisiana/Acadian families travelled similar paths to fortune and power on a smaller scale” (32). This fortune and power was at its peak before the Civil War, a fact that throws a wrench in the theories that blame Anglos for the marginalization of Acadians/Cajuns. As Dormon maintains, those who achieved success and power in the manner of the Mouton family “ultimately came to join the dominant planter/bourgeois class and thus participate in the ‘hegemonic’ domination over the entire population of the region” (33).

The role of Acadians themselves in the formation of Cajun ethnicity is a facet of Cajun history that is not typically recognized. The myth cannot recognize this. After all, if the myth states that Acadians became Cajuns due to forces outside the ethnicity, i.e. Anglos and Creoles, then how can Acadians establish hegemony over themselves?

The blurred lines between myth and reality and the transformation of history into nature are no more apparent than with the various perceptions of the Vigilante Committees of the mid-nineteenth century. As a prime example of this “hegemonic domination,” these vigilantes were predominately Acadians—including multiple members of the Mouton family and others like them—who

acted as agents of social reform against many members of what today would be considered the Cajun community. And yet, in popular portrayals of these events, the script is written in such a way that ignores Acadian participation and rewrites history in order to emphasize Anglo dominance over Acadian and Cajun interests, often conflating the latter in the process.

This and the following chapter will consider two differing accounts of the vigilante movement—the lesser-known mytho-historical French account, *Histoire des Comités de Vigilance aux Attakapas* and the popular, modern English *Belizaire the Cajun* film and novel. By examining the francophone version of this complex history in conjunction with the more popular tale, we can better understand these larger social frameworks and the true hegemonic forces that the mythologized English account largely ignores or otherwise distorts.

Les Comités de Vigilance

Histoire des Comités de Vigilance aux Attakapas first appeared in publication in 1859, written by a Frenchman, Alexandre Barde. Touted in the English version as a historical, eyewitness account¹⁶, the book chronicles the activities of vigilante committees of Southern Louisiana—committees comprised mostly of wealthier white French Creoles and Acadians who targeted minority populations with their own brand of ‘justice,’ which included lynching and expulsion. Containing the personalized slant and style evident in the prominent

¹⁶ The English version adds the subtitle: *An Eyewitness Account of Banditry and Backlash in Southwestern Louisiana*.

narrative voice of Monsieur Barde, this book is inherently politicized and poetically romanticized. Yet behind this unabashedly subjective tone there is a valuable cache of historical data, providing a rich tableau of a complex society.

Alexandre Barde immigrated to Louisiana in 1841 or 1842. He was a teacher near St. Martinville, then plantation tutor until 1858. He regularly wrote prose and poetry for local newspapers, especially the Opelousas-based *Louisiana Courier*, in which he originally published the serialized version of *Histoire des Comités* that he later compiled in book form. Barde is also considered to have written the first Louisiana novel, *Mademoiselle de Montblancard*, which he wrote under his oft-used pseudonym Flavien de las Deümes in 1843.

According to the *Histoire des Comités*, an Acadian Vigilante captain by the name of Sarrazin Broussard, dubbed Alexandre Barde as the official chronicler of the vigilantes (Grimsted 94; Bruce). *Histoire des Comités* chronicles the activity of seven vigilante groups in four Louisiana parishes all working in unison with then-retired Alexandre Mouton as their leader and president of the Vermilionville group.

According to Barde, in the overview “Coup d’oeil sure les Attakapas,” the justice system had become corrupt, with judges and juries acquitting known “bandits” of their crimes. The most common crime reported in Barde’s account is theft, particularly of cattle from prominent landowners, many of whom were members of the vigilante groups. In a detailed and heavily rhetorical fashion, Barde accounts for forty-one beatings, ninety exilings, and six killings committed by vigilantes in the name of justice between the beginning of February and September of 1859 (Grimsted 94).

Barde's account of the vigilante movement is relatively unknown today. David C. Edmonds in his introduction to the English translation of *The Vigilante Committees of the Attakapas* postulates a few reasons why. At the time of its publication, it was overshadowed by the Civil War and the high rate of illiteracy. Its relative obscurity today can be partially explained by the fact that it only existed in French until the aforementioned Edmonds and Dennis Gibson published an English version in 1981, which uses a translation by Henrietta Guilbeau Rogers from her master's thesis at Louisiana State University in 1936. What's more, says Edmonds, "many of the original [1861]¹⁷ copies were purchased and destroyed by irate relatives, friends, and descendants of the people identified as bandits. As a result very few copies are today extant" (viii). Although *Tintamarre* has recently republished the original French version (2007), very few Louisianans are aware of its existence due to the relatively low numbers of French language readership.¹⁸

The exclusion of this text from popular culture may be due to the various myths surrounding this vigilante phenomenon. Popular belief, spurned on by such works as *Bélizaire the Cajun* (discussed in the following chapter), holds that innocent, poor Cajuns were the victims of these vigilante groups who were supposedly comprised of mainly higher-class Anglos. This is partly true; the

¹⁷ Edmonds gives 1861 as the original publication date. However, the 2007 *Tintamarre* edition dates the first edition as 1859.

¹⁸ In addition, it has been my personal experience that the 1981 English translation is now even more difficult to find than the new French publication.

vigilante movement *did* involve a polarization of society that nearly caused all-out class warfare in south Louisiana.

Many of the honest and law-abiding residents of Louisiana viewed the insurgents not as bandits and thieves, but as a natural backlash to a reactionary and narrow-minded vigilante movement. In other words, the Committees had initially been established to deal with rampant banditry, but their overzealous and self-righteous pursuit of justice, coupled with brutal tactics, fell heaviest on the poor. So appalled were friends and relatives of the latter that there was created a group of self-styled “moderators” whose objective was to crush the Committees of Vigilance. Thus, the social disorders of the time, according to these people, was a clash between two societies, between two cultures: that of the relatively wealthy planter and merchant class against the poor of the swamps and prairies.

(Edmonds and Gibson, *The Vigilante Committees...* viii)

However, while class played an important role in the vigilante movement, the claim made in *Bélizaire the Cajun* of “bad blood between the Anglos and the Cajuns” (Shapiro 9) as the primary cause finds little to no evidence in reality. If anything, as we will see, race played a far greater role in the administration of vigilante justice than franco-european ethnicity.

The Lash

In order to understand the popularity of the vigilante movement, one must also understand the political climate at the time. The power of the committees

during their reign came from a political movement by the Democratic Party whose majority was pro-slavery. This heightened the propaganda value. Barde's initial version of the text that tells of their exploits was originally published in a series of editions of a Democratic partisan paper, the *Louisiana Courier*. It was edited and published in book form by Eugène Dumez, a noted pro-Confederate, who also supplied the introduction. Other members of the committee Edgard Voorhies and Alcée Judice wrote for the St. Martinville *Democrat*. Dumez was also the editor of the Vermilionville *Echo*, which published works from William Mouton, brother of Alexandre Mouton. Barde even dedicates entire sections of chapters to discussions on the role of the press (34-36; 40-46; 348-353).

In addition to the backing and publicity provided by these partisan newspapers, the committees operated under the political protection of powerful Democrats, such as the aforementioned Alexandre Mouton, the president of the Vermilionville committee. Mouton was a Jacksonian Democrat and, as previously mentioned, a former member of the U.S. Senate from 1837 to 1842 and governor of the state of Louisiana from 1842 to 1846. His pro-slavery stance was popular among the elite, but his electoral platform also won him popularity among the poor Acadians who “viewed the south Louisiana Democracy as the defender of the common man and the author of the Jacksonian constitution of 1845, which had enfranchised the state's poor whites” (Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun* 57). Such was his dedication to the cause that after these events unfolded, Mouton served as the chairman of the Louisiana Secession Convention in January 1861 in which delegates voted to secede from the Union before joining the Confederacy in March later that year.

The vigilante movement was much more than a solution to a lawless frontier. Its members had as many motives as its victims had alleged crimes.

David Grimsted explains in his study of American vigilantism:

Barde richly illustrates a simple truism often blurred in vigilante chronicles and riot histories: human emotive and psychological and personal drives are not always opposed to, but integrated with, rational and pragmatic judgments and social goals and grievances in riots, as in all other human activity. (94)

According to Brasseaux, some of the more prosperous Acadians of the prairies were a part of this movement, not because they were pro-slavery, but because they were ranch owners and they profited from the protection of the committees from bandits. Of course, being pro-slavery and wanting to protect your financial interests were by no means mutually exclusive, and more often than not went hand-in-hand. By consequence, when Mouton finished his term as governor and became president of the vigilante committee, the Democratic Party had become very powerful and influential, appealing to many groups of Acadians:

...western Acadians viewed local Democratic leaders as champions of law and order on the increasingly lawless frontier. Teche Valley Acadian sugar growers, as well as their more affluent counterparts in West Baton Rouge, Iberville, and Ascension parishes, viewed local Democratic leaders...as staunch defenders of (slavery).

(Acadian to Cajun 57)

And so both the popularity and the purpose of the vigilante movement was multifaceted, political, and pragmatic.

Providing a public good and filling a void in the lawless prairies, the vigilantes were welcomed, at first, as “Sentences...were initially administered indiscriminately, and members of each major local ethnic group—blacks, Anglo-Americans, French and German immigrants, Creoles, and Acadians (even vigilantes' relatives)—tasted the vigilante lash” (Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun* 56).

That “initial” period, however, did not last long as a trend began to develop:

Targets of the Acadian vigilantes and their *confrères* were drawn from the lower strata of local white society—occasionally small land-holders but more frequently landless individuals. It is clear from Barde’s chronicle of vigilante activities that once persons most responsible for crimes against property had been removed from the local scene, vigilantes focused their attention on social control, choosing as victims poor whites and free blacks who threatened the social status quo by harboring fugitive slaves, by conducting indiscreet sexual liaisons, or by challenging contemporary concepts of white superiority. (Brasseaux, 118)

And while the “poor whites” mentioned here might immediately be assumed to be poor Acadians given modern depictions of these events, that was not necessarily the case.

For the sake of simplicity, more modern mythmakers typically portray Acadians as equivalent to Cajuns, both being poor, oppressed people who composed the lower rungs of society and who shared the lot of the black population. This is evident in the reception of the popular tale, *Bélizaire the*

Cajun, discussed in the following chapter. However, the Acadians' high participation in and low victimization by the vigilante committees suggest otherwise:

Acadians constituted disproportionately large numbers of both the leadership and general membership elements of these organizations. For example, all but one of the executive officers of the two-hundred-member Vermilionville committee (...) were Acadians: Alexandre Mouton, president; André Valerien Martin, vice-president; A. D. Boudreaux, secretary; Ignace Mouton, marshal; Edmond Guilbeaux, deputy marshal; Jules Dugat, deputy marshal; Auguste Murr, deputy marshal; and Valéry Breaux, deputy marshal. Acadians constituted 61.67 percent of all known Attakapas vigilantes. (Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun* 118)

To put this nearly two-thirds majority in perspective, French Creoles constituted 23.34 percent of the vigilantes; Anglos, 11.67 percent; and French immigrants, 3.34 percent (note 15, p. 217). Thus, these committees were not groups of Creoles or Anglos seeking to push Acadians off their lands. Quite the contrary, these were committees formed by Acadians with the purpose of protecting Acadian interests from 'vagabonds.' And who were these 'vagabonds?' Indeed, while some of the victims were Acadian, the majority of them were considered to be foreigners to the territory or otherwise enemies whom they perceived as a threat to their way of life (Table 3).

Table 2. Source: Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun 174-175*.

Identity of All Known Vigilantes and Ethnic Composition of Attakapas Vigilante Groups, 1859		
Name	Ethnic Background	Vigilante Group
Andrews, Hiram	Anglo	Calcasieu
Beguenaud	Creole	Pont Breaux
Beraud, Desire	Foreign French	Côte Gelée
Bernard, Alexandre	Acadian	Côte Gelée
Bernard, Gerassin	Acadian	Vermilionville
Bernard, L.F. Tréville	Acadian	Carencro
Bernard, Tréville	Acadian	Vermilionville
Bernard, Ursin	Acadian	Vermilionville
Bertrand, Octave	Creole	Vermilionville
Billaut, Martial	Creole	Côte Gelée
Boudreau, A. D.	Acadian	Vermilionville
Braux, Donat	Acadian	Vermilionville
Breaux, Valéry	Acadian	Vermilionville
Broussard, Don Louis	Acadian	Côte Gelée
Broussard, Jean B.	Acadian	Vermilionville
Broussard, Sarrazin	Acadian	Vermilion Parish
Broussard, Valsin	Acadian	Côte Gelée
Comeau, Adolphe	Acadian	Côte Gelée
Comeau, Charles Duclize	Acadian	Côte Gelée
Domengeaux, Louis	Creole	Grande Pointe
Doucet, Pierre Z.	Acadian	Vermilionville
Dugat, Jules	Acadian	Vermilionville
Dugat, Rosemond	Acadian	Vermilionville
Eastin, Hazard	Anglo	Vermilionville
Foreman, Asa	Anglo	Vermilion Parish
Guidry, D.	Acadian	Côte Gelée
Guidry, Eloi	Acadian	Côte Gelée
Guidry, Joseph	Acadian	Côte Gelée
Guidry, Joseph V.	Acadian	Vermilionville
Guidry, Lessin	Acadian	Vermilionville
Guidry, Treville	Acadian	Vermilionville
Guilbeaux, Edmond	Acadian	Vermilionville
Guilbeaux, Lucien	Acadian	Vermilionville
Guilbeaux, Placide	Acadian	Vermilionville
Hébert, Desire	Acadian	?
Judice, Alcée	Creole	St. Martinville
Judice, Desire	Creole	Vermilionville
Labbé, Césaire	Creole	Côte Gelée
Lachaussée, Raphael	Acadian	Côte Gelée
Landry, Desire	Acadian	Vermilionville
Latiolais, Alexandre	Creole	Vermilionville
Lebleu de Comarsac	Creole	Prairie Robert

Maggy, Capt.	Anglo	Calcasieu
Martin, André Valerien	Acadian	Vermilionville
Martin, Charles Z.	Acadian	Vermilionville
Mouton, A. E.	Acadian	Vermilionville
Mouton, Alc.	Acadian	Vermilionville
Mouton, Alexandre	Acadian	Vermilionville
Mouton, Alfred	Acadian	Vermilionville
Mouton, Ignace	Acadian	Vermilionville
Murr, Auguste	Foreign French	Vermilionville
Nunez, Numa	Creole	Calcasieu
Patin, Dupré	Creole	Anse de la Butte
Prévost, Paul	Creole	Jeanerette
Rigues, John A.	Anglo (?)	Vermilionville
Saint Julien, Aurelien	Creole	Côte Gelée
Saint Julien, Paul-Leon	Creole	Côte Gelée
Savoie, Louis	Acadian	La Pointe
Stanton, Capt.	Anglo	Calcasieu
Voorhies, Alfred	Anglo	La Pointe

Table 3. Source: Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun 176-178*.

Known Vigilante Victims Before September 3, 1859			
Name	Ethnic/Racial Background	Crime	Punishment
Abshire, Leufroi	Anglo	Theft	Banishment
Alfred	Negro slave	Theft	Incarceration in vigilante jail
Anita	Negro slave	Attempting to escape from bondage and marry a white man	Flogging
Armentor, Manuel de	Spanish immigrant	Theft	Incarceration
Bergeron, Pierre	Acadian	Torturing slaves	Banishment
Boudreaux, Clerville	Acadian	Rustling	Banishment
Braux, Oscar	Acadian	Theft and cohabitation with a free mulatress	Banishment
Broussard, Thertule	Acadian	Rustling	Banishment
Claus, George	German immigrant	Accessory to rustling	Banishment
Don Louis	Negro	Theft	Banishment
Emerente	Free person of	Prostitution	Banishment

Esteve, F. P. C.	color Free person of color	Prostitution	Banishment
Gadrate	Free person of color	Prostitution	Banishment
Grand, Prosper	Foreign French	Theft	Incarceration
Gudbeer, August	German-American, son of immigrants	Theft	Banishment and flogging
Guidry <i>dit</i> Canada, Olivier	Acadian	Banditry	Banishment
Herpin, Aladin	Foreign French	Theft and arson	Banishment
Herpin, Dolzin	Foreign French	Theft and arson	Banishment
Herpin, Valsin	Foreign French	Theft and arson	Banishment
Hulin, Tiburse	Creole	Theft	Incarceration
Lacouture, B.	Foreign French	Theft/murder	Banishment*
Lacouture, Jean	Foreign French	Murder	Banishment
Landry, Emile	Acadian	Antivigilante sympathies	Flogging, banishment
Marie the Pole	Mulatress	Theft	Banishment
Maux, Dosit��e	Creole	Rustling	Banishment
Maux, Aurelien	Creole	Rustling	Banishment, flogging
"Picards"	Foreign French	Theft	Incarceration
Primo, Hervilien	Creole	Theft	Banishment
Primo, Euclide	Creole	Theft	Banishment
Reed, Thomas	Anglo	Burglary	Banishment
Romero, Bernard	Creole	Harboring a "convicted" (by vigilantes) criminal	Banishment
Rouly, Maximin	St. Domingue Creole	Theft	Incarceration
Santa-Maria de la Plata	Spanish Immigrant	Seducing and then abandoning white women and masquerading as a physician	Banishment
Unidentified slave	Negro	Theft	Flogging
Vital, Aristide	Foreign French	Theft	Incarceration
W(illiams?), John	Anglo	Attempting to kidnap and marry a slave	Flogging, banishment
Zozette	Free person of color	Prostitution	Banishment

*He subsequently returned and was shot to death by vigilantes

Barde's Tale

An introduction by Eugène Dumez precedes Barde's overview of the region of the Attakapas containing an explanation for the need for vigilantism. This is followed by a chapter describing the vigilante committees in general, their support, their modus operandi, and a preliminary discussion of their opposition. This sets up the legitimacy of their operation while defining the hero vigilantes versus the villainous bandit sympathizers. The rest of the book is organized by committee and each chapter contains a series of stories or chronicles of their exploits: Comités de Côte Gelée, de St-Martin, de Vermillon, du Pont de la Butte, de la Grande-Pointe, de Jenneret, de Vermillonville. Episodes of banditry are recounted, sometimes repeatedly in different chapters, all leading to the culminating battle at Bayou Queue-Tortue contained in the Vermillonville chapter.

Why, exactly, did Barde publish these accounts of 'banditry' and the 'heroes' who snuffed it out and then compile them in monograph form? The timing was critical; political tensions in Louisiana were mounting in the years leading up to Louisiana's secession and the American Civil War. Playing an opposing role in the vigilante movement was a strong presence of Know-Nothings, a political party against whom Barde spoke out in his account. Grimsted explains the puzzlingly strong presence of Know-Nothing appeal in the Attakapas region at the time:

The Party's patriotism entailed both an essential appeal to Unionism and an emotive plebianism that quickly made it a force of influence, especially in Southern border cities, but also in rural areas which (sic) a substantial poor population like Attakapas. (104)

Grimsted cites John Kelly's interpretation to explain the phenomenon of Know-Nothing support in the South "and the virulence of Democratic response to that attraction." He says,

Kelly presents much data suggesting how perceptive Democratic politicians feared the divisions between whites that American [sic] stressed, as potentially creating class and ethnic cleavages that might undermine unified pro-slavery racism." (qtd. in footnote #49, 104)

In *Histoire des Comités de Vigilance*, Alexandre Barde opposes the Know-Nothings and speaks out against "Americanism." Thus we argue that as French immigrants, he and Dumez wished to unify the Francophone population and rally them to their anti-union, pro-slavery cause by "using myths of criminal degeneration to aid their power" (104). This necessarily included incorporating the Acadian population by presenting their acts of heroism to take back their country from the ills of society brought on by Americanism.

Eugène Dumez's "Introduction" begins with a discussion on the rights of insurrection and how it is applied in America: « Quand le joug d'un gouvernement devient trop lourd à un peuple, qu'il viole les droits de ce peuple, l'insurrection éclate et tue le gouvernement » (Barde 11). To Frenchmen like Eugène Dumez and Alexandre Barde, if the vigilante movement was reactionary against social disorder, the publishing of its accounts was a warning of the potential abuse of democracy and the impotence of government in such a large, sparsely populated country:

L'individu, abusant du principe démocratique, a opprimé la société, et la société a réagi. Or, ces réactions qui ont pris le nom de Comités de Vigilance et qui ont pour but de faire rentrer l'individu dans sa sphère...Elles sont la correction des excès possible de la liberté et les limites et les garanties de la démocratie, comme les privilèges individuels en sont la condition. (Barde 12)

Dumez maintains that contrary to Europe, « en Amérique l'individu est tout, et la société n'est rien » (11). In such a diverse place with so many opposing interests, Dumez suggests that the individual is capable of abusing the principles of democracy and oppressing society; in such cases, “la société a réagi” (12) in the form of vigilantism.

Significantly, this echoes what Josiah Royce wrote about vigilantism in mining camps in California in 1856: “Royce saw them as countering the basic evil the United States could and had to fight: individuals’ neglect of social good in pursuit of their own” (qtd. in Grimsted 113). Indeed, Dumez demonstrates his awareness of the California vigilantes while he assures his reader that those were not near as entertaining as the Louisiana variety: « Ce que nous pouvons dire, c'est que la Californie, dans ses temps les plus orageux, n'a jamais rien présenté de plus dramatique que les prairies des Attakapas » (Barde 13). While it almost certainly was not the primary motive of many of the Louisiana vigilantes themselves—who had an additionally strong interest in the property they were protecting as well as the property they were acquiring—it certainly seems that in recounting their tale, Dumez and Barde, at least, desired to “(interrupt) the

slumber of communal and commercial conscience and (awaken) it to civil responsibility” (Grimsted 113).

It is equally evident that Barde also wanted to awaken the masses to the potential loss of a unique French culture at the hands of encroaching Americanism. As Dumez closes out his introduction, he laments the anticipated loss of such a unique, exotic culture:

Notre poète lève le rideau de verdure qui couvrait ces prairies, vaste mer inconnue et mystérieuse ; il sème l’histoire sombre et triste de gracieuses idylles, d’épisodes charmants qui tranchent comme des oasis sur le sable du désert. Il dessine les tableaux de la vie primitive et coloniale, puis de l’ère de la rapine, tableaux qui vont s’effaçant, que le mouvement d’immigration et de défrichement changera demain, et qu’il est d’autant plus curieux de lire. (Barde 13)

Barde picks up in Chapter One where Dumez leaves off. Like Dumez, Barde speaks of social maladies and the need for vigilantism. In order to establish the origins of these social maladies, he describes its virtuous beginnings. In this region of the Attakapas resided two groups. First are the French immigrants from the hexagon, sent by French nobility, « qui y avaient implanté les vertus et les vices de leur sang: vertus incontestables, vices beaux comme des vertus, tant ils étaient brillants! » The French brought with them « comme le soleil ses satellites, une population de travailleurs, active, industrielle, prête à accepter sur ce sol...la dure mais sainte loi du travail » (Barde 16).

The other group to inhabit the Attakapas were also constituents of the working class, the Acadians:

L'Acadie, chassée, dépouillée, comme jadis la Messénie, y avait aussi envoyé une députation de travailleurs, rudes comme la terre d'où les avait chassés la politique anglaise, mais ayant conservé, comme un reflet de la patrie, la probité et le courage des enfants venus de France. (16)

It is significant that Barde describes the force that deported the Acadians as “la politique anglaise” and not “les Anglais” or “l'Angleterre.” He refers, instead, to English *politics*—the type that would be associated with the former British colonies of northern America, the type that threatens the way of life of French Louisiana.

On the backs of these hard-working, courageous French inhabitants, Barde describes a wholesome and simple Christian society. Where De la Houssaye was writing after the Civil War to unify Francophones culturally, Barde, writing pre-Civil War, was attempting to do the same politically. Indeed, Sidonie de la Houssaye is not the only francophone author to seem inspired by the imaginative geography of *Evangeline*. Just as Longfellow describes Louisiana as “the forest primeval” with the “murmuring pines and the hemlocks” where live “Men whose lives glided on like rivers that water the woodlands, Darkened by shadows of earth, but reflecting the image of heaven,” so, too, does Barde describe this Edenesque, unadulterated Louisiana:

Sur ce sol des Attakapas, défriché au prix de tant de sueurs, la société s'était donc constituée avec toutes les vertus de la

civilisation chrétienne. Courage, probité, honneur, y avaient fleuri en plein sol comme l'oranger fleurit sous le tropique, et la croix dominant l'humble clocher des villages attakapiens, avait dû être fière de ne prêter son ombre qu'à une terre et à des âmes mûres pour la vie sociale autant que pour la vie selon le Christ. (16)

Despite *Histoire des Comités de Vigilance* being written 29 years earlier, Barde's flattering portrayal of Acadians resembles many of De la Houssaye's descriptions of these inhabitants, « [qui] appartiennent aux plus nobles familles des Attakapas et des Opelousas et certes, aucun d'eux n'a oublié les préceptes d'honneur, de courage, d'énergie et d'intégrité que leur ont légués leurs pères... » (la Houssaye 1).

In referring to this time of primitive virtue as "l'âge d'or," Barde begins to describe where it all went wrong, setting the stage for the vigilantes:

Ère à jamais regrettable, dont les hommes ne devraient peut-être jamais sortir et dont le souvenir nous porterait comme Jean-Jacques Rousseau, à maudire la civilisation, si cette loi, à la fois bienfaisante et fatale, qui sème tant de bienfaits en broyant tant d'idées et de vertus dans sa marche, n'exécutait pas les ordres de Dieu ! (16-17)

According to Barde, civilization brought new ideas that replaced the traditions of this noble society. Barde recalls the same revolutionary ideals of Rousseau in order to warn people of their potentially harmful effect.

Cependant notre société marchait et la civilisation montait comme une marée dans nos campagnes. Elle arrivait sur notre sol de tous

les points, portée par les vents, par les ailes ardentes de la vapeur, par le pamphlet, par le livre, par le journal, par tous les télégraphes de la pensée. (...) Devant l'action lente, mais incessante de cette marée, dont chaque flot roulait une idée nouvelle, mais en broyait une autre implantée sur notre sol par la main calleuse des premiers colons, il devait s'ouvrir promptement une brèche dans les saintes traditions léguées par les aïeux. (17)

Barde also states that this progress brought with it vices previously unknown to the first colonists. He does not completely absolve them of responsibility in this regard, nor does he blame all of the social maladies on progress. He does, however, blame on new "vice:" the justice system.

Accused bandits, as Barde calls them, were taking advantage of both the honest people who « avaient conservé les vertus d'autrefois » and the « étranges facilités que la loi américaine a données à l'accusé pour échapper au châtement » (19). Not only did this American influence allow for dishonest people to prosper, it also created a « Déplorable indifférence qui a prolongé pendant vingt ans une crise qu'une année de dictature populaire devait faire cesser! » (19). To fight this indifference, Barde rouses the civil responsibility of Louisianans, telling the tale of the vigilantes led by many members of the "premiers colons," the Acadians, who would form this popular dictatorship to counteract the insidious American law.

For Barde, what is at stake is French Louisiana, threatened by American law. He chronicles the events that display what the Acadians are capable of accomplishing by acting on their right of insurrection. Throughout the chronicles,

vigilantes fight the injustice that Barde has already equivocated with *la loi américaine* in his first chapter.

The deeper one reads, though, the more this *loi américaine* takes the form of abolitionism. Barde, the voice of the vigilantes, describes Yankees in such a way that leaves no doubt to the anti-Anglo-American, anti-abolitionist sentiment of the group. Contained in the chapter “Comité de la Grande Pointe—scènes de prairies” is the story of an abolitionist, John W., a Yale man, who came to the area reciting Byron by heart, loving Uncle Tom, and planning to carry on John Brown’s work—an explicit example of the pamphlet-carrier who brought with him the civilization and *les nouvelles idées* that threatened to destroy the traditions of the original colonists. Under the sub-heading of “Un disciple de Mme Stowe,” John W. is described as

...un jeune Américain, blond comme un épi de blé, rose comme une pomme d’api, svelte, élancé comme tous ceux de sa race, ou pour mieux dire la moitié de sa race ; car une moitié est mince—je pourrais dire maigre, mais je ne le dis pas, par courtoisie internationale—comme le manche d’un balai—et l’autre obèse à se demander s’il n’y a pas, dans la création, des créatures de Dieu qui tiennent le milieu entre l’homme et le mastodonte. (225)

This abolitionist, whose doctrine—an obsession forced upon him by his education—is mocked at length, is allowed to practice his «folie» by the vigilantes because « Pour nous, John n’était alors qu’un de ces fous inoffensifs à qui on laisse leur marotte comme leur poupée aux enfants » (226). That is, until he falls in love with a slave woman with « un amour platonique, » an offense that is

found to be laughable, ludicrous, and a crime all at once—a crime punishable by banishment or worse (227). When John W. informs the slave's owner of his intentions to marry her, and after an attempt to talk sense into the young American has failed, the planter exclaims « J'appelle le Comité de Vigilance et je vous fais lyncher [...] Oui le lynch à vous, comme à tous ceux qui toucheront à l'esclavage. Nos nègres sont notre propriété [...] et qui attentera à notre propriété, jouera son honneur ou sa tête... » (231).

The vigilantes hunt down John and Anita, his love interest. While John watches on in agony, Anita is whipped to remind her of her duties: « mes Vigilants lui gravèrent sur le dos un souvenir éternel des devoirs de l'esclave envers son maître et du danger que l'on court en les violant. » (234). John begs mercy for her, but « on ne lui répondit pas. » Before being whipping and exiled, John is summarily accused of his crimes. His crime is not just theft of a slave, but also an attempt to « faire la guerre à nos institutions » (235). It is a scene that one might expect to be portrayed as a moving plea for compassion for the victims. Chez Barde, however, the heroes are the assailants—the popular dictators protecting their institutions. In this version, God, himself, condemns John's actions when he prays for a sign:

--Si j'ai raison, dissipez les nuages qui obscurcissent en ce moment le soleil ; si j'ai tort, parlez-moi par la voix de votre tonnerre, et quelle que soit votre réponse, je vous bénirai.

Le sectaire finissait à peine ces mots, qu'un éclair déchira les airs de ses losanges de feu et qu'un coup de tonnerre épouvantable retentit.

(235)

The story ends with a not-so-subtle moral requested of Alcée Judice by Louis Domingeau: « Ma moralité, à moi capitaine, c'est que votre John était un drôle des plus dangereux, et que si c'est là l'espèce de limiers que le Nord nous envoie pour nous combattre, nous devons tirer dessus comme sur des chevreuils. » This story is recounted as a story told second-hand, and not an actual observed event. However, its inclusion serves a purpose in the narrative and lends further credence to the fact that this work, and by reflection the vigilante movement, were both motivated by the desire to protect the property of its members and, by proxy, to protect a political institution that considered slaves as property.

Acadian Participation in Civil War

It is one thing to identify Barde's motivation for publishing the account of the Louisiana vigilantes—to rally the francophone population of Louisiana to protect its institutions from impending American incursion. It is more difficult to judge his influence. What we can say with certainty is that there were a number of Francophones who were politically motivated and active in Louisiana's secession from and war against the non-slaveholding states. Among these Francophones were a significant number of Acadians—some who voted for, some who voted against secession; some who volunteered as soldiers, others who were conscripted into service.

As noted earlier, political clashes were becoming more heated leading up to 1860. But election records show that Acadians of all classes were active participants in politics even in the decades leading up to the Civil War. In a

parish level study of the 1840 presidential election, Perry H. Howard “found that in 1840 the statewide turnout of voters of voting age was only 41 percent, but in the Acadian parishes it reached 68 percent” (“The Politics of the Acadian Parishes” 177). Additionally, Howard goes on to note the unexpectedly high proportion of lower class voters: “Surprisingly enough, Acadian parishes with the largest number of ‘planters’ recorded a turnout fifteen percent lower than the ‘bayou’ parishes with more *petits habitants*” (177).

Howard is “surprised” by this because the myth maintains that Cajuns were apathetic toward political affairs. This belief is especially common in regards to the Civil War, however, Howard finds that “By the time Louisiana faced the coming of the ‘irrepressible conflict,’ Acadians had begun to vote like the rest of the state.” He explains that despite economic reasons for supporting the Union, on the whole, Acadian parishes supported secession:

With the Whig party’s demise in the 1850s, the proportion of Acadian parishes supporting the Democrats matched that of the rest of the state in the gubernatorial elections. But in the presidential election of 1860, the parishes in the rest of the state were decidedly more Southern Democrat than South Louisiana, where there was a Union sentiment, reflecting the heavy investment in sugar. Yet, an equal proportion of Acadian and other parishes voted in favor of secession” (177).

The modern, twentieth century myth also holds that where Cajuns or Acadians participated in the Civil War, they did so against their will or otherwise abandoned their post out of apathy for the cause or preference for solitude.

Deconstructing the myth requires identifying who were volunteers and who were conscripts as well as defining who was Cajun—both of which are, admittedly, extremely difficult.

How can we look at records and identify who is Cajun or Acadian? As we have seen, there is no consensus as to when we can begin to define the difference between Acadians and Cajuns. After all, we can scarcely define it today. Dormon begins to differentiate between Genteel Acadians and Cajuns around the mid-nineteenth century (30). We saw in the previous chapter that J.A. Breaux recognized the use of the term some time between 1840 and 1901, but he considered it more of a class distinction than an ethnic marker. If that is the case, looking solely at family names would be misleading. This difficulty does not keep the myth from drawing its own conclusions.

Again, we turn to Barthes, « Le mythe ne nie pas les choses, sa fonction est au contraire d'en parler; simplement, il les purifie, les innocente, les fonde en nature et en éternité... » (252). The myth does not deny Acadian participation in the Civil War; it simply chooses to discuss other things. Shane Bernard does not address the Civil War in his chapter on War, but does mention briefly in his introduction that "...the Civil War had only a minor Americanizing influence on the forming ethnic group, which tended to regard the conflict as someone else's fight" (xx). He provides no evidence or methodology in determining this and instead focuses on World Wars I and II.

Carl Brasseaux gives a more nuanced read, allowing for a more varied level of participation of and influence on Acadians, but he maintains that the majority of Acadians had no interest in either the process or the outcome of the conflict:

Despite the fragmentation of Acadian society during the antebellum period, as well as the increasing materialism of the nouveau riche planters, most of Louisiana's Acadians remained an insular people whose view of the world extended no farther than their parish boundaries. Affairs of national importance such as the increasing volatile slavery issue were of only marginal interest to these south Louisianians. (*Acadian to Cajun* 58)

Whether or not Acadians viewed it as “someone else’s fight,” the fact remains that



Figure 7: General Alfred Mouton (1829-1864)

either by volunteering or by conscription, Acadians’ “self-imposed insularity was shattered by the onset of the Civil War” (58). While the texts in this study have already put in question the “self-imposed insularity” of Acadians, this study shall not, nor can it, make wholesale assumptions about the motives of those who either volunteered for or were conscripted into service in the Civil War. However, it recognizes that both cases were true,

and that is enough to question the validity of statements like the following from Brasseaux: “This unwelcome encroachment into their daily lives was bitterly resented by most Acadians, who, **incapable of identifying with the Southern cause**, passively resisted conscription” (58, my emphasis).

To his credit, however, Brasseaux acknowledges later in the same chapter Acadian contributions to the “Southern cause”: “The Acadian population, however, contributed three brigadier generals and a host of lesser officers to Louisiana's Confederate forces and state and parish governments” (58). Brasseaux explains “this apparent paradox” as “the result of the divergent interests of the various classes in Louisiana Acadian society” (58). But, as we have argued, the existence of divergent interests and classes of Acadians *before the Americanization of Louisiana* demonstrates that the Acadians were capable of identifying with a great many various causes.

However, class alone cannot explain the paradoxical participation of Acadians in the Civil War and we know that generals and officers were not the only Acadian volunteers to take up the Southern Cause. Brasseaux maintains that the latter were relatively few overall, but more common in the river parishes:

Responding to the threat of armed Northern intervention, twelve thousand Louisiana volunteers rallied to the Confederacy's colors by June 1, but very few members of these volunteer units (...) were of Acadian descent. For example, Company C of the Sixth Louisiana Infantry Regiment, raised in St. Landry Parish by Acadians L. A. Cormier and L. E. Cormier, included only eight Acadians in its complement of ninety-four officers and men. In the river parish units, however, 27 percent of the recruits on the Donaldsonville Artillery Battery's muster roll bore Acadian surnames, though only five Acadian families resided in that Ascension Parish community. (61-62).

Two things stand out when reading this excerpt: the methodology of using Acadian surnames to identify Acadians and the regional classification of different groups of Acadians determining their motivations.

As Brasseaux notes elsewhere in a lecture delivered at a public forum at McNeese State University where he discussed the genetics of the Acadian people, he states that “Acadian assimilation of other groups through the maternal lines blurred group boundaries, making the tracking of marital alliances along ethnic lines particularly problematic for historical researchers, especially between 1850 and 1900 when the area's population increased geometrically” (“...History of a Society”). While Brasseaux does not express this difficulty in his discussion on Acadian participation in the Civil War, it merits consideration there, too. In this lecture, Brasseaux further explains,

Between 1855 and 1860, marriages between persons with Acadian surnames constituted 57 percent of all marriages involving local Acadians. Fifty-six percent of all Acadian brides took an Acadian husband, but it is noteworthy that an additional 33 percent married non-Acadian Francophones.

That means that between 1855-1860, leading up to the Civil War, forty-four percent of Acadian women married outside the Acadian population. He also states,

Because of the mother's acknowledged role as the principal transmitter of culture, it was the grooms' selection of Acadian spouses that insured the group's survival, while the surprising number of exogamous marriages (marriages outside the

community) by Acadian brides resulted in the rapid assimilation of smaller groups with whom the exiles came into contact.

Returning to Brasseaux's methodology, by only including Acadian surnames in his search for volunteer Acadian Confederate soldiers, Brasseaux is including only marriages of Acadian husbands. But if the culture is passed maternally, should not exogamous marriages by women figure into that count as well, especially if making cultural judgments? Or should one consider all endogamous marriages and include only exogamous marriages by women? In addition, if it was, as Brasseaux suggests, that Acadian men could marry upwardly into Creole society, but that Acadian women would remain in the lower rungs¹⁹, then searching Acadian surnames—carried by men—increases the likelihood of finding members of the elite society in the ranks, which is then used to explain away Acadian participation according to class.

To better understand the scope of Acadian interest in the Southern cause, and therefore further appreciate the diversity of Acadian interests, one should also take into account surnames produced from exogamous marriages. Such a study is outside the scope of this work, so inferences must be made with what information that is currently available. This study also recognizes the difficulty of tracking marital alliances, but in doing so, the hope is to simultaneously

¹⁹ “The feudalistic trappings of white Creole society dictated that marriages be arranged inside-rather than across-class lines. Hence, upwardly mobile Acadians quickly formed alliances with Creole families, while downwardly mobile white Creoles took Acadian spouses.” “Acadian to Cajun: History of a Society Built on the Extended Family”

illuminate the equally problematic approach of drawing vast ethnic and cultural conclusions about them.

The website [Acadiansingray.com](http://www.acadiansingray.com) is an ongoing project that attempts to identify just how many Acadians fought for the Southern Confederacy. Its creator, Steven A. Cormier, began his study in the manner of Brasseaux, with surnames of families who were exiled from Acadie, gathered primarily from Bona Arsenault's *Histoire et Généalogie des Acadiens*, and supplemented with works by Stephen A. White²⁰, Robert C. West, Albert J. Robichaux, Jr., and Timothy Hebert.

Cormier went further, however, to include any family to be considered Cajun:

An important study in this project is that of Acadian marriages in Louisiana from February 1765 through 1861. I call this my Acadian endogamy/exogamy study; after years of effort, it is now "complete." This study reveals the hundreds of non-Acadian families who contributed to the creation of the Cajun culture before the War of 1861. (<http://www.acadiansingray.com>)

All these names were cross-referenced with military unit lists, capsule histories, service records, etc. Cormier's criteria for including a family on his list of Acadians in gray are as follows:

the family must have lived in Greater Acadia (present-day Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Maine, Prince Edward Island, Cape Breton Island, and parts of Newfoundland) before or during *Le Grand*

²⁰ *Dictionnaire Généalogique des Familles Acadiennes, 1636 à 1714.*

Dérangement of the 1750s, and at least one male member settled in Louisiana and produced male offspring who perpetuated the family name in Louisiana; or the family must have settled in Louisiana, and at least one member, male or female, intermarried with an Acadian family before the War of 1861.

Cormier's methodology has shown "So far, 751 families—101 with Acadian surnames, 650 with non-Acadian names—have found their way onto the list of families who produced Acadians in Gray."

Cormier's methodology relies more on a cultural definition of "Cajun." These two extremes—Brasseaux and Cormier—demonstrate the difficulty in determining not only who participated in the Civil War and in what capacity, but who would even be considered Cajun or Acadian. Instead of trying to explain an apparent paradox that only exists when viewed through the lens of myth, Cormier's goal is to identify as many confederate soldiers who could be considered Cajun.

The purpose of this meticulous, time-consuming exercise is not only to dig out new Cajun families to add to my list, but also to demonstrate that the Acadians in Louisiana intermarried with non-Acadians on a substantial scale in the 90-plus years before 1861. As the study shows, between 1765 and 1861, 1 out of 3 Acadian marriages were exogamous. As a result, a new ethnicity had arisen in Louisiana *before* 1861, the culture we call Cajun.

Cormier and Brasseaux both believe the Cajun ethnicity began before the Civil War, so perhaps their findings differ simply because they had different goals in mind.

The other interesting takeaway from Brasseaux's findings is the distinction of different groups of Acadians according to region. He maintains,

As demonstrated by the muster rolls, regional, cultural, and class differences among river and prairie Acadians continued to mold their perception of, and affinity to, the Southern way of life.

Wishing only to be left alone, the insular, poor, nonslaveholding prairie Acadians viewed the war as an elitist cause, and their apathetic response to Confederate recruiting ventures is hardly surprising. (*Acadian to Cajun* 62)

He continues, "The prairie Acadians' apathy was not shared by their more affluent cousins east of the Atchafalaya River. Many river Acadians had entered the planter class and thus had a significant stake in the outcome of the war" (62). This regional difference is the type that was noticed in the "Breaux Manuscript." What is initially striking is that the Acadians formed these different classes and cultures well before the Civil War. This fact alone is enough to show their adaptability and willingness to break from their "Acadian-ness."

In spite of the prairie Acadians' suggested apathy toward the Confederacy, Brasseaux does acknowledge the existence of "a successful recruiting campaign among the prairie Acadians in December 1861," but it is a three-sentence paragraph and deemed "atypical" (62-63). However, this recruiting campaign resulted in the Company A of the 26th Louisiana Infantry, also known as the

“Lafayette Prairie Boys,” and was a voluntary unit of Acadian soldiers led by Acadian Alfred Mouton—a West Point graduate, vigilante, and son of Alexandre Mouton. Brasseaux attributes Mouton's recruitment success “to his leadership position in the Acadian community rather than to the recruits' affinity to the Southern cause” (63). However, as our discussion of the Acadian vigilantes indicates, the “Southern cause” was not lost on many members of the community who took up arms to protect it before war had even broken out. Attributing the existence of the Lafayette Prairie Boys to the charisma of one man is akin to attributing the participation of Acadians in vigilantism to Creole influence and denies the complexity of Acadian agency.

If Cormier's findings challenge Brasseaux's statements about prairie Acadians' inability to adopt a “Southern way of life,” and Howard's data show that they were equally involved in the political decisions that led to secession, then the chronicles of the committees of vigilance demonstrate their determination to impart the “Southern way of life” on society at large.

Gudbeer and Coco

Stories of African American sympathizers are prevalent in *Histoire des Comités*, for whose protagonists the Democratic, anti-Yankee/anti-abolitionist movement was their main motivation. These crimes are recounted side-by-side with stories of theft, banditry, and murder and treated in the same manner. Claims of delivering justice and direct attempts at politically motivating action against American incursion often give way to overt Xenophobia and racism resulting in violent acts of social control.

One of the more striking examples of the social control exerted by the vigilante committees pulled from the *Histoire des Comités* is the case of the Coco family and their acquaintances. In a chapter subtitled “Une Exécution,” Barde recounts with joy an incident from February 4th, 1859, when twenty-two members of the Pont de la Butte committee, who « respirait la bonté et la franchise, » track down one of the bandits, Auguste Gudbeer. Gudbeer first appears in the chapter on the “Comité de la Côte Gelée.” He was their first bandit and had the misfortune of being both poor and foreign: « Son berceau avait été appendu on ne sait où ; les uns disent : en Allemagne ; les autres, en Louisiane ; tout ce que nous pouvons dire de lui, c’est qu’il venait du pays d’où viennent les bohémiens ; de la rue, du bagne, de la boue peut-être ; mais à coup sûr, pas d’un palais » (Barde, 59).

Barde’s work coincides with the rise of scientific racism, and in his portrait of Gudbeer, he provides great detail on the origin of the bandit. His details of Gudbeer’s origins condemn the accused before we hear of his crimes. « Pas d’éducation religieuse ; encore moins d’école. Né peut-être sur un grand chemin, sous un arbre, sur une pelouse, il avait porté jusqu’à ses vingt ans les traditions de son berceau » (59). His crimes are already implicated in « les traditions de son berceau » and in his manner of living differently from his accusers.

Thus Gudbeer’s crime is already constructed in the Côte Gelée chapter when Barde explains that Gudbeer lived in a brothel at Cocoville with black women and that they had « une nombreuse progéniture de voleurs » (60). Gudbeer is tracked down and ordered to leave, but does not. They track him

down again, whip him, and order him into exile again. It is said that he flees to New Orleans and is never heard from again (65-66).

Barde returns to Gudbeer's episode in a subsequent chapter on the committee of Pont de la Butte. Barde describes Gudbeer here as « ...un jeune homme de vingt-deux ans, dont le visage rose trahissait l'origine allemande... » avec les mains « frêles et délicates, et qui auraient été blanches, si elles n'avaient pas été recouvertes d'une couche de bistre. »

This time when Barde retells Gudbeer's story, he elaborates in much more detail on Gudbeer's relationship with a member of the community at Prairie-Marronne. This serves as an introduction to Barde's story about Coco, "Un Mormon nègre." When Barde retells Gudbeer's punishment with more detail in the Pont de la Butte chapter, the vigilantes whip Gudbeer, each one twice while pronouncing his crimes—although the initial charge from the first chapter of theft at an Acadian vigilante's place is by now forgotten. Gudbeer, a white man, accused of raiding ranches on the prairie, is also accused of being a sympathizer of negroes by Barde's xenophobic and racist language. Although Gudbeer is white, his reputation and his actions are sullied by his relations with the blacks (189).

Grimsted notices a recurrent theme with Barde, "This sexual theme laces the ethnic and racial elements in Barde's narrative" (96). In this extended version of Gudbeer's punishment, a photo is discovered just as the vigilantes were leaving the scene. This is perhaps the most damning proof of Gudbeer's culpability: a photo of a mulatto woman, Gudbeer's mistress and the granddaughter of vieux Coco, a free man of color (193). Grimsted sums up the narrative that follows:

"The Gudbeer 'crime' Bard most stressed was one that runs through his narrative

like a twisted thread: a crude racism integrated to sexual fascination. Crimes are mentioned, but interracial sexual dalliance is lingered over” (97). Such is the tableau that Barde paints.

Barde’s and the vigilantes’ disdain for Gudbeer’s relationship with a mulatto woman and their sentiment of white superiority are exemplified in Barde’s description of the woman:

Ses pieds et ses mains ont, il est vrai, des proportions
monumentales et semblant avoir été sculptés à coups de hache ;
mais que voulez-vous ? Dieu, fatigué d’avoir mis toute une longue
journée à créer le blanc, créa le nègre la nuit suivante qui était sans
lune, et oublia de lui donner les proportions harmonieuses du
premier. (193)

Barde uses Gudbeer’s story to lead into in a section of the chapter subtitled « Un mormon nègre » where Barde continues his thread of white superiority. He introduces the Coco family by placing Acadians, specifically, and the black population of la Prairie-Maronne in stark contrast.

Il y a environ un demi-siècle, les Attakapas étaient une demi-
solitude que la charrue et la hache commençaient à attaquer. Leur
population se composait de quelques centaines de colons,
descendants de ceux qui y avaient été envoyés lors de l’émigration
forcées du Canada, **de la race acadienne**—ce grand crime de
l’Angleterre ! (194 ; my emphasis)

Using mythical rhetoric, Barde links the Acadians to God and contrasts them with the inhabitants of la Prairie-Marronne, or prairie of runaway slaves, who are

linked to the devil. The Acadians inhabit an area protected by God and blessed with « une fertilité exceptionnelle. »

[les villages] se composaient de deux ou trois maisons groupées autour d'une église couronnée d'une croix. Ce drapeau du Christ avait couvert les premiers essais de colonisation de son ombre protectrice. (194)

For Barde, this is self-evident: « ...on peut dire hardiment qu'il a porté bonheur à la terre attakapienne : *Benedictus qui venit in nomine domini !* » This language establishing the providential right to colonize the land may be reminiscent of other groups of colonizers, but is never found when referring to Acadians. Indeed, this is quite the opposite impression of Acadians, as they are typically remembered for being on the other side of colonization.

The Prairie-Marronne, on the other hand, is described in the following manner of opposition:

Dans une partie de cette cyprière, que nous pourrions appeler forêt, pour être plus fidèle à l'acception du mot, il se fait tout d'un coup une éclaircie ; les arbres s'arrêtent brusquement, sans raison, comme si la voix d'en haut leur avait dit un jour, comme aux flots de la mer : Tu n'iras pas plus loin ! Là, s'étend une prairie, d'une végétation luxuriante, qui s'appelle la Prairie-Marronne. (194)

It is an unholy land, cursed in its savagery, fitting for its inhabitants, one of which, it is said to be the devil himself.

Un jour...une maison sortit du sol en une nuit (...) Les premiers chasseurs de chevreuils qui passèrent par là, crurent d'abord que

cette maison avait été élevée par un caprice du diable qui avait l'intention de passer sa saison d'été à la Prairie-Marronne. La sauvagerie des lieux rendait cette supposition, un peu hardie, presque vraisemblable. (195)

The actual inhabitants of this house were the Coco family, the patron of which was a free man of color. Barde describes him as « Le colon de la Prairie-Maronne » and « Non un de ces noirs stupides, bétail créé pour l'esclavage, au cerveau déprimé, aux mains de mastodonte, aux pieds d'éléphant, aux lèvres lippues, qui semblent l'anneau qui rive l'Homme, *genus homo* à la races des singes ; » No, Coco was « le 'Don Juan' africain, » « un des plus beaux types de la race africaine...[et] il avait pourtant la conscience de sa beauté, le beau Coco ! » (195). This beauty makes him a threat, especially given Barde's narrative of "interracial sexual dalliance," which is seen quite vividly in the Coco story. And as Barde explains, Coco's beauty is what allows him to seduce and espouse two white women: « Et, trois mois après, le vieux forgeron étant mort, ses deux filles—deux sœurs ! —deux blanches !—étaient, nous ne dirons pas les deux épouses, car elles n'avaient pas invité Dieu à leur mariage, mais les deux femmes de Coco...du beau Coco ! » (197). Barde need not even explain the crime committed here. He simply exclaims it.

To drive home his contempt, Barde repeatedly stresses Coco's 'crimes': his immorality; his 'Mormonism;' his seducing and marrying *deux soeurs, deux créoles, deux blanches*—a refrain repeated frequently, lest the reader need reminding of this sinful situation. These are all affronts to nature and God, a point Barde makes through numerous Biblical references. To summarize, Coco

was the serpent that tempted Eve and somehow ended up with two Eves. He hid his house like a Turkish harem whose doors were guarded by Othello keeping his two Desdemonas under close guard. The prairie was deserted « comme l'Éden aux premiers jours de la Création du monde » (198).

Coco's crimes were not theft, but immorality, interracial relations, and passing these attributes and a lack of work ethic on to his nineteen children. Coco's ultimate punishment was banishment. And just as more modern considerations have portrayed Cajuns as the victims of Anglo-American land-grabbing, Coco believes he was ultimately banished because his land was coveted by his persecutors: « Pourquoi on nous a persécutés? Ma foi de Dieu ! monsieur pour rien...ou plutôt parce que mes voisins étaient amoureux de ma terre et que j'ai refusé de la leur vendre » (216).

This, indeed, was and remains a common criticism against the motivations of the vigilante committees, that they operated under the guise of justice but took advantage of that cloak of righteousness and became oppressors seeking social control, practicing land-grabbing from the poor and black population, and retaliating against their enemies. Grimsted's stance is firm in this regard:

Mouton's band came close to Richard Maxwell Brown's 'constructive' idea: powerful men in the community increasing their control by practicing extralegal intimidation in ways least likely to arouse opposition: moderately and against 'lesser sorts,' that is the most marginal and least protected people around. Yet the white men Mouton had or wanted to drive out remained staunch opponents... (102)

It should be noted that these vigilantes *did* have opposition and were not indicative of the behaviors of all members of their class. There was an anti-vigilante movement, which was mostly composed of the portion of the population that had experienced run-ins with the vigilantes. However, this “vigilante-antivigilante struggle had evolved from a crusade for law and order into a class struggle with strong racial overtones” (Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun* 130).

Barde recognizes these opposing views and even includes some excerpts from opposing newspapers in a section titled, « La Presse louisianaise. » He defends against these accusations not by denying the claims that they took land from the accused whom they exiled, “but only insisted that his heroes always paid «a good price», in addition to giving subsidies because those driven out so brutally abandoned «their families in misery»” (103). However, Grimsted comments on their Christian charity: “One suspects the «good price» was from their point of view, and that they contributed much more generously to themselves than to others...” (103).

As the vigilantes became more extreme, their opposition grew.

For once in the South fatuous tales of slave insurrection plots, criminal clans, and plans for mass murder and plunder were mocked, including the whipped up affidavits Vigilantes made victims sign. (...) a New Orleans paper pointed out how moral sham had been used to justify “brutal passions” and “personal vengeance”, the *Moniteur des Attakapas* declared Mouton’s personal responsibility for “the most mean outrages and inhuman treatment of all opposition”, and the *Baton Rouge Advocate*

damned the *abominable cruelties* that made the Vigilantes, whatever their better motives, themselves “criminals, cutthroats, and outlaws” who, if they went unpunished, should “make everyone blush for the state’s honor”. The Franklin *Planter’s Banner* steadily denounced (sic) “the mob”, and printed letters like the one from a citizen who found little to choose from between bandits and Vigilantes: some people steal and others “paddle you like a nigger if you dare express an honest opinion that does not suit their fancy.” (Grimsted 105)

Many of these denunciations are printed by Barde himself in *Histoire des Comités* so that he may defend against them. However, as Brasseaux has noted, the 1939 English translation omits this section in which Barde lays bare the unfavorable press that opposed the vigilantes (*Acadian to Cajun* footnote 29, 217-218). This is an important omission as it may skew modern considerations of the text.

The Vigilante Cause

The vigilante movement culminated on September 3, 1859 with the Battle of Queue Tortue, where anti-vigilantes had gathered at the home of Émilien Lagrange. The anti-vigilantes claimed to have gathered for a barbecue, but Barde claims that this meeting was to pillage the parish and foment insurrection among the slaves. With pressure mounting from governor Robert C. Wickliffe to

disband²¹, the vigilantes sought the opportunity to rid the area of these anti-vigilantes, who were comprised mostly of accused bandits who had not followed their order to exile. In addition, according to Barde, the anti-vigilantes were collecting members of Vermillon and the surrounding communities to wage “la guerre du pauvre contre le riche” (310).

The Vigilantes were led by Alfred Mouton and included Major St. Julien with 120 armed men, and various members of the committees from the surrounding parishes: Vermillon, Calcassieu, Saint-Landry, Saint-Martin, and Lafayette. With the military strategy of their leaders, they surrounded the home of Émilien Lagrange and cut off all exit points. They even brought a canon (332-333).

What is striking about the identity of the anti-vigilantes is that most of them “were non-Acadians, including large numbers of recent French immigrants and poor white Creoles” (Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun* 120). Barde emphasizes these foreign roots when describing the bandit leaders. The leader of the resistance, John Jones (also known as John Baptiste Chiasson) is described as a man of brown tinted skin that « accusait un sang plutôt castillan que français (...) ces tons bronzés particuliers à la race arabe, peut-être son aïeule. Il gesticulait en parlant comme tous les individus de race méridionale chez qui le système nerveux domine » (310). Later in the chapter, Jones is described as having « du sang espagnol ou portugais, plutôt que celui de la race gauloise. » Barde

²¹ Governor Wickliffe had issued a proclamation to disband the vigilante committees on May 28, 1859, but this proclamation was ignored.

continues, adding to the foreign descriptors: « Dépaycé et transporté dans un *gourbi* de l'Algérie, on l'aurait pris facilement pour un Arabe de Blidah ou d'Oran » (330).

Émilien Lagrange, whose home served as the gathering place for the bandits, is similarly described as « Brun comme un Espagnol, et ayant même comme un reflet de la race castillane... » (331). Other leaders were Wagner, a German; Jenkins, an American “de cette race kentuckienne;” and Dédé Istre who had fled to Louisiana from crimes committed in Texas (330-331).

Having established the foreign-ness of the adversary, Barde interrupts his account of the battle preparations to take a moment and « sortir du cadre austère de l'histoire et de décrire une scène locale qui sera en même temps un tableau de mœurs » (315). In this section subtitled “Un bal nègre,” Barde describes a scene that was supposedly observed by a vigilante spy “déguisé en nègre” in which slaves, led by an unnamed white man, gathered in debaucherous secrecy. According to the “report,” the leaders of the bandit resistance were behind the meeting and planned to « fomenter en même temps une insurrection de nègres » (318).

Barde uses this story to further justify the societal value of the vigilante committees, but also as a tool to promote fear—a boogeyman tale, if you will. The story takes place after dark « Dans la partie florissante et laborieuse de Lafayette qu'on appelle le Carancro » after its residence have all gone to sleep (315). Barde describes the shadowy figures who approach their gathering spot—the one house in the community that is still lit:

...des ombres s'approchaient de cette maison par tous les chemins. Elles s'approchaient de cette maison sans faire crier le sable ou la feuille égrainée par le vent sur les chemins. Si le spectateur eût été superstitieux, il se fût cru au milieu d'une procession de fantômes. (315).

Barde compares the horror of this meeting of “fantômes” to a “sabbat de sorcières” who gather at midnight at the crossroads in the forest, « légende qui a bercé notre enfance. »

The ghostly figures are, of course, slaves who have gathered for a “bal de nègres” where they dance the Calinda and imbibe whiskey—a scene that Barde describes multiple times as “effrayant” (317). Among the dancers is a white man, revealed to be a bandit who was chased from the region. He interrupts this “chaîne satanique” to whisper instructions that are overheard by « l'intrépide spectateur (...) qui jouait héroïquement sa vie pour porter dans les ténèbres de cette nuit la lumière des Comités de Vigilance... » (317). The spy later returns safely to the committee to report that the white man was planning a slave revolt.

To assure his reader of that this has been truth, that this threat was indeed very real, Barde includes a “Nota:”

Qu'on ne nous accuse pas de faire ici du roman, ce qui serait d'ailleurs impossible, car nous serons lu principalement sur le théâtre où se passe notre action ; c'est-à-dire dans un pays qui connaît les faits presque aussi bien que nous-même, et qui aurait le droit de nous blâmer sévèrement si nous faisons de l'imagination, quand la réalité est si triste et surtout dramatique. Nous ne faisons

pas du roman, c'est vrai, mais notre histoire le coudoie sans cesse ;
et quant au chapitre précédent, la meilleure preuve que nous
n'avons fait que de la vérité, la voici :

Le blanc qui avait donné ce bal fut chassé par le Comité de Vigilance
de Vermillonville ; il n'assista pas à la journée de la Queue-Tortue ;
mais ce fut parce que le cœur lui faillit au dernier moment. (318)

Barde's report of the Battle at Queue Tortue drives home the necessity of the
vigilantes and justifies the war they waged on their own home front.

The battle ends with the vigilantes victorious and dispensing of justice
right there on the spot.²² Barde claims that the confessions they heard all
declared the “triple but” of the anti-vigilante gathering: « l'invasion de la
paroisse ; le pillage ; la révolte des nègres » (345-346). These three transgressions,
perpetrated by a group of non-Acadians, not only threatened the vigilante cause,
they threatened to tear the fabric of their society. This group of mostly Acadians
waged all-out war against a perceived external threat to their valued institutions.

In a chapter of *Acadian to Cajun* called “Politics and Violence,” Carl
Brasseaux uncovers continued vigilante operation in the months after the battle,
on those same prairies of supposed apathy, going unfettered by governor
Wickliffe's threats to intervene. Brasseaux uses the St. Landry committees as an
example. These committees “evidently composed largely of prairie Acadians, also

²² Barde claims that the merciful punishment meted out was « le supplice de fouet et
l'exil dans cinq jours » (346). However, in the section subtitled « Critiques de la presse, »
the *Planters Banner* of Franklin reported that « trois victimes (...) avaient succombé aux
blessures faites par le fouet (...) ; qu'un individu avait été fusillé ; que plusieurs cadavres
avaient été trouvés dans les prairies... (349).

disregarded Mouton's order to disband, choosing instead to expel forcibly the Attakapas exiles now living in their midst" (123). When they were finished with the anti-vigilantes and exiles, they then turned their attention to other undesirables. Calling it a "purge," Brasseaux identifies the targets of persecution: "...prosperous free persons of color bore the brunt of the continuing vigilante activities, and hundreds of free blacks were driven out of the parish by night riders" (123-124). Lest my reader be left to draw their own connections from this vigilante activity to the previously-deemed "elitist" Southern cause, I'll simply let Brasseaux draw the connection: "Only the beginning of the Civil War and the enlistment of many former vigilantes into the Confederate army brought a brief hiatus in the extralegal violence in the prairie parishes" (*Acadian to Cajun* 124).

The vigilante cause would only continue to evolve after the Civil War, leading to the formation of the politically-motivated white supremacist group, the Knights of the White Camelia. Brasseaux likens them to the white supremacist group, the Ku Klux Klan, noting specifically that "these white south Louisianians were motivated by the 'shock of 'Negro supremacy' and the threat [which it posed] to the 'southern way of life'" (136). This and other unnamed vigilante groups along with the White Leagues were composed of most of the vigilantes in the Acadian parishes, including the prairie parishes where "many local leaders of the Knights of the White Camelia appear to have been former leaders of the 1859 vigilante movement," which served as an operational blueprint (136-137). Just as with the vigilante movement, Acadian involvement was exceptionally high in these organizations, even in the prairie parishes:

It has been estimated that half the adult white male population in [Acadian parishes] belonged to the movement, but in St. Martin, St. Landry, Calcasieu, Vermilion, and Lafayette parishes, where Acadians constituted a substantial portion of the white population, “almost the entire white population was involved with the Knights of the White Camelia.” (137)

While Brasseaux maintains that the rapid socioeconomic evolution of postbellum Louisiana is to blame for the pressures that contributed to an increase in violence and a deterioration of race relations among Acadians and African Americans, the progression is clear from the organization of and participation in the Committees of Vigilance to their contributions to the Confederate cause, to the Knights of the White Camelia in Reconstruction Louisiana. This is not to say that Acadians were any more racist or violent than any other contemporary southern population, but it simply suggests that they were no better nor were they any further distanced from the “Southern Cause,” regardless of their class or geographical differences.



Figure 8: “Statue of General Alfred Mouton in front of Old City Hall in Lafayette Louisiana in 1968.” State Library of Louisiana. (<http://louisdl.louislibraries.org/cdm/ref/collection/LHP/id/10375>). The statue was erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1922.

Nonetheless, some modern portrayals of the vigilante committees follow the lead of Alexandre Barde and consider the vigilantes as heroes. According to Grimsted, this is not uncommon in vigilante lore:

It’s hardly surprising that those men vigilante groups chose to tell their stories should accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative and appropriate the literary formula they knew best. Only slightly more puzzling is why American historians of vigilantism have generally repeated such inspirational rhetoric as sober reality.

(Grimstead 76)

The romanticized and entirely subjective nature of *Histoire des Comités de Vigilance* is bought into hook, line, and sinker by its very translator, Henrietta Guilbeau Rogers. It is clear in her ‘Translators Foreword’ on which side of the conflict her interests lie. In referring to the Vigilantes, she claims:

It seems worthwhile to embody the traditions of these noble people in a language that all who are interested can read, that their struggle against evil forces and for a better life might be an example for other generations. The time and labor expended in the translation will have been well spent if I have clothed this locale, as well as certain places and familiar names with experiences and associations of a rich past, and have illustrated the peculiarities, customs and local humors of a great home-loving people who were bound to their hearth stones with a love so strong that they were willing to sacrifice their lives to overcome the evils about them. (*The Vigilante Committees of the Attakapas* xi)

She describes the “protagonists” as “heroic” in their battle against the “evil” “antagonists.” It thus stands less as a translator’s foreword explaining her methodology and more like an emotionally invested literophile “clothing” and coloring the reader’s reception by way of her own admiration of the author, while lamenting the loss of such a noble society. Her description actually resonates with many of the type we read about the poorer Cajuns: “noble,” “a great home-loving people,” “bound to their hearth stones.”

In other modern reconstructions of the vigilante phenomenon, the myth takes one step further towards simplification: blaming it on Anglo-Americans

while classifying them as the villains and pitting the 'native' Cajuns and their customs against the threat of metaphorical Americanization.

REENACTING HISTORY: *BÉLIZAIRE THE CAJUN*, CAJUN VICTIMIZATION AND THE CAJUN RENAISSANCE

If identifying Acadian participation in the vigilante movement seems straightforward enough, the last chapter demonstrated how difficult it is to understand their involvement through the lens of the mythical Cajun. In order for the myth to hold up, the resulting paradox of Acadian involvement in vigilante social control has had to be resolved. We have seen that some historical treatments have attributed this paradox to Creole aristocratic influence. These treatments provide one possible, if flawed, explanation to make sense of Acadians' hegemonic participation. Other attempts are aimed at simplifying and diluting the conflict into a story of heroes versus villains.

It is in this way that the historical fiction, *Bélizaire the Cajun*, appears in cinema and literature as a modern retelling of the vigilante movement. As with Barde's account of vigilantism in South Louisiana, a discussion about these events' retelling in the twentieth century merits a thorough consideration of the socio-historical climate that spawned it. Because *Bélizaire the Cajun* appeared on film 126 years after Barde first published his *Comités de Vigilance*, its inclusion in this discussion requires some preamble.

Ethnic (Re)naissance

First, let us recall that the English translation of Barde's chronicles, *The Vigilante Committees of the Attakapas*, published by Edmonds and Gibson, appeared in 1981. At the the time of its publishing, the negative portrayals of both

vigilantes and victims stirred much controversy, opening old wounds and threatening a rift in the population at a time when Acadian/Cajun heritage was experiencing both a revival and a unification. The film *Bélizaire the Cajun* appeared just five years after, in 1986, and served as a hero myth for a burgeoning cultural revival fighting against the assimilative forces of Americanization.

The Cajun revival or renaissance began in the late nineteen-sixties. This period, again, saw lower-class Cajuns entering the mainstream and becoming upwardly mobile. The difference this time, Carl Brasseaux maintains, is that “Unlike their counterparts of the preceding century, however, these upwardly mobile, urban Cajuns did not abandon their parent culture entirely” (Brasseaux. *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma* 78). He believes that “like members of other minorities throughout the United States, [Cajuns] became deeply disillusioned with homogenization into the great, rootless American mass” (78). Shane Bernard echoes Brasseaux: “As occurred among young blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians during the period, some young Cajuns freed themselves to reevaluate their ethnicity by rejecting the establishment and its Anglo-conformism” (72). The result was a backlash resulting in a re-appropriation and a rehabilitation of the Cajun image.

Shane Bernard identifies “two parallel ethnic pride movements” in South Louisiana at the time: “one organized, autocratic, elitist and the other, nebulous, egalitarian, grassroots.” According to Bernard, “the grassroots movement emerged triumphant” (88). The top-down, political movement was led by genteel Acadians like James ‘Jimmy’ Domengeaux and other politicians who established

the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL), whose mission statement was “to do any and all things necessary to accomplish the development, utilization, and preservation of the French language as found in the State of Louisiana for the cultural, economic, and tourist benefit of the State” (qtd. in Bernard 91). Bernard identifies the grassroots movement as being led by musicians such as Dewey Balfa, Zachary Richard, and Michael Doucet as well as a new wave of Cajun activists such as folklorist Barry Jean Ancelet, historian Carl Brasseaux, and linguist Richard Guidry.

Bernard’s victory of the grassroots Cajun activists over genteel Acadians is not so clear-cut. The reality is that the genteel Acadians relied on the grassroots Cajuns while the latter relied on the former’s established lineage and connections. The movement required political and academic support in addition to reviving blue-collar interest. According to Shane Bernard, it took a book of poetry written in Cajun French and multiple academic panels and university studies conducted by Belgian and Canadian educators and universities to convince Domingeaux of the validity of Cajun French as a language. The success of the revival relied on federal funding and scholars to develop Cajun French textbooks as well as universities to use these texts to teach Cajun French courses. While it required more local teachers to replace the foreign French and Belgians hired on the cheap, it also required those local teachers to obtain certification as Second Language Specialists (Bernard 128-129).

The grassroots Cajuns relied on genteel Acadians in other, subtler ways. Acadians supplied the identity with a unique origin. However, one of the implications that go along with this revaluation of culture is that in defining a

cultural identity and establishing what that is, that group must also distinguish itself from others by identifying what it is not. James H. Dormon refers to the 1970s—borrowing a phrase from Theodore Hershberg²³—as the “Age of Ethnicity” and describes it as a time when,

Ethnic awareness on the part of white ethnic groups developed in part out of a sense of resentment at the achievements (both political and cultural) of the blacks, and the determination to assert ‘white ethnic power’ was at least in part a response to the ‘black power’ movement of the period. The achievement of white ‘ethnic power’ required the reestablishment of a sense of ethnic identity and unity, hence the fevered search for ethnic ‘roots.’ (80)

In the case of the Cajuns, these roots were of the white, euro-centric, Acadian variety. This is not to suggest that the Cajun renaissance movement was a conscious search for a pure white ethnic group. However, as Cajuns distanced themselves from the negative connotations they shared with other minority groups, the Acadian origin became significantly tied to the ‘Cajun ethnicity.’

One of the activists involved in the Cajun renaissance was a then Tulane student, Zachary Richard. Richard is known for his music and poetry and for forging strong ties to Quebec and New Brunswick and Canadian Francophones. His most famous song, “Réveille! Réveille!” is both a memorial for *le Grand Dérangement* and “a cultural call to arms, advocating a new militancy (later dubbed *cadjunitude*) against the Anglo-conformism that was destroying

²³ “Toward the Historical Study of Ethnicity,” *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, I (1973), 1.

traditional Cajun culture” (Bernard 72). The refrain is set to a marching beat, featuring these stirring lyrics:

Réveille! Réveille!
C'est les goddams qui viennent
Voler les enfants.
Réveille! Réveille!
Hommes acadiens
Pour sauver l'héritage.

The “goddams” are both the British of 1755 and the Anglo-Americans of the twentieth century. It is a song that I personally heard on a weekly basis in my high school French class to inspire *cadjinitude*. In the way that *négritude* linked its subjects to Africa, *cadjinitude* connected all Cajuns to l'Acadie.

Recent scholarship (C. Trépanier, E. Waddell) has called to question the seemingly strange acceptance by Acadians of the Cajun label through the ethnic revival. As we have seen, the term ‘Cajun,’ despite its supposed etymological roots in the term ‘Acadien,’ was always a catch-all term for lower-class poor, white Francophones. It had no ethnic roots. And while the antebellum upper-class Acadians have been accused by modern scholars of adopting the Creole way of life, technically all Francophones would have been considered Creole—which was a highly inclusive term at the time meant to identify anyone native to Louisiana and of French culture—just as J.A. Breaux describes in his manuscript. Why wouldn't they choose to be Creole yet again?

By the time the ethnic revival took place in the 1960s, the term Creole had taken on an element of racial mixture. So when it came time to unify the

Francophone population in the twentieth century, Trépanier argues that the term Cajun was chosen strategically:

Despite the fact that the Creole identity had always carried a positive image for white and black francophones of Southern Louisiana, it is under the Cajun label that CODOFIL proceeded to unify the region. This choice can only be interpreted as the desire for the French Louisiana elite to assure for the region a 'white' identity. This choice made, the Cajunization of French Louisiana had to begin by the beautification of the word Cajun.

In its efforts to make the Cajun identity respectable, CODOFIL stressed the original genealogical definition of Cajun, that is, its Acadian character. The word Acadian became a synonym for Cajun... (Trépanier 164).

As a result of attributing white, ethnic roots to a previously catch-all identity, contributions from other minority groups have been mitigated or otherwise forgotten from the collective Cajun consciousness. One example is found in the fact that *Attakapas* is no longer used to refer to the region now called the “French Triangle” where many Acadians settled—a reflection of the selectively biased identity (re)formation of the “Cajun Renaissance” that ignores Amerindian contribution. This is further reflected by this area commonly being called “Acadiana” today.

Another prevalent population forgotten by the “French Triangle” is the African-American influence, the population of which “By 1850, (...) constituted approximately 42 percent of the total in the French Triangle area” (Dormon 47).

African Americans, consequently, “heavily influenced the development of Cajun music, folklore, cuisine, folk medicine, and folk religion” (Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun* 131).

Thus, despite the many diverse influences that have formed the majority of the cultural practices of Louisiana Cajuns, the officially recognized ethnic roots remained white Acadian. But while *négritude* links all to the common sufferings of colonialism and the memory of slavery—systems whose whole existence depended upon the power dynamics that defined the white race as superior to the black race—many people who considered themselves Cajun did not have ties to those who experienced the hardships of *Le Grand Dérangement*. While surely many Cajuns and their families had been mistreated, misrepresented, and have experienced a rapid loss of culture, their plight was not universal to all members of the group. As history has shown, since their arrival in Louisiana, many Acadians/Cajuns had the ability to subvert the power systems and become members of the dominant class unlike other minority ethnic groups who cannot claim the white, European roots shared by the dominant class. Being stereotyped as poor, uneducated, and illiterate is unfortunate; but on the whole, there were no power systems in place to keep them that way and certainly none targeted specifically at their ethnicity.

The 1980 lawsuit that established the Cajuns as a federally recognized minority provides a phenomenal example of this uniquely intricate balance. The *Roach v. Dresser Industrial Valve and Instrument Division* decision involved a Cajun man, Calvin Joseph Roach, who claimed that he was discriminated against when he was fired from his job. The judge ruled in his favor and declared that

Cajuns were, indeed, minorities and should be protected by the same antidiscrimination laws as other minority ethnic groups. When a bill was introduced to state legislation to recognize Cajuns as a minority in Louisiana,

The bill (...) encountered strong local resistance from black legislators who opposed sharing state affirmative action benefits with a group that was hardly an oppressed minority in its own homeland. ‘In what way have you been discriminated against?’ demanded a black representative from New Orleans. Governor Buddy Roemer, an Anglo-American from north Louisiana, concurred with the state’s Black Caucus, promising to veto the “dysfunctional” bill. (Bernard 137-138)

This backlash is understandable given the history of the “gentility” attained by Acadians in Louisiana and exemplifies the tension that is implicit in a minority ethnicity that has occupied all rungs of the social ladder—all this while containing many minority-infused elements in their customs, and yet strong ties to a white, European origin. The legislators who backed the aforementioned bill eventually dropped the issue and instead chose “to launch an inquiry into the ‘plight of the Cajuns’ and the culture’s value to state tourism” (138).

The same type of inquiry will carry us on into our study of how all this tension and intricacy has been glossed over by one of the most influential representations of Cajun Culture, *Bélizaire the Cajun*—a film that provides a modern example of yet another piece of propaganda whose goal was to transform a divisive moment in the Acadian and Cajun history and unite those of francophone heritage against the tide of American assimilation.

Cajun Cinema

Representations of Cajuns in any medium—French or English, modern or historical—tend to run the gamut of genres. From *Louisiana Story* (1948), Robert J. Flaherty's intimately artistic portrayal of idyllic Cajun swamp life at the dawn of the oil boom to *Southern Comfort* (1981)—a drama/thriller where a group of National Guard troops training in the Louisiana swamp transgress against a group of local Cajuns who exact their revenge using what can best be described as guerilla war tactics. As absurd as that sounds, this comparison to Vietnam warfare may actually provide a more accurate portrayal than the more common comedic caricatures the likes of Adam Sandler's *Waterboy* (1998). Where Adam Sandler's Cajun portrayal is more like a slapstick Forrest Gump, at least the vengeful Cajuns featured in *Southern Comfort* are shown enjoying the music of Dewey Balfa.

Of the historical genre, it was in school in the late nineteen-nineties as an educational lesson about Cajuns where I first saw the film *Belizaire the Cajun* (1986)—a period piece set in 1859 during the vigilante movement, written and directed by Glen Pitre, and widely touted to be one of the more authentic portrayals of the Louisiana natives. If *Les Comités de Vigilance* is an unapologetically subjective and romanticized version of the vigilante phenomenon, *Belizaire the Cajun* is its modern English language counterpart largely lacking the complexity of the former.

Belizaire the Cajun enjoyed widespread domestic and international critical praise. It was an official selection for film festivals at Sundance, Toronto, Munich,

Moscow, and Torino and received a nomination for a Spirit Award. It screened in the 'Un Certain Regard' section at the 1986 Cannes Film Festival. Pitre's biography demonstrates the success of his first major film and to what extent he and his milestone film are representative of his home state:

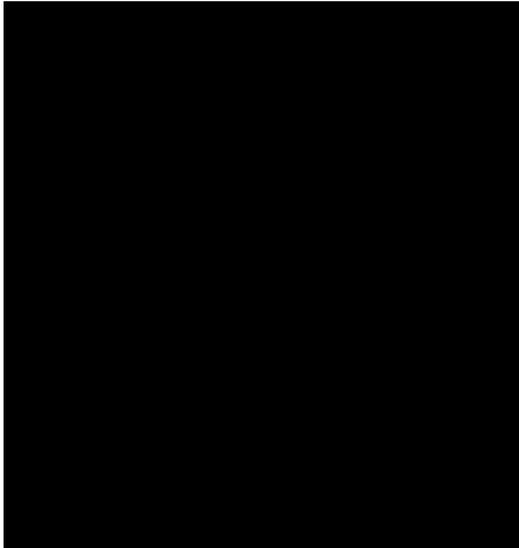


Figure 9: Glen Pitre. Cote Blanche Productions.
<http://coteblanche.com/glen-pitre>

Born at Cut Off, Louisiana, Glen Pitre worked his way through Harvard by fishing shrimp each summer. By age 25, American Film magazine dubbed him "father of the Cajun cinema" as his low-budget, French dialect "gumbo westerns" broke house records in bayou country theaters. With the help of the Sundance Institute, his internationally-lauded 1986 *Belizaire the Cajun* became his first

English-language production. Since then Pitre's works in a variety of media, frequently in collaboration with wife Michelle Benoit, often about life in his native Louisiana wetlands, have earned him numerous awards, including an honorary doctorate and a knighthood from France. In a 2006 book, America's most famous film critic, Roger Ebert, acclaimed Pitre "a legendary American regional director." (<http://coteblanche.com/glen-pitre>)

The film was such a success that Pitre followed it with a novelized version in 1988, *Belizaire the Cajun: a novel*. In short, it is one of the most influential recent portrayals of Cajun heritage in popular culture.

In the preface of Pitre's novelized version of *Bélizaire*, writer-journalist and co-author, Dean Shapiro (who holds a B.A. in History) introduces the tale in the customary manner, by relating the story of *le Grand Dérangement* and referencing *Evangeline*. Shapiro then begins establishing the indigenous protagonists and distinguishing them from the foreign antagonists, thereby defining the conflict. He does this by first establishing the post-Acadie Acadian homeland, "That homeland was the French-founded colony of Louisiana" where they "built their homes, followed their customs and religion, and spoke their own language, free from the harassment of others" (8). According to Shapiro's version of history, "The Acadians—or 'Cajuns,' as they had come to be known—began moving westward" (8) after the large plantations had begun to encroach upon the Acadian settlements. This claim originates with William Faulkner Rushton who wrote that following statehood in 1812, Cajuns experienced "a slower second Expulsion that most historians have forgotten", in which the "Cajun refugees were chased by *les Américains* farther into Louisiana's jungle wilderness" (*The Cajuns...67*). Even though Brasseaux has insisted that this "so-called Second Expulsion" did not actually happen, Shapiro makes this claim without admitting that many of these plantations were owned by Acadians (*Acadian to Cajun* 11-12). Shapiro leads his reader to the false conclusion that their homeland was, again, under threat from outsiders.

Shapiro, uses the terms Cajun and Acadian interchangeably—a common simplification that, while problematic, is clearly self-serving. This strategy establishes a direct link from to the modern 'Cajun' to the 'Acadian' ancestors and simplifies the past in a way that Barthes describes as being the core function of

myth. Shapiro's assertion equates this encroachment of large plantations on the Acadians/Cajuns to a second expulsion in a manner that recalls the hardships of the *Grand Dérangement*: "This time their 'migration' took them to the swamps and prairies that covered vast tracts of south Louisiana" (8).

And yet, Shapiro's introduction in the book version is much more detailed than the one that appears in film:

Word of a new home spread among the scattered [Acadian] refugees. From around world they made their way to Louisiana. The 'Cadjuns rebuilt, hoping their new homes would be permanent. But within a century, they were once again in peril. Committees of Vigilance were being formed to rid the state of 'undesirables.'

A brief backstory familiarizing the audience with the Acadians, their British conquerors, and their subsequent exile is immediately juxtaposed with "The 'Cadjuns" and their conflict with the Committees of Vigilance, thereby equating the two "perils."

Shapiro's stereotypical Cajun/Acadian was a peaceful hunter, fisher, or farmer preferring to live in isolation. If the image contradicts both the *Pouponne et Balthazar* portrayal and the "Breaux Manuscript," it is representative of the most contemporary characterization of the "Cajun." By Shapiro's account, "Those who settled on the prairies where the soil was not conducive to farming took up raising cattle. This was something they had learned from the Spanish colonists of Mexico..." (Pitre 9). This seems to have worked for them for a little while.

After 1812 when Louisiana became a state, Pitre and Shapiro's Cajun was once again under duress by encroaching English-speaking settlers who learned

about cattle ranching from the Cajuns only to take over their homesteads as they became “more and more hostile to the Cajuns, and vice versa.” These encroachments forced “the descendants of the earlier Acadian settlers” into the status of “second-class citizenship” (9). They resorted to “stealing cattle from these land barons in order to survive and feed their poor families.” The identity of the land barons is not specified exactly, but the author is certain to clarify that the theft was justified, that this was an Anglo-American takeover, and that “The differences in language, religion, and culture created a rift between the ‘Anglos’ and many of the Cajuns who resented their presence.” Shapiro claims, “There is ample evidence to suggest that such thievery was widespread across the prairies, and it added further to the bad blood that existed between the Anglos and the Cajuns” (9). When the local law enforcement failed to indict these thieves, many land-owning citizens formed ‘Committees of Vigilance.’

The eponymous protagonist in Pitre’s story finds himself on the wrong side of this vigilante movement. Bélizaire Breaux—quite a different Breaux from the “Breaux Manuscript”—is a *traiteur*, a Cajun medicine man of sorts, who is deeply religious and peaceful, a Cajun hero who stands up to the Anglo villains who are trying to expel the Cajuns from their land.

Of the historical Vigilantes, Shapiro acknowledges that “Many of their members were Cajuns themselves, and their targets were not only Cajuns. Blacks, both slave and free, who were considered to be troublemakers—along with their white sympathizers—were also singled out for punishment” (10). While the book claims that it does not “...single out particular individuals or groups for praise or condemnation” nor does it “moralize about who (if anyone) was right or wrong in

the confrontations between the vigilantes and the alleged lawbreakers they condemned,” (12) neither the text itself nor the film that promote the myth of *Bélizaire the Cajun* make any further mention of these very important facts about the true identities of the people involved. Here again, we see the use of the term ‘Cajun,’ which confounds the situation and ignores socioeconomic distinctions, infusing modern notions of ethnicity into an era where it did not exist. The last thing the vigilantes would have called themselves was Cajun. And yet, the preface claims “it does attempt to put the turbulent events of that time in their proper perspective and show how they affected the lives of those described in these pages.” However, since the distinctions of origins of those described in these pages do not fit the myth, they are omitted. According to Shapiro, “Discerning readers can formulate their own judgments” (12).

As a result, what is actually propagated in the story of *Bélizaire the Cajun* is a flattening of the cultural historical landscape—a hero myth that pits a local, indigenous population against the incursion of Anglo ‘foreigners’ who force them off their land while equating ‘Acadian’ with ‘Cajun’ and harkening back to the events of the *Grand Dérangement*.

While it may seem like low-hanging fruit, from an academic perspective, to question the historical veracity of a film like *Bélizaire the Cajun*, it is worthwhile to appreciate the far-reaching effect on popular culture that this film has had. A perusal of the audience reviews on the Internet Movie Database (IMDB)²⁴ reflects how *Belizaire* has skewed popular perceptions of the vigilante movement,

²⁴ From: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0090710/reviews?ref =tt_ury

flattening the complex historical landscape in which is set. Initially striking are the consideration of historical veracity and the idea of “authenticity,” that is, the belief that this story is an accurate depiction of historical, ethnic persecution of Cajuns (all emphasis mine):

“...it is also about the **discrimination and hatred** the Cajuns had to endure.[...] I have a friend that is a Cajun from Houma, Louisiana and she says that it is very **authentic and true to the Cajun's history.**” – “jewellsofdixie”

“A fairly **accurate** portrayal of life in the Bayou, and the **prejudices** faced by the Acadian settlers, and how so many of them dealt with it.” – “ragreen259”

In a second, and perhaps more troubling phenomenon stemming from the first, is the equating of this ethnic persecution depicted in this false history with the very real persecution of other minority ethnic groups and races:

“It tries to tell about a rather obscure part of American history [...] and it tries to tell the story in an **accurate, realistic** way that **doesn't whitewash** some of the darker aspects of America's past [...] An awful lot of us don't realize that **Cajuns were, and ARE, a discriminated against minority** in America. Learning that alone is worth the time to see the film.” – “Gavno”

“I can now say what an awesome drama about the Cajuns and their struggles against the **prejudice of certain white Americans** who settled in The Pelican State, this is.” – “tavn”

“**Historically correct**...This is a very good film for those who only think that American History is only about American Independence, Civil War and Cowboy's [sic] and Indians. There are many more stories to be told about America like the Cajuns, the American/Mexican war, American Indians

and not just slavery of African-Americans [...] I know that this does not compare to the persecution of the African-American slaves during the same period, **but it does attempt to show the similarities.**” –

“la_broussard”

“With BELIZAIRE THE CAJUN, film maker Glen Pitre gives us a trickster's tale that is steeped in a little known chapter of United States history. And that chapter, which is as **"all-American" as the white-led anti-black riots** in St. Louis during the First World War and the U.S. led massacre at My Lai in Vietnam, is a semi-fictional chronicle of the **harassment of the Arcadian (or Cajun)** peoples of Southwest Louisiana in the years before the Civil War.” –“oyason”

The racial distinctions both comparing the Cajun experience to that of African- and Native-Americans and distinguishing Cajuns from typical “white Americans” is one of the more profound consequences of the myth, i.e. maintaining difference from other white American groups while still maintaining their whiteness. Even the venerable Roger Ebert, in his 1986 review of the film, found it appropriate to use the concept of racism to explain the otherwise confusing plot: “Exactly why Willoughby [a white, Anglo vigilante character] would marry a Cajun woman and then want to run her people out of town is never quite explained by the movie, but then, I suppose, racism is never logical” (<http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/belizaire-the-cajun-1986>. July 18, 1986).

The other, seemingly relatively minor consequence, but far-reaching nonetheless, is that despite the fact that this film is set in 1859, many people still maintain that this is an accurate portrayal of Cajuns today: “I love the movie now because, well it shows what I have always known, that Cajuns are a fiercely loyal,

independent, determined people. Family is everything, God, family, community and then everything else” (IMDB user “ponyiq”).

This ignorance of the lack of historical veracity is evinced by the film’s reception, but the misconception of the Acadians’ role in the Vigilante movement is also pervasive throughout Louisiana culture—not to mention their owning of slaves, to whom their plight is compared. In the survey mentioned in my introduction, when asked “What book, movie, or television show, if any, best represents what it means to be a Cajun?” the most common response—outnumbering second-place *Swamp People*—was *Belizaire the Cajun*, receiving 10% of all responses.²⁵ A few responses did not just list it, but also cited its historical accuracy (“Perhaps ‘Belizaire, The Cajun’, from a historical prospective [sic].”). These responses are so indicative of the audiences’ historical perception of those events that one participant even responded, “Belizaire is the story of my grandfather, Horsce [sic] Guidry.”

The Intersection of Myth and History

Pitre and Shapiro were demonstrably aware of Barde’s *Histoire des Comités* when they made the book and film versions of *Bélizaire*. Shapiro directly references “one recorded instance” in which a rustler who has been caught steeling cattle boldly says to his accuser that he can produce witnesses to attest that he bought the cattle outright. When the case goes to court, the rustler keeps

²⁵ Strangely enough, *Duck Dynasty*—a television show that claims no connections to Cajuns other than being set in Louisiana and purporting to promote Southern values—came in third place.

his word and produces the witnesses necessary to acquit him (9-10). While Shapiro never does cite his source, and does not mention Alexandre Barde and his *Histoire des Comités*, this “one recorded instance” comes directly from the opening chapter of Barde’s chronicles. And instead of actually being a “recorded instance,” in Barde’s version it serves as more of a parable, what the author himself calls “une anecdote,” to serve as an example of the type of injustice they’re dealing with: « (Nous n’en nommons pas les auteurs, mais la paroisse Lafayette tout entière pourrait les nommer au besoin.) » (Barde 27). It even has the distinct literary form of a fable:

Un honorable habitant surprit un soir un de nos nombreux bandits,
au moment où il volait sa plus belle vache.

--Cette fois je te prends, dit l’habitant au bandit.

--Pas encore, fit l’autre.

--Mais c’est le flagrant délit !

--Pas le moins du monde ; je te prouverai par dix témoins
que je t’ai acheté cette vache.

L’affaire mise en cour, le bandit prouva ce qu’il avait promis
de prouver par quinze témoignages. Le bandit y avait mis du luxe :
il avait produit cinq témoins de plus. (27)

Shapiro adds that “this was not an isolated incident” and many others like it were “recorded” throughout South Louisiana. He does not cite references, however (Shapiro 10).

There are other familiar parts of *Bélizaire* that make Pitre’s historical license seem questionable. In a dramatic nighttime scene lit by torchlight, the vigilantes ride out to condemn Bélizaire’s cousin, Hypolite Leger, and other

Cajuns for their crimes. The scene directly mirrors the beginning of Barde's Auguste Gudbeer story, replacing the German with a Cajun. The sentencing that is read aloud by the vigilantes in Pitre's film and book reads as follows:

“Hypolite Leger, you will undergo an infamous punishment because you have taken part in all the crimes which have desolated the country for many years!” the spokesman announced. “No longer having faith in our juries, mauled as they are by sheriffs who keep away honest men and admit rascals to the jurors' bench, we have formed ourselves into juries! You have been found guilty of theft and barnburning! You have been condemned to leave this state within two weeks!”... “If you break this bond, you will be hanged!”

(39)

And for comparison, this is the speech from Barde's version:

Gudbeer, tu viens de subir un supplice infamant, parce que tu a pris part à tous les crimes qui désolent le pays depuis bien des années. N'ayant plus foi dans notre juri, tel qu'il est tripoté par les avocats qui écartent les honnêtes gens, grâce au droit de récusation, pour laisser monter aux bancs des jurés des drôles de ton espèce, nous nous sommes formés nous-mêmes en juri. Tu as reçu le fouet, châtiment bien doux, si tu le compares à la grandeur des crimes que tu as commis. Va chercher ailleurs une réhabilitation par le travail et la moralité. Maintenant, je vais te lire ta sentence...le nommé Gudbeer a été trouvé coupable de vol et d'incendie. Il a été

condamné à quitter l'État sous huit jours. S'il rompt son ban, il sera pendu. (192)

In Barde's version, the vigilantes mentioned are Paul Broussard, Desiré Bernard, and St. Julien, two Acadians and a Creole. In Pitre's book version, the riders mentioned are Matthew Perry, James Willoughby, and Amadee Meaux (37). Perry and Willoughby are acknowledged as Americans; Meaux's origin is not officially recognized. None of these names appear in Barde's account as vigilantes, however, there are a couple of Creole Moux's who were vigilante victims (Table 3). The book attaches the name William Mouton²⁶ to one of the vigilantes responsible for killing Hypolite Leger, presumably as a stand-in for all the Moutons and all the Acadians involved in the movement. In the movie, however, that character is not credited with a name, and the actor—Edmundson—is only credited as “Killer Vigilante.”

History Contradicts Itself

At the time of writing this, Longfellow Evangeline State Historic Site had recently held its annual “Vigilantes on the Bayou,” a reenactment of the events of the vigilante movement. On their Facebook page, they advertised the January 24th, 2015 event as the following,

²⁶ The book is very clear as to whom this character name refers, including a photo with the caption: “Vigilante William Mouton (Bob Edmundson)... (74) and a description: “William Mouton, a large, red-bearded vigilante...” (94).

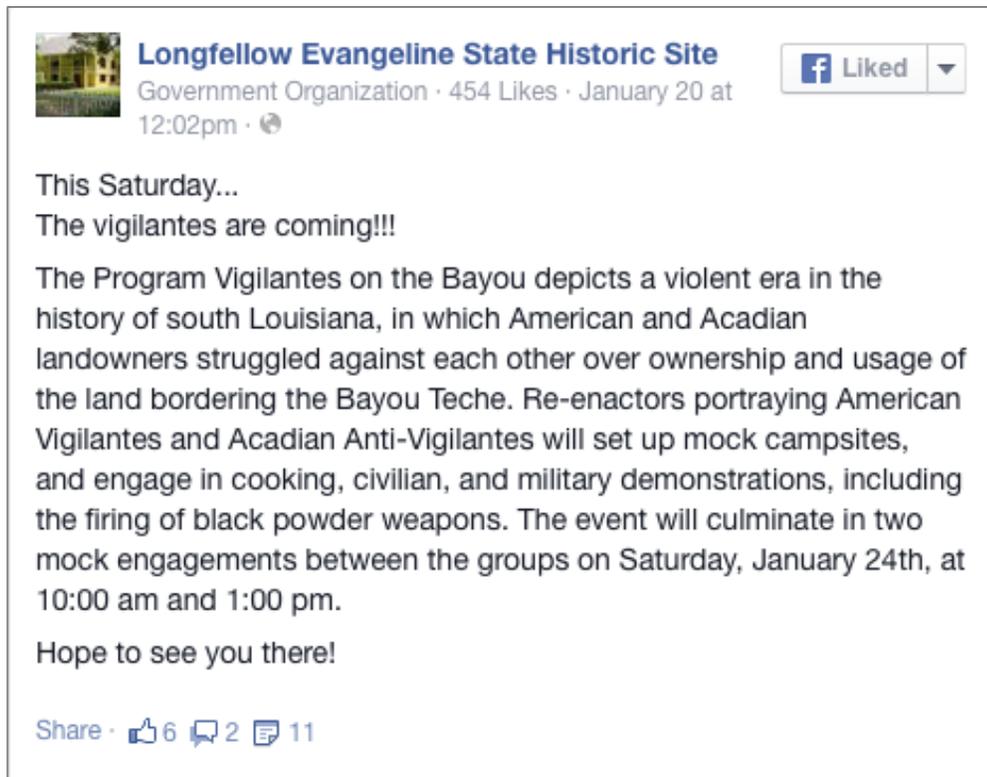


Figure 10: Longfellow Evangeline State Historic Site. Facebook. Jan. 20, 2015. Accessed 1/26/15. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Longfellow-Evangeline-State-Historic-Site/180222262028125?fref=nf>

The Program Vigilantes on the Bayou depicts a violent era in the history of south Louisiana, in which American and Acadian landowners struggled against each other over ownership and usage of the land bordering the Bayou Teche. Re-enactors portraying American Vigilantes and Acadian Anti-Vigilantes will set up mock campsites, and engage in cooking, civilian, and military demonstrations, including the firing of black powder weapons.

The event was also reported in *The Daily Iberian* as a story called “Re-enacting Actual Battle.” In the article, Charles Goulas, who portrayed the “defiant French-speaking patriarch of the cabin,” explains the purpose of the reenactment, “It gives us a chance to come out and play, a chance to show people history. It’s good

for us and it's good for local people.” In the reenactment, the vigilante group, led by Park Ranger Philip J. Frey, approach the Acadian cabin and “The two parties argued back and forth in English and French and eventually turned to their guns to settle the dispute.” At this point, “The farmer was aided by the ‘anti-vigilantes,’ who organized as a counter to the vigilantes’ apparent fabrication of crimes.”

In what amounts to journalism (re)creating History, the article points out that “Frey and Goulas deliberately avoided stating definitively which party was right in this particular exchange, which side was ‘the good guys,’ because documented history was unclear on that answer.” However, Mary Guirard, another park ranger, is quoted in the article as saying “The vigilantes would ride up to a house and accuse, without having a trial, whatever family they were chasing out. It was really a race thing and the wealthy wanting the better land.” That last sentence displays perfectly the confusion between race, ethnicity, and class. It appears as though Mary Guirard would like the reader to consider Acadians as a race and she equates them with poverty. The fascinating phenomenon about this reenactment is that, while the organizers and participants (park rangers at a state historic site, one of which is specifically cited as having studied history in college) are at least attempting not to point the blame at one group or the other, they are still unable to stray from the *Bélizaire* myth that the two groups consisted of Anglo-American vigilantes versus Acadians: “To ask Guirard, that time was a dark time for a lot of Acadians who were unjustly convicted of crimes and either shot or hanged for it. ‘The vigilantes always came with a lot of people and a lot of weapons,’ she said. ‘The Acadians never stood a chance.’”

In the repetitiousness of myth, the events of the *Grand Dérangement* and the epic journey of *Evangeline* are drawn out and replayed as a constant reminder of the subjugation of Cajuns and as a link to an Acadian past. This is not just a cultural byproduct of a work like *Bélizaire the Cajun*; it is explicitly stated as if Shapiro were the omniscient narrator of History:

To the Cajuns in 1859, forced exile was an all-too-painful reminder of their roots. Many of them, whose families had forged an existence on their lands for generations dating back to the earliest Acadian settlements in the 1700s, lived in terror of the judgment of these night riders who operated at the behest of the cattle barons.

(Shapiro 11)

Shapiro's statement is not necessarily false. However, the not-so-subtle irony lies in the Acadian identity of the perpetrators of forced exile—the vigilantes—and their apparent amnesia regarding the pain thereof.

In the story of *Bélizaire the Cajun*, the love triangle between Cajuns Bélizaire and Alida, who is married to American vigilante Matthew Perry, serves to drive home the pressures of Americanization. Alida personifies the Cajun-turned-American with her “*half-American*” children (77) and her American husband.

The Americans are, without exception, the villains. Through the point of view of the American characters, who are motivated by money and power, the Cajuns are savage; their ways and customs are foreign, misunderstood, and antithetical to American ideals of progress and capitalism. And while Alida's husband, Matthew Perry's actions never show any sympathy toward Cajuns, the

other American characters ridicule him, saying that he “...wants to be an Indian (...) He wants to be a Cajun” (59) simply because of his relationship with Alida. It is little wonder why reviewers of the film view the Cajuns as analogous to Native Americans.

Bélizaire does not understand why Alida is with Matthew and he tries to convince her to run away with him. The reason for her choosing Mathew becomes apparent—he can provide a prosperous living for her and her family: “‘And what about my children?’ she demanded, crossing angrily over the porch toward him. ‘How are you going to feed my babies? With pecans that you can’t even keep?’” (...) ‘What do you have to offer us, Bélizaire?’ (...) ‘What can you give us? Dolsin, he wants a horse for his birthday! Where would you ever get him a horse?’ (87). Alida’s decision is based entirely on financial interest, something Bélizaire in his Cajun simplicity cannot understand.

The twist occurs when Matthew Perry is killed²⁷ and it is revealed that Alida and Matthew were not married in the Catholic Church. The story then shifts to Willoughby—Matthew’s brother-in-law and murderer—dodging responsibility to care for the bastard Cajun children fathered by Perry out of wedlock. Bélizaire uses his wiles to provide for Alida’s children by negotiating it into his false confession for killing Perry and convincing the priest to vouch for Alida and Matthew’s legitimate marriage in the Church.

While the issue of slavery—a tenet so central to the vigilante movement—is conspicuously absent from the movie version, its emphasis on the victimization

²⁷ No vigilantes are killed in Barde’s account.

of Acadians and Cajuns at the hands of Anglos and upper-class Creoles has practically become common knowledge in Cajun mythology.

I have called *Bélizaire the Cajun* a misrepresentation of historical events. Perhaps that is too harsh. Instead, it is a re-presentation that recalls a historical rift in the francophone population—a rift that some have pointed to as the beginning of Cajun ethnicity itself—and repackages and repurposes it in a fashion that better fits the Cajun myth. In doing so, it unifies the upper-class Acadians with the lower Cajuns against a common enemy, Americanization. Its success is self-evident. In doing so, however, the identity loses a part of itself and alienates members of its own community. While the truth may be uncomfortable to recognize at times, it also allows for a level of diversity that is uniquely intrinsic to the Cajun population—a diversity that can now only be recognized in opposition to the myth.

CONCLUSION

For modern Cajuns, there are more opportunities to express identity from within the community than ever before. The Cajun Renaissance has allowed for and undoubtedly encouraged this. However, because the image being expressed from the inside is still in dialogue with the outside stereotypes often contributed by Anglo-American observers who viewed them as simple agrarian peasants, concerns of authenticity arise along with a tension between expressing oneself and keeping within the realm of *cajinitude*.

In his 1982 collection of poetry titled *La Charrue*, Carol Doucet was inspired to express his identity in such a manner: « J'ai senti un devoir d'employer le peu de talent que je croyais avoir, un devoir d'écrire, un devoir d'exprimer en français mes sentiments sur le passé, le présent, l'avenir » (vii). In his introduction to this collection, Mathé Allain describes Doucet as: « C'est Carol Doucet, Cadien des prairies, professeur de et chantre de la vie acadienne contemporaine » (xi). Doucet is a model of an educated Cajun who still maintains that classic Acadian lifestyle, demonstrating, according to Allain, the possibility of adopting multiple cultural values: « Ses vers portent la marque de la double influence de son héritage acadien et de son éducation française classique » (xii). While this classic French education in the nineteenth century would indicate a divesting of oneself from the Acadian heritage, creating a book of poems that « rappellent souvent les romantiques » is viewed differently in the modern context.

But Doucet not only exhibits his « faiblesse pour Lamartine, » he remains steadfast in expressing Cajun stereotypes, even when they contradict his own nature:

Les poèmes de Carol Doucet décrivent souvent des aspects caractéristiques des mœurs acadiennes. Ainsi « Sacre Poteau. » Les Cajuns aiment bien boire, et ce poème traite l'ivresse avec un doigté léger, rempli de bonne humeur typique de la culture, bien qu'inattendu chez un Acadien qui ne touche jamais une goutte d'alcool. (xiii)

Allain adds that another of his poems: « «Tracasse-toi-pas» se fait l'écho des stéréotypes du pauvre Cajun, démuné de tout, qui vit cependant joyeusement, au jour de jour » (xiii). In a collection of poetry, as a means of self-expression (“un devoir d’exprimer...mes sentiments”), its author—an educated professor—instead expresses something else: a stereotype.

The struggle for modern Cajun self-expression outside of the stereotypes also exists in other media, such as music. In addressing questions of authenticity, for younger generations of Anglophone Cajuns, Ryan Brasseaux and Erik Charpentier examine the career and music of Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys—a band whom the authors describe as “stand[ing] at the point of impact where the Cajun Renaissance’s interpretation of authenticity and America’s vision of traditional music collide” (*Fabricating Authenticity* 488).

In the beginning of their career during the 1990s, Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys “became known as one of the top purveyors of ‘authentic’ traditional Cajun music” (488). However, the authentic traditional aspects of

Cajun music became more of a disconnect with reality: “A deepening gap between measures of authenticity, as defined by Cajun activists and roots record labels, and the reality of life in south Louisiana culturally constrained the Playboys’ capacity for expression” (488). Many of the “roots music aficionados, traditionalists, and south Louisiana’s Franco-centric cultural activists” who “identified French as the criteria for authenticity within the Cajun community” relied on the Playboys’ to bear the mantle of this authenticity by playing traditional Cajun folk music in French, acting as emissaries of Cajun culture. As long as the band was creating music “within the tradition,” their marketability as a legitimate Cajun band would remain in tact.

However, in a community that no longer speaks but very little French, and a band whose members were English-speaking at their formation,²⁸ one band member, David Greely, expressed his concern that their music was not being understood: “And it frustrates me a little bit, you know? I wish that I was communicating with those people” (489).

When the band released a bilingual album, *Bayou Ruler* in 1998, R. Brasseaux and Charpentier claim that it was “frowned upon by the Renaissance’s talking heads” despite its being “the bands most accurate portrayal of the modern Cajun experience” (491). They identify folklorist Barry Ancelet’s absence from the liner notes of this album as indicating “a riff between the rigid constraints of Renaissance ideologies and the late twentieth-century artistic yearnings of a

²⁸ The authors note, “In recent years, particular band members have made successful strides to immerse themselves in the French language” and cite an article from 1995.

south Louisiana band” (492). Although this may not be an explicit indication of disapproval,²⁹ the band’s English innovations are considered a departure from authentic Cajun music despite expressing the creativity of the band itself and reflecting the reality shared by their modern audience.

Brasseaux and Charpentier recognize the philosophical purpose of authenticity and its role in comprehending cultural phenomena, but they add:

However, the synthetic and heterogeneous nature of Cajun culture and musical expression complicates any notion of legitimacy within the theoretical “traditions” and “cultural boundaries” fabricated by scholars and activists in Louisiana, particularly as the community’s realities perpetually fluctuate. (492)

As my study has shown, before the Cajun Renaissance, the members of the Cajun communities were able to adapt to the fluctuating cultures to which they belonged. Though the agrarian authenticity and the Acadian origin may provide a rootedness in a society in which many people feel themselves to be uprooted (Henry & Bankston 1039), those roots can also be restrictive.

Perhaps instead of roots, we should consider rhizomes. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari summarize the concept of the Rhizome as follows: « Le rhizome connecte un point quelconque avec un autre point quelconque, et chacun de ses traits ne renvoie pas nécessairement à des traits de même nature » (*Mille*

²⁹ Sam Broussard, Mamou Playboys’ guitarist, has written a blog post in rebuttal to the article: “Ryan Brasseaux: Fabricating Authenticity” (<http://www.sambroussard.com/writing/rant19.html>)

Plateaux 31). Édouard Glissant applies this concept to describe the reality of a Caribbean plural identity:

Quand j'ai abordé la question, je suis parti de la distinction opérée par Deleuze et Guattari, entre la notion de racine unique et la notion de rhizome. Deleuze et Guattari, dans un des chapitres de *Mille Plateaux* (qui a été publié d'abord en petit volume sous le titre de *Rhizomes*), soulignent cette différence. Ils l'établissent du point de vue du fonctionnement de la pensée, la pensée de la racine et la pensée du rhizome. La racine unique est celle qui tue autour d'elle alors que le rhizome est la racine qui s'étend à la rencontre d'autres racines. J'ai appliqué cette image au principe d'identité. Et je l'ai fait aussi en fonction d'une « catégorisation des cultures » qui m'est propre, d'une division des cultures en cultures *ataviques* et cultures *composites*. (*Introduction à une poétique du divers*, 59)

Glissant describes “la culture atavique” as « celle qui part du principe d'une Genèse et du principe d'une filiation, dans le but de rechercher une légitimité sur une terre qui à partir de ce moment devient territoire » (59). But in these composite cultures, such as Louisiana, « très souvent, on se trouve en présence d'une opposition entre l'atavique et le composite » (60).

As the definition of ‘Creole’ has come to be accepted as dependent upon socio-historical context, the ‘Cajun’ has not. But should it not be the same? Henry and Bankston describe the fluid nature of the term ‘Creole’ and how it differs from the strict definition of ‘Cajun’:

“For one, research on creolism has convincingly established that the changing and layered meaning of ‘Creole’ can best be explained both by historical situation and social structure rather than by the content of a Creole culture (Dominguez 1986; Hirsch & Logdson 1992; Henry & Bankston 1998). Thus, depending on the situation in which the term is used as well as on the time and place of reference, Creoles may be construed as white, black or both, urban upper-class or rural poor, proficient bilingual speakers or users of a stigmatized dialect. The case of Cajuns is different. Although little studied but by a handful of Louisiana scholars from a mostly descriptive and humanistic perspective, there is and has been little challenge to the monolithic view of Cajuns as white, of Canadian origin and rural dwellers in Southwestern Louisiana. Furthermore, the historical portrayal of Cajuns has been solidly pejorative.” (Henry & Bankston 1023)

When studying Cajuns solely from a descriptive, humanistic perspective, through stereotypes created by outsiders, it becomes very difficult to remove oneself from the constricting sphere of those same stereotypes. Furthermore, attempting to create a unified culture out of these descriptions creates a tangled web of essentialist ideals that become inhibitive over time.

This approach also affects the outcome of study. For example, in a footnote to his paper on the environmental impact on Louisiana Acadians, Malcolm Comeaux opines:

It is very distressing for a modern Cajun to read accounts of his ancestors in the nineteenth century. Very few of these accounts are complimentary...Most of these accounts were written by Anglos, but they report the situation as they saw it. The picture they paint is not a pretty one, but given the conditions as presented in this paper, the attitude and the plight of the Cajuns are understandable. (footnote #36, 126)

By looking through the lens of outside stereotypes, one cannot expect to find a complete picture. “The attitude and plight of the Cajuns” are predetermined.

Moreover, when an identity is built from stereotypes, maintaining these stereotypes becomes a necessary, but torturous task. For example, on one page, Vaughn Baker writes, “Aware that Creoles looked down upon the Acadians as peasants, the upwardly mobile members of the Acadian population sought to model themselves upon the Creole pattern” (Baker, “In and Out the Mainstream” 100). This line relies on a stereotype that our study of French literature shows to be untrue—that Creoles looked down upon Acadians³⁰—and then uses that to create the distance necessary to distinguish genteel Acadians who “model themselves upon the Creole pattern” from Cajuns while still maintaining the identity’s link to Acadie. However, Baker seems to contradict this on the following page: “The ability of the more prestigious Acadians to continue to

³⁰ Baker cites as a source *The Growth of Southern Civilization, 1790-1860* by Clement Eaton, which is the same text that Baker refutes a few pages earlier concerning the Cajuns’ involvement in the institution of slavery. It should be noted that Eaton’s work has been reviewed as being poorly edited and, thus, “the reader is left at the close of the book with only a very sketchy summary of Southern attitudes” (William R. Taylor, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2205414>).

ascend socially and politically was dependent upon their ability to maintain close ties with both the Cajun planter minority and with the prosperous Cajun yeoman farmer class” (101).

The pains of maintaining stereotypes are magnified when attempting to describe the different geographical Cajun communities. I return to Vaughan Baker as she struggles with classifying these different populations of Acadians/Cajuns. Moving from the aforementioned upper-class Acadians to the “other, less prestigious, far more typical ones who constituted the majority,” she says that “it is they who gave rise to the Cajun stereotype” (101). Then, after listing a few of these stereotypes, she launches into the “geographical realities of Louisiana (...) [that] determined, in part, Acadian cultural development” and left many Cajuns in isolation “almost totally removed from contact with the centers of commercial activity” (102). She is referring to those Cajuns who lived in the swamps and subsisted mostly on hunting, fishing, trapping, and small farming. From there, she claims that these Cajuns “preserved instead their own version of the lives they lived in Nova Scotia. Inhabiting their remote corner of the world, they clung to their own traditions scarcely touched by the dominant American cultural mode” (103). And yet, despite this isolation “from cultural contact, they were not entirely removed from outside society. In the penumbra the Acadians mingled with civilization’s outcasts in an unstable mix of Spanish, black, Indian, American, and perhaps Caribbean elements” (103). Her next sentence, though, seems to contradict this unstable mix: “Travel accounts yield clues that diverse ethnic elements lived together in a comparative harmony in the fringe areas of Louisiana” (103).

Writing from within the stereotype, constantly recalling it and combatting it with more stereotypes, or symbolic stereotyping, tends to ignore what even historians like Carl Brasseaux recognize—that identity (Cajun or Acadian) was fluid. For example, in order to point out flawed perceptions of Acadians/Cajuns, Brasseaux customarily lists the many negative traits often attributed to them:

Thus, for most North Americans, and many Europeans, Louisiana remains a lost paradise—an exotic land, populated by even more peculiar French-speaking primitives, the Acadians. In this illusory image of Acadiana, Acadians, descendants of Louisiana’s eighteenth-century Acadian immigrants, are inevitably poor, inbred, ignorant, hedonistic, unambitious, and sinister swamp dwellers leading an idyllic, if not indolent, existence against the backdrop of North America’s most backward, corrupt, and exploitative political and economic systems. (*French, Cajun, Creole, Houma* 38)

He goes on to say that these “flawed perceptions of the Acadians betray the limited vision of their creators” noting justly that “journalists have traditionally failed to perceive the complexity of modern Acadian society.” He continues:

Indeed, these writers have generally failed to comprehend that Acadians constitute a complete, highly stratified, and now heavily urbanized society, living in highly diverse economic and topographic environments. A “typical” Acadian might now be a banker, truck driver, architect, mechanic, physician, farmer, public school teacher, trapper, realtor, shrimper, oilfield worker, engineer, welder, university professor, police officer, plumber, electrician, or

lawyer, living in an equally broad range of house types and topographic subregions. (39)

This is not only true of modern Acadians (or Cajuns), but as my study has shown, the same could be said of Acadians at any point in their history upon arrival in Louisiana. Are we not equally limiting our visions of “traditional” Acadians when we combat these stereotypes with more stereotypes?

When historians dismiss the eighteenth century Acadians’ participation in politics, war, vigilantism, slavery and the Louisiana aristocracy, their intermarriage with Creoles, their different topographical subregions; when their differences are minimized as atypical or otherwise blamed on Americanization; when we claim their “incapacity” to simply hold a differing opinion, do we not exhibit the same limited vision and display the same failing of comprehension? The Acadians represented in the francophone literature studied here are yeoman farmers and plantation owners; merchants and priests; cattle ranchers and cattle rustlers; vigilantes and bandits; soldiers and vagabonds; politicians and historians; slaveholders and abolitionists. They adapted to their environment, geographically, socially, and culturally. They integrated into various societies and integrated others into theirs. Some became Cajun, some became Creole. Some Creoles became Cajun, as did many others. The Cajun is an identity born in Louisiana with rhizomatic roots that spread like cypress knees across the cultural landscape. This study has sought to reveal what is obscured beneath the surface.

WORKS CITED

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. Rev. ed. 1991. New York: Verso, 1999. Print.
- Arsenault, Bona. *Historie et Généalogie des Acadiens*, 3rd ed. 6 vols. Carleton, QE: Television de la Baie des Chaleurs, 1988.
- Baker, Vaughan B. "In and Out the Mainstream: The Acadians in Antebellum Louisiana." *The Cajuns: Essays on Their History and Culture*. U.S.L. History Series, No. 11. 3rd ed. Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwest Louisiana, 1983. 95-108. Print.
- . "Patterns of Acadian Slave Ownership in Lafayette Parish." *Attakapas Gazette*. 19.2 (1974): 144-148. Print.
- Barde, Alexandre. *Histoire des Comités de Vigilance aux Attakapas*. Shreveport, LA: Les Cahiers du Tintamarre, 2007. Print.
- Barde, Alexandre, David C. Edmonds, and Dennis A. Gibson. *The Vigilante Committees of the Attakapas: An Eyewitness Account of Banditry and Backlash in Southwestern Louisiana*. 1st ed. Lafayette, La.: Acadiana Press, 1981. Print.
- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Paris, Éditions du Seuil (Abbeville, impr. de Paillart), 1957.
- Belizaire the Cajun*. Dir. Glen Pitre. Key Video/CBS Fox, 1986. DVD.
- Bernard, Shane K. *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*. Jackson [Miss.]: University Press of Mississippi, 2003. Print.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London ; New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

- Bienvenu, Marcelle, Carl A. Brasseaux, and Ryan A. Brasseaux. *Stir the Pot: The History of Cajun Cuisine*. New York: Hippocrene Books, 2005. Print.
- Brasseaux, Carl A. "Acadian Education: From Cultural Isolation to Mainstream America." *The Cajuns: Essays on Their History and Culture*. U.S.L. History Series, No. 11. 3rd ed. Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwest Louisiana, 1983. 133-144. Print.
- . "Acadian to Cajun: History of a Society Built on the Extended Family." *Genetics of the Acadian People*. McNeese State University. Bulber Auditorium, Lake Charles, LA. 9 August 1999. Keynote.
- . *Acadian to Cajun : Transformation of a People, 1803-1877*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992. Print.
- . *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma: a Primer on Francophone Louisiana*. Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005. Print.
- Bruce, Clint. "Les Feuilletons du *Courrier de la Louisiane*: Les années Jérôme Bayon (1843-1849)." Centenary College of Louisiana. Web.
<<http://www.centenary.edu/french/courrier/courrier.html#6>>.
- Brasseaux, Ryan and Erik Charpentier. "Fabricating Authenticity: The Cajun Renaissance and Steve Riley & the Mamou Playboys." *Accordions, Fiddles, Two Step and Swing: A Cajun Music Reader*. Eds. Ryan A. Brasseaux and Kevin S. Fontenot. Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, Univ. of Louisiana Lafayette, 2006. 487-494. Print.
- Cable, George Washington. "Acadian Notebook" Cable Collection, MS Division, Tulane University Archives. Manuscript.

- Cash, Joe L. "Evangeline: Legend of Acadian Culture." *Attakapas Gazette*. 19.2 (1984): 50-56. Print.
- Cocari, Frank. *Waterboy*. 1998. Touchstone Pictures. Film.
- Conrad, Glenn R. "The Acadians: Myths and Realities." *The Cajuns: Essays on Their History and Culture*. U.S.L. History Series, No. 11. 3rd ed. Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwest Louisiana, 1983. 1-18. Print.
- . "A Biographical Sketch of Joseph A. Breaux." *Attakapas Gazette*. 26.4 (1991): 150-152. Print.
- Dargo, George. *Jefferson's Louisiana*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.
- Deleuze Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, t. 2. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980.
- Ditchy, Jay K. *Les Acadiens Louisianais Et Leur Parler*. Montreal, Québec: Comeau & Nadeau, 1996. Print.
- Dormon, James H., and University of Southwestern Louisiana. Center for Louisiana Studies. *The People Called Cajuns : An Introduction to an Ethnohistory*. Lafayette, La.: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1983. Print.
- Flaherty, Robert J. *Louisiana Story*. 1948. Film.
- Glissant, Édouard. *Introduction à une poétique du divers*. Paris: Gallimard, 1992.
- Gossett, Amy. "The Louisiana Experience: Culture, Clashes, and Codification." *The Constitutionalism of American States*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2008. 302-316.

- Grimsted, David. "Né D'Hier: American Vigilantism, Communal Rebirth and Political Traditions." *People and Power: Rights, Citizenship and Violence*, ed. Loretta Valtz Mannucci. Milan: Grafiche Vadacca, 1992. 75-113.
- Hebert-Leiter, Maria. *Becoming Cajun, Becoming American the Acadian in American Literature from Longfellow to James Lee Burke*. Southern Literary Studies. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009. Print.
- Henry, Jacques & Carl Bankston. "Ethnic Self-Identification and Symbolic Stereotyping: The Portrayal of Louisiana Cajuns," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24.6 (2001): 1020-1045. Web.
- Hill, Walter. *Southern Comfort*. 1981. 20th Century Fox Film Corporation. Film.
- Hill, Zane. "Re-enacting actual battle." *The Daily Iberian*. 25 January 2015. Web. 26 January 2015. <http://www.iberianet.com/news/re-enacting-actual-battle/article_5aa7a3e6-a448-11e4-8e54-930f675363ed.html?mode=story>.
- Howard, Perry H. "The Politics of the Acadian Parishes." *The Cajuns: Essays on Their History and Culture*. U.S.L. History Series, No. 11. 3rd ed. Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwest Louisiana, 1983. 174-194. Print.
- Klingler, Thomas A. "How Much Acadian is There in Cajun?" In Ursula Mathia-Moser and Günter Bischof (dirs.). *Acadians and Cajuns. The Politics and Culture of French Minorities in North America / Acadians et Cajuns: Politique et culture de minorités francophones en Amérique du Nord*.

- Canadiana oenipontana 9. Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press. (2009): 91-103.
- La Houssaye, Sidonie de, and May Rush Gwin Waggoner. *Poupponne Et Balthazar*. Lafayette, La.: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1983. Print.
- La Houssaye, Sidonie de. *Poupponne Et Balthazar Nouvelle Acadienne*. 1888. Web <<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/6340194.html>>.
- Louder, Dean R., and Eric Waddell. *French America: Mobility, Identity, and Minority Experience across the Continent*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993. Print.
- Mouhot, Jean-François. *Les Réfugiés Acadiens en France: L'impossible réintégration, 1758- 1785*. Québec: Les éditions du Septentrion, 2006.
- Pitre, Glen, and Dean Shapiro. *Belizaire the Cajun : A Novel*. Gretna, La.: Pelican Pub. Co., 1988. Print.
- Reinecke, George, trans. and ed. "Early Louisiana and French Life and Folklore: From the Anonymous Breaux Manuscript, as Edited by Professor Jay K. Ditchy." *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany 2* (1966): 1-58. Retrieved from *Folklife in Louisiana*. Web <http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/the_breaux_manuscript.html>
- Reneaux, J. J. *Cajun Folktales*. 1st ed. Little Rock: August House Publishers, 1992. Print.
- Rickels, Patricia K. "The Folklore of the Acadians." *The Cajuns: Essays on Their History and Culture*. U.S.L. History Series, No. 11. 3rd ed. Lafayette:

- Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwest Louisiana, 1983.
219-232. Print.
- Rushton, William Faulkner. *The Cajuns: From Acadia to Louisiana*. New York:
Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979. Print.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Cary Nelson and
Larry Grossberg, eds. *Marxism and the interpretation of Culture*.
Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988: 271-313
- Thomas, Leanna. "A Fractured Foundation: Discontinuities in Acadian
Resettlement, 1755-1803." Master's Thesis, University of Central Florida,
2011.
- Tinker, Edward Larocque. Rev. of *Les Acadiens Louisianais et Leur Parler*. by
Jay K. Ditchy. *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Mar., 1934), pp.
188-190. Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press. Article DOI:
10.2307/2912098. Article Stable URL:
<http://www.jstor.org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/stable/2912098>
- Trépanier, Cécyle. "The Cajunization of French Louisiana: Forging a Regional
Identity." *The Geographical Journal* 157.2. (1991): 161-71.

VITA

Scott Gossett was born and grew up Cajun in Lake Charles, Louisiana. He attended high school in Sulphur, LA where he learned French from a Texan named Bette Drymon. He entered undergraduate studies at Tulane University in 2000. It was there that he first questioned what it meant to be Cajun. He received a Bachelor of Arts in French and Religious Studies in 2004. His first semester of graduate school had hardly begun at Tulane when hurricane Katrina forced a temporary relocation to the University of Missouri in the Fall of 2005. He returned to New Orleans the following semester to complete the Master of Arts in French. He then spent a year on fellowship at l'École Normale Supérieure in Lyon, France. Upon returning to the United States, Scott served as a Lecturer of French at Baylor University from 2008-2010. He returned in 2010 to the University of Missouri to pursue a doctoral degree in French.