

l'Écorce grossière, l'âme aristocrate:
Literary Representations of Cajuns in Francophone Louisiana,
Nineteenth Century to Present

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ABSTRACT

Cajuns have been traditionally defined as originating from French Acadian refugees who arrived in Louisiana from present-day Nova Scotia beginning in the late eighteenth century. However, many of the people who identify today with the Cajun ethnicity are not descendants of those Acadian settlers. Moreover, this and other modern definitions of 'Cajun' have been solidified fairly recently in the twentieth century and have been formed through a dialogue with Anglo-American stereotypes. These stereotypes restrict the identity and ignore the major influences from a plethora of diverse cultures.

This study is a literary attempt to recognize and provide some of the historical images constructed from outside the community and to show how they have been adopted into self-identification of Cajuns. While a few studies have approached the Cajun identity in terms of its confrontation with Americanization, this study demonstrates how the transformation of 'the Cajun' began long before Americanization. It also demonstrates the similarly problematic attempt at 'Frenchification,' past and present. This is done through the lens of francophone literature produced in the state about the Cajuns and the Acadians in the nineteenth century. This study provides Francophone alternatives to the English stereotypes and accounts for the complexities of Cajun identity while providing an alternative portrayal with which to enter a dialogue.