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## **African Americans (Research Report #121)**

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# Racial and Ethnic Groups in the Gulf of Mexico Region



## African-Americans

### 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 less than 1 percent of the residents in the region identify as Native American,

this group was the foundation of the culture, economy and history of the region, and many Southerners can trace their ancestry to Native American roots.

These eight groups emerged as significant through the existing literature that details their unique effects in building the culture, economic stability and political climate in the region, as well as their ties to the oil and gas industry operating in the Gulf of Mexico. For each group, we have focused our review on common elements such as the culture, history, immigration, ties to the oil and gas industry and economic standing. In addition to these common elements, we examined other prominent themes that emerged for particular groups. For example, the effects of Hurricane Katrina on the Vietnamese fishermen living in southern Louisiana were 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 seventh in a series of reviews. This review discusses the experiences of African-Americans in the region.

### African-American or Black?

The terms African-American and black will be used interchangeably within this report.

Research has shown the in-group preference between these two labels has fluctuated throughout history. A 1991 survey conducted by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies found nearly three-fourths of African-Americans prefer the term black to African-American. Those results challenged the rising popularity of the term African-American following the 1989 African-American Summit in New Orleans, where it was suggested this identification would provide people a better sense of their cultural heritage (Social Science and Citizen 1991). Gallup polls throughout the 1990s and 2000s suggest the majority of black Americans do not

Table 1. Diversity in the Gulf of Mexico Region.

Ancestry Category	Percentage of Total Population	Number
British	15.36	2,147,789
French	7.81	1,092,377
German	8.71	1,218,236
Middle Eastern	.49	68,544
Northern/Eastern European	5.24	733,424
Southern European	3.09	432,724
Subsaharan 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	Percentage of Total Population	Number
African-American	19.14	2,568,703
Cajun	7.81	1,092,377
Croatian	.05	6,422
Latino	29.72	3,988,491
Native American	.64	85,455
Other Asian	2.95	396,007
Vietnamese	1.15	154,669
White	63.72	8,912,239

Table 2 data from ACS Five-Year Estimates and 2010 Decennial Census. Percentages 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.

have a preference for either term. Since 1994, however, respondents have been more likely to identify as African-American than black (Newport 2007).

The racial heritage of the Gulf Coast region has resulted in numerous groups with partial African-American ancestry. Some of the most notable groups of mixed African-American ancestry include Creoles of color (Brasseaux, Fontenot and Oubre 1994; Dormon 1996), mulattoes (Everett 1966, Usner 1981) and black Indians (Powell 2004). A significant number of Louisianans who identify themselves as Creole are African-American. The term Creole, as used in Louisiana technically refers to anyone who traces their heritage back to the early French, Spanish and Haitian settlers who came and lived in the area before the Louisiana Purchase. Although many modern-day Creoles are mixed-race people of African, European and possibly Native American ancestry, some Creoles have no African ancestry at all and therefore are not also considered African-American by the wider society (Brasseaux, Fontenot and Oubre 1994; Dormon 1996). Gramling (1982) asserts the ethnic mix of Creole, Cajun and Indian culture led to many shared characteristics as Cajuns assimilated certain African linguistic and cultural traits that persist even today. While we touch on some aspects of the multiracial identities and histories of African-Americans in this report, the final report in our series will discuss Creoles and multiracial groups in more detail.

## Origins and History

From the early 18th century to now, African-Americans have lived in Louisiana and the other Gulf states and played an integral role in shaping the linguistic and cultural traditions of the region.

African-American history in the Gulf of Mexico region dates back to the 17th century. In this section, we describe the literature that covers three broad historical periods: (a) the origins of the Louisiana Settlement to the Civil War; (b) the Civil War and Reconstruction; and (c) the Jim Crow era and the civil rights movement.

### Early Settlement Through the Civil War

Historical studies suggest the Gulf Coast region included both African slaves and free blacks dating back to the original settlements in the region. Settlers brought slaves with them as they occupied the territory of present-day Louisiana. Beginning in 1719, thousands of slaves were transported directly to New Orleans, many of them thought to be from the Senegambia region (Sydnor 1927; Usner 1981). Early in the history of this region, there were also free persons of color, some who arrived on ships coming from the French West Indies, some who purchased their own freedom and some who were manumitted (set free) by their masters (Sydnor 1927; Nordmann 1990; Brasseaux, Fontenot and Oubre 1994).

In the 18th century, New Orleans' population grew partially due to the in-migration of slaves. They were joined by Haitian refugees who fled their homeland following rebellion (Fussell 2007). Free blacks represented a significant percentage of New Orleans' population during the late 18th and 19th centuries, attaining their freedom through manumission, migration and coartacion (the right of self-purchase). Although many former slaves earned their liberty, they rarely enjoyed the same freedoms and rights extended to whites (Hanger 1997). Hanger (1997) argues free blacks had more opportunities to succeed under Spanish rule, as opposed to French rule or the United States. Shumaker

(1969) describes the Canary Island origins of many of the people who settled in St. Bernard Parish, including a large number of Spanish-speaking blacks who lived along the northern end of Bayou Terre-Aux-Boeufs in Verrette (Verret).

In Louisiana, the Code Noir (Black Codes) served as a legal basis for creating a third class of free blacks and mulattoes (Everett 1966). Kein's (2000) edited volume includes 14 essays that describe the histories and lifestyles of the free people of color in Louisiana. Aslakson (2007) argues that the role of free blacks in creating the three-caste society of New Orleans from 1791 to 1812 was critical in shaping the history of both the city and the broader region. Foner (1970) compared the three-caste system that emerged in Louisiana to that in Haiti and argued that, in both cases, the goal of the middle caste was to integrate into white society, but those goals were not realized because the structure of the caste system prevented it.

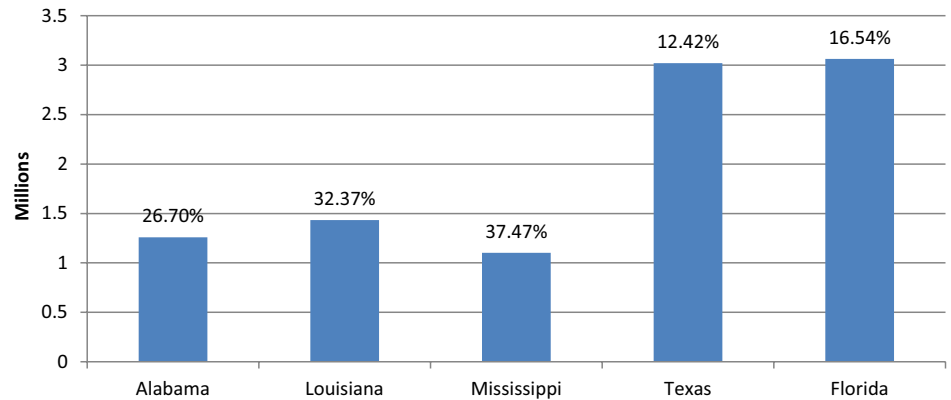
Free blacks enjoyed many legal privileges, including the right to own property in Louisiana and thus became the most prosperous group of African-Americans in the South during the antebellum period, but black ownership of property led to backlashes against the black property owners by poor whites (Schweninger 1990). At times, hostile reactions even led to government action. For instance, an escaped slave known as Bas-Coupé was a victim of a manhunt during the 1830s that was supported by the New Orleans city government (Wagner 2005). In some instances, free blacks owned their own slaves. Whitten (1995) notes that Andrew Durnford, who established a plantation in Plaquemines Parish on the Mississippi River, owned as many as 37 slaves.

In addition to the free blacks and mulattoes, historical literature also suggests significant interactions between African-Americans and Native Americans in the Gulf region (Powell 2004). During the frontier period (1699-1783), Usner argues that the substantial economic and social interactions between three major racial/ethnic groups – whites, blacks and American Indians, made the Gulf region and Louisiana, in particular, unique in many ways. There also were Native American slaves in the Gulf region, and some historians believe there was substantial intermixing between blacks (slaves and free) and Native American populations during this period (Usner 1981).

During the early 1800s, the shifting economic relationships between American settlers and blacks led to military intervention intended to control slave rebellions and American Indian resistance (Usner 1985). Milne (2006) argues the French mistreatment of the Natchez and other Southern Native American tribes, along with its use of African slaves, contributed to its inability to effectively govern and ultimately maintain its colonies in North America.

In the decades leading up to the Civil War, the three-caste society in the Gulf Coast region became enmeshed in the broader national economic cycles as well as the national discourse on slavery. Buchanan (2004) argues the invention of the Steamboat and the corresponding emergence of major urban centers along the Mississippi River (St. Louis, Cincinnati, Louisville, Nashville, Memphis, etc.) provided opportunities for free blacks from the South to find employment and for slaves to escape to the North. Prior to the Civil War, African-American slave labor was involved in nearly every aspect of the sugarcane industry because the crops were grown primarily on Southern plantations (Conrad and Lucas 1995).

## African-Americans in the Gulf of Mexico Region by State: 2010



Data from 2010 ACS Five-Year Estimates.

### Civil War and Reconstruction

The national debate and Civil War that brought an end to slavery and freedom for about 3.5 million black Americans led to significant changes for blacks throughout the South, including those living in the Gulf region. Those changes affected both former slaves and free people of color.

Many Southern states contributed troops to the Union Army during the Civil War. Rein (2001) presents an historical, descriptive account of Southern troops in Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas and other Southern states that joined the Union Army during the Civil War. While troops included whites, immigrants and Latinos, there also were a substantial number of free blacks from the “Trans-Mississippi” area that served in the Union Army (Rein 2001). Louisiana was particularly important because New Orleans was one of the largest ports and cities in the Confederacy that served as a transportation hub both up the Mississippi River to the urban centers of the Midwest and around the Atlantic to the Northeastern United States.

After the war, all black regiments posed serious political problems in the region. In Brownsville, Texas, all members of the 25th Infantry

were issued dishonorable discharges from the Army by President Roosevelt, who bowed to public outcry after a group of men went on a shooting rampage in the town that left one person dead and another wounded (Malbrew 2007). Malbrew (2007) argues the reasons for the dishonorable discharges were not supported by facts and also argues for reparations recognizing the discriminatory aspects of these actions.

Freed slaves who remained in the South sometimes stayed in the communities where they were slaves but in other cases moved to form new communities of freed slaves. For example, an isolated area on the Gulf Coast of Texas – Aransas, Texas – became home to a number of freed slaves (Allen and Taylor 1977).

Rosenberg (1988) argues that labor solidarity between black and white dockworkers was strong during Reconstruction, culminating in the general dock strike at the Port of New Orleans in 1907. Other scholars have argued, however, that “Jim Crow” racism, technological progress and white flight weakened interracial labor solidarity and unionism as a whole in the South. For example, Schwening (1989) details how many affluent free black and mulatto families in Louisiana

that had amassed wealth before the Civil War subsequently lost their fortunes during Reconstruction as a result of general backlash against them.

During Reconstruction, there was consensus among African-Americans to push for agriculture reforms that would allow them to become landowners (Bond 1938). After the Civil War, the Mississippi Delta region offered mutually beneficial economic opportunities in agriculture (primarily cotton) to both former slaves (to work for pay) and whites who owned the land. These opportunities were short-lived, however, (Willis 1991) because many blacks left the Delta region to escape white violence and lynching while pursuing opportunities in the industrializing North.

In response to increasing attacks by whites in Alabama, black leaders organized the “colored conventions” to explain their plight to the federal government (Leforge 2010). The limited success of these conventions and the increasing frustration with Reconstruction among many blacks in Alabama (feeling that the federal government was not doing enough to ensure their civil rights) led to an exodus movement to the Midwest that started in the late 1890s. During Reconstruction, African-American communists organized the East Central Alabama Negro tenant farmers into a sharecropper’s union that had no long-term effect on a national or local level due to the united opposition of whites (Beecher 1934).

Curtin (1992) describes the context of black political prisoners in Alabama during Reconstruction, suggesting that they played an instrumental role later in the long-term fight for racial justice in Alabama.

Scott (1994) analyzed how sugarcane workers in Louisiana fared

in the decades following the end of slavery. The sugar industry needed the surplus labor, therefore, former slaves therefore were able to secure paid labor on the sugar plantations. The social position of blacks remained subjugated in the still white-dominated society, however. According to Scott (1994), sugarcane workers in Louisiana fared about the same as sugarcane workers in Cuba and Brazil after slavery ended in those countries, even though sugar plantation owners pursued different methods of securing labor. 1870 to 1910 was a period when sugar planters in Louisiana believed black laborers were not suited to farming and producing sugar. In response, they unsuccessfully attempted to replace African-Americans with Chinese contract laborers and then Italian immigrants (Halpern 2004).

The Reconstruction period was a time of horrific violence against blacks by whites in the South, symbolized by lynching. According to Corzine (1996), lynching was a commonly employed form of extralegal justice and social control in which both blacks and whites participated. Although this violent practice has been primarily associated as a crime against blacks, African-Americans did not become the primary victims of this heinous act until 1886. Intra-racial lynching – involving whites executing other whites and blacks executing other blacks – was more common than interracial lynching during the 1880s, with whites suffering more deaths than blacks. Much of the black-on-black lynching was a response to the failure of the white-dominated criminal justice system to convict felons. One of the primary arguments the Ku Klux Klan used to support lynching was the claim that it was a necessary means to prevent the “black beast rapist” from sexually assaulting white women. During the 1890s, white mobs organized “spectacle lynchings” that featured the execu-

tion of African-Americans as the centerpiece for social gatherings attended by hundreds of white witnesses (Hill 2010).

About 500 African-Americans immigrated from the Chattahoochee Valley of Georgia and Alabama to the West African republic of Liberia between 1853 and 1903. Most of these people left during the uncertainty following the Civil War and sought to escape white supremacists. Others, however, were motivated by Black Nationalist attitudes and the evangelical opportunities to spread Christianity throughout Africa (McDaniel 2007).

### Jim Crow and Civil Rights

During the Jim Crow era of segregation and the events that led to and culminated in the civil rights movements of the 1960s, African-American and white Southerners continued to coexist in their daily lives. In the Alabama coal industry, for example, black and white workers were segregated during work, but there were enough similarities and shared hardships that blacks joined whites in a major industry strike in 1921 (Alexander 2004). In Louisiana, blacks became involved in the Louisiana Shrimp Festival in 1957, when a black festival subcommittee was established and organized a shrimp gumbo cooking contest, an art exhibit and tennis matches (Thibodaux 1986).

While groups such as the Louisiana French reaped socioeconomic benefits from the booming rice industry during the Jim Crow era, African-Americans – especially later arrivals – obtained manual labor jobs in that industry but were not involved in the more lucrative aspects of this business (Sexton 2006). Tenant farmers lived in particularly miserable conditions during this period, stuck in isolated and poorly furnished facilities (Agee and Evans 1941).

A questionnaire and series of interviews conducted by Richards (1943) found that African-American workers were primarily motivated by money when pursuing an occupation, and did not consider occupational change after obtaining a job that provided a living wage, although discrimination was commonly reported across all occupations observed in this study (1943). According to a series of interviews conducted within rural Georgia, the most influential African-American community leaders came from a diversity of professions, such as barbers, blacksmiths, brick masons, businessmen, cabinet makers, carpenters, dentists, farmers, janitors, jewelers, lumbermen, ministers, morticians, nurses, physicians and teachers (Edwards 1942).

New Orleans remained a critical area of racial tension during both the Jim Crow and civil rights eras. The city had mixed-race residential patterns during the Jim Crow era that set it apart from Northern cities and its Southern counterparts due to factors such as scarcity of higher terrain, economic difficulties which reduced opportunities to create new segregated subdivisions and a unique racial heritage with a lethargy towards segregation (Hastings 2004). Data collected from New Orleans employment firms in 1943 found that nearly all African-Americans were employed in unskilled labor positions. Manual labor was the only sector where blacks and whites worked the same jobs; only one in four employers reported this form of integrated labor (Wilson and Gilmore 1943). While many Southern cities became known as the exclusive domain of a single black protest organization during the civil rights era, New Orleans became a place where numerous national groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Congress

of Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Black Panther Party established their bases (Firven 2008).

Substantial northern migration of both blacks and whites occurred during the 1930s and 1940s. While many Southern whites ultimately merged with Northern whites in affluent urban and suburban neighborhoods, the majority of black migrants ended up in African-American enclaves throughout the Northern cities. Interestingly, Southern whites who migrated north virtually disappeared and played no significant role in any anti-civil rights movements (Sugrue 1998).

Although whites violently repressed rural blacks and denied them access to power, good schools and other opportunities, some suggest race relations were slightly more complex than these common stereotypes indicate. Johnson (2003), for example, provides some accounts of black-on-white violence in the 1940s in northern Louisiana, suggesting that both races knew (or should have known) their “place,” and that blacks in some areas could turn to militancy to keep arrogant whites in their place. Scholars such as Williams (1985) argue the stultifying denial of civil rights to blacks in Mississippi did not completely stifle African-American efforts, particularly after World War II, to improve their situations. Williams (1985) describes efforts by blacks in Mississippi from 1945-1955 to prevent anti-black violence, gain voting rights, fight for income equality across various industries and demand equal educational facilities – all precursors to the more well-known and celebrated movements of the 1960s.

McMillen (1997) emphasizes how World War II influenced significant changes in Southern society that en-

abled the civil rights movement and led to the end of Jim Crow era.

One of the most recognized organizations involved in the civil rights movement in Mississippi was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). SNCC participants in the Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964 helped usher in a period of profound changes for race relations in Mississippi, in the entire Gulf Coast region and in their own lives (Miller 1994).

Other studies of participants in the Mississippi Freedom Summer explored how the race and gender of civil rights activists influenced their interpretations of the successes and shortcomings of the civil rights movement (Irons 1998; Mills 1999; Harwell 2010). During the 1960s, civil rights activist groups such as Womanpower Unlimited responded to the unjust arrests and torture of the Freedom Riders. They later took an active role in the Women Strike for Peace movement (Morris 2002).

Another key organization was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In Iberia Parish, Morgan City and many other smaller towns and communities throughout the South, the NAACP played a dominant role in bringing about civil rights for African-Americans (Fairclough 1995). In Louisiana, community organizations that arose as byproducts of civil rights and the war on poverty managed to make some federal programs more flexible at the local level (Brabant 1993).

Although the civil rights movement is largely known for the non-violent forms of activism promoted by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., there also were some violent elements of the movement. Umoja (1996), for example, argues that armed defense of life, property and civil rights played a critical role in reducing racial violence in Southern black

communities and in winning concessions in the form of civil and human rights. At the extreme, an effective Black Nationalist movement known as the Republic of New Africa (RNA) emerged in Mississippi. Cunigen's (1999) study of the RNA suggests that even though the Black Power movements were dominated by the urban North, the RNA was very important for the rural South and led to significant changes for blacks as it allowed them to connect their struggles to larger, universal struggles for human rights.

Although the civil rights movement faced severe opposition from whites all over the South (particularly in Mississippi), change did occur at many levels in society. For example, Horn and Young (1975) compared a local newspaper story in 1975 in Carthage, Miss., to the types of news coverage that prevailed just 10 years previously and found significant improvement in how race relations were portrayed by these media outlets.

Despite improvements in local news coverage and in the legal system, residential segregation increased in many Southern cities during the 1970s (Fly and Reinhart 1980), even while social segregation declined.

## Migration and Economics

From 1910 to 1970, African-Americans participated in one of the largest migrations in human history as more than 9 million blacks left the South and settled in the North and the West. Known as the Great Black Migration, this process peaked in the 1950s and slowed in the 1960s before many African-Americans and their descendants returned to the South during the early 1970s (Brown 2006).

Blacks had remained highly concentrated in the rural South prior to this massive migration movement

that was heavily inspired by the pursuit of better economic opportunities in Northern cities. Meanwhile, blacks who remained in rural areas encountered poor economic prospects (Pfeffer 1993). Much of the economic growth was in the manufacturing industry. Although manufacturing growth also occurred in the South, blacks were blocked from job opportunities in industrialization because of frequent salary discrimination, a form of inequality that unions were unable to reduce during the 1950s and 1960s (Cobb 1984).

The return of African-Americans to the South during the early 1970s was due to increased underemployment in the North. Many moved to metropolitan areas, however, instead of rural ones because of better economic opportunities in Southern cities (Pfeffer 1993). This phenomenon continues to the present day, as many natives and descendants return to regions such as the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta (Brown 2006).

The declining outmigration rates of nonwhites in the Alabama Black Belt region from 1960-1970 has been attributed to increased political and economic equality, such as employment opportunities in nonagricultural industries (Bogie 1982). Between 1975 and 1980, many blacks left the South again – particularly those with higher levels of education (Pfeffer 1993). According to the 1980 Census, there were level net migration rates within low-income Southern counties but a net loss among African-Americans (Voss and Fuguitt 1991). Black communities were plagued with high poverty rates throughout the 1980s, when more 35 percent of African-Americans lived below the poverty line (Cobb 1984).

Although the bulk of African-American migration occurred from 1910 to 1970, Maruggi and Wartenberg (1996) found that blacks

have had net outmigration rates in Louisiana since 1870 due to better job opportunities in Northern cities and areas outside of the state, while whites and other races have had net in-migration rates. At the time of Bennett's study (1952), blacks comprised about a third of Louisiana's population and were most highly concentrated in the plantation and cotton areas in the Mississippi and Red River deltas, the northern regions of the sugarcane area and the northwestern portion of the Florida parishes.

The rise of the oil industry reduced the black population in St. Mary Parish, where this demographic fell from 45.3 percent to 28.6 percent from 1940 to 1970. During the same time period, the black population of Morgan City fell from 22.7 percent to 16 percent. The decline of the region's black population correlates with a rise of its white population, as well as the shift in economic opportunities from rural to urban areas (Gramling and Joubert 1977). At the time oil was discovered in southern Louisiana, blacks were the lowest on the occupational hierarchy and were therefore initially excluded from participating in this lucrative industry (Gardner and Austin 2002).

There were significant net outmigration rates among African-Americans from 1960-1970, as the state's population became older and whiter during this period. According to Burford and Murzyn (1972), these results reflect the limited economic opportunities in the state. Shreveport, Monroe, Lake Charles and Lafayette were the areas with the highest outmigration rates in the state (Christou 1972).

Plaquemines Parish was another area where blacks continued to face labor market discrimination following the civil rights movement. For example, a law passed in 1979 illegalized the use of 2-foot hand

dredges by fishermen. This piece of legislation disproportionately targeted independent black oyster fishermen (Bryant 1982).

## Segregation and Discrimination

African-Americans have encountered the most intense discrimination practices of any ethnic group within the Gulf Coast region. The history of the South has upheld race as one of the primary social boundaries in the region, particularly between whites and blacks (White 1998). Park (1931) observed how the physical characteristics of race create an immediate distinction that does not exist in other cultural characteristics such as religion. Duncan (1934) claims early French and Spanish settlers were indirectly responsible for initiating the enslavement of African-Americans in states such as Arkansas and Texas. Even when the plantation industry had nearly completed its transition to sugarcane as one of its primary cash crops, blacks and whites remained at the center of the agricultural social hierarchy (Gramling 1982).

Cajuns, who had lived in relative isolation throughout rural south Louisiana, were recruited by Southern elites and white supremacists to oppose black emancipation (Sexton 1990). Like the other groups of European immigrants who joined this coalition of white solidarity, Cajuns enjoyed privileges such as suffrage, access to better jobs and the right to own land (Abbott 2006). Although slavery ended, white solidarity continued decades later in opposition to the civil rights movement (Pinkney 1975; Abbott 2006).

Discriminatory practices were common between these two pivotal periods of African-American history. Some have described the Deep South during the 1930s as a color caste system due to the severe segregation practices that existed

throughout the region (Davis 1941). Western (1973) observed that although the different ethnic groups of whites within Houma, La. had become significantly less segregated, African-Americans in that city remain relatively isolated in terms of residency, relationships and social interactions. Racial discrimination was even justified on a national level throughout this timeframe. For instance, the WPA published guides to the Deep South that portrayed blacks as the most exotic segment of the region's population to justify racial segregation (Means 2003).

Some African-Americans tried to isolate themselves to avoid discrimination. For example, the Louisiana Chapter of the American Folklore Society and the Federal Writer's Project attempted to use their influence to develop racial and class identities that separated upper-class African-Americans from other black Louisianans through folklore (Jordan and Caro 1996).

Residential segregation has been an ongoing issue in the Gulf Coast region. Heberle (1948) stated the movement of wealthy whites from the center of oil communities toward the periphery area resulted in spatial segregation because their outmigration pushed blacks toward less economically advantaged areas. According to Aiken (1990), increased segregation on the regional level has led to a greater separation of blacks and whites within many municipalities. For example, federally sponsored housing and restructured business districts have left many African-Americans in new black ghettos that lie throughout former plantation regions, where they account for at least 75 percent of the municipalities' population. In addition to federal housing, these regions have high poverty rates and scarce employment opportunities (Aiken 1990).

Race has been the primary distinguishing factor in geographic distribution throughout Mississippi, with black and white residency varying dramatically at the regional, local and intermediate levels (Lowry II 1971). A statewide analysis of residential segregation in Mississippi found relatively high levels of segregation across the state, with higher rates in the Delta and the Piney Woods and lower rates along the Gulf Coast. This phenomenon is most strongly correlated with black/white income differences and with higher residential segregation existing in areas where the income gap between these races is higher (Marcum, Holley and Williams 1988). Chen (2009) found Alabama's coastal population has a higher percentage of blacks than the rest of the nation, as well as less affluent residents with lower levels of education. A case study conducted by Friend et al. (1982) in Alabama found that the integrated index of wilderness decreased significantly as the African-American population increased across counties. He suspects socio-historical factors such as slavery and segregation, as well as socioeconomic conditions, might relate to this geographic distribution.

Negative racial stereotypes combined with discriminatory practices reflected how whites perceived blacks as inferior to them. According to a study conducted by Powdermaker (1968), less than 40 percent of whites believed blacks were "no different essentially from other people." On the other hand, nearly a quarter of whites considered blacks "abhorrent" and more than 80 percent believed blacks should exclusively work manual labor jobs (Powdermaker 1968). Muir (1991) found institutionalized racial prejudice also was exhibited by college students at the University of Alabama following desegregation, where Greek fraternities and sorori-



ties were significantly less accepting of blacks than whites unaffiliated with these organizations. A survey conducted with LSU students in the 1940s found that less than 9 percent of them were willing to accept an integrated college campus and more than two-thirds believed interracial marriage should be illegal (Turbeville and Hyde 1946).

Mississippi and Louisiana share an infamous history of racial discrimination practices. The racial climate in early to mid-20th century was so tense in this area that Davis Knight – who appeared white and claimed Caucasian descent – was labeled a “white Negro” and found guilty of miscegenation on December 7, 1948, in Mississippi. The label was likely due to the fact that Davis’ great-grandmother was a “freed woman” and his father was a famous Civil War outlaw who led a group of Confederate army deserters that later joined the Union (Bynum 1998).

Gray (1970) observed that from 1959-1968, the overwhelmingly white population of Lafourche Parish excluded African-Americans from many economic opportunities during this growth period of industrial jobs. He outlines the factors that contributed to the discriminatory practices: high percentages of family businesses in shrimping and fishing; large family-based landowners reluctant to sell their property, particularly to nonwhites; and an oil industry historically unwilling to hire nonwhites (Gray 1970).

Neuback and Cazenave’s (2001) study concludes white supremacists used negative racial stereotypes in their attempts to deny black mothers access to the welfare program known as Aid For Dependent Children (ADC) in the 1960s. During the decade the Louisiana Legislature made common-law marriage between men and women illegal and made it a crime for women to

have more than one child outside of marriage. Known as the “segregation package,” these laws disproportionately affected blacks – who were more likely to live in abject poverty – by removing thousands of African-Americans and more than a quarter of ADC recipients from welfare programs during a time when two-thirds of the children dependent on ADC were black (Neuback and Cazenave 2001).

Ezeala-Harrison and Glover (2008) discovered minority housing loan applicants have consistently high denial rates that cannot be easily explained by their financial backgrounds. Results from a recent study conducted on seatbelt law enforcement in Louisiana and Mississippi found primary enforcement of these laws – which involve citing a driver only for breaking a seatbelt law – is more likely to reduce the racial disparity in black/white motor vehicle mortality rates than secondary enforcement (Levine et al. 2006). A recent study conducted across 12 of Mississippi’s 15 community colleges found instructors had a negative bias towards black American English accents (Ivey-Hudson 2007).

The hanging of a hangman’s noose in Jena, La., was one of the most recent examples of hate speech in the Gulf Coast region that garnered national attention. Few of those who commented on it focused on the hate speech behind this action because blacks and whites had drastically different interpretations of the incident (Bell 2009). A study of the “Jena Six” court case found that Jim Crow ethics, which depict black offenders as culturally and socially inferior, were used in the form of coded racial narrative during that trial (Alfieri 2009). Goidel et al. (2011) conducted a telephone survey that found blacks followed news about the Jena Six more closely than whites and considered race as

the primary motivation behind the prosecution. They also were most likely to believe the decision to prosecute was wrong (Goidel, Parent and Mann 2011).

## Politics

The Gulf Coast region’s history of racism and discrimination has dramatically affected the level of African-American participation in politics. In the 1890s, the Populist political party had gained black supporters who had become heavily involved in its political revolt. White supremacists overcame this movement, however, and its efforts were buried by an earlier political group known as the Negro Alliance, which also had sought political equality (Rogers 1960).

African-American voter registration remained a huge issue in Louisiana more than a decade after the 1944 Supreme Court ruling to prevent whites from blocking black voter registration in the South. In 1956, only 30 percent of African-Americans eligible to vote were registered – compared to 73 percent of whites. The voter registration rates for blacks varied dramatically by parish, including 17 parishes where less than 20 percent of eligible African-Americans were registered and 11 where at least 70 percent of eligible blacks had undergone voter registration (Fenton and Vines 1957).

During the 1940s, blacks in St. Landry Parish struggled to increase their political participation due to the racial hostility of the area’s predominately Cajun population and their use of intimidation tactics (Fairclough 1995). Plaquemines Parish, dominated by the actions of Judge Leander Perez, aggressively pushed against black voter registration in the 1960s. He openly opposed President Johnson and described the Voting Rights Act of 1965 as an attempt by the federal

government to impose African-American leadership upon the South (Conaway 1973).

The passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act led to substantial increases in black voter registration in highly resistant states including Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi, with the most dramatic effects occurring in the latter (Timpone 1997). Only 28,500 black voters were registered in Mississippi in 1965, but that number jumped to 406,000 by 1984 (Colby 1986).

Despite their increased political participation, blacks remained less likely to vote or to be elected to public office than whites (Colby 1986). Following the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the Mississippi Republican Party spent the 1970s and early 1980s in an internal conflict regarding whether they should pursue black voters. As a result, they alternated between vigorously seeking the black vote and relying upon the strength of their segregationist white base (Danielson 2009).

The civil rights movement led to a transition from older, conservative black leaders concerned with economic change and avoiding civil protests to younger, more militant leaders who organized protests in support of desegregating community services unions and other social institutions – as well as including blacks on decision-making boards. While this new group of black leadership had some success during the 1970s, the “old line” black leadership re-established their economic-based platform to limited success when economic development began to decline in the early 1980s (Hill 1990).

African-Americans have made some political progress in the past couple of decades, although racial elements have remained in play. At the time of Hill’s (1990) study, he found blacks had only recently

acquired somewhat limited political authority in southern cities such as Bogalusa, La. On the other hand, Harvey Johnson was elected the first black mayor of Jackson, Miss., in 1997. Orey (2006) attributes Johnson’s political success following his failure to even make the Democratic primary runoffs in 1993 to the different race-based political strategies he used in each campaign. While Johnson ran a “deracialized” campaign in 1993 that failed to attract white voters and weakened his African-American support, his decision to run a “racialized” campaign in 1997 resulted in nearly twice as many black voters supporting him (Orey 2006).

Race also played a major role in the 1995 Louisiana gubernatorial election, where “symbolic racism” occurred three decades after the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act. During this election, there was heavy white backlash towards the increasing political presence of African-American candidates and a tendency to have race influence white conservative voting tendencies in opposition towards black candidates (Knuckey and Orey 2000). Orey (1998) found that during this election, white voter support for racially conservative white candidates had a positive significant association with the level of black population density by parish, supporting his “black threat” thesis. Recent research found African-Americans are more likely to vote or participate in political activities once they become involved in church projects that provide opportunities to exchange political messages and acquire civic skills (Brown and Brown 2003).

### Hurricane Katrina

New Orleans’ black citizens were affected disproportionately by the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which resulted in a decline in the city’s majority black population and a rise in its minority white popula-

tion following the storm (Bankston III 2010). A Gallup poll (2006) published a few months after the storm found the city’s racial demographics had changed from 67 percent black and 28 percent white before Katrina to 52 percent white and 37 percent black following the storm.

Prior to Katrina, more than one-third of African-Americans in New Orleans lived in poverty, compared to only 11.5 percent of Americans of European descent living in Orleans Parish (Ruscher 2006). Of the 142,000 people living in poverty in New Orleans prior to Katrina, 84 percent were black and most worked from sunrise to sunset without earning a living wage (Mann 2006). Graham (2010) states that black Americans were shipped out of New Orleans in 2005 to cleanse the urban area and reshape the city’s demographics. The author goes so far as to describe the Superdome and the Convention Center as “concentration camps” where blacks were herded during the storm (Graham 2010).

Many of the city’s most flood-vulnerable regions were overwhelmingly black, including the Lower Ninth Ward (98 percent black) and New Orleans East (more than 80 percent black). About 70 percent of the 1,836 people killed during Hurricane Katrina were African-American and more than a quarter-million blacks relocated to 44 different states during the storm, with common locations including Shreveport, Baton Rouge, Houston and Atlanta. Many have not returned to New Orleans (Mann 2006).

The housing crisis in New Orleans following Katrina displaced many African-Americans who remained in the city during the storm or wanted to return. As of 2006, only about 1,000 of the 5,100 housing units affected by the storm had reopened. Housing problems stretched beyond the realm of public housing and also included issues with the Federal

Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailers, insurance claims and securing federal money to rebuild the city (Ruscher 2006). These also affected blacks across different social strata. Almost four years after Katrina, less than 50 percent of the residents of Pontchartrain Park – a black middle-class neighborhood – had returned to their homes. According to Gafford (2010), New Orleans’ history of racial discrimination placed obstacles in the way of middle-class blacks interested in moving back to their homes that did not affect middle-class whites. Due to the history of the city, rich whites were able to build on higher ground prior to other groups, even middle-class blacks (Economist 2006).

Social reformation advocates have sought to address the racially disproportionate effects of Hurricane Katrina by rebuilding New Orleans in a manner that seeks social justice through methods such as providing affordable housing and enabling active participation in democracy (Bankston III 2010). At the time of Mann’s study (2006), there was much concern regarding whether the city would be radically rebuilt in a manner that addressed the city’s inequalities or merely restored to maintain the status quo. Following Katrina, many poor New Orleans constituencies consisting of predominantly poor black residents organized and resisted those attempting to destroy their communities. They also sought access to adequate housing, healthcare and dignity in response to the post-Katrina violations of the basic human rights to housing (Gardner, Irwin and Peterson 2009). Groups such as the Fazendeville community from the Lower Ninth Ward have maintained their cultural livelihood, despite the tremendous destruction resulting from the storm, through a sense of communality, spirituality and

commitment to tradition (Jackson 2006).

Based on her comparison of victims of Hurricane Katrina to the victims of the 2007 San Diego wildfires, Rubin (2008) concluded the lackluster assistance provided to the hurricane victims was due to the fact they were primarily poor African-Americans. The wildfire victims, on the other hand, were predominately middle-class whites (Rubin 2008). Lavelle and Feagin (2006) argue race and class have always been a means for both the white elite and the white citizenry to preserve white supremacy and privilege in New Orleans. Pinder (2009) challenges scholars who claim the fate of the African-American victims during Hurricane Katrina was due solely to their class and states race remains inherently linked to class in this scenario due to factors such as the monolithic media portrayal of African-Americans and New Orleans’ status as a racially segregated community.

Analysis of national television news coverage following Katrina revealed stress within unfamiliar situations leads to ethnocentric, dichotomous and stereotypical modes of thinking among individuals, which was reflected in the manner by which white privilege influenced how journalists discussed racial matters after the storm (Johnson et al. 2010). Mainstream media outlets often presented distorted images of poor blacks in and from New Orleans during this period (Lavelle 2006).

Marable (2006) views the inadequate response to Hurricane Katrina by the Bush administration and the resulting public display of black suffering as part of a “civic ritual” highlighting the United States’ racial hierarchy, which white America denies to preserve its dominance. Survey data found African-Americans perceived more

racism in the Hurricane Katrina response than white Americans. Adams et al. (2006) suspects the following are two of the primary causes: Whites are less likely than African-Americans to be aware of historically documented acts of discrimination, and conflict of group interests might arise due to the fact that whites and African-Americans face opposing motivations in regard to how they perceive racism, with the former benefitting from legitimizing the status quo and the latter interested in remaining aware of possible instances of racial discrimination. Racial tensions even occurred within relief efforts, such as when the Common Ground Collective accused the black community of sexually assaulting some of their white female workers in 2006, only to later discover almost all of the sexual assaulters were nonlocal white men (Luft 2008).

Germany (2007) provides historical context for the racial inequality from prior decades that precluded the disproportionate effect of Hurricane Katrina upon African-American communities. During the 1960s and 1970s, New Orleans attempted to reverse its high poverty rate and racial inequality through government assistance programs. But the oil market bust of the 1980s, combined with the long-term reduction of jobs at the New Orleans port, resulted in a depression as whites and many middle-class blacks fled the city and moved to the suburbs. Government assistance declined following this depression, and the city never completely recovered from this economic downturn. The citizens of New Orleans ended up abandoning the war on poverty that had started in the 1960s and instead accepted its economic inequality as a social reality they merely sought to contain instead of eliminate (Germany 2007).

## Contemporary Economic and Environmental Issues

Analysis of the recent economic situation for African-Americans in the Gulf Coast region continues to highlight instances of inequality. Although the South has been fairly successful in attracting high-tech industries to the region, blacks remain disproportionately concentrated in low-skill positions that yield lower income than high-tech occupations (Colclough and Tolbert 1990). Cray's (1991) content analysis of the Southern Growth Policy's Southern Count-Level Data Files found racial tension combined with the high concentration of poor blacks in the Mississippi Delta are associated with the region's absence of new technology industries. African-Americans in the Mississippi Delta are considered more likely to participate in the informal economy for subcultural reasons as opposed to ones that provide them personal economic benefits (Brown, Xu and Toth 1988). Adeola's (1999) research on minority poverty in Louisiana parishes found female-headed households, race and minority employment in the economy's primary sector serve as significant predictors of economic hardship. A study conducted on prison admissions in Louisiana found a lower association between unemployment and African-American prison admissions than whites. Dobbins and Bass (1958) suspect the following reasons might explain their results: Blacks are more likely to commit crimes against people than whites; blacks are less likely to commit crimes that result in direct economic gain; and unemployment might be more critical to sustaining a white person's self-esteem than a black person's, because blacks are more likely to be marginalized in the workforce.

A few studies have examined environmental issues in relation to the African-American community.

Jones and Carter (1994) challenged the notion that blacks are less concerned about the environment than whites and even suggested the reverse is true. While blacks are less likely to actively participate in environmental organizations, they are more likely than whites to remain committed to the environment during economic hardships. A study conducted by Marshall (2004) in the Louisiana region known as "Cancer Alley" found that black females are significantly more cautious toward environmental risks than white males. Marshall (2004) suggests this is because white males feel less vulnerable due to their privileged position in society, while black females potentially feel more vulnerable due to their lower position on the social ladder. A study of a Mississippi Head Start program found that black mothers were less likely to store pesticides in a storage room, to understand the causes of food poisoning or to take precautions in relation to environmental hazards than white mothers (Whitehead et al. 2008). Crawford (1996) argued the Mississippi state government failed to provide safeguards for the poor, predominately black community of Noxubee, Miss., when corporate outsiders moved into the area and built hazardous waste facilities.

## Culture

### Family and Community

After the Civil War and through the period of Reconstruction, scholars and folklorists were interested in how African-American families and communities in the Gulf Coast region were influenced by slavery and its residual effects (Fauset 1927). Young (1970) concluded from her research of black families and their children in a small Georgia community that indigenous behavior – as opposed to deprivation – serves as the primary formative agent of behavior in African-Americans.

The focus of scholarly work shifted, however, toward the effects of urbanization and modernization throughout the 20th century. Adams (1947) studied black sharecroppers in the Mississippi Delta and concluded they were disproportionately affected by acculturation through urbanization due to increased population isolation, increasing literacy rates, the rise of new media forms such as the press, movies, radio, the jukebox and other characteristics of city life. According to Hannerz (1969), black urban society emphasizes distinctions between itself and white culture. This study claims the ghetto ideals of black males and females, known as soul, are organized into four different categories: mainstreamers, swingers, street families and street corner men (Hannerz 1969). A study conducted decades later in nonmetropolitan Louisiana found the sex ratio (the number of men per 100 women) within black communities had a positive effect upon the marriage rates of black women, two-parent households and the number of black children reared in two-parent houses. The sex ratio also had a negative effect upon non-marital births (Fossett and Kiecolt 1990).

African-Americans within the Black Belt region have struggled to maintain land ownership primarily due to the lack of property inheritance, which frequently results from lack of clarity within a will. The Black Belt refers to the Southern region that spans from east-central Mississippi to the Virginia Tidewater and can be identified by the following characteristics: high concentrations of African-Americans; agrarian landscapes; a relative lack of urbanization and few nonagriculture related jobs; high poverty and unemployment rates; relatively low levels of education; high dependency rates; slow population growth or declining populations; poor community health, including high infant

mortality rates; and high rates of Democratic Party support (Webster and Bowman 2008). In these regions, property typically is subdivided among numerous co-owners, with a single co-owner or a small group of them living on the land and taking on all the financial and maintenance responsibilities (Dyer, Bailey and Van Tran 2009).

### **Music**

African-Americans established two of the most popular cultural music genres in Louisiana – blues and rhythm and blues – and the popularity of that music eventually expanded throughout the country (Louisiana Division of the Arts 1999). Juke joints in the Mississippi Delta served as a central hub for black music and culture during the Jim Crow era. They were typically based in abandoned buildings where African-Americans could publicly gather without alerting the whites who lived outside of their towns (Nardone 2003).

Popular blues musicians toured the South throughout the 1930s. Artists Muddy Waters and Robert Johnson spent the following decade touring Northern and Midwestern cities such as Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis and Cleveland. Although the artists received little pay for their performances, they found the touring lifestyle more satisfying than the arduous sharecropper work they previously had done in the Mississippi Delta (Rutkoff and Scott 2005).

Recently, locations such as Farish Street in Jackson, Miss., have emerged as centers for “new blues tourism.” This initiative focuses on promoting the African-American heritage of this region through the preservation of urban neighborhoods where numerous buildings have ties to the blues genre, support from the local population and media outlets for these establishments and a commitment to preserving the

authenticity of the culture (Gulyas 2008).

While the legacy of African-Americans in the blues genre has been well documented, Snyder (1997) emphasizes the relatively ignored phenomenon of black accordion players who were born in Mississippi between 1870 and 1880. Black accordionists frequently have been overlooked because many people assumed there was never a significant population of blacks that played this instrument outside of the Cajun southern Louisiana region (Snyder 1997).

### **Religion**

Religion has long been an integral part of the African-American community. White (2003) found Louisiana black’s religious roots can be traced back to Africa. Even during slavery times, masters allowed their slaves the freedom of public worship (Davis 1917).

The Black Holiness Movement, which originated in Arkansas, was one of the most notable religious groups to emerge from the post-Antebellum South. Their charismatic worshipping and literal Bible interpretations embraced the traditional African-American church culture and gained favor among rural working-class blacks. Middle-class African-Americans, on the other hand, despised and fought against this movement because they feared these religious practices would cause whites to view them as primitive and childlike (White Jr. 2009).

Religion and race combined to play a significant role in the presidential campaigns throughout Louisiana during the 1960s. At the time, African-Americans were nearly a third of the state’s population. Republicans had the most success during this campaign in parishes with low Catholic and African-American populations (Cosman 1962).

Adams (1947) claims city life has challenged the church’s central role in the African-American community because the appeal of secular life has reduced the authority churches and ministers have over the lives of their congregations.

### **Health**

The African-American community of the Gulf Coast region continues to suffer disproportionately from health risks in several areas. Limited health care access has long been at the root of this problem. Discriminatory health care practices have persisted throughout the late 20th century, partially due to revisionist historical accounts, such as the downplaying of prejudice in health care initiatives when editing African-American midwives’ memoirs (Craven and Glatzel 2010).

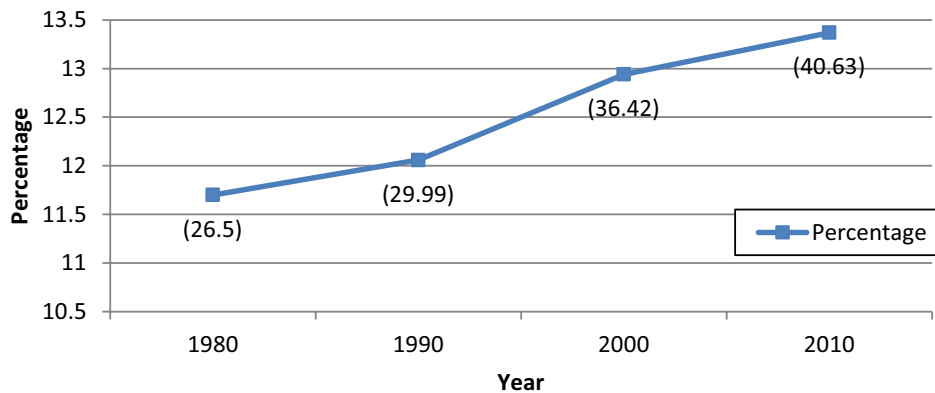
Sumpter (2010) discusses how many black residents of St. Tammany Parish were denied treatment during the late 19th and early 20th centuries as the spread of yellow fever occurred, despite the fact many New Orleans residents had fled to this safe haven to restore their own health. Civil rights groups eventually would address some of these prejudicial practices. Led by the activism of black feminists throughout the 1970s, the Delta Health Center in Mississippi developed an initiative that addressed the connection between reproductive health with the larger health issues affecting minority women in the state by providing this segment of the population the sanitation, transportation, housing, clothing and food necessary to improve their situation (Nelson 2005).

Numerous studies have examined racial differences in sexual behavior and drug use. Research has shown African-Americans below 40 have higher rates of HIV and AIDS than the majority of the nation’s population (Lichtenstein 2000; Dévieux et al. 2005). Analysis of subsections

within the black population reveals the problems can't be solved by treating African-Americans as a monolithic demographic. Some of these studies have connected lifestyle choices to higher HIV rates, ranging from bisexual activity among black men in Alabama to religious attendance having a significantly smaller inverse influence upon black drug use compared to its effect upon whites and Hispanics (Lichtenstein 2000; Rote and Starks 2010). In certain cases, the African-American community's perception of drugs influences the ones they choose to consume. A study of black adult smokers in Atlanta found their overwhelming preference for menthol cigarettes is likely due to the fact they perceive such "light cigarettes" as having fewer health risks (Richter et al. 2008). Allen and Page (1994) found that despite the overall lower drug use for blacks compared to whites, African-American high school students in Mississippi remained overrepresented "in public drug treatment programs, hospital admissions for drug problems, drug-related mortality and arrests with drug-positive urine samples."

Dietary issues also have been explored for African-Americans in the Gulf Coast region. McGee et al. (2009) found that younger, lower-income black males in the Mississippi Delta are less likely to eat out than their white counterparts. A couple of studies also have detailed the practice of geophagy, or dirt eating, among some African-Americans in Mississippi. According to Vermeer and Frate (1975), the practice is an Old World custom that was brought by slaves to America and was practiced by black women and children of both sexes in Holmes County, Mississippi. Although black males were not known to partake in this practice, young black women were reported to use laundry starch, baking soda, wheat flour and dry powdered milk as substitutes for

## African-Americans in the United States: 1980-2010



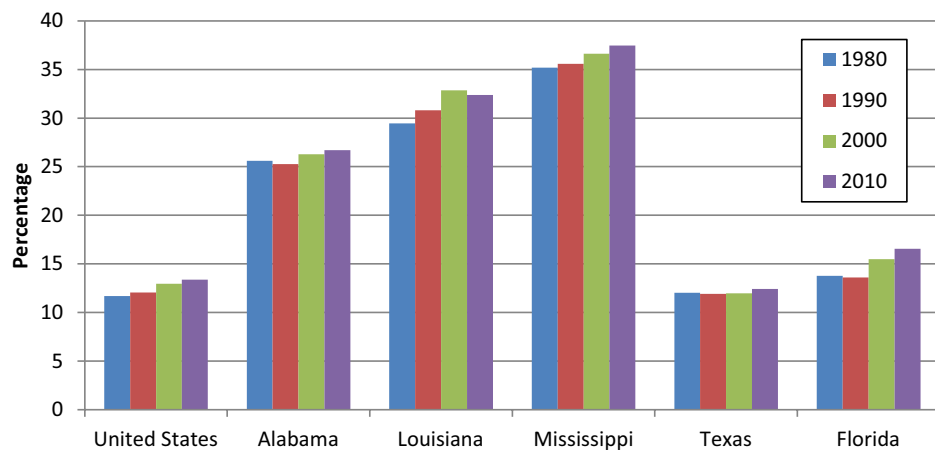
Data from U.S. Decennial Census and ACS Five-year Estimates. (African-American population in millions in parentheses.)

obtaining their average daily consumption of 50 grams (Vermeer and Frate 1975). In a study conducted in Oktibbeha County, Mississippi, every African-American respondent was familiar with the practice of geophagy and knew a few people who partook in it. Reasons for geophagy include the sour lemonlike taste of clay and the belief that it is healthful – especially for pregnant women (Dickins and Ford 1942).

Environmental issues have affected African-Americans disproportionately in the Gulf Coast region. White (1998) found that poverty-stricken African-Americans living in the New Orleans and Baton Rouge

areas have suffered high rates of cancer. This phenomenon raised environmental concerns due to the more than 125 oil and chemical plants in this highly industrialized region that uses the Mississippi River as its primary drinking water source (White 1998). While relatively little research has been conducted on black suicide rates, a recent study in Fulton County, Georgia, found black suicide victims tend to be younger, male and more likely to hurt others when taking their own lives. They also are less likely to leave a suicide note, report suffering from depression or have a family history of depression (Abe et al. 2008).

## African-American Population of the United States and the Gulf of Mexico Region: 1980-2010



Data from U.S. Decennial Census and ACS Five-year Estimates

## New Orleans

No review of the literature on African-Americans in the Gulf of Mexico region would be complete without specific mention of the city of New Orleans. According to Kaslow (1981), the French and Spanish colonial influences combined with the high concentration of African-Americans in New Orleans created a cultural landscape that consists of benevolent societies, carnival organizations, ecstatic religions and other factors that contribute to a unique sense of black community within this region.

White (2003) studied how slaves in French Colonial New Orleans used different dressing techniques to distinguish themselves from one another. She found many examples of West African aesthetics in their attire, such as head adornments layered with ornaments and jewelry; frequent use of the color red; and turbanlike head wraps.

Many working class African-Americans in New Orleans are members of benevolent societies that host second-line parades. These parades, which occur most Sunday afternoons from mid-August to late March, celebrate the anniversaries of their social groups. They also take the form of “jazz funerals” honoring their deceased members (Regis 1999).

Black leaders began to gain political power due to the rise of the elite “Creoles of Colour” several decades ago. Massive racial inequality has persisted, however, despite their increased political representation in the city. This includes high rates of black-on-black crime and disproportionate numbers of African-Americans living in poverty. A disconnect exists between the socioeconomic background of the contemporary black leadership, who come primarily from middle-class backgrounds, and the poverty-stricken African-

American residents whose issues the leaders fail to adequately address (Cunnigen 2006).

## Education and Historically Black Colleges and Universities

While blacks saw education as an opportunity for social advancement, many whites attempted to maintain control over African-American learning to preserve their own self-interests (Span 2001). Reed (1965) investigated how legislative Reconstruction efforts failed to provide equal educational opportunities for African-American children. In fact, white Southern legislators worked in collaboration with municipal and civic leaders to establish a racially segregated education system to limit the economic and social opportunities for African-Americans (Green 2010). Although Southern African-American teachers worked in tremendously unfair and discriminatory positions, they refused to become victims of this hostile environment as they self-identified as professionals and performed their jobs accordingly (Walker 2001). Fairclough (1995) notes the average per capita sum for black students increased dramatically between 1940 and 1955, rising from 24 percent of the amount spent upon white students to 74 percent.

Racial animosity toward blacks carried over to the collegiate level as well. A survey conducted with LSU students during the 1940s found only 13 percent approved of integrated schools (Turbeville and Hyde 1946). These racial attitudes did not prevent LSU from becoming the first Deep South state university to admit a black student in 1950 (Fairclough 1995).

Despite the vehement discrimination many whites fueled throughout the history of the Gulf Coast region, some played an important role in educating blacks. According to Davis (1917), some slave own-

ers even taught their slaves to read. Following slavery, whites would help African-Americans establish historically black colleges and universities. Blacks eventually sought to gain financial and leadership control from whites because they believed this was vital to developing African-American men who would serve as capable community leaders (Wright 2008). Historically black colleges and universities such as Jackson State University and Tougaloo College sheltered their students from Mississippi’s discriminatory practices by functioning as a closed society that isolated students from political hostility and “state-sanctioned terrorism” (Favors 2006). As racial tensions eased following the civil rights movement, the University of Alabama established eight African-American fraternities and sororities between 1973 and 1976, with the intent of enhancing social, cultural, spiritual and academic opportunities for the black student body (Jones 2007).

Over the years, college athletics have become equally important to blacks as to whites as part of Southern heritage. Much of this is due to the increased popularity of college football at historically black colleges and universities. The annual Grambling/Southern rivalry, which began in 1932, was ignored by the white press at that time. Today, known as the Bayou Classic, it has become a nationally broadcast game held in the Superdome (Aiello 2010).

Educational inequality continues to plague African-American communities in the Gulf Coast region in the post-civil rights era. McAllister (1972) states that for the sake of improving Louisiana’s schools, public sentiment needs to favor the implementation of teacher training specifically focused on African-American education and improving the places where these educators are trained. Whites continue to outper-

form blacks on academic achievement tests (Bankston III, Caldas and Zhou 1997). Since Louisiana passed Act 478, its most recent educational accountability system in 1997, there has been a slight improvement in African-American student achievement – although the achievement gap persists between black and white students. Black students also remain more likely to be retained, suspended or expelled, or to drop out of school, than their white counterparts (Szymanski 2010).

Racial segregation also remains an issue in the contemporary education system. In May 2000, a court order was issued to close two predominately African-American elementary schools in southwestern Louisiana and bus the students to five predominately white schools in an effort to desegregate Lafayette Parish schools (Caldas et al. 2002). Eckes (2006) study of schooling in the Mississippi Delta examined parents' perceptions of defacto segregation consisting of predominately black public schools and all-white private schools. White parents perceive the private schools as offering a higher quality education. They also said they feared potential discipline problems, lower academic expectations and a lack of extracurricular activities as other reasons for opting out of public education. Black parents, on the other hand, perceived the more affluent whites as abandoning the public schools and continuing to hold on to outdated, racist attitudes (Eckes 2006).

Table 4: Overview

Overview of African-Americans in the Gulf of Mexico Region	
Section	Broad Conclusions
Origins and History	African-Americans originally were brought as slaves to the Gulf Coast region. Although they were emancipated following the Civil War, discrimination and inequality have persisted, even since the advent of the civil rights movement.
Migration	From 1910-1970, African-Americans participated in one of the largest migrations in human history as they left the rural South and sought better economic opportunities in the urban areas of the North and the West. Once industrialization helped to urbanize the South and underemployment occurred in the North, many blacks moved to Southern cities for better job prospects.
Culture	African-Americans have made unique cultural contributions to the Gulf Coast region, particularly in the realms of music, religion, education and community celebrations.
Occupations	After slavery, many African-Americans struggled to find employment outside of agriculture or manual labor. They gradually have begun to integrate into other labor markets.
Oil and Gas Industry	When the oil industry expanded in the Gulf of Mexico region, many African-Americans initially were excluded from this lucrative profession. The oil bust left many blacks geographically isolated in poverty-stricken regions with few well-paying economic opportunities as well-to-do whites moved to the suburbs.
Economy	Although overcoming disproportionately high poverty rates in the Gulf Coast region that stem from geographic and occupational segregation has been a struggle for African-Americans, their situation has significantly improved since the Jim Crow era.
Ecology	African-Americans have been mislabeled as less environmentally concerned than whites because they are not as likely to be activists. They are more likely, however, to remain committed to the environment during economic hardships than whites.
Politics	African-American voter registration increased dramatically following the passage of the Voting Rights Act. Although cities such as New Orleans have had many prominent black politicians, decades of racial tension have made many whites reluctant to vote for black public officials.



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