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Creole & Multiracial (Research Report #122)

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April 2014
Research Report #122

Racial and Ethnic Groups in the Gulf of Mexico Region

Creole & Multiracial

Introduction

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

Of these various groups, we have focused our reviews on eight specific racial, ethnic and ancestry groups: African-Americans, Cajuns, Creoles, Croatians, Latinos, Native Americans, Vietnamese and Other Asians (not Vietnamese). Although some of these groups may be small in number, their effects on the region have been substantial (see Table 2). For instance, although only about 7.8% of the residents in the region identify as Cajun/French, this group has had significant effects on shaping the cultural and economic climate of the region through the tradition of Mardi Gras, ethnic food ways, commitment to Catholicism and culture of revelry.

These eight groups emerged as significant through the existing literature that details their unique efects in building the culture, economic stability and political climate in the region, as well as their ties to the oil and gas industry operating in the Gulf of Mexico. For each group, we focused our review on common elements such as the culture, history, immigration, ties to the oil and gas industry and economic standing of the group. In addition to these common elements, we examined other prominent themes that emerged for particular groups. For instance, the effects of Hurricane Katrina on the Vietnamese fishermen living in southern Louisiana was widely discussed by scholars and thus became a prominent discussion in our review of the literature on Vietnamese living in the region.

Below you will find the eighth in this series of reviews. This review focuses primarily on the Creoles. It also describes some multiracial groups with a historical presence, as well as the current trends in multiracial identity in the Gulf of Mexico region. Concentrated in coastal Louisiana, Creoles represent one of the larger and more well-known multiracial (or mixed-race) groups that have long histories in the region. More recently, data from the 2000 and 2010 censuses show that a sizeable portion of Americans and Gulf Coast residents persist in claiming multiracial identities.

Origins and History

Terminology

Creole is a polysemous term, used at different times and various geographical areas to describe diverse identities, languages, people, ethnicities, racial heritages and cultural artifacts (see, for example, Brasseaux 2005; DuBois and Melancon 2000; Domínguez 1986; and Long 1980). Contemporary use of *Creole* in the United States is restricted to southern Louisiana and the coastal portions of Mississippi and Ala-

Table 1. Diversity in the Gulf of Mexico Region

Ancestry Category	Number	Percentage of Total Population
British	15.36%	2,147,789
French	7.81%	1,092,377
German	8.71%	1,218,236
Middle Eastern	0.49%	68,544
Northern/Eastern European	5.24%	733,424
Southern European	3.09%	432,724
Sub-Saharan African/West Indian	1.22%	170,670

Total Population: 13,985,914

Table 1 data from ACS Five-Year Estimates.

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

Racial/Ancestry Group	Number	Percentage of Total Population
African-American	2,568,703	19.14%
Cajun	1,092,377	7.81%
Croatian	6,422	0.05%
Latino	3,988,491	29.72%
Native American	85,455	0.64%
Other Asian	396,007	2.95%
Vietnamese	154,669	1.15%
White	8,912,239	63.72%
Two or More Races	305,214	2.27%

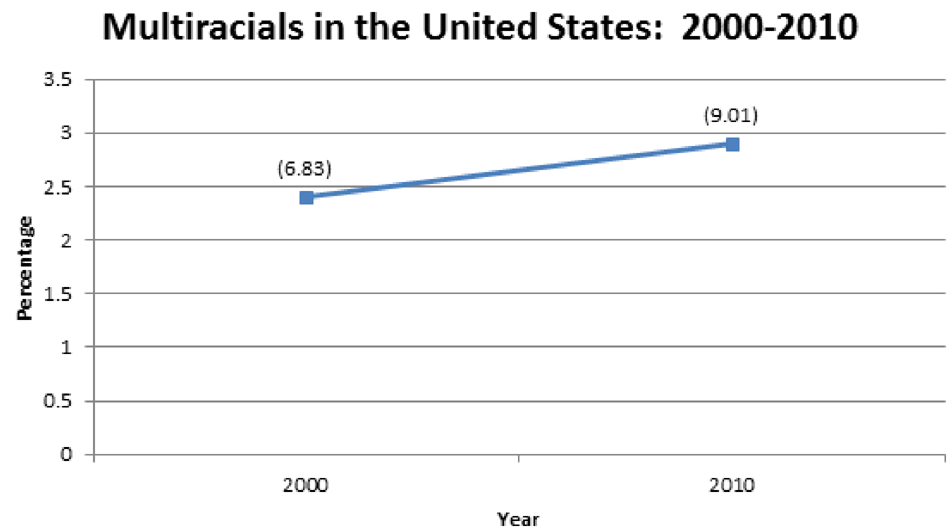
Table 2 data from ACS Five-Year Estimates and 2010 Decennial Census. Numbers do not add to 100 percent because individuals can indicate more than one race, ethnicity or ancestry group. "Other Asian" refers to Asian groups other than Vietnamese.

bama (Eble 2008). Precise definitions and explanations of *Creole* are difficult to establish because "almost everything about the word is contested" (Mentz 2004: 14). Debate continues over the derivation of the word itself, with some crediting Portuguese (*crioulo*) while others look to Spanish (*crollo*) or French (*créole*) origins (see Brasseaux 2008; Hall 1992; Long 1980; and Tregle 1992).

Uses of Creole have shifted and evolved over the time, and consequently the term has come to mean very different things to different people. Creole individuals typically identify their ancestries back to some combination of French, Spanish and/or Haitian settlers who came and lived in the area prior to the Louisiana Purchase. Some of these early settlers coexisted with Native Americans and, therefore, some Creoles also may claim a Native American heritage (see Jolivétte 2007 or Thorne 1987).

Although the general contemporary understanding is that Creole is a mixed-race identity that has at least some African ancestry, some scholars distinguish between "Creoles" and "Creoles of Color," which would suggest important differences within the shared identity (e.g., Douboid and Harvath 2003; DuBois and Melancon 2000; Dorman 1996; and Eble 2008). These distinctions may have further varied geographically as the tripartite racial caste system was more firmly entrenched in coastal than in prairie parishes in Louisiana (Kammer 1941). Still today there are Louisianans who identify as Creole but claim no African ancestry at all (Brasseaux, Fontenot and Oubre 1994; Domínguez 1986; and Dormon 1996). To this end, a working definition of *Creole* is dependent on the historical and social context in which the term appears (Domínguez 1986; Hirsch and Logdson 1992; and Henry and Bankston 2001 1998).

Figure 1.



Data from U.S. Decennial Census. (Multiracial population in millions in parentheses.)

Origins

Creole populations in the Gulf of Mexico region trace their heritage back to "Old World" origins in Europe and Africa (see e.g., Edwards 1994; Hanger 1996; Henry and Bankston 2002; and Mandelblatt 2002). Colonial expansion of European political powers throughout the world, from the 16th through the 18th centuries, gave rise to numerous Creole languages and cultures. These Creole societies shared some common features such as "structured economic, and often political, contacts with Western Europe, a self-image as pioneering societies surviving or thriving in nearly unlivable surroundings and a heterogeneity of physical appearance, language and cultural heritage" (Domínguez 1986: 13). Early uses of the term *Creole* tended to include anyone "born in, native to or committed to the area of living," and this meant slaves were included (Braithwaite 1971: xv; see also Brasseaux 2005). Initially self-adoption of the term carried a political implication where *Creoles* felt differently about their homeland than did their progenitors (Long 1980).

History

Like many ethnic populations, the Creoles celebrate their rich and complex history. To better understand the conditions through which Creoles came to occupy a unique political, economic and social position in the Gulf of Mexico region, we present an overview of how Creole identity was formed – and persisted – in the face of several shifts in state sovereignty.

Under French Sovereignty

Beginning with Jacques Cartier's exploration of the St. Lawrence River in 1534, France gained sovereignty over vast geographical territory in North America. Eventually, the French established five colonies: Canada, Acadia, Hudson Bay, Newfoundland and Louisiana (Pritchard 2004; Johnston 2001). Administration of the French North American Empire was located in Louisiana, which extended from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes and encompassed most of the Mississippi River's drainage basin. An administrative capital originally was established in Mobile but later was moved to Biloxi. Eventually, due to fears surrounding diseases, hurricanes and tides, the inland harbor capital La Nouvelle-Orléans (New Orleans) was established.

Colonization was undertaken by military personnel, French settlers and French-Canadians. In addition to these groups, large numbers of enslaved Native Americans and indentured servants were included in the colonial population, which in later years constituted nearly half of colonial Louisiana population (Young and Young 1992). As colonial expansion increased, the system of indentured servitude became strained due to a narrowing supply of poor white colonists and increasing tensions with the native populations. Consequently, largely due to the unprotected status of African peoples, the use of black slaves as laborers increasingly became the norm (see e.g., Davis 2011; Hall 1992). From 1719 to 1731, over 6,000 slaves were brought to colonial Louisiana, with nearly 4,000 of them originating from the Bambaras and Senegambia regions of Africa (Hall 1992).

In colonial Louisiana biracial unions between whites and blacks were technically illegal but relatively commonplace and socially accepted (e.g., Dominguez 1986; Hall 1992; Fairclough 1995). While "Mulattos," the offspring of such unions, were not recognized as being white. They were, however, often manumitted (freed from slavery). At this time in much of the Gulf region, racial classification was based on a tripartite, where distinctions were made between whites, colored and blacks, with the main distinction between the latter populations being slavery (Dominguez 1986; Dubois and Melancon 2000; Hall 1992; Fairclough 1995). In fact, so commonplace was the manumission of people of color with mixed ancestry that in 1810 it was the presumption of the Louisiana Supreme Court that all people of mixed race were free (Hall 1992).

During this time, evidence suggests the term *Creole* was used to designate numerous groups: the native-born first-generation European settlers, immigrants, black slaves, Mulattos and free people of color (Dominguez 1986). Such designation is problematic, however, insofar as the term *Creole* often was used interchangeably with other terms such as "slave," "negro," "native," "Indian," and "Creole negro." In fact, Dominguez (1986:98) notes records from the French colonial government include references to Creoles but there is "little evidence of an exclusive (or allegedly exclusive) political action or social group labeled Creole."Dominguez (*ibid*) goes on to further note a lack of evidence of infighting or tension between the Creole and non-Creole populations, a sentiment echoed by Hall (1992), who notes that, due to general pressures associated with survival, "notions of racial and/or cultural and national superiority were a luxury." (155)

Under Spanish Sovereignty

Resulting from a treaty between France and Spain, in approximately 1768, the Spanish government took possession of the Louisiana territory and almost immediately colonial residents reacted with hostility toward new taxes and other impositions placed upon them (see e.g., Davis 2011; Dubois and Melancon 2000; and Dominguez 1986). In what has been dubbed the Louisiana Rebellion of 1768, settlers from the New Orleans area of the territory, rallying behind the French flag and their espoused French identity, expelled Antonio de Ulloa, the first Spanish governor. The Louisiana Rebellion ultimately was put down, and a replacement governor, Alejandro O'Reilly, implemented Spanish law.

During this time, to promote loyalty toward the Spanish crown and stimulate economic and political stability, immigration policies were enacted that encouraged an influx of Spanish elites with the enticement of private ownership of land (Dominguez 1986). In addition to the Spanish elites, land ownership also was granted to several Francophone groups: Royalist aristocracy seeking refuge from the French Revolution, white Creole bourgeoisie, Acadians recently deported from Canada and free people of color, as well as a small group from French-controlled portions of the island of Hispaniola.

As a result of these Spanish land-tenure policies, two classes of landowners were created: 1) estate owners, who gained power through ties to the Crown and perceived merit and 2) small farmers/peasants, who produced food crops for the colonial domestic market (Brasseaux, Fontenot and Oubre 1994; Dominguez 1986; and Hanger 1996). Spanish law legitimated a demarcation of rights to land through the identification and creation of aristocracies and meritocracy. Dominguez (1986:104) notes that "The affects such a system of land grants upon colonial Louisiana at the close of the 18th century cannot be overestimated." This system increased social and economic stratification in Louisiana and created a self-styled aristocracy among the estate owners with the small farmers/peasants later becoming the "poor whites" of the antebellum and postbellum South (Brasseaux 1989; Buck 1925; Shugg 1939). The differentiation between these groups became compounded by the economic prosperity brought to some from accelerated economic growth associated with the sugarcane plantation system (Clark 1970). Individuals who managed to secure sizable land grants not only gained economic power but also accrued greater social standing and advantages nearing the turn of the 19th century.

Scholars have noted that during this period neither Cajuns nor those who assimilated into Cajun communities chose to identify as Creole (see e.g., Dominguez 1986 and Hall 1992). As an adjective,

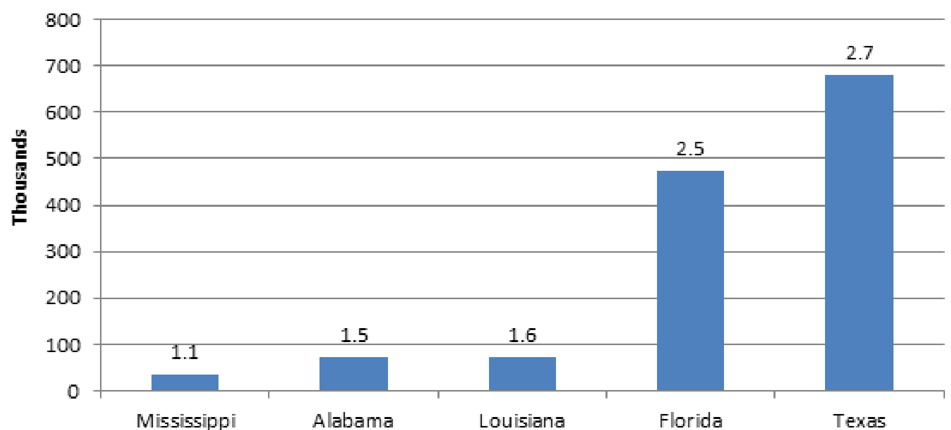
however, Creole does begin to be applied as a marker of higher status afforded to Louisiana-born people. For example, Creole was used to distinguish Louisiana-born slaves from those born in Africa (Tregle 1952, 1992). Additional colonial documents often referred to a person, usually someone with African ancestry, as a "Creole of Louisiana," "Creole of Jamaica," "Creole of Martinique," etc. Hanger (1996:6) noted that "It was during the three and half decades of actual Spanish rule in Louisiana (1769-1803) that free persons of African descent in New Orleans made their greatest advances in terms of demographics, privileges, responsibilities and social standing."

Creole identity was not innately linked to racial demarcation under Spanish sovereignty, however. On the contrary, Creole identity began to acquire certain socioeconomic dimensions (i.e., greater wealth and higher statuses) as well as certain cultural facets (i.e., persisting ties to the French culture) (Dubois and Melancon 2000; Klinger 2003; White 1998).

Creole still referred to people born in the colony regardless of race, with a mixed ancestry and lighter skin providing higher statuses and additional social opportunities from nonwhites, free people of color or colored Creoles, as they would come to be known. These "colored Creoles" were able to freely amass a degree of education and did well when contrasted to the people who would come to be known as black Creoles (see e.g., Dubois and Melancon 2000; Dubois and Horvath 2003; and Dominguez 1986).

Yet, nonwhite Creoles continued to live in an ambiguous state, sharing French or Spanish language, Catholic religion and European education of elite whites, but also keeping indigenous African traditions from their earlier heritage (Gehman 1994). Furthermore, those who would be identified as white Creoles, along with the colored Creoles, came to form a unique socioeconomic community that occupied the upper strata of the Louisiana class structure (see e.g., Bryan 2000; Dominguez 1986; and Fairclough 1995). The term Creole was used during this period but its use was not widespread as an important marker of identity until Louisiana came under the rule of the U.S. government (Tregle 1992).

Figure 2.



Data from U.S. Decennial Census. (Percentage of total population presented as data labels.)

Under American Sovereignty

Following a brief return to French sovereignty, the United States government took control of the Louisiana territory in 1803. At that time, being born in Louisiana became the important identifying characteristic by which native-born people were distinguished from Anglo-American settlers and European immigrants moving into colony. *Creole* began to be widely used (as a noun) as an indicator of native birth in Louisiana, racial heritage notwithstanding (Dominguez 1986; Klingler 2003).

The incoming non-Creole people demonstrated contempt for the French Creole culture, language and adherence to the Catholic religion. U.S. territorial Louisiana began to be Anglicized, as books, newspapers and magazines switched from French to English. In 1812, the Louisiana state Constitution, written entirely in English, was adopted with no specific delineation of rights to Francophones, even though they represented the majority population in the state. Furthermore, native-born Creoles and Anglo-Americans demonstrated the differences in terms of architectural style and political leanings, with the English community tending to be sympathetic to the ideologies of racism, anti-Catholicism and xenophobia espoused by the Whigs and "Know Nothing" parties (Dominguez 1986; Lanusse 1911; Desdunes 1911).

Facing a rapidly growing English-speaking community, Creoles began to lose not only linguistic dominance but also social, political, numeric and economic clout. Creole identity began to be seen in a negative light by the English-speaking population and was used to demark those who "spoke French and identified with French culture." (Dominguez 1986:125) This seemingly straightforward recognition of Creole quickly became problematic, however. Where language and culture provided a superficial commonality for Creoles, biological race increasingly

divided them. Demarcation between native-born white, colored and black Creoles became more pronounced, and distinct identities for the different groups began to emerge. Initially, while white Creoles asserted that by definition Creoles were white, they nonetheless allowed the colored Creoles limited access to the term noting that "New Orleans has had an unusually superior class of black." (Judge Miner Wisdom, quoted in Fairclough 1995:10).

The term colored Creoles inadvertently gave rise to a misconception that Creole necessarily indicates an individual of mixed race ancestry (Tregle 1992). White Creoles, who found themselves increasingly aligned with the Anglophone community as enmity between blacks and whites intensified as the Civil War approached, actively sought to correct this "misunderstanding" with the assertion that Creoles had no African ancestry but rather were of European descent and native-born to Louisiana.

Tregle (1952, 1992) notes that such endeavors by white Creoles were so successful that a "mythology" of *Creole* as a native-born white population emerged and persisted in many parts of Louisiana well into the latter half of the 20th century. Tregle (*ibid*) further notes the myth of the "white only" Creole has never accurately reflected how the term has been used in Louisiana. The wealthy estate-owning white Creoles switched to English, increasingly socialized with the Anglophone population and began to actively campaign for the dissolution of the ternary classification system in favor of the binary system predicated upon race: black versus white (see also Davis 2011; Dominguez 1986).

Following the adoption of the binary system of racial classification, the white population, be they Creole or Anglo, no longer perceived a clear distinction between colored Creoles and black Creoles. Nevertheless, colored Creoles represented a unique threat to the white population (Dominguez 1986). Americanization may have legally redefined Louisiana's population, but the social lines of the triple-caste system were never completely erased (Dollar 2004). Instead, old cultural distinctions remained, and institutions like churches and schools in the Creole and African-American communities actually augmented separate identities among them through time (see also Brasseaux, Fontenot and Oubre 1994). Consequently, the relatively large, free, property-owning populations that comprised the colored Creoles became the targets of frustrated whites who endeavored to "repatriate," "recolonize" and/or "extinguish" such threats (Brasseaux 1996:77-78).

Building on the adoption of the binary system of racial classification, the future trajectories of colored Creoles and black Creoles were fundamentally altered by three specific social changes (see e.g., Dominguez 1986; Dubois and Melancon 2000; Hall 1992; and Fairclough 1995). First came outlawing the marriage or cohabitation between people of different races. Many scholars assert that miscegenation further deprived colored Creoles of their previously held separate status from black Creoles. Dominguez (1986:137) makes the case that such actions actually forced the Creole population to claim either a white or black heritage, citing the article in the French newspaper *Le Carillon* on July 13, 1873:

> **From One Side or from the Other**
> The time has come to indicate what the sons of Louisiana want – that one must be either WHITE or BLACK, that each person must decide for himself. There are two races here: one superior, the other inferior.… Their separation is *absolutely* necessary. So let us separate ourselves as of today into two distinct parties – the White Party and the Black Party. Positions will be made clear – between white Louisiana and black Louisiana. *Le Carillon* displays the white's flag, with the profound conviction that only within its folds can Louisiana be saved (Dominquez's translation, 291).

Dominguez notes that ideas such as this "spread like wildfire throughout Louisiana" (*ibid*: 137), often with violence (i.e., the September 14, 1870, "Battle for White Supremacy," which took place in the Canal Street area of New Orleans).

The second social change came in the wake of increasing racial polarization when white Creoles, facing pressure to maintain their racially undifferentiated social category, increasingly embraced the demand for *sang pur* or pure-blooded. At the time, de facto law required that white individuals be able to prove the "purity" of their ancestry for five generations, often referred to as the "1/32nd law." Responding to a notions that all Creoles had, at a minimum, a "touch of the tar brush," white Creoles actively set about in books, speeches, lectures and articles redefining Creole as an exclusively white identity tied to French and Spanish ancestry (see e.g., Gayarré 1886; Poché 1886; and Wilson 2007). These endeavors were aided by such entities as the English-speaking *Daily Picayune*, which in its Dec. 22, 1884, edition asserted that "Creole is not used by Americans unless referring to people (of) Spanish or French descent" (quoted in Dominguez 1986:143).

Such actions, compounded by the lack of social and political power of colored Creoles and black Cre-

oles, resulted in Creole acquiring a "white only" label, a myth that would persist well into the 20th century. The most famous of the segregationists was Leander "The Judge" Perez, a member of the Isleno community whose ancestors came from the Canary Islands and settled in Plaquemines Parish, La. Perez dominated the political scene in Plaquemines Parish from 1920 to 1960, and his influence extended into state and national politics in support of segregationist candidates (Conaway 1973, Jeansonne 1977).

Despite legal restrictions of Jim Crow segregation, Creoles of color persisted in maintaining unique identity. Eble (2008:48) asserts this uniqueness was maintained by upholding that which "had earlier set them apart – their French language, culture, education, religion and often a mixed heritage of African, French, Spanish and Native American." (See also Bond 1931) While legal statute restricted Creoles of color from many opportunities afforded by "whiteness," they continued identifying as *Creole* and found solidarity in church attendance, schooling and living within the same neighborhoods. According to Logsdon and Bell (1992:256), Creoles of color were instrumental in the establishment of the *Crusader*, the only black daily newspaper published in the United States during the 1890s, which was "an aggressive vehicle for racial protest in New Orleans."

At the time, many Creoles of color stepped up as leaders in opposition to race-based policies within the Gulf Coast region as well as nationally. For example, Homer Plessy, a Creole of color from New Orleans, challenged segregation laws, including Louisiana's "equal, but separate" train car accommodations for whites and blacks (Margo 1990: 68; see also Davis 2011; Dominguez 1986). In 1896, however, the U.S. Supreme Court denied this appeal in the momentous *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. This ruling resulted in the "separate but equal" principle (which would remain valid for another 60 years). Facing intense racial polarization and repudiation of cultural identity, the region witnessed a mass exodus of the colored Creoles and black Creoles, leaving Louisiana predominantly white for the first time in decades (Fairclough 1995).

Emboldened by the outcome of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, a third social change was instituted that altered the trajectories of Creoles of color. In 1898, the Louisiana state constitution was ratified and established literacy as an essential condition to be considered worthy to participate in democratic voting processes. In so far as only a small handful of colored Creoles were able to meet this condition, the new law in effect stripped all nonwhite Creoles of meaningful political influence. In addition, voter registrars used newly implemented poll taxes to further restrict participation of nonwhite Creoles (Davis 2011; Dominguez 1986).

The first half of the 20th century saw increased formalization and legalization of segregation throughout the South. Creoles continue to be identified as white, with little to any acknowledgment of colored Creoles or black Creoles (Davis 2011; Dominguez 1986; and Hanger 1996). Tensions between colored and black Creoles and other populations of blacks increased in different ways in different parts of Louisiana. In comparison to the plantation system in the prairies, the "half-agricultural, half-aquatic life of the narrow fringes" bayous were more egalitarian, less restricted by class and more conducive to casual friendships and intermarriage (Kane 1944). Yet, the effects of segregation were perhaps harshest in these instances, as families and groups filed lawsuits and claims in a phenomena known as the "color trial" – to define oneself as superior to others and more deserving of jobs and good schools (Kane 1944). According to Kammer (1983):

> Plaquemines has a racial problem that was not found in the other three parishes. On both sides of the river are to be found mulattoes, who refuse to mix with Negroes of darker shade, and the whites refuse to mix with either. This color discrimination is carried over into the churches: The middle aisle is reserved for whites, one side aisle for mulattoes and one side aisle for the dark Negroes.. . . The basis for this discrimination seems to be that the mulattoes all claim to be descendants of the "free people of color" who came to Louisiana after the revolt in Santo Domingo. They were never slaves.

In some circles of New Orleans, by contrast, Creoles of color and other black populations rarely encountered each other (Fairclough 1995). According to civil rights leader A.P. Tureaud's recollections of his childhood days in New Orleans prior to the outbreak of the World War I, "There wasn't too much mingling between Creole Negroes and what we called the American blacks above Canal Street." (quoted in Fairclough 1995: 14-15) In addition, not only were these two groups strangers to one another, but a certain degree of the hostility existed such that one ran the risk of assault by inadvertently straying into unfamiliar territory (see also Worthy 1984; Logsdon 1987). Additional derision between these groups arose from accusations that "Creole pride" fostered a sense of cultural superiority and fixation on European-looking features (Dorman 1996). Fairclough (1995: 16) observed that "If color represents a source of division among blacks in Louisiana, it also consistently

reminded them of the hypocrisy, inconsistency and illogicality of segregation." Some of these inconsistencies were portrayed in a collection of Creole folk tales, published by Hewitt Ballowe in 1947, which both depict the predominant stereotypes of the Creoles and also refer to differences between the black Creole and "de coleurs," or colored Creoles, at the time.

Occupying a unique, albeit marginalized, social position afforded by education, assertiveness and self-confidence (Fairclough 1995:3), colored Creoles sought to combat racial discrimination by becoming "the social and political leaders of their race" (Brasseaux et al. 1994:104). To this end, in 1915 colored Creoles established a branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in New Orleans. Colored Creoles also forged alliances with white Republicans and actively sought to be engaged in the political process. Furthermore, colored Creoles were active in establishing social and professional services in terms of education, religion, recreation, medical/health care and legal and financial affairs. At the same time, the distinction between colored/black Creoles and other black American groups became increasingly difficult to maintain as a result of a decline in the French language, intermarriage and social mobility, as well as a culture of white supremacy (Fairclough 1995). Allison Davis, the acclaimed anthropologist who pioneered research on Southern race and class in the 1930s, noted that "The Creole group itself is merging socially and biologically into the American Negro group." (quoted in Fairclough 1995: 17)

Creole increasingly became a "white only" identity as racial classification laws were expanded in the 1940s to the point that: "Any degree of traceability was sufficient for Negro classification." (Brasseaux et al 1994:123) These laws continued on the books until 1970 when Louisiana state legislators adopted Act 46, which specified "1/32nd Negro blood" as requisite for delineating an individual as "colored." Over the next 13 years, Act 46 not only faced condemnation from the national and international press for its racist overtones but also faced a continuing challenge by Creoles of color (Brasseaux et al 1994). Responding to these pressures on July 2, 1983, Act 441 was signed into law. It not only repealed Act 46 but also allowed race to be self-identified (*West's Louisiana Statutes* 1990). Since then,the Gulf Coast region has witnessed a resurgence of Creoles of color, many of whom are "oriented toward pride in being both black *and* French" (Spitzer 1986:154; see also Brasseaux et al 1994; Dormon 1996). Today, the politically concocted "white only" Creole identity is no longer given or defended (Eble 2008: 49, see also Knörr 2010).

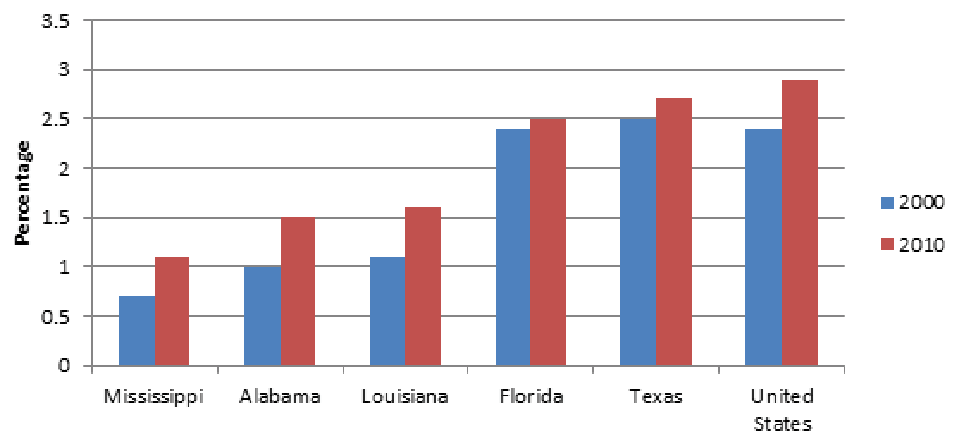
Contemporary Creole Culture

The Creoles of the Gulf Coast region are an excellent example of a group that is increasingly proud of its mixed ancestry as well as mixed cultural heritage. Spitzer (1986: 154) notes Creoles express great pride in the "essentially bivalent properties of their ethnic identity." In the Atchafalaya Basin, Gramling (1982) asserts the ethnic mix of Creole, Cajun and Indian culture led to many shared characteristics as the Creoles assimilated certain African linguistic and cultural traits that persist even today. Brasseaux et al (1994:17) make specific note of Creole cultural priorities of "religion (Catholics), family (of nuclear and extended), family values and hard work near the values of neighboring Cajuns" (see also Nordmann 1990). Increased recognition and acceptance of the cultural dynamics that previously isolated Creoles from full social participation are now seeing a revived interest in "traditional Creole culture." (Brasseaux et al 1994: 125)

Language

One way Creole ancestry is claimed is through language (see e.g., Corne 1999; Dajko 2012; Dubois and Melancon 2000; Klinger 2003; Neumann 1985; Marshall 1997, 1989; and Valdman 1997, 1992). Very important to linguistics is the notion of Creole languages, a 20th century employment of the word, also used in Louisiana to describe a type of contact-induced French vernacular. For more information on the linguistic uses of the word Creole in Louisiana, see, for

Figure 3.



Data from U.S. Decennial Census.

example, Baronian (2005), Bodin (1990), Corne (1999), Greene (2005), Oetting and Garrity (2006), Marshall (1997) and Valdman (1997). At least three distinct varieties of French have been used in the Gulf Coast region: (1) Louisiana Standard French, by far the "purest" of the varieties, is near extinction; (2) Cajun (Acadian) French has some traits in common with the French spoken in eastern Canada, and tonal fluctuation is characteristic; and (3) the slaves developed a Creole language, still spoken by many blacks, and one of its characteristic features is agglutination (e.g., Bailey 2003).

Cajun and Creole French are thought of by scholars and lay people alike as the two varieties of French spoken in Louisiana (Camp 2010). Although Cajun French has higher prestige and a larger number of speakers than Creole, the latter is argued to have influenced the former in the case of negative imperative constructions (e.g., Baronian 2005). A comparison of the phonological and lexical systems of the two dialects is sketched by Bodin (1990), who found the two languages influenced one another and became assimilated to the point that Louisiana Acadian often is, although incorrectly, viewed as a creolization of 17th century Colonial French.

In addition, Calvet (1996) documents an unusual case of creolization and linguistic alienation reported from sociolinguistic interviews with inhabitants of Kraemer, La., where villagers described themselves as French speakers and perceived a continuum between Creole and Cajun French. Local language repertoire depends on age, sex and profession, however (Lebas and Brehn 1996). The elderly were raised speaking Creole, learned English in school and can use Cajun, Creole and English in different contexts. Middle-aged residents perceive Creole as stigmatized and will not use it with outsiders. But those employed in tourism will accommodate Francophone visitors, adopting expressions from Cajun and Standard French. Young people are taught English in the home; boys learn some Creole elements from fathers and uncles and speak it among themselves as a kind of secret code.

Others have embraced the idea of "Creole Exceptionalism," which is defined as a set of beliefs, widespread among both linguists and nonlinguists, that Creole languages form an exceptional class on phylogenetic and/or typological grounds (DeGraff 2003, 2005). It also has nonlinguistic (e.g., sociological) implications, such as the claim that Creole languages are a "handicap" for their speakers, which has undermined the role Creoles should play in the education and socioeconomic development of monolingual Creolophones (DeGraff 2003, 2005).

Creole African American Vernacular English or CAAVE is a variety of English spoken by African Americans of French ancestry who live primarily in the French Triangle of Louisiana (Mentz 2004). A study comparing Cajun Vernacular English and Creole African American Vernacular English in rural speech communities of southern Louisiana has since been analyzed (Dubois and Horvath 2003).The English spoken by Creole African Americans in southern Louisiana reveals language change in the shift from French to English and the persistence of local forms of English (Dubois and Horvath 2003). A collection of folk tales from the people of Plaquemines Parish depict both the uniqueness of the Creole dialect in that particular location, as well as differences between "de couleurs" (colored creoles) and blacks from the perspective of the whites (Ballowe 1947).

Ethnic Identity

Contemporary Creole culture is in part being kept alive by various groups within the Gulf Coast region and beyond. Each year, thousands of Creoles gather at festivals in Louisiana, Texas and California. In addition, newspapers such as *Bayou Talk* are published in an effort to provide "a platform for the ongoing awareness of Creole cultural heritage and events." (*Bayou Talk*) From their investigations with two Louisiana French communities, Dubois and Melancon (2000) determined contemporary Creole identity is by and large predicated on having Creole ancestry. Such an assertion is somewhat at odds with other scholars who have pointed to the Creole Francophone language (see e.g., Baronian 2005; Bodin 1990; Greene 2005; Oetting and Garrity 2006; Marshall 1997; and Valdman 1997) as the primary attribute for claiming Creole identity. Dubois and Melancon found that having parents and grandparents speak French was secondary to establishing Creole genealogy (2000: 250-251). Furthermore, Dubois and Melancon complicated race-based scholarly conceptions of Creole identity, noting that 80 percent of their respondents indicated membership in a particular racial category is not essential for claiming Creole identity. Insofar as present-day Creole identity is linked to ancestry, it becomes necessary to understand what constitutes having Creole ancestry. Modern-day Creole ancestry is not claimed as a matter of establishing direct ties to the original French settlers, however, but rather is linked to having any connection whatsoever to French-speaking ancestry within the region (Mentz 2004: 21).

Dunbar-Nielsen (2000:9) affirms that the "true Creole is like the famous gumbo of the state, a little bit of everything, making a whole, delightfully flavored, quite distinctive and wholly unique." Due to historical pressures, however, some scholars have argued that colored Creoles may be more forthcoming in acknowledging mixtures than their

white Creole compatriots (see e.g., Domínguez 1986). Yet in actuality, mixed-race ancestry carries the same implication for Creoles of color as it does for white Creoles: Group membership is not simply the end result of ancestry, but rather self-identification as Creole involves an elemental choice. To that end, contemporary Creoles in the Gulf Coast region "choose to stress a particular ancestral connection over the other possible ones." (Domínguez 1986:188)

For example, Dormon (1996:169) notes that with the onset of the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s many Creoles of color chose to identify with non-Creole blacks in "the 'Black Pride' element that promised black solidarity in the quest for black rights" (sic). As such the younger generation of Creoles of color at this time chose to identify "completely with the black community," while the older generation tended to be "committed overtly to the movement while maintaining a clear sense of their identity as Creoles of color – still a very special people." (*ibid*; see also DeWitt 2008; Woods 1989) The documentary, *Ends of the Earth: Plaquemines Parish, La.*, depicts the lifestyles of colored Creoles in the city of Diamond (Alvarez and Kolker 1985).

The patterns of Creole self-identification established during the Civil Rights movement were reaffirmed by the aforementioned study by Dubois and Melcancon (2000: 253) where a survey conducted in two Creole communities in south Louisiana (Opelousas and Breaux Bridge) found that "younger and middle-aged respondents tend to adopt the African-American label (70 percent and 68 percent, respectively) much more than the older generation (33 percent)." Nonetheless, Woods (1972) documents how not all of the younger Creoles were comfortable with the separation from their Creole identity and inability to be differentiated from the larger Black community. Regrettably, due to political/historical climate, such individuals often found themselves in a socially marginalized context, facing pressures to conform/assimilate as "black" (see e.g., Domínguez 1986; Dormon 1996; Spitzer 1977; and Woods 1972). Dormon (1980) notes, however, that ethnic group after ethnic group – inspired by the successes of African-Americans in garnering political and economic power – began to re-examine their own identities and potential for group power. Eventually, a Creole revitalization movement would come, but only in the wake of efforts to re-establish the identity of the Acadians ("Cajuns") of the Gulf Coast region.

Concerned with preserving the unique Francophone dialects in the Gulf Coast region, Louisiana lawyer/politician James Domengeaux and his supporters were able to establish the Council for the Development of French Louisiana, known as CODOFIL. While CODOFIL was primarily focused on preserving/restoring spoken French to the Gulf Coast region, other organizations actively sought revitalization and preservation of the broader spectrum of Cajun culture (Paul, Cowley, Schafer and Blanchard 2012). To the degree these efforts were successful, popular use of the "Cajun" label in the Gulf Coast region soon assumed a ubiquitous connection to all things linked to French ancestry. The seemingly nonchalant use of the "Cajun" label and the incising "Cajunifiication" of south Louisiana understandably distressed groups within the region that had not claimed Acadian ancestry. Included with these non-Cajun groups was the black population and the Creoles of color. Dormon (1996: 173) captures the degree of the distress by citing one respondent who stated "I can't be Cajun. I'm *black* (*sic*, original emphasis)." An additional example can be seen in another person's protest of the "Ragin' Cajuns" label for the University of Southwestern Louisiana's black-dominated athletic teams (see Dormon 1996).

In response to the Cajunifiication of the entire region, numerous organizations began to be established from the 1970s on for the promotion and preservation of Creole heritage. Examples of these organizations include Louisiana Creole Heritage Center (located in Natchitoches, La.), St. Augustine's Historical Society (located in Natchitoches, La.), C.R.E.O.L.O. Inc. (located in Lafayette, La.), Cammie G. Henry Research Center (located in Natchitoches, La.), The International French Creole Culture Society (located in San José, Calif.), The Associates for the Preservation of Creole Cultural Heritage (located in Los Angeles, Calif.), Creole Heritage Education Research Society (located in Slidell, La.) and others. The vibrancy of the Creole culture can be seen in individual assertions of pride, such as the wearing of T-shirts and jewelry that express Creole identity. In addition, there are unique Creole flags, pins, prayers, poetry, literature and folktales (see e.g., Ancelet 1994; Greene 2005; Kein 2000; and Sexton 1992).

The Creoles the Gulf Coast region have a long-standing musical tradition. Synthesizing elements from a diverse cultural heritage, Creole music is influenced by rock, rhythm and blues, soul, hip-hop, jazz and many other American styles (Ancelet 1996). One unique musical style known as zydeco emerged as Creoles and Cajuns collaborated in terms of rhythms, percussion styles and improvisational techniques (see e.g., Ancelet 1989, 1991, 1996; DeWitt 2008; Henry and Bankston 2002; Minton 1996; and Spitzer 1986). Another hybrid form of music, swamp pop, emerged in the 1950s and has been wildly popular in the bayou

communities of southern Louisiana and southeastern Texas. A fusion of Cajun, rhythm and blues, country and pop music, swamp pop influenced Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis and other early rock 'n' roll stars (Bernard 1996).

While Creole folk music, zydeco, swamp pop and Creole blues are relatively well known, perhaps the least noted form of Creole music is the popular 19th century sheet music (sometimes called "concert" music). On this topic, Sullivan (2000) provides an overview of the accomplishments and background of musicians such as Edmond Dédé, Sidney and Lucien Lambert, Victor-Eugène Macarty, Samuel Snaör and Rasile Barès.

Arguably one of the best ways in which the multifaceted heritage of Creole people of the Gulf Coast region is exemplified is found in the uniqueness of their cuisine. Noted Creole poet and scholar Sybil Kein suggested that Creole cuisine is best understood as revising the old adage "too many cooks spoil the pot" into a more applicable expression "many cooks spawn the pot." (2000:244) Beyond the obvious connections to France, Spain and the United States, scholars have traced various aspects of Gulf Coast Creole cuisine to traditions from numerous countries from West Africa to the Northeastern coast of south America and the Caribbean (see e.g., Burton and Lombard 1978; Harris 199; Kein 2000; Mandelblatt 2002; McKee 1991; and Mendes 1971). Eble (2008) notes that in practice, when describing the food, many people in the Gulf Coast region do not distinguish between *Creole* and *Cajun* dishes. But the *Official Louisiana Tour Guide 2013* notes that in contrast to Cajun cuisine, "Creole dishes are richer and more refined, often featuring wine- or liquor- based sauces and a butter and flour roux." (22)

Primary Occupations

From the early days of French colonization until World War II, Creole people living in the Gulf Coast region primarily were tied to various aspects of their respective agrarian systems. Further, in Louisiana, both Creole and Cajun occupational niches also depended on whether or not the communities were located closer to the coastal zones (or bayou or southeast Louisiana) versus agricultural zones (prairie, Acadiana or southwest Louisiana). Both white Creole and colored Creole communities were quite prosperous in antebellum Louisiana: Their members owned property and slaves, managed productive farms and worked as brick masons, carpenters, coopers, stone masons, mechanics, shoe makers, cigar makers and in other capacities as skilled artisans (Schweninger 1989). Colored Creole artisans in Plaquemines Parish also were famous for their duck decoys (Frank 1985).

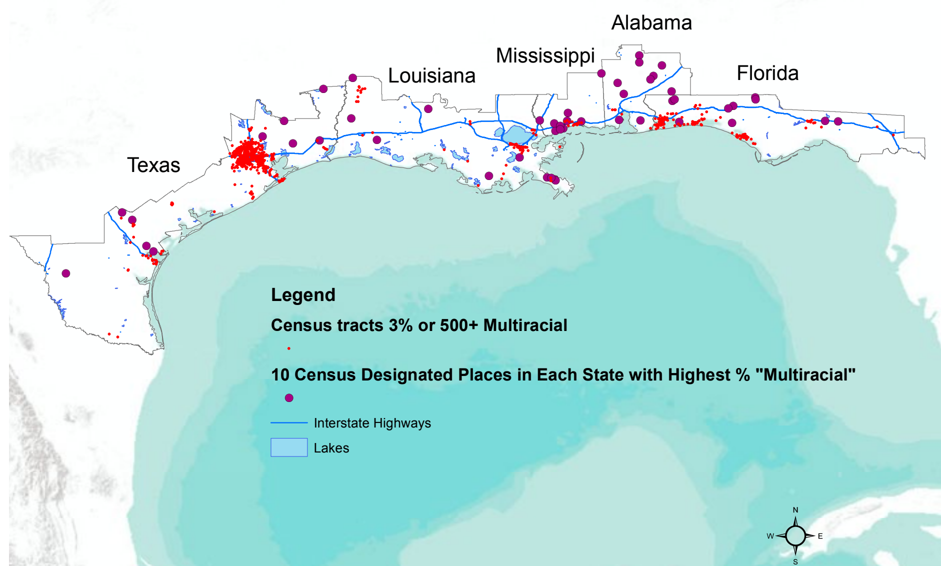
The Civil War and its aftermath were disastrous economically for colored Creoles because the vast majority of the wealthiest members of this community lost their land, slaves, farm machinery, livestock, buildings and personal possessions (Schweninger 1989). The colored Creoles who lost their wealth and status were not able to regain it during the Jim Crow era.

The economic boom experienced during the U.S. involvement in World War II introduced a range of new jobs to the area. A prospering construction industry and an influx of textile plants, as well as new opportunities associated with the oil and gas industry, provided opportunities not only to Creoles but to most people living in the Gulf Coast region (see e.g., Brasseaux et al. 1994; Dubois and Horvanth 2003; and Henry and Bankston 2002). One recent study identified Creoles employed in occupations such as agricultural, city employee, student, architecture, politics, military, construction, communications, consumer, shipbuilder, accountant, fisheries/oysters and oil and gas workers (Wroblewski, Strand and Dubois 2009). Overall, today it is not uncommon to find Creoles filling a variety of occupations and continuing to work in a broad range of industries.

Ties to Oil and Gas Industries

Although, to our knowledge, there exists no literature that specifically discusses a direct role Creoles in Gulf Coast region have filled in the oil and gas industries, there have been a few scholars who likened their experience to those of Cajuns (see e.g., Dubois and Harvath 2003; Henry and Bankston 2002; and Wroblewski, Strand and Dubois 2009). To that end, for a detailed account of how the oil and gas industries significantly have influenced the Acadian and Creole cultures since the industries' establishment in the early 1900s, we refer you to Paul, Cowley, Schafer and Blanchard (2012).

Several significant social effects should be considered following establishment of these industries. For example, not only did the oil and gas industries bring jobs to the Francophone communities of the region, additional amenities (e.g., stores, hotels, theaters, bakeries, restaurants and automobile dealerships) also arrived in relatively isolated communities (Bernard 2003). While such amenities provided novel opportunities, many Francophones expressed concern regarding such issues as environmental pollution and loss of the centrality of French, as well as cultural shifts brought about by the influx of outsiders. Furthermore, an unforeseen consequence of offshore oil drilling and establishment of marsh canals was severe land erosion. Ruston (1979) noted these ecological shifts altered



the ways the shrimp and fish populations thrived, which, in turn. disrupted traditional livelihood strategies in the region and prompted many Francophones to move further inland.

Historical Perspective on Race in the Gulf of Mexico Region

With racial attitudes shifting in America, some scholars sought to expand the study of racial diversity in the South beyond the confines established by other disciplines, which used white culture for the majority perspective while examining the polarized racial system of whites versus blacks, with the minority Indian population as a periphery subject matter (e.g., Jolivétte 2007; Nelson 2011; Zack 1995). These rigid categories gloss over the additional layers of diversity within this area (Hill and Beaver 1998), however. According to Williamson (1995), the majority of African-Americans are of mixed ancestry. Mulattoes – those who are half black and half white – are one of the most well-known groups of mixed races. The interactions of mulattoes and blacks throughout American history eventually resulted in a united cultural heritage. This "fusion" began during the colonial period as mulatto history and culture before it ended as negro history and culture toward the close of the 20th century (Williamson 1995).

For many years, mulattoes remained caught between the racial worlds of black and white because they refused to accept the socially inferior status given to blacks but often failed to pass as white. In some cases, mulattoes successfully isolated themselves from African-Americans. Although they could not attend schools with whites, they were allowed to establish institutions that separated their students from blacks (Park 1931). According to William Harlen Gilbert (1946), the United States remained a biracially segregated society following World War II, where many people whose ancestry included variations of white, Native American and black still failed to easily assimilate due to the continued use of categories such as "colored" and "mulattoes."

According to Davis (1941), the majority of freedmen in Louisiana during 1802 were mulattoes. While some remained in rural areas, many found employment in the city in areas such as mechanical arts and menial offices (Davis 1941). Freedmen in Louisiana were allowed to own property. Prior to the Civil War, they owned at least 20 percent of all the property in New Orleans. Although they still faced racial discrimination, some freedmen even owned slaves. Free blacks were treated almost as equals to whites in rural areas such as St. Landry Parish, where interracial marriages amongst whites and mulattoes were common (Jones 1950).

Over time, Native American tribes also began to comprise various mixtures of white, African-American and Indian ancestry (Johnson 1939). During the early to mid-1800s, African-Americans who escaped from slavery and fled to Florida ended up establishing their own sociocultural group known as the Black Seminole Maroons in Pilakikaha. Powell (2004) found that black Indians today still value their tribal recognition as an important part of their identity, which also yields them economic benefits. African-Americans in Louisiana who were part of recognized Indian tribes were significantly more likely to be younger and have higher annual incomes than black Indians from nonrecognized tribes (Powell 2004). According to Terrance Weik (2002), the Black Seminole Maroons likely lived among the Seminoles and Creek as slaves or equal members in their societies prior to settling in their own communities. While this group successfully settled in Florida, many Black Seminoles fled the state in 1821 for Andros Island, Bahamas, following the British in Nassau's refusal to keep their promise to aid the Seminole Indians and black Seminoles in their struggles against Floridian white oppressors. These descendants of the Florida Black Seminoles comprise the majority of the present population at Red Bay (Howard 2006). Around the same time, the Croatan Indians of Robeson County, N.C., were classified as colored by the whites because

their mixed ancestry included black blood. After the state constitution was ratified in 1835 and removed the Croatan's rights to suffrage and to attend white public schools, they constructed their own one-room schools so they would not have to attend the same institutions as African-Americans (Johnson 1939).

Vernon (1950) studied a triracial group of white, Indian and African-American ancestry known as the Sabines, who were settled within the fringes of Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes as of 1940. Another triracial group known as the Freejacks lived in the Fifth Settlement on the northern shore of Lake Pontchartrain during the 1970s, where they were bordered by two white communities to their east and west, a swamp to their north and timberland to their south. This group consisted of approximately 2,500 people. The original settlers were descendants from interracial marriages (not legally recognized) of sons of the first settler of Mandeville (Posey 1979). Excluded from white society, they migrated upriver and married with other mixed bloods, local Choctaw and Acolapissa Indians and possibly Baratarian pirates. These were free people of color (mostly from Haiti), distinguished from freed Negroes for having never been slaves. They owned land, including Spanish land grants, and established sufficiently profitable farms to own slaves. During the 1820s, repressive laws were passed that severely restricted their civil liberties. During this time, as well, white settler homesteaders from the Carolinas and Georgia surrounded the Freejack community. "The Freejack community was forced to maintain geographical isolation in order to emphasize a unique racial heritage and protect a separate cultural tradition." (Posey 1979)

Conclusion

In many ways, the Creole people of the Gulf Coast region truly represent the "melting pot" mantra espoused in American ideology. While some racial ideologues of the past espoused the idea that mixing produced hybridized, impudent, weak and sickly offspring, Creoles stand as evidence to just how wrong they were. Dancing to African rhythms and feasting on a cuisine infused with the flavors of many lands and people, the Creoles of the Gulf Coast region proclaimed a culture that has endured marginalization and now stands prominently alongside their diverse neighbors. Barthelemy (2000:275) asserts that contemporary Creole identity "rests on pride, not shame" of their mixed ancestry (see also Trentchoff 1975). This resurgence of pride in Creole culture in the Gulf Coast region "reflects changes in racial attitudes in the nation as a whole, as America slowly comes to grips with the unique status and racial identities of persons of mixed ancestry." (Brasseaux et al. 1994: 125)

The U.S. census started tracking people with multiracial identities in the 2000 census. Between 2000 and 2010 the percentage of Americans with multiracial identities increased from about 2.4 percent to 2.8 percent. Among states in the Gulf of Mexico region, Florida and Texas have almost the same percentages of multiracials as the nation as a whole, while Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi are only about 1 to 1.5 percent multiracial. Historically, the central Gulf states had many more multiracials, but this area witnessed a mass exodus of multiracials and African-Americans during the Reconstruction and Jim Crow periods. Also, Florida and Texas have higher populations of Latinos who identify as multiracial. The trends shown in the 2000 and 2010 census data suggest multiracial populations are growing faster than single race populations, particularly in the southern states. This trend is likely to continue for several decades.

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