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Time, Place, & Purpose: The Performance of Creole Identity in Louisiana

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TIME, PLACE, & PURPOSE:
THE PERFORMANCE OF CREOLE IDENTITY IN LOUISIANA

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Dedication

For my mother, Evelyn Aker, and my grandparents, Norman and JoAnn Fry, who reminded me often how proud they were of me. Their unconditional love and support continue to guide me today.

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And finally, to my Nik, I would not—could not—have done this without your strength, support, and love at my side. I love you dearly.

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Abstract

Though much of the early development of Louisiana Creole culture can be found in New Orleans, the culture spread and continued to grow throughout the rest of South Louisiana in both similar and different ways. Expanding beyond Joseph Roach's treatment of Creole cultural performances in New Orleans in *Cities of the Dead* (1996) and journeying across land and water, this project identifies more Creole cultural performance as they emerge across place and time. I present Louisiana and the Gulf South as a kind of inland archipelago, with the currents of culture-creation moving in and around distinct community enclaves. The flow of the protest traditions of the Afro-Creoles of New Orleans and a self-identified Creole madame in Storyville travel along the banks of the Mississippi River to the capital crossroads of Baton Rouge, where two universities are linked by a history of segregation, protest, and inescapable connection. These intertwined histories faced off in a hometown football game in which the Southern University Human Jukebox and the LSU Golden Band from Tigerland explored creolized possibilities in a first-ever combined cultural performance in Tiger Stadium. Across the River, Creoles in South Louisiana are doing the work of expanding the state's narratives of the Cajun-dominated Acadiana through both traditional and nontraditional cultural performance. Together, in Festivals Acadiens et Créoles, Cajuns and Creoles resist the overarching views of the region by sharing time, music, dancing, food, and crafts. And finally, these elements of dramaturgical inquiry into a broader understanding of Creole cultural performance and conditions turn to Lake Charles, Louisiana, in 1963, as the characters of Tony Kushner and Jeanine Tesori's *Caroline, or Change* encounter the rapidly shifting tides of social and political upheaval from a Black, Louisiana Creole position. A creolized view of Louisiana cultural performance opens up new understandings of cultural creation and the complexity of race and community in the state.

Chapter 1. Louisiana Creole Cultural Performance

For many, Louisiana exists outside of the state in a kind of imaginary based in myth, stories, and performances. There's something to that perception. It both looks and doesn't look like the other Southern states around it, mostly because of its history, its people, and their cultures. Beyond its borders, Louisiana is most well-known for New Orleans or for the image of swamps and bayous, gumbos and jazz. Of course, the truth of Louisiana is that it is all those things but also much more. The influence of Catholicism in South Louisiana, imported by European colonizers, differs wildly from the more Protestant and Evangelical North Louisiana along the edge of the Bible Belt. A contested line between the northern and southern parts of the state marks across cultural differences, but even within those sections of the state, there are many more cultural differences from parish to parish and city to city.

This dissertation looks at the ways that Louisiana Creoles, often believed to have their origins solely in New Orleans, also emerged in locations across the state. Creole culture relies on performances of various kinds to create and maintain community, familial, and personal identity in different ways and for different purposes. I demonstrate through performance analysis and historiography that Creole culture is a living one, complex and varied, particularly in three locations across South Louisiana. Analyzing these cultural performances requires dramaturgical knowledge about the complex racial, cultural, legal, and protest histories of Louisiana Creoles. Cultural performances, according to ethnographer and anthropologist Dwight Conquergood, include "rituals, ceremonies, celebrations, myths, stories, songs, jokes, carnivals, contests, games, parties, politesse, and other expressive traditions."[1] Cultural performances are framed in

[1] Dwight Conquergood, "Performing Cultures: Ethnography, Epistemology, and Ethics," *Cultural Struggles* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 19.

time and space and have both performer and audience. The exchange between performer and audience transforms both in a kind of transaction of culture, a sharing and receiving that shapes the culture in each performance. Performance molds and transmits values, beliefs, what is known, and what can be known. Some of those Creole cultural performances presented in this dissertation include festivals, protest, storytelling, parades, and a battle of the bands. Additionally, I present the ways culture is performed in perhaps less traditional forms of gallery exhibits, websites, and activism. Throughout South Louisiana, these Creole cultural performances both reinforce and transform the culture.

Discussed in more detail later, I find it important to introduce a few key concepts about Creoles and Cajuns upfront. Some Creoles of South Louisiana can trace their lineages back to the Creoles of early colonial Louisiana, while others do not have documentation or archives to rely on. Creoles are often Black, but not all are. Some are mixed-race or multi-ethnic. Some identify as white and Creole, while others identify as Black and Creole. Cajuns, on the other hand, often have family heritages going back to the Acadians who settled in Southwest Louisiana, also called Acadiana. Cajuns are typically white, though not all are. Also, both Cajuns and Creoles engage in self-identification in many cases: their identity may be claimed because of their being born and/or raised in South Louisiana, rather than being able to definitively locate Cajuns or Creoles in their family ancestors. Alternatively, they may identify with either category based on their race. Race is also not always based on skin tone, but on family background. These issues of identity remain complicated now as they were historically, as I point out throughout the project.

Throughout this dissertation, I demonstrate how Louisiana relies on the most recognizable parts of itself as a script to perform the state for outsiders. In privileging representations of New Orleans and Cajuns, the contributions and culture of Louisiana Creoles

are overshadowed in the state's official performances of Louisiana culture. When Creoles are showcased, they are often New Orleans-based Creoles. Yet Creoles throughout the state are not all the same, and their cultural performances, from music to food, differ.

As a dramaturg by training, complex and nuanced histories that better elucidate the contextual circumstances of theatre and performance have always intrigued me. Those historical contexts, I realized, shape a performance's meaning. In a project for a Louisiana folklore course I took at LSU, I was struck by how few sources discussed broader South Louisiana Creole folk practices. The cultural practices of Cajuns and New Orleans Creoles dominated the literature. In response to this, I collected an oral history of a self-identified Creole who discussed his upbringing and educational history in Baton Rouge for my final project. At the time, I saw Cajun histories and New Orleans histories getting the most attention, leaving untouched or even reinforcing deep misunderstandings about the peculiarities of Creole and Black history elsewhere in Louisiana. Even in general understandings of the state's many cultural practices through folklore study, history, and literature, again and again, Cajuns (and more generally "Louisiana") were often at the forefront of intellectual inquiry, with Creoles receiving secondary or tertiary attention. To be clear, this was not the case in all scholarship. Nevertheless, a pattern did emerge. And, if scholars gave Creoles equal attention, it often started with their far-past origins and ways that they developed as a group of people over a period of time, but with less or little attention to current practices, values, and beliefs.[2]

[2] For instance, an LSU Libraries search results in 3,805 entries for "Louisiana Creole" and 70,531 entries for "Cajun." In the "Foreword to the Revised Edition" of Gary B. Mills' *The Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color* (2014), H. Sophie Burton comments that Mills' original 1977 work inspired a wave of studies on antebellum Afro-Creoles, "albeit the focus tended to be on New Orleans" (xv). In the foreword to Barry Jean Ancelet's *Cajun and Creole Folktales: (1994),* Carl Lindahl notes that Ancelet "treats the two groups as a continuum," because of the "powerful connections between Cajun and Creole tales" (x). Prior to this, folklore studies works treated them separately, and more were published about Cajuns than black Creoles. *Creoles of Color in the Bayou Country* (1996) by Brasseaux et al, gives a rich history primarily through the 19th and early 20th century, with its conclusion discussing the intricacies of racial identification in Black and Creole Louisianians during the 20th century.

Over the past two decades, the fields of Louisiana folk studies and history have continued to grow with a renewed interest in and attention to Creole cultural performances and their role in the development of the state's varied cultures. Studies on the histories and cultures of Black and Creole Louisianians in Baton Rouge and Southwest Louisiana have also emerged.[3] It has been incredible to see, and the most exciting part of it is that much of the attention is coming from inside the community, both in Louisiana and the Louisiana Creole diaspora.

While Creole scholars speak from experience and with personal interest in representing their community faithfully, I too hope to be recognized as speaking with respect on and about a culture that I am not part of, but that has influenced the city and region I have lived in for almost a decade and has welcomed me as both an active participant and observer of its cultural performances. My experiences in Baton Rouge and the bonds that have emerged in my relationships here have been greatly influenced by Creole and creolized culture. I am a white woman originally from central Texas, from a small city just across a lake from Fort Cavazos. With industry rooted in the military, a large hospital system, and a variety of local universities and other businesses, the county I grew up in was very racially and ethnically diverse, with a larger than normal international population. I had family in Houston and later moved there for my masters. There, I also lived in an incredibly diverse city, where my experience was shaped by the many different people and cultural practices I participated in over the years. Finally, I moved to Baton Rouge, where again, I was introduced to new cultures that at times resembled some I knew already, while also being quite different in other ways. In Baton Rouge, I have been able to participate in some of the Creole cultural performances I share throughout the dissertation. I have

[3] Elista Istre, *Creoles of South Louisiana: Three Centuries Strong* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2018). Petra Munro Hendry and Jay D. Edwards, *Old South Baton Rouge: The Roots of Hope* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2009).

interest in representing Louisiana, the Creoles, and Cajuns faithfully as I approach the culture through a lens of performance and what may be identified as a kind of social or cultural dramaturgical lens. Performance, as I demonstrate throughout the project, allows insight into the larger culture through discrete (and sometimes not so discrete) events and practices that transmit information about who the cultural actors are, but also what they want others to know about them. This combined attention to performance and dramaturgy requires attention not just to the individual actors and their intended audiences, but also to the historical, institutional, legal, educational, and cultural elements that influence the milieu of the region. In doing this, I highlight the ways that South Louisiana and Creole culture are complex, and how understanding the region and its people relies on fuller, deeper understandings of those component parts.

Setting the Scene

We begin in New Orleans but quickly move West: down IH-10 W to Baton Rouge; then to Acadiana in towns like Lafayette, Opelousas, and Carencro; and further even to Lake Charles in Calcasieu Parish. That culture doesn't stop at the state line, of course, and the borders of what separates South Louisiana and North Louisiana are similarly contested. Louisiana's influence is larger than the small state's size and population suggest. Scholar of Comparative Literature Benton Jay Komins declares New Orleans an "inland island."[4] In this same spirit, I argue that we view Louisiana and the wider American South as a series of cultural islands making up a larger system: an archipelago. Particularly in Louisiana, known for its relation to water—from the Mississippi River and the Atchafalaya Basin to its changing coastline along the Gulf, along with its swamps, marshes, and bayous—many cities across the southern part of the state can only be

[4] Benton Jay Komins. "The Convoluted Logic of Creolization the New Orleans Way." *The Comparatist* 24 (May 2000), 99.

accessed by bridges and boats.[5] Like the theorizing of the Caribbean islands, the various cities discussed in Louisiana bear similarities and differences to their neighbors. And they also bear a colonial past, with contemporary conditions that keep these communities in positions of precarity and danger, to be discussed further below.

Just like the ever-changing understanding of what Creole is and means, Louisiana Creoles have changed, too. The culture, the place, the time have changed, and so have the people. Understandings of race and history, of past, future, and circumstances, have demonstrated that Creoles are the product of their doing—of their being and performing, of their actions—more than just a piece of paper declaring that they are one thing or another. Louisiana Creoles have played a crucial part in the ways that understandings of race in the United States have been constructed and have changed in time, as I'll discuss more in detail below and throughout my dissertation. Engaging Creole performance carefully means attending to the nuances and complications of discourse about the South, Louisiana, and Black Americans. My research specialty in theatre and performance first centered on gender and sexuality in performances of the American South, but the deeper I got, the more that I began to understand that race, culture, and power are intertwined in these intersections. In Texas, I studied Chicanx and Latinx feminist theory—Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, to name two key figures. Moving to Louisiana, I began to realize that so many elements of the bridges and borderlands Anzaldúa and Moraga write about find resonance in Creole connections and creations. To lifelong residents of the South, the media depictions of the American South can feel stereotyped or distilled down to being entirely a product of racial issues (understood as Black versus white) or as a land of cultural richness devoid of racial tensions. But there is something in the middle, or perhaps on

[5] Biloxi, Houston, Galveston, cities in Florida and along the rest of the Atlantic coast might fit into this extension of the Caribbean rim by this definition.

the outside, or even in the in-between, that makes the South something else, different from the rest of the country. The diversity of cultures and experiences across the South deserve careful attention. Like every place, there is a beauty and history that is particular to this place, the South—and even more than that, there are individualities of culture and place that are specific to Louisiana.

In the last few decades scholars from a range of fields have offered complex investigations and reformations of the South and Southern culture, mapping out that in-between space between racial overdetermination and racial erasure.[6] I am not alone in this desire to highlight the South's complexity. E. Patrick Johnson, in his oral history collections of quare Black men and women of the South, shares the sentiments about the ways that different states across the South are not the same as the next. His work of archiving oral histories through saved written texts and devised performances emerged out of wanting "to talk about the South in broad strokes but also in its particularities, in particular locations, because the South is a complicated region and there are a lot of intercultural tensions, even within one state."[7] Johnson presents Louisiana as a prime example of those intercultural tensions and complexities.

Joseph Roach, in *Cities of the Dead*, identifies the ways that African interculture, Amerindian performance cultures, and European cultural and religious practices created a new kind of culture that could be labelled as Creole. In these new cultural practices, Creoles incorporated "mortuary rituals, carnival festivities, and a multitude of musical and dance forms

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[6] Historian James C. Cobb's *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (1994), *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (2007), and *The South and America since World War II* (2010) each illustrate the complex origins of Southern identity and its ties to racial relationships across the South. Adolph L. Reed, Jr.'s *The South: Jim Crow and Its Afterlives* (2022) gives attention to how Jim Crow policies structured inequality not just in the better-remembered explosive encounters, but also in everyday ways. And just this year, *A New History of the American South (2023),* edited by W. Fitzhugh Brundage, pushes against stereotypes of the South to reveal the complexity of the South's people, cultures, and histories.

[7] Jason Ruiz, "Pleasure and Pain in Black Queer Oral History and Performance: E. Patrick Johnson and Jason Ruiz in Conversation," *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* 1, no. 2, (Summer 2014).

that others would eventually describe (and appropriate) under the rubric of jazz."[8] Roach's work theorizes that memories of certain places and times become part of the embodied practices of performance, whether it be in traditionally understood performance mediums like plays and rites, or in what has more recently been understood as performance, daily rituals. Roach offers the elements of memory and history that are performed in the intercultures developed in both London and New Orleans, and how elements of surrogation, substitution, and ritual carry memory and history into the modern day through performance. Especially in his exploration of New Orleans, special attention is paid to Creole and Cajun cultural traditions, from Mardi Gras/Carnival to burial practices. Following from the history of the trans-Atlantic/circum-Atlantic trade slave, the roots of commodification are explored in contemporary displays of cultural exchange. Roach's work stresses that time and place are particular elements in the study of performance and culture, especially in the South, as they inform our understanding of race and status.

Roach's important work contributes to the body of scholarship that complicates understandings of Louisiana's culture through its presentation of cultural performances, but some scholars don't necessarily realize from this work that Creole culture exists outside of New Orleans. Some practices are the same, as I demonstrate, while others differ greatly due to a difference in location and time. The Creole cultural performances of the greater South Louisiana region are even more complex and varied than his already diverse examples. Much like I have encountered people outside of Louisiana who ask me about my relative distance from New Orleans (Baton Rouge not even a point in the map they'd recognize), I have also encountered tales of colleagues from LSU who, when introducing themselves to others at conferences, get

[8] Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, 9.

told in excited voices, “Oh, I love *Cities of the Dead*!” We do, too, and it’s a vital read for anyone who wants to learn more about the state and its culture. But I want more of Louisiana’s lesser-known cultural performances to be recognized and celebrated as well.

This was cemented early in my time at LSU, as I quickly realized how outsiders and residents perceive a state, and how the people who live there are perceived by themselves and others, matters. I was teaching an Intro Theatre class of approximately 100 students at LSU when Swine Palace Theatre produced *Vieux Carre*, an early Tennessee Williams play about a young artist enchanted by the cultural milieu of New Orleans, in the spring of 2016. The week after the show closed, we had our usual post-show discussion about the production. One of my students, a New Orleans native, raised her hand and asked something along the lines of, “Why is my hometown always exoticized and fetishized? I had a normal life there. It’s not just what they show it to be.” She pointed out the conversation we had had in an earlier class that had moved into a discussion of “tragedy porn” that seemed to be a common narrative about Louisiana, from 10-year anniversary retrospectives of Hurricane Katrina in 2015 to the upcoming film about the Deepwater Horizon spill. We talked about how Tennessee Williams likely found solace and refuge in New Orleans as a gay man in and from the South, and that there was a spark of something special about the city to someone desperately seeking contact with others like himself. There might be something unique about the ways that the city moves and doesn’t sleep, or the way that it seems to be celebrating, or mourning, or doing *something*, when everyone else (outside New Orleans or South Louisiana) is just going about their usual business. But, we discussed, there is a kind of *othering* about the way that New Orleans is viewed as a kind of anomaly, and that it can be frustrating when the city, state, and/or region gets judged for any number of ways that it moves outside and around expected norms of the nation. Further, New

Orleans as Louisiana is a metonymy that the city and state can barely escape from—as vibrant places, the rest of the state gets lumped together as not-New Orleans. The realities of the real people who make up Louisiana are often overshadowed by these outside perceptions that have been hazed up by the fog of unkind news stories and drunken weekend vacation tales.

These perceptions are fueled by the state and its own performance of Louisiana-ness for national and international audiences. Tourism and entertainment are top industries in the state. Under Lieutenant Governor Billy Nungesser, the State of Louisiana invested more than $2 million in floats and appearances at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and the Tournament of the Roses Parade through 2021 and 2024. The Lt. Governor's Office estimated that the first Macy's parade appearance "garnered more than $15 million in media coverage and boosted the state's tourism profile."[9] Tourism Secretary Doug Bourgeois estimated that the payoff in advertising from the 2023 Roses Parade $350,000 investment provided the state a potential $24 million advertising equivalent with 2.6 billion views across media platforms. "We love a parade," Bourgeois explained.[10] Floats for both parades highlighted Louisiana's natural flora and fauna, with native trees, alligators, and pelicans appearing. New Orleans showcases heavily in all of them. The Rose Parade float in 2022 featured balconies in the style of those of the French Quarter. The 2023 Rose Parade featured a river boat "Louisiana culture and music"—specifically beauty pageant queens from across the state and a New Orleans jazz band. The Macy's Parade float, used for multiple years, has colorful house facades like those seen in New Orleans as well, sitting atop a giant alligator. Featured artists have included Jon Batiste and Troy "Trombone

[9] Missy Wilkinson, "Louisiana to Spend $550,000 on Parade Float for Tournament of Roses; See Rendering, Performers," nola.com, December 17, 2021, https://www.nola.com/news/louisiana-to-spend-550-000-on-parade-float-for-tournament-of-roses-see-rendering-performers/article_7e5861fa-5f61-11ec-9096-bf9edf4edcda.html.
[10] Doug MacCash, "$350,000 Flower-covered Riverboat Float to Represent Louisiana in 2023 Rose Parade," nola.com, November 19, 2022, https://www.nola.com/entertainment_life/festivals/rose-parade-2023-louisiana-riverboat-float-cost-350000/article_80668610-6786-11ed-ab9a-5316b321912e.html.

Shorty" Andrews, both New Orleans natives. Smaller elements, like baskets of produce, a crawfish boil pot, and other items pointed to life outside of New Orleans, but nothing else held the central focus like New Orleans as character. These floats stand in contrast to the other standard narrative of Louisiana-ness, that of the Cajun culture.

In determining how to intervene in these performances of cultural identity and expand on the performance of Louisiana's culture, I found myself falling back on my own background and training as a dramaturg. Dramaturgy, in the simplest of terms for this purpose, is a process of research that aids in the development of a play or performance. Some dramaturgs work with playwrights or companies who are writing or devising new works. Other dramaturgs work with production companies who are actively in rehearsal, offering historical and cultural insight into the world of the play or performance. The practice of dramaturgy relies on an understanding that in telling other people's stories, we must bear the responsibility of learning about those people and their circumstances to better communicate them to others. Dramaturgs often break down important historical moments, cultural performances, and interpersonal practices for the actors or audience, to better help them grasp the many-layered meanings of the performance or play. This is quite useful for plays or performances that exist outside the experience of the audience or actors, but companies utilize dramaturgs for performances about the past, present, future, and imagined times and places.

Theatre practitioner Sadie Berlin has recently championed what she has called cultural dramaturgy, "a dramaturgical approach that focuses on how all the intersections in a production (text, other creative sources, choreography, creative team, performers) are factored into the outcome, can help broaden or restrict the scope of casting."[11] Elsewhere, Berlin's concept of

[11] Sadie Berlin, "Outcast: Limits and Possibilities in Casting Black Performers in the Age of Granular Dramaturgy," *Canadian Theatre Review* 193 (Winter 2023): 42, https://doi.org/10.3138/ctr.193.009.

cultural dramaturgy "aims to create a higher quality of theatre by focusing on cultural intimacy, specificity, and authenticity for every performance."[12] In the podcast *Old Heads,* Berlin advocates for plays to be produced with representative parties in the room—for example, if producing a play about Creoles, every attempt should be made to have a Creole who can speak to that experience in the space. She acknowledges that this is not always possible.[13] But dramaturgs, theatre historians, practitioners, and theorists can and should approach their performance sites and those they represent care and respect, and with a curiosity borne out of those, to offer deeper understandings of the cultures and people represented.

In that spirit, my project offers a mix of history, theory, and legal and educational milestones to mark how and why Louisiana Creole cultural performance has changed over time and exists today. Not quite Berlin's cultural dramaturgy, as I am not Creole, but rooted in the same impulses of authenticity and respect, I employ a kind of social or historical dramaturgy that centers on the various contextual elements that revolve around a given cultural performance with particular attention to time, place, and purpose. As I also recognize that dramaturgy emerges out of a way of telling stories, I also use stories to help place the reader into a more specific scene or location, with unique people and epistemologies, relying heavily on the realities of geography, landmarks, and waterways. I have recently been introduced to the work of anthropologist Kathleen Stewart, who tracks the cultural poetics of other "forgotten" places across the United States through a method of storytelling, inviting readers into new locales and introducing them to new people through thick descriptions of place and time.[14] These methods of dramaturgy and

[12] Casting Canadian Theatre, "Cultural Dramaturgy," *(Re)Setting the Stage: The Past, Present, and Future of Casting Practices in Canada,"* accessed December 2, 2023, https://castingcanadiantheatre.ca/archives/2013.
[13] Sadie Berlin, Interview with Addae Moon and EB Smith, *Old Heads* episode 3, podcast audio, July 16, 2020, https://podbay.fm/p/old-heads/e/1594960816.
[14] Kathleen Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

storytelling work together to expand questions about the people and performances of South Louisiana, while also helping share about them in a way that is accessible. Much like the folk stories discussed later in the project, the teller and the listener (or here, the reader) are changed in the exchange of the story. Each time a storyteller spins a tale, new questions emerge and shape the telling and what is known and learned therein.

In this storytelling, I at times favor chronology. Since so much of Creole history exists as scattered references in other works, I occasionally find it necessary to gather these references into a sensible chronological narrative. Aware of the dangers of narrative historiography, I nevertheless occasionally choose simply to tell (one version of) the story that Creole cultural performances emerge from and transmit. At other times, I lean into what D. Soyini Madison describes as a patchwork of telling or a mosaic of stories, recollections, actions, and shared experiences. When presenting her ethnographic work, "Interviews, incidents, and performances…are sometimes interrupted by juxtaposing and inserting a different text or scene that depicts the simultaneity of temporalities and discourses that are more authentic to how it was lived and remembered." [15] These moments work together and against each other at times, both interrupting and building a broader, thicker understanding. And, as is often the case in Louisiana, but also in the country and world more generally, things are complex; more than one thing can be true at once. Just as multiple things can occupy the space of truth at once, so too, can multiple identities, beliefs, and cultures. As Madison explains, "Performance aims to delve into the undercurrents, the deep particularities, to ask: How is it what it is?"[16] It is with those many things

[15] D. Soyini Madison, *Acts of Activism: Human Rights as Radical Performance,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 26.
[16] Madison, *Acts of Activism*, 224.

I keep in mind as I argue for more attention to the Louisiana Creoles and the conditions and performances of their culture-making in the Gulf South.

Who are Creoles? The Cajuns?

The label of *Creole*, both here in Louisiana and globally, has a variety of meanings that stem from historical encounters, laws, people, and place. Creole most often refers to someone from the Caribbean or the "New World," usually francophone, and often of a mixed racial or ethnic heritage. In the United States—in Louisiana and along the Gulf Coast—Creole has meant many things and still does today. Unless specified, I will use *Creole* to mean *Louisiana Creole*. What Louisiana Creole is and has been has varied quite a bit over time and place It is hard to pin down what constitutes Creole identity and belonging. Just as Creole as an identity exists through the process of creolization, it is not a fixed term, but one that shifts and changes. Here, I am using Louisiana scholar Nick Spitzer's definition of creolization, a process that "conjoins multiple sources in new identities and expressions, continuously comingling and adapting traditions in ways that link the local, regional, and global."[17] This definition, beyond just mixing, represents creolization as an ongoing, culture-shaping project. Louisiana Creole relies on its context, just as the varying global concepts of Creole depend on geography, institutions, people, and time. In the Gulf South, the term Creole (and its antecedent names) has a long a storied history. Initially, Portuguese *crioulo* and Spanish *criollo* meant "someone in the house," or "someone of the household," but by the middle of the 16th century, their definitions changed to mean "native to the colonies."[18] The word (at this point, *criollo*) named anything or native to the

[17] Nick Spitzer, "Creolization as Cultural Continuity and Creativity in Postdiluvian New Orleans and Beyond," *Southern Spaces* (November 28, 2011), https://southernspaces.org/2011/creolization-cultural-continuity-and-creativity-postdiluvian-new-orleans-and-beyond/.
[18] Connie Eble, "Creole in Louisiana," *South Atlantic Review* 73, no. 2 (2008): 40. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27784777.

New World, including animals, plants, or a child born to two European parents in the New World. Later Spanish and French began to incorporate the elements of miscegenation; "Creole" categorized people of mixed European and native or Black ancestry. As such, the Creole people held far less status, power, and safety in relation to the colonizers. Subsequently, Creole referred to anyone who had a past that could be traced back to European and native or Black heritage.[19]. The term has always meant multiple things, often at the same time.[20]

Language has at times been an identifying characteristic of Louisiana Creole people. Today not all Creole-identifying people speak Louisiana Creole French, just as not all Cajuns speak Louisiana or Cajun French. Language needs a special bit of attention here. The terms *Louisiana Creole, French Creole,* and more recently *Kouri-Vini* all are used interchangeably as names for the dialect, depending on who is speaking. Sometimes *Louisiana Creole* or *French Creole* is used to label *Cajun* or *Louisiana French*. Because of these various labels and differences, I use *Louisiana* or *Cajun French* to describe the patois or dialect of French that is used most by a primarily white francophone population in Louisiana, especially those who identify as Cajun.[21] Black and Creole people in the state also speak Louisiana French, but there is another language specific to Louisiana Creoles: *Kouri-Vini*. Previously referred to as Louisiana Creole or Creole French, or even Kréyòl, Kouri-Vini has Creole advocates who speak the

[19] Connie Eble details the shifts from Portuguese "crioulo" and Spanish "criollo" to French "créole" and then English Creole usage in the Caribbean and Louisiana in "Creole in Louisiana" (Spring 2008). Most histories of Creoles share a similar evolution, including Richard Allsop, *Dictionary of Caribbean Usage*, 1996. and James Lockhart, *Spanish Peru*, 1968.

[20] For an idea of one way that Creole is understood today, the Visit New Orleans site has a brief history that reveals the more recent "from here" interpretation, or that Creole is a result of being from the culture. "Creole History in New Orleans," Visit New Orleans, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.neworleans.com/things-to-do/multicultural/cultures/creoles/.

[21] For more on Louisiana Creole/Kouri-Vini, this chapter provides a quick but thorough overview on the history and linguistic markers of the language: Thomas A. Klinger and Ingrid Neumann-Holzschuh, "Survey Chapter: Louisiana Creole," *The Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures Online Vol 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), accessed December 7, 2023. https://apics-online.info/surveys/53

language to avoid confusion with Louisiana French. One theory is that the name comes from the French *courez-venez,* which translates into “come-and-go," or literally “go-come.”[22] Alternately, independent scholar and Kouri-Vini advocate Christophe Landry argues that sometime in the mid-twentieth century, along Bayou Teche, the term arose from how Creole speakers would say, “I went, you came”: *Mo kouri, to vini.*[23] The area stood as a crossroads for a number of languages: Indigenous languages of the region’s native tribes, Spanish, Portuguese, English, Haitian Creole, and of course French. Black people in South Louisiana were the primary speakers of Kouri-Vini, compared to white Louisianians who predominantly spoke Louisiana or Cajun French. Kouri-Vini is an endangered language, but efforts to recover the language and widen its usage have emerged and will be discussed in Chapter 2.

As the first Creoles in Louisiana date back to the 17th century, who was identified as Creole has changed considerably over the centuries. Again, the original Creoles were anyone who had mixed heritage or was born in Louisiana. Because of the aspect of location, the label of Creole came to mean both white-identified people and people of color, especially free people of color in New Orleans and beyond throughout the region. Some scholars now identify a specific group of free people of color in New Orleans as the Afro-Creoles, bound by time in the 19th century.[24] I discuss this group in a bit more detail below, but these Afro-Creoles were generally well-educated, living free during the antebellum period, and able to own property.[25] Their French more closely resembled Louisiana or Standard French, and many travelled abroad to study or

[22] “Meaning of Kouri-Vini,” WordSense Dictionary, accessed December 2, 2023. https://www.wordsense.eu/kouri-vini/.
[23] Christophe Landry, “What is Kouri-Vini?” Louisiana Historic & Cultural Vistas, accessed December 7, 2023. https://www.mylhcv.com/kouri-vini-whats-name/.
[24] Caryn Cossé Bell, *Creole New Orleans in the Revolutionary Atlantic, 1775-1877*, 2023. Clint Bruce, *Afro-Creole Poetry in French from Louisiana’s Radical Civil War-Era Newspapers*, 2020.
[25] Property at this time included enslaved people.

visit.[26] Kouri-Vini developed more in the rural and plantation parts of the state, but especially in the south-central and southwest parts. As the Civil War ended, the New Orleans Afro-Creoles worked in some endeavors to ally themselves with the new freedmen and freedwomen, rural Blacks who may or may not have identified as Creole at the time. Migration between rural towns and more industrialized cities happened with more regularity during the turn of the twentieth century, shifting where the different French-based languages were spoken in the state. The state banned public school lessons in French in 1921.[27] By the end of Reconstruction and the beginning of Jim Crow, Creole was a term being debated for its racial implications. Americanization and a shift in racial categories from the three-tiered caste system of the antebellum period led to new definitions of race across the white-Black binary into the 1920s.[28] Some French-speaking whites tried to maintain Creole as a term for themselves, as non-Cajuns used the term as a derogatory label against them. Eventually, during the Cajun Renaissance in the 1960s and 1970s[29], as Cajuns embarked on their own journey of reclaiming their French heritage as a positive in the eyes of the state, Cajun and Creole became the new white-Black binary in parts of South Louisiana.[30]

The French Acadians, or Cajuns, came to South Louisiana in the decades following their expulsion from Canada under British rule in 1755. They had refused to pledge allegiance to the

[26] Bruce, *Afro-Creole Poetry*, 2020.
[27] "French's Legal Status in Louisiana," Office of Cultural Development: CODOFIL, accessed December 7, 2023. https://www.crt.state.la.us/cultural-development/codofil/about/french-in-louisiana/legal-status/index.
[28] Bruce, *Afro-Creole Poetry*, 44-50.
[29] In an effort to change the perception of Cajuns, a cultural renaissance that highlighted Cajun contributions to foodways, festivals, and the maintenance of language in the state began in the mid 1960s. By 1968, CODOFIL, the state department for fostering French in Louisiana, and later Francophone culture, was created. The learning and speaking of Louisiana French, which had been banned in public school lessons for decades, was now being encouraged and celebrated.
[30] For more on shifting racial views and the Cajun Renaissance: Alexandra Giancarlo, "'Don't call me a Cajun!': race and representation in Louisiana's Acadiana region," *Journal of Cultural Geography* (July 23, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1080/08873631.2018.1500088.

British Crown and Anglican Church, and they took to sea to move south towards the east coast of the United States, the Caribbean and eventually Louisiana. With permission from Spain, which had control of Louisiana from 1763-1803, the Acadians came to New Orleans, but most moved west after experiencing hostility from the French aristocracy there. In Southwest Louisiana, the Acadians were originally subsistence farmers, but some of them eventually adopted the plantation system and slavery, leading to multiple strata of class amongst them. The Civil War greatly affected class amongst white people in South Louisiana, leading to a larger population of working class and poor white people. Acadians also began to marry outside of their community, "particularly Creole descendants of French, Spanish, and German immigrants," which led to the development of a new ethnic group, the Cajuns.[31] Here, we see the complication of calling groups Creole, as the Cajuns themselves are sometimes descendants of people who identified as Creole centuries ago. Today, Cajuns can be found throughout Louisiana and in neighboring states, some being able to trace their lineage back to the original Acadians, while others cannot.

I'd like to take a moment here to look a little more deeply into the racialization processes of the Creole identity in Louisiana. Today, though there are exceptions, Creoles are typically seen to be Black, while Cajuns are typically white. In "Migratory Movement: The Politics of Ethnic Community (Re) Construction Among Creoles of Color, 1920-1940," Andrew Jolivétte writes about the migration of American Creoles of Color, who the state of Louisiana classified as Black for the first time in 1920. This led to changes in political, cultural, and economic status because of the loss of previously recognized rights, including education and land ownership. That re-categorization, as Jolivétte explains, inaugurated the second large migration, the first being from

[31] For a brief history of the Cajuns: Shane K. Bernard, "Cajuns," *64 Parishes*, last updated July 3, 2022, https://64parishes.org/entry/cajuns.
For a deeper look at the Cajuns and their shifting identities: Shane K. Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People* (Oxford, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2003).

1840 to 1890, when Creoles of Color moved to locations where "racial lines were more fluid."[32] Migration and the creation of ethnic and cultural enclaves were necessitated and emerge as a kind of performativity of identity and collective culture. Defining identity on one's own terms additionally serves to challenge the overarching shifts in racial classification by the state of Louisiana and the United States. Jolivétte also argues that "'passing' reveals an underlying political, racial, and economic project that both denies white and Black racism and results in the marginalization of mixed race, hybrid, mestizo populations."[33] He also warns that "Although many scholars in the twentieth century observe that Creoles maintained much of their distinct culture, others have only analyzed this in the context of black-white relations and have reduced the Creole experience as multiracial to an issue of 'passing' white or being 'authentically black.'"[34] Jolivétte's attention to the problems of multiraciality and the Black-white color line echoes Catanese's discussions of the dangers of reducing truly multi-ethnic identities to a single thing. In condensing them, their cultural contributions and performances lose nuance. I take these as warnings to carry with me in my work with Creole cultural performances.

According to Jolivétte, the migration that began in 1920 took Creoles to New Orleans, Houston, further across the country mostly to large cities, and even to the Caribbean and Latin America. This mass movement created a Creole migration. Rather than blend in with other multiply ethnic communities, Creoles carefully chose and built their enclaves. They "chose to be true to their ethnic and cultural distinctiveness, by not denying any portion of their ancestry,"[35] modeling their new communities after their remembered home in Louisiana. Also, Creoles

[32] Andrew J. Jolivétte, "Migratory Movement: The Politics of Ethnic Community (Re)Construction Among Creoles of Color, 1920-1940," *Ethnic Studies Review* 28, no. 2 (2005): 38.
[33] Jolivétte, *Movement*, 38.
[34] Jolivétte, *Movement,* 40.
[35] Jolivétte, *Movement,* 42.

"caused ruptures in the binary thinking [of Black and white] that was established from 1865-1920"[36] by insisting on being recognized as Creole, rather than passing as white or claiming a "pure" black ancestry. Jolivétte argues that such authentic acceptance and performance of their identity as Creoles allowed them to forge strong kinship networks, outside of Louisiana and usually modeled after the home that they remembered. He does warn, though, that most scholarship on Creole identities forecloses the Native American ancestry of many Creoles, especially those originally from Southwest Louisiana and southeast Texas. Finally, Jolivétte explains that "Creoles have historically been seen as 'performing' race when in actuality a constructionist model or even a social interactionist view demonstrates that Creoles have been forced by their surroundings to shift from a collective group identity as Creole, to individual identifications with French, Indian, Spanish or African ancestry."[37] Because of national and state systems, Creoles have denied their racial and cultural complexity because of census reports that didn't recognize their culture as a distinct one. Only in the past two decades have these systems added options for marking more than a single race. Jolivétte's interviews highlight the ways that the academy and scholarship has further denied Creole identity its acknowledgement as a culture when anthropologists look for the "pristine people," or "finding a whole culture intact" (French/Indian Interview Respondent, quoted by Jolivétte).[38] He points to cultural formation as a product of "the activities that take place within these institutionally defined spheres and of the meaning produced in them," and argues that, in contrast to racial formation, cultural formation "tends to more specifically and practically link the in-between spaces that inter-lock ethnic identification with not only ancestry and not only patterns of behavior and ritual, but connects

[36] Jolivétte, *Movement*, 44.
[37] Jolivétte, *Movement*, 52.
[38] Jolivétte, *Movement*, 53.

both in a complex, fluid, and hybrid formation."[39] Creoles actively and continuously chose to perform, reconstruct, and maintain their ethnic identity by embracing others like themselves and being authentically themselves whether away from Louisiana or in places not traditionally recognized as Creole Louisiana.

This difficulty in tracing lineage and the regular re-forming of what culture and belonging look like creates one of the major reasons why these groups—both Creoles and Cajuns—operate primarily as self-identifying labels. The shifting of definitions over the centuries have taken their toll, leading many to have incomplete pictures of their ancestors. Family legend proves enough to lay claim to an identity for many. For others, family records are nonexistent or sparse. The realities of weather phenomena and disasters like hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, and fires lead to the loss of birth certificates, health records, and more. And before digitization, even the paperwork kept by the city, parish, or local hospital might be lost in a similar event. Language as an identifier can be helpful, but for large periods of time in the twentieth century, in particular, French was not allowed in schools. Faculty and staff of schools physically punished students if they were heard using it. Both Creoles and Cajuns were publicly ridiculed for speaking French. Not until 1968, when The Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) was created, did the state support French speakers, and even then, it privileged white and Louisiana French speakers. Creoles benefited in some ways from CODOFIL, but not until later and to a lesser degree. There are additional burdens on Creoles for identifying ancestral belonging because of the history of familial enslavement, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Great Migration, and the effects of systemic racism resulting in higher rates of imprisonment, extrajudicial killings of Black people by police, and other economic and social oppression.

[39] Jolivétte, *Movement,* 53.

Despite all these challenges, there are still Louisiana Creoles. They build community, they share histories, and they create new culture. The conditions of creolization are still happening, with individuals and communities that may not be able to pinpoint their historical heritage, but, through proximity, time, and precarity, they continue to creolize. Some people are Cajun, some people are Creole, some people are both, and some people are neither.

Creole Cultural Performance

Recently, there has been a growing scholarly interest in the ways that creolization and performance interact with each other, as well as ways in which Louisiana Creole culture exists in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Nicholas Spitzer remains a key figure in the maintenance and archiving of Louisiana Creoles, particularly Francophone and Creole of Color communities. Some of his work extends past New Orleans, but by and large, his focus is on New Orleans and the surrounding parishes. His work on "postdiluvian" or post-Katrina New Orleans cultural continuity offers helpful tools for speaking about Creole culture today, and can be translated to other South Louisiana communities following both natural and manmade disasters.[40] Komins explores specific modes and conditions of creolization, specifically in New Orleans, focusing on the elements of creolized seepage, ideological manipulation, issues of difference and acclimation, confrontation, and the contradicting consequences of sharing more popularized histories. In the recent *Staging Creolization: Women's Theater and Performance from the French Caribbean*, Emily Sahakian analyzes seven French and French Caribbean plays by women playwrights from the 1980s and 1990s that have since been performed in the United States, arguing that they perform and dramatize creolization. She joins other global studies

[40] Nicholas R. Spitzer, "Creolization as Cultural Continuity and Creativity in Postdiluvian New Orleans and Beyond," *Southern Spaces* (November 28, 2011), https://southernspaces.org/2011/creolization-cultural-continuity-and-creativity-postdiluvian-new-orleans-and-beyond/.

scholars in likening creolization to performance, comparing the ways they both allow for creation and creativity through dynamic process under a variety of conditions.[41] These processes of performance and creolization reveal themselves in the cultural performances of South Louisiana time and again, as I demonstrate throughout the dissertation.

Dwight Conquergood offers reflections on performance as cultural process in a more general sense, as his work centered on a variety of different cultures. His work influences mine as I present lesser-explored Creole cultural performances as processes of belonging and coping, as well as community-building. Conquergood muses that the "dramaturgical perspective," popular in the mid-twentieth century saw increased interest from scholars, particularly anthropologists and ethnographers, at the turn of the twenty-first century. To view culture as performance can be helpful to the scholar, especially to avoid thinking of culture as a "metaphysical or immanent entity, something prior to, above, and privileged from social performance."[42] He argues that "What keeps the performative nature of culture as enlivening energies in perpetual motion is that people continuously enact—perhaps it is more fitting to say 'transact'—culture."[43] Culture is political because of its capacity to "induce self-knowledge, self-awareness, plural reflexivity."[44] Volatility and dynamism mark the more ephemeral qualities of performance, but they are "nonetheless, framed, repeated and recognizable events."[45] Theatre and performance theorist Richard Schechner asks and answers: "And what is performance? Behavior heightened, if ever so slightly, and publicly displayed; twice-behaved behaviour."[46]

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[41] Emily Sahakian, *Staging Creolization: Women's Theater and Performance from the French Caribbean,* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017).
[42] Dwight Conquergood, "Performing Cultures: Ethnography, Epistemology, and Ethics," *Cultural Struggles: Performance Ethnography Praxis,* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 15.
[43] Conquergood, "Performing Cultures," 15.
[44] Conquergood, "Performing Cultures," 19.
[45] Conquergood, "Performing Cultures," 20.
[46] Richard Schechner, *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance,* (London: Routledge, 1993), 1.

Elsewhere, he argues that history isn't "what happened but what is encoded and transmitted," continuing that, "Performance is not merely a selection from data arranged and interpreted; it is behavior itself and carries in itself kernels of originality."[47] Though I offer dramaturgical views of the history and context around the Creole cultural performances of South Louisiana, the performances themselves shape those histories, too. They are mutual participants in the shaping of the region, its people, and the broader culture of the state.

In discussing Creole cultural performance, issues of race and performance also play in the conversations of meaning and culture-making. Brandi Wilkins Catanese opens her book *The Problem of the Color[blind]* with the bandied-about truism that "blackness and performance are ineluctably linked."[48] She suggests, though, that scholars "couple our attention to the power of expressive culture with an understanding that other modes of performance—related to institutional and capitalist imperatives of surveillance, productivity, and efficacy—play equally significant roles in constructing the lived experience and political possibilities of black Americans."[49] She encourages a relational analysis of the representations of cultural performance, particularly in the ways that performance regulates, provides pleasure, enacts possibility.[50] In a society that calls itself post-race or multicultural, Catanese argues that the limitations and risks of visibility have been forced upon racial minorities, and that through the "affective potential" of performance, "the relationship between racial representation and racial reality" can be uncovered. Catanese clarifies that race is not essential, while also being what Harry Elam calls "situational significance."[51] Race, according to Catanese, is not entirely

[47] Richard Schechner. *Between Theater and Anthropology*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 51.
[48] Brandi Wilkins Catanese, *The Problem of the Color[blind],* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 1.
[49] Catanese, *Color[blind]*, 1.
[50] Catanese, *Color[blind]*, 2.
[51] Catanese, *Color[blind]*, 8.

biological or social construct, but a concept that, through references to different bodies, signifies "social conflicts and interests."[52] Catanese calls for attention to transgression, rather than transcendence, in Black performance, as borders are crossed and pushed, not just gotten over. Fred Moten discusses transgression as well in his concept of fugivity, explaining that it "is a desire for and a spirit of escape and transgression of the proper and the proposed."[53] Blackness is something fugitive, an ongoing refusal of standards set upon it. He also argues that "Blackness is an ongoing performance of encounter: rupture, collision, and passionate response."[54] Though not all who identify as Creole also identify as Black, many do. The Creole cultural performances of South Louisiana cannot be separated out from the performances of Blackness and the meaning-making therein. Additionally, Louisiana stands as a prime example of the multiculturalism and creolization of American culture—Catanese's work opens up questions about the limits and possibilities of race and culture through the various lenses of Black and white, multicultural, and more.

And finally, for Louisiana and Creole performance, Joseph Roach, as introduced earlier in this chapter, remains a key scholar in the understanding of Creole cultural performance and its development in New Orleans. His work *Cities of the Dead* remains a seminal work in this field. But, as I explained before, only knowing about the Creole cultural performances of New Orleans forecloses the rich and varied Creole cultural performances of the rest of South Louisiana, and beyond across the Gulf. Some of these practices resemble those of New Orleans, while others are distinct and separate, as I demonstrate throughout the dissertation. Roach's work, like the port of

[52] Catanese, *Color[blind]*, 18.
[53] Fred Moten, *Stolen Life*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 131.
[54] Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2003), Kindle edition.

New Orleans itself, continues to be an exciting and fulfilling entry into the performance of the region, but I demonstrate that many other cultural performances deserve attention as well.

Each of these theories of performance and cultural performance influence my analysis of the various sites throughout this project, among others who will be referenced throughout. From specifically Creole and creolized performance practices to the questions of race and the performances of and from that signifier, and then to the ways that culture is performed and that cultural performances repeat and transform, each of these elements is instrumental in better understanding Louisiana Creole culture. Also, I think it is important here to define how I use the term *culture*: customs, social institutions and groups, as well as art and achievements of a particular group of people. Culture shapes how that group of people understands the world while also shaping the world around them. Once it begins, culture grows and changes through ritualized, educational, and creative productions. Culture is not singular; someone can be a member of more than one culture. Neighboring cultures or the multiple cultures of a person or group shape each other and lead to new displays of cultural performance and performance of culture. Time, place, and purpose are all necessary factors of understanding the culture of someone else. Creole cultural performances are those events and expressions of culture that speak to both the community member and the outsider, telling them who they are and what they will be. Creole cultural performances are shaped by the myriad of influences that exist in the South Louisiana milieu.

Re-constructions of Race in New Orleans

In the interests of understanding Louisiana Creole culture better, I begin in New Orleans before moving to the various sites of Louisiana Creole culture outside of the oldest and largest city in the state. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Afro-Creoles of New Orleans,

educated free people of color, whose works in news-reporting, *poésie engagée*, and early civil rights advocacy, created the foundations of a heritage that Caryn Cossé Bell terms the Afro-Creole protest tradition.[55] This tradition of activism and its effects can then be seen across the region throughout the next century and beyond. Herman Plessy's 1892 act of civil obedience—riding a whites-only streetcar after the onset of segregation after Reconstruction—stands as an example of this protest tradition as well. *Plessy v. Ferguson* had lasting effects, as Louisiana's understandings of race transformed during the Americanization of the very European state, while also shaping the emerging institutions of racial difference across the country for the next half century. Finally, Madame Lulu White, a Black brothel owner who claimed Creole identity, demonstrates the ways that, even in New Orleans amongst French-speaking Creoles, a woman from Alabama was able to take on the mantle of Creole. The identity of Louisiana Creole today is one of self-identification for a number of reasons, and she serves as one example of how identity can be claimed.

Prior to the Civil War, a system of plaçage existed in New Orleans, and the territory of Louisiana (and later, the state). White men and women of African, Indigenous, or mixed-race descent entered into relationships outside the standard legal practice of marriage, producing children who in turn became free people of color. The categories of race recognized societal difference between white people, free people of color (or the Creoles of Color, called by scholars Afro-Creoles), and Black people. Additionally, not all Black people were enslaved, as some earned or purchased their freedom through various means. As the Civil War neared, a class of highly educated, often well-traveled Afro-Creoles emerged in New Orleans who began sharing egalitarian ideals for people of all races, but particularly for the Creoles, spurred on by the influx

[55] Caryn Cossé Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718-1868,* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

of refugees from the Haitian Revolution and contact with France. Their writings, expressions of their raced and educated culture, led to white lawmakers passing a state statute in 1830 that imposed a death sentence on anyone whose writings produced "discontent among the free coloured population of the State, or insubordination among the slaves therein."[56] Not until the dawn of the Civil War did public printing of their writings begin to emerge again. A group of Afro-Creoles began printing and distributing first *L'Union* and then *La Tribune*. As Clint Bruce explains, the papers filled with news stories and poetry in French, did not shy away from themes of historical transformation, even revolution. In 1862, *L'Union* declared "a new era in the destiny of the South,"[57] the same year that the Union captured New Orleans and then Baton Rouge. Following the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, and the abolishment of slavery in Louisiana in 1864, the editor of *L'Union,* Paul Trévigne, received death threats, leading to the end of the newspaper. Two days later, *La Tribune de la Nouvelle-Orléans* appeared in its place, with many of the same editors and contributors.[58] *La Tribune* continued printing opinions about state and local elections as well as *poésie engagée*, or politically-engaged poetry, which included a rich interplay of news and poetry.[59] "Discourse conjoined with action" became the modus operandi of the Afro-Creoles, as the end of slavery led them to begin attempts at allying with freedmen along the lines of Blackness, and establishing advocacy organizations and the Republican party in Louisiana.

It is during this time that Bruce makes a subtle shift in his discussion of the Afro-Creoles: this is not a name they would have used to describe themselves, but one given them by scholars. In contrast to this label, it is in discussion of the happenings of the late 1860s and beyond, as the

[56] Clint Bruce, *Afro-Creole Poetry*, 11.
[57] Bruce, *Afro-Creole Poetry*, 19.
[58] Bruce, *Afro-Creole Poetry*, 21.
[59] Bruce, *Afro-Creole Poetry*, 28.

Afro-Creoles begin to work not just for ideals of their own but for all Black people in the state, that he begins discussing the larger group as Louisiana Creoles. Just as the audience shifted from that of the Afro-Creoles' newspaper and later legal writings as they began drafting a Constitutional Bill of Rights in 1867-1868, so, too did their community identities transform. They were no longer just the Afro-Creoles, but now part of a larger community of Louisiana Creoles of more diverse backgrounds, broadening who, what, and where Creoles were. The Afro-Creoles drafted the beginnings of a century long script of ideals for freedom and civil rights that would guide Louisiana Creoles through the next century.

In 1892, the *Comité des Citoyens* or Citizens Committee of New Orleans recruited Herman Plessy to test the Louisiana Separate Car Act, which barred Black people from riding in a whites-only railroad car. Louisiana law considered Plessy, identified as 1/8 Black and a light-complected Creole who could pass for white, Black. The law had shifted considerably following the end of plaçage and the Civil War. Plessy refused to leave the car when approached and was arrested, leading his performance of civil disobedience to become the Supreme Court case that established "Separate but Equal" as the law of the land. Though his lawyers argued that the Separate Car Act violated the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments and that the laws based on blood, race, and skin color were arbitrary in nature, the Court upheld that the state's law could be enforced within its own state boundaries. In a 7-1 decision for Ferguson, Justice Brown's majority opinion argued that the Fourteenth Amendment established equality for the races, but that "separate treatment did not imply the inferiority of African Americans."[60] Sole dissenter Justice John Marshall Harlan argued that the Constitution was colorblind and that the United States had no caste system.[61]

[60] "*Plessy v. Ferguson*," Oyez, accessed on December 7, 2023. https://www.oyez.org/cases/1850-1900/163us537.
[61] "*Plessy v. Ferguson," Oyez.*

In contrast to the mostly Creole men discussed above, a particular character appeared in New Orleans in a specific 16-block part of the city called Storyville (named after alderman Sidney Story, who designed the city's guidelines and preferred for the area to be called "The District"). In the area now known as Tremé, prostitution was legal. Within Storyville lay Mahoganey Hall, owned and run by Madame Lulu White, a Black woman born in Alabama but claiming a Creole identity via the West Indies. Advertising her boarders in the souvenir booklet about her business, she described them as "born and bred Louisiana girls," whether they were or not. As Emily Epstein Landau explains,

> Lulu White embodied disorder. As a so-called octoroon and a madam, she crossed the lines that 'proper,' 'white' society was constructing through the enforcement of the color line, and the sexual and gender arrangements that went with it. She defied both the moral and the racial perimeters erected by the rising bourgeoisie and in so doing represented danger.[62]

Landau's history pitches White against the Creole men who strove for political and civil rights, arguing that "she relied on the color line not only in order to promote its transgression, but also in order that the 'octoroon appear exotic, different, atavistic and female—all of which added to her attractiveness."[63] She refused to be shoehorned into the categories of white or Black, insisting upon the continued use of the identifier Creole or Octoroon. But, like the Creoles of the time, she also used the legal system to push for change that benefitted her and other brothel owners. As segregation after *Plessy v. Ferguson* spread alongside changing ordinances surrounding the red-light district, she and other madams, including Willie Piazza, won their right

[62] Emily Epstein Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness: Sex, Race, and Memory in Storyville, New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 132.
[63] Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness*, 132.

to stay in the district in 1917.The women of color who worked and resided in Storyville could remain. Before the redrafted ordinance could go into effect, though, a national law passed that prohibited prostitution within five miles of a military base in the wake of World War I. White continued to run her brothel illegally, resulting in multiple arrests that were consolidated into a single court case later declined by the Louisiana Supreme Court as she appealed the lower courts' decision on grounds of unequal treatment under the law. She continued to run a brothel, albeit off Basin Street until her death in 1931.[64] A complex figure, White used Creole identity and her success as a businesswoman for her continued economic gain and, like her male counterparts at the time as someone identifying as Creole, she challenged the shifting laws despite her precarity as a woman and a sex worker. The narratives and history of White highlight the slipperiness of the boundaries of Creole understandings a century ago.

Each of these various figures of New Orleans in the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries illustrates the various ways that Creole as a cultural and ethnic identifier could be held by very different people, from the educated Afro-Creole men, to Homer Plessy, and to Madame Lulu White. Already, the identity of Creole was complicated and open for adoption by different Black people within the state, as the nation and Louisiana began shifting to a hard binary between Black and white. The protest tradition of the Louisiana Creoles manifests in each of these cases, too, showing the ways that the law is pushed, transgressed, in order to make change. Though not always successful in achieving goals of public and individual rights, these individuals began writing the script for the continued challenges of racial segregation over the following century and beyond.

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[64] Landau, *Spectacular Wickedness,* 132-135.
Alicia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920,* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

Moving Beyond New Orleans

The rest of my project travels across South Louisiana to explore the cultural performances and performances of culture of Louisiana Creoles in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Although many scholars of Louisiana Creoles (such as Roach) focus on New Orleans and on ritual practices like funerals and Carnival, I center on three other cities and locations moving west from New Orleans: Baton Rouge, Southwest Louisiana or Acadiana, and Lake Charles. Employing a multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary approach that combines dramaturgy and storytelling, performance and cultural theories, sociology, and legal history, as well as close readings of theatre and other expressions of culture as performance, I argue for a more careful, Creole-ized view of Louisiana culture. I analyze the complex racial and protest histories cited and transmitted through various cultural performances in these three locations, highlighting within what might otherwise be glossed as Cajun, Louisianian, or Southern. Of course, these Creole elements are never homogenous or stable across time. Louisiana Creole culture is creolized (mixed), and by extension, so is much of Louisiana's culture more broadly. Census data, archives, and legal cases also build a foundation for understanding the shaping of Louisiana Creole culture, especially in our understandings of the ways that race plays into the conditions of creation.

In Chapter 1, I begin in Acadiana or Southwest Louisiana, first by exploring the ways that Louisiana performs the region, with its emphasis on Cajun cultural contributions, and then how both Cajuns and Creoles perform their culture, sometimes together and sometimes separately. From the origins of zydeco to South Louisiana foodways and language, Southwest Louisiana is a site of constant cultural collision, generating both a shared culture and separate cultures that raise questions about race, how culture is performed, and who performs it. Spread across almost a

third of the state, Southwest Louisiana encompasses both small urban cities and lots of rural locales, leading to a wide variety of cultural expressions that are rooted in the past while also still creating new and exciting features of the culture. I pay special attention to festivals, tourism, and the ways that technology has changed agency over how culture is maintained and shared with wider audiences, both inside the state and out. Festivals Acadiens et Créoles has been proudly displaying the music, food, crafts, and stories of the region since the mid-1970s, as the Cajun Renaissance successfully shifted perceptions of Cajuns, but only since 2008 have Creoles been listed explicitly in the festival's name. With those changes, the Festivals has made progress in being more inclusive in reflecting the region's cultural contributors. Outside of this larger organization that promotes shared commonalities amongst Cajuns and Creoles, grassroots organizations that aim to preserve, maintain, and expand awareness of Louisiana Creole culture and its contributions have emerged. These groups urge us to consider how culture in the twenty-first century is both private and public, in light of technological advancements and the advent of social media and web resources.

In Chapter 2, we move back east to Baton Rouge, a city whose population is not usually discussed in terms of Creole culture. In the capital city, the elements of segregation, migration, urban sprawl, and more raise questions about why the cultural practices of the Black and Creole populations have not been more seriously considered. Overshadowed in outsiders' minds by New Orleans, the city houses Southern University, an HBCU, which has been no stranger to innovative contributions to creolized culture. The Fabulous Dancing Dolls, founded in 1969, stands as the model for other HBCU and PWI dance troupes, as one of the first dance troupes to

accompany a marching band that wasn't a majorette or kick line group.[65] The Southern band, The Human Jukebox (formerly the Marching Counts of Sound), helps lead innovation in college marching bands, alongside other HBCUs, in their influence on the craft and showmanship of marching. Both groups' participation in Mardi Gras and St. Patrick's Day parades and alongside game day celebrations open up events and sites of creative play, cultural callback, and citationality. As Baton Rouge is still a racially and ethnically segregated city, these events serve as prime examples of the confrontational creativity of the area, and I present the September 2022 Southern v. LSU football game, and specifically its events that saw the bands face off, as a site of continued cultural creolization. Baton Rouge is sometimes overlooked in discussions of culture in Louisiana, as interest usually lies in the Creole culture of New Orleans and the Cajun culture of Acadiana. Baton Rouge, bordered on one side by the Mississippi, sits almost equidistant between New Orleans and Lafayette. As a capital city and home of two major universities, the city has experienced a lot of movement in and out of its population over the years. Borrowing from the migratory and diasporic cultural influences of those who come here, while also trying to maintain a sense of history and individual identity, Baton Rouge's cultural practices are unique to this place—from parades to tailgates.

In Chapter 3, I use the previous chapters' foundations of cultural and historical understandings of South Louisiana and Louisiana Creole culture to analyze a play about a city in Southwest Louisiana. Beginning with the premise that the American South is often understood in broad strokes that mask unique and rich difference from place to place, I argue for a dramaturgy of specificity and cultural understanding when engaging with texts and performances of the

[65] Alcorn State University, an HBCU in Alabama, also makes the claim that they were the first such group in 1968, but it has been argued that they were still serving as majorettes, as they continued to use batons in their performances for at least another year.

South, especially in concern to race, ethnicity, and culture. In Tony Kushner and Jeanine Tesori's sung-through musical *Caroline, or Change*, we see a complex story about families, racial difference, and intense political change through the lead character Caroline Thibodeaux, a black maid working for a Jewish family in Lake Charles, Louisiana, in 1963. This chapter examines an often-overlooked aspect of Kushner's treatment of race and difference in the book and lyrics of *Caroline, or Change*—the importance of its Louisiana setting and Creole culture, especially in his use of anthropomorphized characters and traditional folktales. Critical assessments of the play have often overlooked these elements and others from the play, or credited them to Kushner's well-documented love of children's stories, rather than exploring the ways in which Caroline's identity as a Black woman in Louisiana—who is a product of Louisiana Creole culture—influences the use of such characters and situations. These elements highlight a complicated relationship to place, as Caroline's world spins out of control from her attempts to carefully manage her life and her children. Her own daughter's involvement in the defacement of the Confederate statue in Lake Charles becomes a pivotal moment in the play, begging another look through the lens of Creole protest tradition in Louisiana. By examining *Caroline, or Change* alongside understandings of Louisiana Creole culture, traditional folklore, and history, we find a play that presents the complicated experience of its lead character and highlights the ways in which Louisiana Creole culture expands our understanding of Black Louisianan experience.

Finally, in the Conclusion, I argue that continued attention to the specificities of time, place, and purpose of cultural performance benefit broader and deeper understandings of the elements of difference, especially in the American South, but also elsewhere. When producing plays or learning histories, a cultural or social dramaturgical lens helps disrupt the center and better identify the contributions of those on the margins. With this kind of attention, we can

move away from stereotypes of difference, into more generous and clearer understandings of the unique ways that culture exists in various places amongst different people. In Louisiana, in particular, such efforts challenge the ways the state presents itself, allowing for more space for the other participants whose histories are often glossed over or ignored completely.

Chapter 2. Recovering Creole Cultural Performance in Southwest Louisiana: (Re)naming, (Re)claiming, and (Re)Engaging

Talk to someone outside of Louisiana, and if they're not picturing New Orleans in their minds, they're thinking about Acadiana. If they're not imagining an old French city with a libertine spirit fueled by unlimited vice, exquisite cuisine, jazz and blues, it's swamps and bayous, big cypress trees, pots of comforting gumbo and jambalaya, and a kind and welcoming fellowship centered around dusty dance boots and acoustic instruments. These perceptions are the result of carefully communicated and scripted performances of Louisiana. Yet such mythic (or stereotyped) images contain some truth. Separated by water, land, time, experience, sometimes language, and influences beyond their control, the regions of Acadiana and New Orleans are distinct faces of Louisiana's Creole culture, united in a will to survive harsh environments and histories. The region's creative survivals, however, manifest differently. They have their own distinctive looks, sounds, and tastes. Each of the locations discussed in this project, from New Orleans to Lake Charles, to Baton Rouge and Acadiana in between, are products of strong people of different races, ethnicities, and origins managing to create cultures that, though separated from each other, bear the marks of their neighbors and those who came before them. The performances of South Louisiana culture are the result of these varying geographic locations and the histories of their people, which is why I will take a moment to set the scene. In order to better identify and analyze the work that Creole cultural performance does in the region, it will be helpful to shift back to a dramaturgical lens for a moment.

Geographical context is indispensable. Acadiana starts across the Mississippi River from Baton Rouge to the west, on the way towards Texas. It's hours away from New Orleans. The largest cities in the region are Lafayette, Lake Charles, Alexandria, and Opelousas, though whether all of these are included officially in what's labelled Acadiana are, like many things in

the state, not always agreed upon.[1] Acadiana does have swamps, but it also has rich farmland, ranching, and communities that have developed to serve their own in business, education, and health, among other things. The region extends south towards the Gulf coast, where the coastline gets squidgy, the effects of climate change eating away the edges of the state with coastal erosion. Here, industry centers around shrimping or fishing and oil, primarily. In small rural towns, like anywhere in the country, it isn't uncommon to travel to the larger cities of the region to acquire groceries, supplies, etc. Small communities in South Louisiana can be like small islands in the inland archipelago, cut off from each other in many ways while still being reliant on the surrounding area in others. With the shifting of the sea, some of these communities are at risk of being lost, a subject of much desperate preservation through folklife studies and documentaries over the past few decades. But it's not just the coast that's in danger. In the past few years, flooding has become a more constant companion for the region, and in other years, drought has threatened even the wetlands with wildfire.

All this said, the land here has always been at least a bit inhospitable. Louisiana has a mythic quality in the outsider's mind that rivals Australia for its wildlife—the threat of snakes, spiders, alligators, nutria, and mosquitoes can and likely should bring even a tiny shiver of fear down their spine. That would give proof that they have respect for the place. Having lived in Baton Rouge for almost a decade and been a visitor to various parts of the state through family ties for longer than that, Louisiana is all of those things that people might think of. The land's

[1] Sharing the oft-argued "what is South Louisiana?" bit here. Some argue it's anything south of IH-10, which would exclude parts of Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Opelousas, and Carencro to name a few very South Louisiana towns and cities. Others point to Alexandria and Pineville, near the center of the state, as the border. North Louisiana is often jokingly (or not) referred to as East Texas, West Mississippi, or South Arkansas, depending where along IH-20 they're referring to. North Louisiana has always been less French-influenced and Catholic, leaning towards Protestantism, though there are enclaves of each throughout the region. One example of the differences is that where South Louisiana has liquor in every grocery store, gas station, and pharmacy, there are parishes and towns in North Louisiana that have strict blue laws that prohibit the sale of when and what liquor can be sold.

wildness is part of its charm and beauty. It's also not only that. The summer and hurricane season can be brutally hot and dangerous. Winters are typically mild in South Louisiana, but there has been an increase in tornadoes across the state over the past few years. It's a place that forces its people to account for what's important and make do with what's available, and to celebrate at every opportunity. Because life isn't easy, so why wallow in it? Survive it and make it something wonderful.

Such good-natured resilience applies to all of South Louisiana, not just Acadiana, but this chapter explores the ways that Acadiana makes something magnificent out of this place. Traditions are important, but as with other cultural practices rooted in the past, tradition lived and performed as ritual results in changes to the activity and to the performer. Creole and Cajun cultures of Acadiana share the ground (and water) they've grown in. The practices of both groups bear remarkable similarity to each other, while still maintaining distinct elements in storytelling, music, cultural symbols, and other folk practices. In this chapter, I present the Festivals Acadiens et Créoles as a site of "creative cultural continuity,"[2] a ritual practice that has emerged in the region to remind people who they have been, who they are, and who they may become. In embracing traditional community fellowship practices, the people of Acadiana reinforce their cultural identities while also shaping them into something new. I also highlight the ways that Creole ritual and culture are being actively recovered and preserved through contemporary performance forms like film, gallery exhibits, digital archives, social media, and books. Each of these performances help strengthen the local cultural community even as they bring in new audiences. In doing so, the voices of Southwest Louisiana Creoles join the larger set of players, asserting their presence and value. The Creole and Cajun cultures of Acadiana and the broader

[2] "History," Festivals Acadiens et Créoles. Accessed December 7, 2023. https://festivalsacadiens.com/about/history/.

South Louisiana area are in danger of being washed away in the next big storm, but through efforts to preserve their distinct practices, that risk is minimized. Although the predominant cultural performance from Louisiana remains "Cajun," I argue that local sites of Creole performance—preserving, transmitting, and transforming Creole culture—interrupt the image of Louisiana as predominantly Cajun. There is room enough for both cultures to be recognized and celebrated in official narratives of the state, as demonstrated by the ways that Creoles and Cajuns do so in festivals and other cultural performances. Additionally, the contributions of Black and Creole Louisianians in Southwest Louisiana paint a more complex picture of the history and culture of the region.

Acadiana or Southwest Louisiana?

A dramaturgical research question arose the deeper I got into my exploration of the region, begging a question of naming. The region of Louisiana that lies between the border of Texas and west of the Mississippi Region south of Alexandria is most often called Acadiana, though I found the area called Southwest Louisiana by Creoles. Officially, the state recognizes twenty-two parishes as the official Acadiana region, with the Cajun heartland deemed the eight-parish central core of the region, radiating out from Lafayette Parish.[3] Geographically, the region consists of prairies, marshes, and wooded rivers and bayous. The land that the Acadians settled in is a big draw in tourism and cultural endeavors sponsored by the state of Louisiana. To peruse the various official cultural, legislative, and tourism sites created by the state of Louisiana, it would be easy to think that Acadiana is solely the homeland of the Cajuns. The Louisiana House website, describing the Acadiana Legislative Delegation, only mentions Cajuns and Acadians in the description of the region. These different performances of Louisiana culture serve as a set of

[3] Louisiana House, "Acadiana Legislative Delegation," Louisiana.gov, accessed December 7, 2023, https://house.louisiana.gov/acadiana/.

directions for their audience—both residents of the state and tourists visiting. I will demonstrate that the various guides and narratives push interested parties to see certain landmarks and engage in specific activities that continue to perform Louisiana, especially the region referred to as Acadiana, as mostly a white Cajun place. The stars of the larger South Louisiana region are Acadiana and New Orleans cultures, as they do the work of creating an enticing pull to explore the "exoticism" of Louisiana. The cultures of Creoles throughout the state, as well as North Louisiana (mostly discussed in terms of its hunting and sport offerings), are pushed aside to make room for the more identifiable products and performances of Louisiana culture: those of the Cajuns in Acadiana and New Orleans' never-ending fun and festival.

I begin by reading the most overt script for cultural performance available to visitors here: the official "travel authority for the state of Louisiana," Explore Louisiana, boasts the tagline "Feed Your Soul." Louisiana emerges as a place whose food, culture, music, and art can feed something On the Explore Louisiana site promoting the Trails & Byways tourism program, one of the tourist paths is labelled the Zydeco Cajun Prairie Scenic Byway. This suggested journey through the central part of Acadiana takes visitors around important landmarks of "Cajun music," and finally to Opelousas, "the birthplace of musician Clifton Chenier and considered by many to be the home of zydeco." Throughout the description of the 238-mile excursion, Cajuns are mentioned multiple times, but Creoles are not labelled specifically a single time.[4] In fact, zydeco is widely agreed to be a Creole musical creation, "influenced by French music, blues, and rhythm and blues," relying on piano or accordion instead of Cajun music's fiddle. The musical form was popular and already called zydeco when in 1964, Chenier, called the King of Zydeco or the King of the South, recorded and released the song "Les z-haricots sont pas salés" ("The

[4] "Louisiana's Zydeco Cajun Prairie Scenic Byway," Explore Louisiana: Trails & Byways, accessed December 7, 2023, https://byways.explorelouisiana.com/byway/zydeco-cajun-prairie-byway.

snap beans aren't salty").[5] Neither zydeco nor Chenier are identified as Creole in the website. Such an omission erases the role that Creoles played in the creation of the regional cultural music. In doing so, Cajuns seem to be the players, while Creoles are literally left out of the narrative. Another Explore Louisiana site describes the Lafeyette area as the "heart of Louisiana's Cajun and Creole Country," but again, Cajuns are named for their music, while Zydeco is mentioned but not credited. Of course, zydeco is played by both Creoles and Cajuns today, but its origins are again not explicitly stated, even on the linked page that takes the visitor to more information about Opelousas. The site explains that the Cajun dialect of French is still spoken in the area, but Creole French or Kouri-Vini is not named.[6] The guided audio tours go into more depth, but the information is not available to the potential tourist browsing the site in advance of the trip.

The "Creole Crescent" page is devoted to the foodways of the Creoles of New Orleans.[7] Creoles and their history are discussed in the Cane River National Heritage Trail Scenic Byway near Natchitoches in the west-central part of the state. Visitors are encouraged to visit the Cane River Creole National Historical Park in Natchez, the designation for the Oakland and Magnolia Plantations. The family of Marie Therese Coincoin built Melrose Plantation; Coincoin was born into slavery but at some point gained her freedom. The first Catholic church built and maintained by free people of color, St. Augustine's Catholic Church, is also in this byway.[8] The Creole Nature Trail All-American Road carves a path around Lake Charles, Calcasieu Lake and across

[5] Sara Le Menestrel, "The Color of Music: Social Boundaries and Stereotypes in Southwest Louisiana French Music," *Southern Cultures* 13, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 91, https://doi.org/10.1353/scu.2007.0032.
[6] "Lafayette Area," Explore Louisiana: Feed Your Soul, accessed December 7, 2023, https://explorelouisiana.com/areas/lafayette-area.
[7] "Culinary Trails: Creole Crescent," Explore Louisiana: Feed Your Soul, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.explorelouisiana.com/culinary/creole-crescent.
[8] "Cane River National Heritage Trail Scenic Byway," Explore Louisiana: Trails & Byways, Accessed December 7, 2023, https://byways.explorelouisiana.com/byway/cane-river-national-heritage-trail-scenic-byway.

the southern coast of the prairies of far southwest Louisiana. Why it is called "Creole" is not explained.[9] Creoles are mentioned as one of the groups contributing to the food culture of South Louisiana along the Louisiana River Road-All-American Road.[10] The website's descriptions of the various attractions seem impoverished to eyes tuned to detect the missing Creole cultural contributions. But for some tourists, this may be the first encounter they have with the state when planning a visit.

The state of Louisiana's tourism offices give more attention to Creole people and culture in the entries about the African American Trail. One such site is the Opelousas Creole Heritage Folklife Center, which serves as an educational center for local youth while also offering "an intense and very personal narrative of local African American life in the first half of the twentieth century."[11] According to these sites, Creoles resided in and can be learned about in three specific places: Cane River, some cities in Acadiana, and in New Orleans. Sites like this lead to the misunderstandings of the larger influence of Creoles in the state, both in outsiders and residents. Another pattern emerges in the ways that such official scriptings fram Creole culture as a culture of the past—the stuff of antebellum plantations, of enslaved people and later tenant farmers, of creators but not necessarily current players of Zydeco. In fact, Creole culture continues to influence Louisiana today and has continued to develop beyond the practices and traditions of the past. Additionally, though tourist scripts portray Black Louisianians as mainly hailing from New Orleans, the majority of South Louisiana's parishes have a larger percentage of Black people than the national average for other counties throughout the country.

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[9] "Creole Nature Trail—All-American Road," Explore Louisiana: Trails & Byways, accessed December 7, 2023, https://byways.explorelouisiana.com/byway/creole-nature-trail-all-american-road.
[10] "Louisiana River Road—All-American Road," Explore Louisiana: Trails & Byways, accessed by December 7, 2023, https://byways.explorelouisiana.com/byway/louisiana-great-river-road.
[11] "Creole Heritage Folklife Center," Explore Louisiana: Feed Your Soul, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.explorelouisiana.com/african-american-heritage-trail/creole-heritage-folklife-center.

On other sites sponsored by the Lt. Governor's office, Creole and Cajun influences receive more equal weight. For example, the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area site discusses the ways that Cajun and Creole music have many similarities having been created and played for more than a century alongside and with each other. Some differences, like Cajuns using fiddles and Creoles trading them for washboards, are highlighted. The Atchafalaya Basin is the nation's largest river swamp, and it sits between the Mississippi River and Lafayette, though the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area extends past Lafayette in the west and across the Mississippi River to East Baton Rouge and Ascension Parish in the East. It follows the path of the rivers from along the Louisiana-Mississippi state line down to the coast in Iberia, St. Mary, and Terrebonne Parishes. Foodways of the region are also described in terms of "creolization" or cultural blending of the area, with gumbo described as a dish that "melds African with European and Native American" cultural foodways. The site recognizes the French, Spanish, African, German, Caribbean, and Native contributions to the foods of South Louisiana.[12] The site's "Traditions" page describes the blending of culture, with special attention paid to Creoles, who are lauded as having "influenced plantation life, slavery, secession, the Civil War, and reconstruction in ways different from that experienced in other regions of the South." Cajun and Creole French languages, as well as architecture, religion, and other folkways are the product of "coexisting ethnicities," according to the page.[13] Though more attention is paid to Creoles and their culture in this set of sites, it is still mostly discussed as a product of the past, rather than as living culture. Cajuns, by contrast, exist in the now. The State narrates Cajun culture as alive and thriving, the dominant culture of almost a third of the state. The websites acknowledge Creole

[12] "Cuisine," Atchafalaya National Heritage Area, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.atchafalaya.org/food.
[13] "Tradition," Atchafalaya National Heritage Area, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.atchafalaya.org/traditions.

contributions to Cajun culture, even calling it creolized, but less attention is paid to Creole culture as a distinct or even shared-history culture. Creole culture results from the practices of Black and other ethnic mixing, but it is most often discussed in terms of how it helped make Cajun culture what it is today.

More often than not, these various performances of Louisiana and the Acadiana region influence the potential tourist to see white, though multiethnic, Cajuns as the state's predominant creators and performers of culture. Cajuns are recognized nationally and globally as Louisiana, standing in for the state as its major characters through food, music, and other folk practices. Since the Cajun Renaissance began in the 1960s, Cajuns have dominated the narratives of Louisiana-ness outside of New Orleans. Cajuns have contributed much to the state's region, but collapsing the entire region of Acadiana down to a display of Cajun-ness obscures the contributions of the Black and Creole Louisianians, many of whose ancestors lived in the area even before the Cajuns. The Cajuns themselves are a product of the creolization of the area, which some of the state's websites, like that of the Atchafalaya Basin, are careful to underscore. This chapter seeks to redress some of the marginalization performed by and in the state's script. I step away from those official narratives to follow other avenues of performance, particularly those created by the area's Creoles.

I would like to take a moment here to finally mark the naming of the region and how I will move forward. As stated above, the state officially recognizes the region as Acadiana. I have found over the past few years, though, an alternate name for the region: Southwest Louisiana. In my earliest encounters with this label, particularly in folk studies, Southwest Louisiana was used to describe the prairie region of the southwestern part of the state, namely the area above and below IH-10 from about Eunice and Crowley through Lake Charles and finally to Sulphur and

the other towns sitting along the Texas border. This region is set apart from Acadiana when used in this sense. A web search of "Southwest Louisiana" produces information about a small five-parish region specifically in the lower southwest corner of the state, centering on Lake Charles, while also speaking to this broader usage and expanse encompassing anything west of the Mississippi River. Now, Southwest Louisiana is being used more frequently, particularly by Louisiana Creole-identifying people. There is a precedent for the name extending more centrally through South Louisiana: University of Louisiana at Lafayette used to be called University of Southwestern Louisiana. As this chapter continues, I use both terms. *Acadiana* is an apt descriptor and necessary to communicate in the same language of people familiar with the region already. But, I also employ *Southwest Louisiana* for the same area. Such doubled usage reflects the mutual development of culture and gives nod to the ongoing, overlapping sharing of cultural contributions and performances of the region.[14]

Performing Acadiana

After that quick tour of the region, following the state's suggested routes, I bring us now to Lafayette for a festive performance of, by, and for the region's denizens themselves. Since 1977, Festivals Acadiens has been held in Girard Park, a 33-acre recreation and natural center managed by the City-Parish of Lafayette, located south/southwest of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (ULL). Since 2008, it has been called Festivals Acadiens et Créoles to better reflect the region's cultural development influences. In 1974, The Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) produced the first Tribute to Cajun Music Festival, a three-hour concert, was produced by at the Blackham Coliseum in Lafayette. In 1972, the Louisiana Native Crafts Festival, later renamed the Louisiana Native and Contemporary Crafts Festival began at

[14] If referring to the small southwestern corner of the state, nearing the Texas border, I use either southwestern Louisiana or the Prairie parishes.

the Lafayette Natural History Museum near Girard Park. The Bayou Food Festival emerged in 1977 to celebrate the food of the region.[15] The festival is funded in part by corporate and community sponsors, in exchange for advertising in the official communications of the Festivals. As of 2022, "7 media partners donated $300,000 in in-kind advertising," consisting of local television news sites, radio stations, newspaper, and websites.[16] Today, Festivals Acadiens et Créoles (FAeC) combines all three of these separate festivals into one weekend event every October. I will note briefly that the event's planners use Festivals Acadiens as shorthand not just in descriptions of the events, but also in their website and social media handles. In the spirit of continuing to include and acknowledge Creoles in my discussions of the events, I will either use FAeC or Festivals throughout. Note also that *Acadiens* refers to Acadians or Cajuns, not the region, which would be *L'Acadiane*. In naming the people rather than the region, the Festivals effectively reclaims their roles in the continued creation of their shared cultures. The festival showcases people and their performances—their music, food, art, and storytelling.

In 2020, the Festivals had to be cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic shutdowns. In 2021, the Festivals were due to return, but had to be postponed because of the Delta surge in October. It was rescheduled, and both the March 18-20, 2022, and the October 14-16, 2022, events proceeded as planned. For the first time in its history, then, Festivals Acadiens et Créoles held two festivals in a single year. I was able to attend both that year, the spring event being my first time to participate in the Festivals activities. I attended the Friday night opening ceremonies that April as the sun set across the park's fields. There I found multiple stages, large tents for

[15] Barry Ancelet and Philip Gould, *One Generation at a Time: Biography of a Cajun and Creole Music Festival* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2007), vii-xii.
[16] For more information about how specific sponsorship packages, ranging from $1,500 to $100,000, are advertised visit the online "Sponsorship Opportunities" PDF published by the Festivals: https://festivalsacadiens.com/wp-content/uploads/FAetC-Sponsorship-Packet-2022.pdf.

special activities, smaller tents for the Bayou Food Festival, and even smaller vendor tents for the Crafts Festival. Again, in the fall of 2022, I attended the Saturday afternoon and evening events of the Festivals.

All of the promotional materials and social media posts about the Festivals talk about dusty boots, and I soon learned why. Though a grassy park in many places, the large oak trees leave large patches of dirt where grass doesn't grow in the shadows of their branches and along their roots. In other parts of the park, the fields are trodden by use. The park is obviously used and appreciated, as the dust has become a symbol of the place. It began to get kicked up as the bands took the stage and people of so many different ages and race and ethnicity began to dance in the middle of the larger standing crowd. On the edges of the park, nearing the ULL parking lots and garages that serve the Festivals, attendees set up small personal tailgating tents with folding chairs and coolers. The Festivals' planners don't require entry through a single gated space, instead allowing the crowd to enter from anywhere around the park. The tailgating tents sat closest to the mainstage of the evening and near the Bayou Food Festival setup. Flags hung from the tents—Louisiana flags, Acadiana flags, and Creole flags. I even saw rainbow Progress flags. The attendees marked themselves for the world. Between the food and concert set up stood a very large white event tent that housed two banks of tables on either side. On one, t-shirts, sweaters, towels, and hats were being sold with that year's poster image. Attendees could also purchase past Festivals' promotional items. On the other side of the tent, merchants arrayed pins, posters, and books for purchase. In both cases, a display of all of available merchandise served as a visual archive of the Festivals' heritage. As the proceeds benefit the continued support of the Festivals, which is free to the public, the merchandise tent maintained a frenzied buzz of transactions between patrons and volunteers. In buying a shirt or poster, the attendees not only

get to mark their festivities with a souvenir, but they also get to participate in the continual creation of the region's culture.

Attendees also lend their financial support to Creole and Cajun vendors who sell crawfish dishes, fried chicken, pralines, pecan pie, beignets, and more in the Bayou Food Festival. Across a small driveway, past the big oak trees, the vendors of the Crafts Fair also benefit from the surge in event sales. Local jewelers from across South Louisiana, whose work celebrates the culture, flora, and fauna of the region, including Baton Rouge-based Mimosa Handcrafted and Lafayette-based Magnolia Floral Preservation, are peppered amongst candle and soap makers, tin yard art booths, and fine artists. ULL's own ceramics department always has a table and sometimes provides demonstrations of the craft. Another booth sells large washboards, used in zydeco music but also sells small jewelry-sized pieces that folks can wear as necklaces or earrings. Wooden benches, signs, and art, painted in incredibly bright and joyful colors sit down the row from tin artists, whose sculptures are purchased for placement in gardens across the region. In these purchases, attendees get to take home a piece of the creolized cultural products that are still being made and evolving today.

I purchased a few pieces myself during my visits to the FAeC in 2022. First, I got the t-shirts bearing both posters released in 2022. Denise Gallagher, a Lafayette-based artist and illustrator who serves as a faculty member at ULL, designed both posters. After the cancellation of the Fall 2021 Festivals, she adjusted the poster to reflect the new dates, and in creating the Fall 2022 poster, did so with pairing the two on walls in mind. In the March design, a suited man with an alligator head dances with a chicken-headed woman wearing a skirt that bears three fleur-de-lis. They are surrounded by a background of turquoise blue and oak trees, a crescent moon, and

stars, “as if to place the viewer in the festival’s closing performances as day wears into night.”[17] The words, “le grand retour” or “the grand return” sit across the moon. On the enamel pin version of the design, the dancers stand in front of a low and large moon, adorned with stars, lending to the already whimsical folk element of the art. In the October 2022 poster, four musicians, a bird—perhaps a pelican, an alligator, a pig, and a rooster bear the instruments of the music of the festival: a fiddle, a washboard, and an accordion. In the golden background, music notes, an oak tree and the words, “Ensemble encore/ensemble toujours!” flank the stacked musicians. I originally translated this phrase to “Still together/Together again!” A member of my committee, Dr. Sherri Johnson, though, highlighted that *toujours*, used after the word *ensemble*, may better translate as “always.” “Together still/Together always!” changes the meaning, and the double resonance of “again” and “always” highlights both the return from the pandemic but also the ways that the two groups—Creoles and Cajuns—have shared histories in the region. The two posters paired together sit beautifully next to each other, combining the musicians with the dancers visually while acknowledging the lost festivals and the celebration of being together again. One thing stands out, though. While likely unintentional, the title “Festivals Acadiens” is set on white banners in large text on each of the posters. “Et Créoles” sits below on each, not on a white background, but in a similar toned shade of the background, just of different intensity. Visually, this sets Creoles apart and different from the Acadiens. As stated above, the Festivals still use the original name of the combined events as their truncated nickname on promotional materials, which may explain why the name is privileged in its depiction.

[17] Ken Stickney, “Lafayette artist blends New Orleans roots, Cajun influences in Festival Acadiens poster, pin,” *The Acadiana Advocate,* February 11, 2022, https://www.theadvocate.com/acadiana/news/coronavirus/lafayette-artist-blends-new-orleans-roots-cajun-influences-in-festival-acadiens-poster-pin/article_ce294d7e-8b63-11ec-ab94-a7429085e4f0.html.

I looked back over the various poster, t-shirt, and pin designs since 2008, and the 2016 designs stood out for their total embrace of Creole representation. The poster, designed by Lafayette-based artist Tony Bernard,[18] incorporates Cajuns and Creoles explicitly. Under the broad branches of an oak tree bearing the names of Cajun dance halls and Zydeco clubs on pennant flags next to the names of the cities they reside in, are the silhouettes of a dancing couple in the wide trunk of the tree. On either side of the tree are musicians—Creoles with the washboard, accordion, and electric guitar, representing Zydeco and Creole music, and on the other are Cajuns with a fiddle, a triangle, and an acoustic guitar to represent Cajun music forms. Dancers of different skin tones show the different races and ethnicities of the region, from Creoles and Black-identifying folks, to white, Asian, and Indigenous people. They wear cowboy boots and sneakers, some in casual dress of t-shirts and tank tops with jeans and shorts, and others in more traditional cowboy or trail wear. Off to the edge of the dancefloor, a sandwich board bears the words "*gros bal à soir*" or "big ball tonight." Someone's shrimping boots, the white rubber rain boots recognized throughout south Louisiana, sit to the side, perhaps a nod to the local industry. Both Creoles and Cajuns are given equal space across the banner title of the poster, and both the Acadiana and Creole flags are flown on either side. In the pin for the same year, also designed by Bernard, the silhouetted dancers stand between the Acadiana and Creole flags, with both "Acadiens" and "Créoles" sitting alongside together on the same line.[19] Bernard presents the Festivals and the larger region as multicultural, multiracial, multiethnic and proud of

[18] Tony Bernard created the infamous Louisiana Vote sticker featuring a pelican wearing an earring (despite not having ears) that was featured on John Oliver's *Last Week Tonight* in 2020, in which Oliver discusses the challenges of getting people to mail-in vote. He points to the Louisiana voting sticker as a sure way to get people to vote in person, describing the figure on the sticker as a "truly excellent pelican. Look at this absolute king…his crown that says the state of Louisiana has a monarch, and I am it." People in Louisiana will vote because "that large waterbird fucks."
John Oliver (@LastWeekTonight), "Voting by Mail," *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* (HBO), YouTube, June 1, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-nEHkgm_Gk.
[19] "Bring Some Festival Home!" *The Independent,* October 12, 2016, https://theind.com/articles/24066/.

it. The attendees have joined together to celebrate the music and culture of the region for the weekend and are enjoying themselves mightily. The contributions to the regions culture are equally billed and equally celebrated in a unified way. The food, music, crafts, and other activities throughout the weekend Festivals fully embrace both Creole and Cajun influences on the region. Below, I discuss some ways that Creoles present themselves in their efforts to reclaim, preserve, and celebrate their culture.

Recovering Language

Today, Creoles and Cajuns still live together or in neighboring communities throughout Acadiana. Language of the region is a particularly important part of the history of the area. Though not every Creole or Cajun speaks French, many did historically, at least at home. As I detail below, dialect has been a site of cultural trauma and reclamation for both cultural groups. The Louisiana Creoles that emerged in Southwest Louisiana shared some similarities to the Afro-Creoles of New Orleans in their mixed heritage and ethnicity, in the existence of free people of color in society, and the many resulting effects of plaçage. They also have unique characteristics that emerge out of their development in very different urban and rural areas, with the early influence of plantation life, Acadian and Indigenous neighbors, the shared communities of free people of color and Black freedmen and freedwomen, and later in the kinds of work, education, and regional development seen in Acadiana.[20] Language in the region is also different, at least when compared to the Afro-Creoles of the late 19th century who would have been educated in and writing in Standard French, with some Louisiana-specific dialect. French speakers outside of

[20] For a refresher or more background, see Bruce, Giancarlo, and Jolivétte and Chapter 1.

the state and abroad could understand the writings.[21] Throughout the state of Louisiana, though, a Cajun French dialect or patois and a distinct Louisiana French Creole language developed.[22]

Cajun French and Creole French are different in many ways, and varying efforts have been made by the state's cultural offices to preserve them. The Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) was created to recognize the ongoing Cajun Renaissance or cultural revival that began in the late 1960s and 1970s, but its emphasis sat mostly in preserving Cajun or Louisiana French.[23] Here is another way in which Cajun French, as it is also referred to, has been privileged, especially institutionally, in the state. Explore Louisiana devotes an entire page to "How to Speak Cajun," but gives no space to Louisiana Creole French.[24] Louisiana Creole French has more recently been identified with a new name Kouri-Vini, and the name Kréyòl is also used. Some Louisiana French speakers still use the term "Creole" to describe their own dialect, so the new names were an attempt to help differentiate the languages.[25] It developed mostly among Black French-speaking people, but like many things in South Louisiana, the language is spoken by people who identify as White, mixed race, and Indigenous as well.

A recent gallery exhibit at the Capitol Park Museum in Baton Rouge welcomed attendees into the space first with a map of where Kouri-Vini has been and is spoken, while highlighting

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[21] Bruce, *Afro-Creole Poetry.*

[22] Louisiana Creole French, Kréyòl, or Kouri-Vini is distinct from Cajun French and International French, but also distinct from other Caribbean Creole languages, like Haitian Creole. They may be able to converse with each other sparingly, but they are not the same dialect.

[23] Here, Louisiana French is a larger regional dialect or patois of Standard French. Cajun French emerges out of Acadiana and rural Louisiana with its Creole and Indigenous influences. Cajun French can be understood by a native French speaker. Creole French or Louisiana Creole, though once the name used as an umbrella term for Louisiana French, refers to the French-influenced language that developed primarily in South and Southwest Louisiana among people of color. For more information, see Chapter 1.

[24] "How to Speak Cajun," Explore Louisiana: Feed Your Soul, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.explorelouisiana.com/articles/how-speak-cajun.

[25] The naming of Kouri-Vini seems to be a grassroots movement. Academic articles and books don't seem to have caught up with the people-led (re)naming. As Creole, Inc., Louisiana Historic and Cultural Vistas, and various language tutorials on the web, led by regional cultural advocates, have begun using the name, I have chosen to use it as well. The exhibit below was foreworded by LSU professor of French and Francophone studies Nicholas Rabalais, marking what I believe to be a turn in the scholarly field around the language.

the language differences in the state. *Mitoloji Latannyèr/Mythologies Louisianaises,* was guest curated by local artist/advocate and Baton Rouge poet laureate Jonathan "radbwa faroush" Mayers.[26] Mayers, whose own work spans across mediums of poetry, the visual arts, and activism, "celebrates the rich cultural heritages and the unique landscape of Louisiana, while integrating written language with visual art." He calls his art "*Latannyèrizm*."[27] For the exhibit that employed sculpture, found objects, soundscaping, painting, poetry, and other forms, Mayers "collaborated with artists and writers who have been distanced from their cultures as a result of Americanization or physical location as well as others who have embraced the cultures of the region."[28] When possible, the exhibit's text appeared in English, Louisiana French, and Kouri-Vini. The exhibit also highlighted the importance of Tunica, a language of the Tunica tribe of Louisiana, with the inclusion of a tale in that language. The creative partners"'*réklamé mañè-layé péyisaj maré yê ensemb*" (reclaim the ways in which the landscape binds them) through an exploration of themes like "environmental devastation and social justice," asking the visitors to "engage in this homage to the state's language[s], identity, and folklore."[29] Mayer's work preserves the language and culture of the Louisiana Creoles, as he uses poetry (written in English and Kouri-Vini), visual art, and institutional advocacy as some of his tools.

In the fall of 2022, Mayer launched Chinbo, an organization to preserve Kouri-Vini and also educate others about the language and culture of Creoles. *Chinbo*, as the website explains, means "to hold, to 'hold well' (literally), hold on, or keep."[30] The website also explains that the

[26] "Alumni Spotlight: Jonathan Mayers," LSU College of Art + Design, February 3, 2022, accessed December 5, 2023. https://design.lsu.edu/alumni-spotlight-jonathan-mayers/
[27] "Jonathan Mayers," LSU Art + Design, accessed December 7, 2023, https://design.lsu.edu/alumni-spotlight-jonathan-mayers/.
[28] "*Mitoloji Latannyèr/Mythologies Louisianaises*," Louisiana State Museums: Capitol Park Museum, October 21, 2023, accessed December 7, 2023, https://louisianastatemuseum.org/exhibit/mythologies-louisianaises.
[29] Capitol Park Museum, "Mitoloji Latannyèr/Mythologies Louisianaises."
[30] "Learn," Chinbo, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.chinbo.org/en/aprenn/.

language, though critically endangered, is still spoken in enclaves across the Gulf South, particularly in Alabama and Mississippi, which had been part of Louisiana's territories, as well as in places like Southeast Texas, California, and Illinois, which have been sites of Louisiana Creole migration diaspora. Additionally, he claims that in light of revitalization efforts by Louisiana Creoles, "there are more heritage language (re)learners studying Kouri-Vini than before World War I."[31] The myth section of the Chinbo website also points to the ways that the language is a distinct language, separate from French, and has always been spoken by many ethnic and racial groups within the state. It is a language shared across place, time and people, and through Mayer's and others' efforts, the language is seeing a resurgence.[32] The various laws that banned French from Louisiana classrooms are also referenced, emphasizing that the loss of language as culture was felt not just by Louisiana Creoles but by Cajuns and others who spoke French languages, however they identified.

One piece from *Mitoloji Latannyèr/Mythologies Louisianaises* spoke particularly to the sentiment shared by Creoles and Cajuns about their respective French languages. A poem and a painting hung beside each other on the green walls of the gallery. To the right hangs a canvas painted in acrylic of a young woman with brown skin and black hair that has begun to grow vines and flowers. She is sitting in a chair, reading, as someone unseen except for their hands cuts her hair and the vines. Behind them and around the corner, black men, with a variety of skin tones, on horses ride closer. It is unclear whether the men are coming back from working on their horses, or if they might be arriving back from a trail ride, an Acadiana Creole traditional

[31] "History of Kouri-Vini," Chinbo, accessed December 7, 2023. https://www.chinbo.org/en/aprenn/#listwakourivini.
[32] "Language Myths," Chinbo, accessed December 7, 2023. https://www.chinbo.org/en/aprenn/#mit.

practice.[33] The work, called *The Flowers Were Clipped but the Roots Remained* is by Chase Julien, a Loreauville-raised and Lafayette-based artist.[34]

To the left of the painting is a poem entitled *Mo Kréyol* or *I Am Creole* by Alex PoeticSoul Johnson. PoeticSoul is a Lafayette-based poet and arts educator with the Acadiana Center for the Arts and the founder and director of Lyrically Inclined, a spoken word organization.[35] The first version of the poem is displayed on top in Kouri-Vini, translated by Clif St. Laurent. Below it lies the English text. The poetry describes the ways that the speaker was denied access to their grandmother's language, as state law banned the French-based languages in schools. As English took over in the state following the Civil War and Reconstruction, stigma emerged among the Cajuns and Creoles for speaking anything other than English. Attempts by their elders for younger generations to escape the stigmatizing shame of speaking Kouri-Vini is reflected in the lines, "Say we young children too good to waste time learning French/Better we get our education at school." As discussed above and throughout this project, attempts to Americanize the French-speaking peoples of Louisiana led to the requirement that all public-school lessons must be taught in English for a period of more than 50 years beginning in 1921. Prior to this, French had been banned in public schools from 1864 and 1879.[36] "Shame," the

[33] For more information on this practice, Jeremiah Ariaz's book *Louisiana Trail Riders* (2018) offers a breathtakingly beautiful photographic account of the black cowboy and trail riding tradition of South and Southwest Louisiana. It is discussed more later in the chapter.

[34] "Introducing Chase Julien," Basin Arts, February 10, 2022, https://basinartslafayette.com/2022/02/10/introducing-chase-julien/.

[35] "Alex 'PoeticSoul' Johnson," Acadiana Center for the Arts, accessed December 7, 2023, https://acadianacenterforthearts.org/teachers/alex-poeticsoul-johnson/.

[36] "CODOFIL," Louisiana Office of Cultural Development, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.crt.state.la.us/cultural-development/codofil/about/french-in-louisiana/legal-status/index.
Roger K. Ward. "The French Language in Louisiana Law and Legal Education: A Requiem." *Louisiana Law Review* l 57, no. 4 (Summer 1997).
In the Constitution of 1879, primary schools could teach French, but the law still prohibited French as the language of the classroom beginning in secondary school. In the Constitutions of 1898 and 1913, French instruction was allowed in both primary and secondary classrooms. In the Constitution of 1921, French was again banned from being used for classroom instruction.

speaker tells us, “lay over her tongue too heavy to share,” as they describe that the Anglicizing white government labelled “native” Louisiana Creoles as “foreign,” before French was restored into schools. Physical violence was used against the Creoles, the speaker tells us, despite the language being something that infused their grandmother’s voice with a “cadence.” Her grandmother was told not to teach the next generation the native language, but she still taught the practices of the culture, like how to make a roux, plant, and other bits of knowledge that get passed on through the ritual of sharing. A single Kouri-Vini line remains in the English version of the poem: “É mé tou kèkshoz mon she,” which could translate into something along the lines of “And I also have something to say,”[37] which makes sense in the context. Some of the words are also available in an online Kouri-Vini database, and the first three words translate literally to “And but all,” though the rest of the words are not available. It is possible, based on alternative spellings that the last three words translate to “something my dear.”[38] The grandmother speaks this to the grandchild, made obvious by its inclusion within the English lines, but the reader is alienated in a similar fashion to how the speaker felt hearing the words not taught or shared. The poem ends with a reference back to the practice of the roux-making, lamenting that,

> Someone made her feel identity was not a gumbo worth serving now I struggle
>
> To put the pieces together
>
> Like when she said French she meant Kouri-Vini
>
> I am not Cajun

[37] Note about this translation: The phrase does not translate using a French to English translator. This approximation of the translation is using Haitian Creole in Google Translate (which is what I did while at the gallery, too). I attempted to translate and confirm this translation using the Memrise Kouri-Vini Community Course, but was unable to. The course is a user-friendly community-created resource for learning Kouri-Vini vocabulary. https://www.memrise.com/en/community-courses/learn-kinyarwanda

[38] “Louisiana Creole (Kouri-Vini) Dictionary,” Webonary, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.webonary.org/louisiana-creole/.
“Mon she,” sounds like “mo shaer” in KV or “mon sha/cher” in Louisiana French.

I am Creole

(PoeticSoul)

Though there may be similar feelings about the loss of language and its effects on cultural education and preservation amongst Creoles and Cajuns, the poem ends with a distinct statement about the speaker's identity. Raised in Acadiana, and despite efforts to whitewash portions of the state, Creoles still exist. And some make it clear that being from Acadiana does not make them Cajun, as PoeticSoul's poem does[39]. The culture may overlap, and their cultural performances may look similarly in response to similar situations and stimuli—but Creoles and Cajuns are not synonymous. Whereas Festivals Acadiens et Créoles attempts to lean into the similarities of the two dominant cultural groups in Southwest Louisiana, artists like those in Mayer's exhibit give a more complex view of the ways that Creoles, Cajuns, and Indigenous people of South Louisiana perform alongside each other—in dialogue with each other even when they speak/spoke different languages. For each of these groups, the culture is revealed by or gleaned from the cultural performances of their elders. When the elders could not or would not share the culture, they reached into those silences and behind those walls to grasp what elements they could in order to rebuild and restore their heritage.

Visitors who engaged in these presentations and performances of identity, language, and folklore did so as active participants. The artists' works were displayed in one of the state's heritage museums sitting directly in front of the capitol, reminding us that where performance of culture happens is important, can be political. The location of the performance framed the exhibit as legitimate, in the eyes of the state, something it was willing to allow to perform Louisiana for visitors and audience who attended during its duration. The reception that capped the opening

[39] Also reflected in Alexandra Giancarlo's "Don't Call me a Cajun!" (2018).

night activities featured cuisine from the region: spicy Creole shrimp, a pasta dish, and other local fare. The balcony doors open to step outside, and the attendees could stand and cast their gaze across the front grounds of the capitol, up to its tall profile. The proximity of these performances of reclaimed language, art, and culture to the towering structure whose decisions and laws ripped them from their ancestors bespeaks a particular = power and transgression. Richard Schechner reminds us that a "world monoculture," is not inevitable if there is a "varied 'culture pool.'" He explains that the strategy that "fits into, and yet opposes," world monoculture happens by "preserving a varied culture pool," through "restored behavior." [40] The boundaries of the state go only as far as those who are willing to breach them, or push back on them. The exhibit both fits into the expected norms of museum display, while also pushing against it—forcing its audience to fully engage in the cultural performance of invitation, alienation, hope, and grief. The exhibit wouldn't have happened the way it did if the state embraced the cultural practices of the Creoles and its language and performances more wholeheartedly throughout history. These pieces and the goals of the exhibit served to not only lay stake in the space, but also force witness to the attempted choking of a culture and the new momentum of growth and rediscovery.

Sharing the Work of Preservation

Both artists mentioned in the exhibit pieces above as well as many of the others featured in the exhibit do the work of cultural preservation through their advocacy, art, and educational endeavors. The exhibit creator and artists thanked scholars from universities across Louisiana for their contributions to the event, and more widely for the work they've done in preserving the cultures of Louisiana. The Capitol Park Museum is just one facility in a network of Museums

[40] Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 114.

across the state that is sponsored by the State of Louisiana through the Lieutenant Governor's office, as well as the Explore Louisiana/Feed Your Soul Tourism Project. The Office of Cultural Development, under the direction of the Lieutenant Governor, promotes "Louisiana cultural assets" through work in French Immersion, Historic Preservation, Archaeology, and the Arts.[41] The Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities also makes cultural creation work more possible through grants and funding. More locally, museums, arts centers, and community groups also serve as sites of cultural preservation throughout the state, stepping in to fill in the gaps and correct the misleading narratives that sometimes emerge out of the state's performance of Louisiana. By using the tools and performances of their culture—protest tradition; oral storytelling, arts, and other folk expressions; and educational activities—these various individuals and organizations continue to demand witness and engagement from others. These occasionally nontraditional performances of culture activate flows of exchange between those who hold the culture and those who are interested in learning more. The pedagogical impulse of performance is seen in the creative and varied ways that Louisiana Creoles and those who love and respect their culture continue to expand what Diana Taylor calls the archive and repertoire of the culture.[42]

I return again to a dramaturgical view, this time with attention to the people and institutions participating in a variety of cultural performances. The work of maintaining and creating new culture falls on many in the region, who have different goals and reasons, but who all contribute to the cultural landscape as it continues to change and grow. Performances of culture require bound time, a set apart location, and an exchange between performer and

[41] Louisiana Office of Cultural Development, accessed December 7, 2023. https://www.crt.state.la.us/cultural-development/.
[42] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2003).

audience. This next section highlights the ways that both traditional and nontraditional modes of performance are being utilized by Creoles, scholars, and even Cajuns to encourage a Creole-aware heterogeneity in Louisiana and in the Creole diaspora. As their website explains, one organization, the Louisiana Folklore Society, was created in 1956 "to encourage the study, documentation, and accurate representation of the traditional cultures of Louisiana." Members range from professors to schoolteachers, museum workers, and other interested, non-affiliated individuals, to name a few.[43] The Society also publishes the annual *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*, a journal available for purchase, and hosts information and interest meetings across the state and on Zoom.

Some of the scholars referenced above are folklorists and historians who study and record Louisiana history as part of their ongoing research and writing. Some notable academics located in the region include Nicholas R. Spitzer at Tulane University in New Orleans, Carolyn Ware at LSU, and Barry Jean Ancelet at University of Louisiana at Lafayette (ULL). Universities as institutions are also involved in the preservation of culture in the state. LSU Libraries houses several physical and digital archives on Louisiana life, used in this project. Digital archives, in particular, have helped make materials that were previously difficult to access more available to people outside the academy. Across the state are also other institutions like LSU involved in publishing scholarship and teaching new generations of scholars about the culture of Louisiana. One such publisher is University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press (ULL) who published a recent book by Elista Istre. Dr. Istre is a life-long resident of Lafayette and is a descendant of Cajuns, French Creoles, and Spanish Isleños. Her book *Creoles of South Louisiana: Three Centuries Strong* (2019) is beautifully rendered with glossy photos and illustrations alongside essays and

[43] "Home," Louisiana Folklore Society, accessed on December 7, 2023. https://www.louisianafolklore.org/.

historical entries that is accessible to most readers. With a PhD in Heritage Studies from the University of Arkansas, Dr. Istre has also founded a business, Belle Heritage, which "offers consulting expertise and creates cultural experiences that inspire individuals and organizations to celebrate the beauty of heritage."[44] Through tours, presentations, living history programs, activities for children, and a consulting branch, Dr. Istre is working to help others understand more about Creole and Cajun culture in Acadiana. Her work serves as an alternative to the tours supplied by the state.

Another scholar whose work has also helped expand and shape our current understandings of Louisiana Creole culture is Andrew J. Jolivétte. Originally from San Francisco, Jolivétte is part of the Louisiana Creole diaspora. A sociologist by training, Jolivétte is the Chair of the Ethnic Students Department and Director of the Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS) Program at University of California-San Diego. His scholarship challenges its readers to remember that South Louisiana was occupied by Native and Indigenous tribes that have also contributed to the culture of the place. His work also strives to remind us that Creole people outside of New Orleans deserve attention in historical and cultural scholarship. Also, multiracial identity, as many Creoles in Louisiana are descendants of multiple races and ethnicities, needs more attention, especially in Acadiana and Southwest Louisiana. The experiences of individuals who sat outside the Black-White binary that developed following the Civil War created stigma and otherness in the region, particularly as class factored in following the destruction of the previous caste system that included free people of color/mulattoes.[45] A

[44] "Celebrating the Beauty of Heritage," Belle Heritage, accessed on December 7, 2023. https://www.belleheritage.com/.
[45] Jolivétte. *Louisiana Creoles: Cultural Recovery and Mixed-Race Native American Identity* (New York: Lexington Books, 1007), 59.

prolific author, Jolivétte's cultural recovery projects have helped move understandings of Creole identity in new directions over the past couple of decades.[46]

Another recent book that has helped shape new understandings of Creole culture in Acadiana and beyond is LSU Art + Design Associate Professor Jeremy Ariaz, whose photography captures the community and culture of Black trail riders in Acadiana.[47] Ariaz' art often explores the American West, and in his discussions about the book, he talks about the ways that cowboys of color—Black, Latinx, and Indigenous—are often left out of the narratives of the range. In Louisiana, Black riders worked in Acadiana and Southwest Louisiana along the Texas border, and the skill of riding has never been lost. Annual trail rides are whole community affairs, and the practice is passed down from adult to child in an act of cultural continuity. Ariaz also points to the Black riders seen in protests across the country following the murder of George Floyd in 2020—in Houston, Los Angeles, and Oakland. As he explains, "They were not only participating in an American tradition of protest; these Black men and women were in the streets on horseback, where the saddle has often been reserved for military and law enforcement." Such an act, he continues, takes "the reins of a symbol long associated with independence and power."[48] Ariaz has captured the soul of a folk practice that has continued to evolve today. The trail riders of Southwest Louisiana push against stereotypes of cowboys and both the American South and the West. Also, they stand to prove that Creole culture doesn't exist only in the past, but those practices and performances are adapting to now. Memory and restored behavior are

[46] "Andrew Jolivétte," UC San Diego: Ethnic Studies Department, accessed December 7, 2023, https://ethnicstudies.ucsd.edu/people/jolivette.html.
[47] I am drawn to Ariaz' work with Black trail riders for a number of reasons. As a former resident of the Third Ward in Houston, I remember turning the corner in my neighborhood to see horses in a row house yard. A couple of years later, on a drive from Houston to Baton Rouge, I encountered one of the Louisiana trail rides—near Eunice, along IH-10 were dozens of Black riders. I have been so glad to learn more about the practice.
[48] Jeremiah Ariaz. "Louisiana Trail Riders," *Southern Cultures* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2021), accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.southerncultures.org/article/louisiana-trail-riders/.

seen in the ways that the older men and women share the culture of trail riding to new generations. The community strengthens with each new year of trail rides, as they invite new members to become active participants in the continuing cultural practices.

Documentaries about South Louisiana also help preserve endangered cultures. LSU English and Screen Arts Associate Professor Zachary Godshall's documentaries about South Louisiana create permanent records of and for the residents of the Gulf coast state. One, *Water Like Stone* (2013) by Godshall and Michael Pasquier, explores the "cultural consequences of environmental decay," and offers a portrait of the people of Leeville, whose practices, culture, and way of life are at risk of being lost to the encroaching sea. *The Boatman* (2015), a short documentary available from *Time,* follows Joseph and Selina Gonzalez in their lives after Katrina in the small town of Yscloskey.[49] Cote Blanche, the production company of filmmakers Michelle Benoit and LSU Screen Arts Artist-in-Residence Glen Pitre, also keep elements of Louisiana's diverse culture safe for future generations in documentaries like *Mary Queen of Vietnam*, *American Creole*, and *Good for What Ails You*, among others.[50]

Others in the region have also shown interest in creating a more permanent record and helping the outside world know more about the local cultures. Creole cultural performances have emerged on online platforms like Tik Tok, YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook (and to a lesser degree Twitter/X). Back in Baton Rouge, Southern University's Human Jukebox and Fabulous Dancing Dolls are featured in their own Youtube channel, @su_humanjukebox. The channel, to date, has 121,000 subscribers, 3,100 videos, and more than 73 million views since the page began in January 2007. Their most watched video with 2.3 million views is the Marching Out from the Bayou Classic in 2013. The Bayou Classic is the matchup between Southern and

[49] Zack Godshall, accessed December 7, 2023. https://www.zackgodshall.com/.
[50] Cote Blanche, accessed December 7, 2023. https://www.coteblanche.com/.

Grambling State University, the HBCU in the North Louisiana town of Grambling that's held every year in New Orleans.Their audience has expanded well beyond the stadiums of the past into a new kind of digital audience, allowing a more global witness and engagement.

When the audience is an active participant in the performance, whether it is a band's halftime field show or a storyteller's tall tale, how does the video collection of them change the fundamentals of the form? Does it affect meaning? In the case of the folktale, yes, it does, as the audience in communication with the storyteller helps shape the direction of that particular story's telling. As it's told orally and is not being read, it is different every time. The same could be said about the bands' performances, even though they're rehearsed to be routine every time. A similar question exists in theatre, as plays are usually performed onstage in front of a live audience and sometimes filmed for wider distribution or historical record. Despite drawbacks to not being in the room, the film as archive does serve to preserve at least some of the culture, even if something is lost in that action.

Though the Human Jukebox's established tradition of playing the same Fifth Quarter set against different opponent bands had changed (and it wasn't the first time tradition had changed, as I detail in Chapter 3), one of the markers of a living culture is its ability to evolve and innovate, particularly in a creolized environment. The online audience is still a participatory agent in the performance, even if they aren't seen in real time. An in-person house can and does boo sometimes, just as they cheer. Being able to read each individual response may be a bit more personal than hearing a crowd feed off each other as they express their favor or disappointment, but it still drives the performance—if not the one being watched, the next one. Another benefit of the online sharing of performances is a wider audience and appreciation. Recruitment may change. Invitations to perform in new venues may result. Southern University, in particular, and

HBCU bands and dance troupes more generally have reached global audiences by playing Super Bowls (which they've done since the late 1960s), Rose Bowl and Macy's Thanksgiving Day parades, and being featured in films and music videos with artists like Beyoncé and Lizzo. In 2021, Adele responded on Twitter to a Human Jukebox cover of her song "Easy on Me," during the Bayou Classic, with a heart eyes emoji. The video had a combined 93k likes and more than 11,000 retweets.[51]

Other forms of online cultural recovery, preservation, and evolution are seen in Facebook and Instagram pages and groups, as well as blogs and websites. Independent scholars and interested citizens have turned to the internet as a tool for both research and for sharing of information to wider audiences. These sites have become points of advocacy, education, and personal narrative, all coming together to create a wider web of archival evidence of Creoles and their impact in the twenty-first century, as well as the past. New Orleans Creole Story Pot is run by Shawanda Marie, a "Culinary Storyteller and Chef," who created the page in 2016.[52] With 10,000 followers, the page's posts share recipes, personal memories, community history, and educational events. Alex Genealogy, a page run by Beaumont-based Alex Lee, works to collect and share genealogical records of Gulf Creoles like photos, birth records, and other historical artifacts.[53] The page connects people to other folks from their own extended families through his work. Lee is also a contributor to the site Louisiana: Historic & Cultural Vistas (LHCV), created and managed by Christophe Landry.[54] Each of these pages allow the audience to engage with the performers and stewards of culture, bringing an ever-growing awareness to the culture. But it

[51] @Adele X, https://twitter.com/Adele/status/1464751338357772290.
Since becoming X, the number of views is no longer a visible metric for some videos. Based on the likes metrics, the video likely had more than a million views on Twitter alone.
[52] Creole Story Pot, https://www.facebook.com/creolestorypot/.
[53] Alex Genealogy, https://www.facebook.com/Alexgenealogy.
[54] Louisiana Historic & Cultural Vistas, accessed December 7, 2023. https://www.mylhcv.com/.

does more than that, too. It shapes the very culture itself, the way that any performance would. Online platforms allow Louisiana Creoles to continue to learn more about themselves, while also creating new ways to express that knowledge. The stage/platform may have changed, but the impulse to perform and share has not.

And finally, to return to Kouri-Vini and Creole performance, I would like to take one last look at a set of digital repertoires. Through his site and various social media platforms, Cristophe Landry is working to expand Kouri-Vini learning and awareness. LHCV offers genealogy research information, a magazine, a blog about Creole cultural history and future with many contributors, and a project to help others learn Kouri-Vini. Other organizations are also encouraging Louisiana Creoles and the wider community to learn Kouri-Vini: Chinbo Inc and C.R.E.O.L.E. Inc. have created lesson plans and glossaries to help more people learn Kouri-Vini.[55] The group L'Assemblée formed in September 2023 with the goals of preserving Louisiana culture, language, and heritage with special attention to the issue of land loss to environmental and manmade/corporate/governmental factors.[56] Grassroot efforts created by Creoles to help their culture and language flourish in Louisiana are multiplying across the state, and the groups are working together to create events that help educate and celebrate the unique identities of Southwest Louisiana. The past few years has seen an increase in Creole educational events, heritage festivals, and exhibits. Creoles are using institutional sites like government-sponsored museums, arts and culture centers, and universities to create events that highlight how Creole culture is not a thing of the past, secondary to Cajuns, but still flourishing and growing today. These perform a kind of resistance to the state's various messaging and scripting about Southwest Louisiana. As we saw in Festivals Acadiens et Créoles, *Mitoloji*

[55] C.R.E.O.L.E. Inc., accessed December 7, 2023. https://www.creoleinc.net/.
[56] L'Assemblie de la Louisiane, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.assemblee.la/.

Latannyèr/Mythologies Louisianaises, and the outcropping of grassroots efforts, the performances of both Creole and Cajun cultures are safe in the hands of people who have preservation in mind. Their work collectively challenges previous narratives and performances of Cajun homogeneity in Southwest Louisiana, and instead champion the complexity and nuance of a region that is also the homeland of Louisiana Creoles.

Conclusion

Southwest Louisiana, though most often discussed as Acadiana, has been and still is a region with a rich and complex history shared by two dominant cultural groups—the Creoles and the Cajuns. The state of Louisiana's official narratives about the region rely heavily on a privileging and centering of the development of Cajun culture, which overshadows the older and just-as-present Creole cultural contributions of this more rural part of South Louisiana. The two cultures' shared histories are still intertwined today, as Creole and Cajun Louisianians both participate in some cultural performances and practices together while maintaining others as distinct from the other. For those outside of the state, but also for some who have lived in Louisiana their whole lives, the overriding narratives of Southwest Louisiana as Cajun Country prevent them from having a fuller picture of the overlapping cultures of the region. By taking a closer look at creolized cultural performances of festivals, preservation efforts, and exhibits, a more nuanced understanding of the multicultural, multiethnic, and multiracial development of the cultural practices crystalizes. Additionally, distinct Creole cultural performances outside of those laid out in New Orleans by Joseph Roach and Clint Bruce emerge in the very different landscape of rural Louisiana. While some can be seen in both places, like the speaking of French, a focus on educational access, and using protest as a form of transgressive performance, practices

like the Creole trail ride, Zydeco, and festivals arise on the other side of the Mississippi River in unique ways.

Those unique conditions of creation exist because of the differences in the region—its rural setting, its confluence of cultures, heritage, and race, and its relation to time. Creole culture, like Cajun culture, continues to grow and change in Southwest Louisiana, both in new and old ways. Looking backwards and forwards has allowed Southwest Louisiana Creoles to shape the present day in conversation with their Cajun neighbors. Sometimes they hold those conversations on dusty dance floors and wooden stages, sharing the gifts of their music and storytelling, and sometimes, they have to stand up and ask for more—more attention, more consideration, more understanding. Perhaps the various advocates for more focus on Creole culture in the region will get the state and others to see them as clearly as they do the Cajuns of the region.

Chapter 3. Not As Good As, But Better Than: Capital-area Creole Performance

The LSU football game day experience is a full-body experience and spectacle. As someone who has lived directly next to LSU's campus the entire time I've lived in Baton Rouge, I have seen, heard, and generally experienced more gamedays than most. Setup begins as early as the night before,[1] as RVs, trailers, and trucks show up to claim their spot somewhere on campus and begin erecting events tents, generators, and smokers or grills. The morning of the game, people begin arriving to campus to cook, drink, and party. Tailgates don't just happen in parking lots and sidewalks but across any available grassy area or quad. The Tigerland Band warms up in the Enchanted Forest near the Northgate—the sound of drums, horns, and flutes drowning out the speakers with country, rap, and pop playing from different tents. As the day progresses, the band parades down Victory Hill toward the stadium, accompanying the team to the stadium, known as Death Valley. As the gates open, fans make their way to the stadium to find their seats amongst more than 100,000 other fans (when the stadium is at capacity). Others stay at the tailgates, big-screen TVs set to move from the day's earlier college games to the one playing within walking distance. The game is an all-day affair.

In September 2022, a different kind of game was played. For the first time in history, LSU and Southern University (Southern or SU) met at Tiger Stadium. Tailgates doubled, as both teams were home(town) teams. Smoked pork, grilled burgers, and boudin filled the air with the smell of savory local cuisines. These were paired with trays of Blue Store spicy fried chicken wings, jambalaya, and potato salad. The usual sound of the band rehearsing that day (and the night before) was amplified, as the LSU Band, directed by Dr. Kelvin Jones, hosted the Southern

[1] A particularly busy game, like one against rival Ole Miss or Alabama, will result in people holding tailgating spots even before the gates open at 5 PM on Friday night before the game.

Band, known as the Human Jukebox, under the direction of Dr. Kedric Taylor, on its rehearsal fields and the Enchanted Forest. As kickoff neared, not just the Tigerland band marched down Victory Hill. No, Southern did their Marching In, livestreamed to their Facebook and YouTube platforms, with the Fabulous Dancing Dolls leading the way. Their march took them through a large portion of campus as they paraded toward their perch in the southside of the stadium. LSU's band took their traditional spot across the field at the North endzone, near the student section seating.

The stadium was the fullest I have ever seen in person, as rarely do pre-conference games sell out like this game did. Only in the year that LSU won the National Championship have I seen a crowd that rivaled it. Unlike a usual game on a Saturday night in Death Valley, the crowd wasn't dominated by LSU's purple and gold, with the opponent's team colors sequestered to one small section of the 400s seats and peppered throughout amongst the home fans. This game was awash with not only purple and gold but also gold and light blue. The energy was magical. I had been looking forward to this weekend of events since it had been announced the previous year. As the usual pregame festivities in the stadium like the national anthem and the introduction of the teams concluded, the Human Jukebox played the last strains of "Neck," and its crass chant filled the stadium. The game had begun.

On most weekends in a fall semester in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the colors of the city's two major universities can be seen almost anywhere you happen to visit, whether the football games are at home or away. On one side of the city next to the Mississippi River, Southern University's Gold and Columbia Blue,[2] the colors of sunshine and blue skies, adorns the campus and people surrounding A.W. Mumford Stadium. In another part of the city, the primary color

[2] "SU Visual Identity Guide," Southern University, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.subr.edu/assets/subr/MediaRelations/SUvisualstyleguide_5.pdf.

combination of Royal Purple and Old Gold prevails , as Louisiana State University (LSU) prepares itself for the day's upcoming game. Southern, as it is locally called, is an NCAA Division I member of the Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC), made up of other Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the American South. LSU is in the NCAA Division I as a part of the Southeastern Conference (SEC). One Saturday in 2022, the city of Baton Rouge found both universities' colors mixed together across the city and surrounding Death Valley. For the first time in their long histories, Southern and LSU faced off on the field, and embracing traditions distinct to the city together.

At first sight and sound, it may seem like any other football game. But under closer inspection, we find two universities with intertwined histories and tensions in a city that still, in its landscape, politics, and schools, reflects the pressures of a legacy of segregation, civil rights, and how to move forward. Though you might think we'll be looking at the game itself, I will leave that to performance scholars who specialize in sports.[3] Instead, I present this game as a way to look at Baton Rouge as a site of Creole cultural performance in a way that it rarely is. I focus on the bands. Specifically, I argue that in this performance we see the Human Jukebox and the Dancing Dolls absorb LSU's band and Gold Girls as well as every fan in the place, into a Creole cultural performance that both speaks to potential futures in the city and redresses the past by placing these specific people into a space they've rarely if ever had access to.

Most studies of Creole culture in Louisiana exclude Baton Rouge for reasons related to how and where French was spoken, as well as a privileging of the development of Creole cultural centers in New Orleans and Southwest Louisiana. The Creole cultural development in the city, like the city itself, sits somewhere outside and between them. The city's varied history

[3] Scholars like LSU's own Shannon Walsh explore sport through the lens of performance, bringing us new insights into the ways that gender, race, sexuality, community, and belonging are played out on the field, court, or mat.

and later development into an urban center leaves it as an outsider to the conversations around the French-speaking Afro-Creoles of New Orleans. Its location, across the Mississippi River from Acadiana, separates it from the development of rural Creole cultural development discussed in Chapter 2. Folklorists have even separated it out from discussions of South Louisiana in one study that draws the borderline of North and South Louisiana folk regions just south of the city.[4]

A more recent study, though, situates Baton Rouge as a Creole milieu, albeit different than the ones on either side of it to the east and the west. The authors point to a small traditionally Black community in Baton Rouge, Old South Baton Rouge, just north of LSU's campus. Within this community, they observe,

> elements of nineteenth century rural African American plantation culture were brought together and mixed with the cultures of European Creoles, French speaking Afro-Creoles, Sicilian Italian immigrants, Anglo-Americans, Scotch-Irish, Canary Islanders, German Dutch highlanders, Cajuns, and American Indians. These eventually blended into a local repertoire of practices which served the growing population of the area. In the African American community the merged patterns resulted in a unique ethnicity which would distinguish itself in the cultural character of OSBR.[5]

The conditions for creolization and the development of both Creole culture and cultural performance did and do exist in Baton Rouge. I argue that the elements of activism, segregation, migration, urban sprawl, and more have made the city a prime setting for contemporary Creole cultural creation for well over a century. The city's Black communities, with their participation in

[4] Maida Owens. Eds. Carl Lindahl, Maida Owens, and C. Renée Harvison. "Louisiana Folk Regions Map," *Swapping Stories: Folktales from Louisiana* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press 1997, xxxviii
[5] Petra Munro Hendry and Jay D. Edwards, *Old South Baton Rouge: The Roots of Hope*, (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2009), 11-12.

government and law at the capital and in the courthouses, join with the city as a site of civil rights advocacy to reflect the state's Creole influence, which is left changed by their contributions. Though perhaps not usually considered franco-Creole,[6] the city serves as an example of a place that has creolized over the centuries, reminding us that culture is not left unchanged over time. In the practices and performances of the Black population of Baton Rouge such as creative play, cultural callback, and citationality, Creole culture continues to evolve into new forms and opens up possibilities for considering contemporary practices as part of the Creole milieu of the state.

In what follows, I bring forward and align cultural and historical contexts that shape the LSU/Southern battle of the bands as a Creole cultural performance. I demonstrate the development of Baton Rouge-area Creole cultural performances generally by linking the New Orleans Afro-Creole protest tradition to the Jim Crow and Civil Rights activism as seen in protests and legal contestations of the segregation of public services including education. Because Baton Rouge is rarely read as a Creole cultural center, I return to my dramaturgical methods and spend a substantial portion of the chapter tracing the protest events of the city, establishing the cultural positions that Southern and LSU find themselves in today. An understanding of these events will first highlight key points in the city's racialized protest history. Such highlights in turn establish the importance of the cultural performance of the Southern at LSU game.

[6] "Significant numbers" of free people of color were also in Baton Rouge, according to the LSU Libraries introduction to the Free People of Color archive.
"Free People of Color," LSU Libraries, accessed December 7, 2023, https://lib.lsu.edu/sites/all/files/sc/fpoc/.

Baton Rouge in Brief

Today, Baton Rouge sits directly on the east bank of the Mississippi River, about a 70-minute drive from New Orleans across Lake Pontchartrain and along IH-10 to the west. Visiters must cross many bridges, including the Bonnet Carré Spillway Bridge that runs just shy of 11 miles across the edges of the lake, to get here. The city of Baton Rouge and the Parish of East Baton Rouge are hard to distinguish as different entities. The city mayor and parish president are the same person, but there are four official cities within the parish borders—Baton Rouge, Baker, Zachary, and Central. Even beyond these are other distinct communities and suburbs (some of them official Census-designated places) like Scotlandville, Shenandoah, St. George, Gardere, Old Jefferson, among others. Closer to downtown, nearer the original borders of the city, Baton Rouge is divided into even smaller neighborhoods: Spanish Town, Beauregard Town, Mid City, Old South Baton Rouge, Ogden Park, Old Goodwood, Garden District, and Southdowns, to name a few. These are some of the oldest parts of the city, and they bear the legacy of the city's history in their names and streets.

The demographics of Baton Rouge reflect its place as a Southern industrial city and political center. As of the 2020 U.S. Census, East Baton Rouge Parish had a population of 456,781. Of those residents, about 45% were Black alone, 42% White alone, 3% Asian alone, 0.2% Native American or Alaska Native alone, with about 7% Hispanic or Latino and 3% identified as Mixed Race/Multi-Racial. The larger metropolitan area includes nine parishes on either side of the Mississippi River with a total population of 870,569 at the 2020 Census. The city of Baton Rouge has a population of 227,470 with 53.55% of those residents identifying as Black alone and 34.22% as White alone. Mixed Race/Multi-Racial residents comprise 2.55% of

the city's population, and 5.94% are Hispanic or Latino. The rest of the identity categories resemble the Parish's demographics.[7]

Baton Rouge, the second-largest city[8] and capital of the state of Louisiana, houses two major public universities. Louisiana State University, a land-, sea-, and space- grant university as well as the state's flagship, sits adjacent to the Mississippi River, just south of IH-10. Southern University and A&M College, the 1890 land-grant institution and an Historically Black University (HBCU) on the northside of the city, sits off I-110 and near a bend in the river called Scott's Bluff.[9] To understand the ways that the city has been left out of discussions of Creole culture in many ways, it will be helpful to discuss some of its history.

Baton Rouge's Historical & Educational Landscape

The city's history is, for lack of a better word, a complicated one—finding itself under many different flags in its early history after its "discovery" by French explorers in 1699. The lush green and forested land that lay nestled into bends of the east bank of the Mississippi River gained its name from a French translation of Istrouma, or Red Stick, based on the local indigenous words for large cypress wood poles that marked the boundaries between the Houma and Bayougoula tribes. Until 1763, the area was used as a French outpost and possible fort for travel north from New Orleans. Then, in the Treaty of Paris, the area transferred to the British and renamed New Richmond. The Spanish defeated the English at Fort Butte on Bayou Manchac, gaining claim of West Florida, which included Baton Rouge (what are referred to

[7] UScensus.gov, accessed December 7, 2023.
[8] This has not always been true. Following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Baton Rouge became the largest city in Louisiana for a short while. There has been some discussion about how New Orleans and Baton Rouge may change places over the next few decades, particularly because of the effects of climate change nearer the coast. Another factor that leads to such speculation is room for residential and business expansion in the Greater Baton Rouge Metropolitan Area.
[9] "Local legend marks Scott's Bluff as the location of the famous *baton rouge* or 'red stick' from which the city of Baton Rouge got its name."
"Water Heritage," Atchafalaya.org, accessed December 7, 2023, https://waterheritage.atchafalaya.org/trail-sites.php.

today as the Florida parishes). In 1810, locals overthrew the Spanish, the city was annexed by Louisiana, and East Baton Rouge Parish was created. Louisiana became a state in 1812, and Baton Rouge was named the capital in 1849. During the Civil War, the Louisiana Confederate government abandoned Baton Rouge as the Union captured New Orleans in 1862, at which point they renamed Opelousas, and then Shreveport, the capital of the Confederate state. In 1863, after the Union siege of Port Hudson, about 25 miles northwest of Baton Rouge along the River (and today, still a part of East Baton Rouge Parish), the Union established full control of the Mississippi River, cutting off communication between the east and west states of the Confederacy.[10]

Following the war, Baton Rouge saw an influx of Black freedmen and freedwomen. In the 1880 census, Baton Rouge was about 60% Black, up from about a third of the population before the war (then mostly enslaved people).[11] This population trend continued until about 1920,[12] as the effects of Jim Crow and the subsequent Great Migration began and Black southerners began moving to other cities across the country,[13] at which point white people made up the majority of the city. In the decades following the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation, as New Orleans Creoles began to attempt alliance with freedmen and

[10] City of Baton Rouge, "A Brief History," Parish of East Baton Rouge, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.brla.gov/841/A-Brief-History.
[11] "Population, by Race, Sex, and Nativity," U.S. Census, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1880/vol-01-population/1880_v1-13.pdf.
[12] "The race determination was based on the enumerator's impressions."
"1920 Federal Population Census," National Archives, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.archives.gov/research/census/publications-microfilm-catalogs-census/1920/part-01.html#louisiana.
[13] M. Kay Brown, "The Power of Leaving: Black Agency and the Great Migration in Louisiana," (Senior Honors Thesis, University of New Orleans, 2018), https://scholarworks.uno.edu/honors_theses/102.
Jolivétte also addresses the Great Migration, as referenced earlier in the dissertation.

freedwomen,[14] Baton Rouge re-emerged as the capital of the state (which was readmitted to the Union in 1868).[15]

The city's political importance led to the relocation, or at least regular visits, by many of the state's leading Creole and Black advocates, lawyers, and politicians. Oscar Dunn, born into slavery and the first elected Black Lt. Governor in the country in 1868, served as acting Governor in 1871, after then-Governor Henry Clay Warmoth left the state to rehabilitate from an injury. Dunn died in office months later.[16] The next year, Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback became the second Black Lt. Governor and then acting Governor of Louisiana, when Warmoth was impeached. Pinchback was born free to a Black enslaved woman and her white planter master, who raised their children as his own on his plantation. Pinchback's mother, Eliza Stewart, moved them to a free state, Ohio, at the death of his father. Pinchback came to New Orleans after the start of the Civil War, where he became an officer commissioned in the Union Army. He served in the Louisiana State Senate prior to his turn in the executive branch, and later was elected to the United States Senate in 1972, though he was never seated because of white challenges to the election.[17] In 1879, Pinchback participated as a delegate in the Louisiana constitutional convention and helped support the founding of Southern University in 1880,[18] alongside T.T. Allain, T.B. Stamps, and Henry Demas. The University's first class in New Orleans had twelve students, and a budget appropriation of $10,000. Southern moved to

[14] Clint Bruce, *Afro-Creole Poetry in French from Louisiana's Radical Civil War-Era Newspapers* (The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2020).
[15] "Pickney Benton Stewart Pinchback 1872-73," Louisiana Secretary of State, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.sos.la.gov/HistoricalResources/AboutLouisiana/LouisianaGovernors1861-1877/Pages/PBSPinchback.aspx.
[16] Charles Vincent, "Oscar Dunn," *64 Parishes*, updated May 4, 2023, https://64parishes.org/entry/oscar-dunn-2.
[17] Justin A. Nystrom, *New Orleans After the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010). Justin A. Nystrom, "Reconstruction," *64 Parishes*, updated July 13, 2023, https://64parishes.org/entry/reconstruction.
[18] Justin A. Nystrom, "P.B.S. Pinchback," *64 Parishes*, updated June 22, 2023, https://64parishes.org/entry/p-b-s-pinchback.

Scotlandville,[19] then a rural area of East Baton Rouge Parish, and now an incorporated part of north Baton Rouge, in 1914 as a land-grant institution. The founders wanted the goals for Southern University, as it was founded, to become an institution that would serve anyone, but especially Black Americans. [20] This hope was reminiscent of the egalitarian ideals of the Afro-Creoles who hoped for education for all races in the years following the Civil War.

Desegregating Baton Rouge Education

Law Professor Gail S. Stephenson's article, "The Desegregation of Louisiana's Law Schools" (2021) offers us a full picture of the various cases that brought the study of Law to Black and Creole students in Louisiana in the 1940s through 1960s.The Southern University Law School opened in 1947, following a lawsuit by Charles Hatfield, a Black graduate of Xavier University, who sought a law degree at a state institution. He had applied to LSU, and the dean Paul M. Hebert denied his entry. In a 1946 case submitted by NAACP lawyer Thurgood Marshall and the three Black lawyers in Louisiana (J.A. Thornton, A.P. Tureaud, Sr., and Louis Berry, all graduates of Howard University's law school), the state court ordered LSU to admit Hatfield for that school term. Three days later, the Louisiana Board of Education held an emergency session that implemented the earlier state provisions for a law school at Southern. It opened in the fall of 1947, only after the court dropped Hatfield's case saying he should have filed against Southern. In 1951, another case, *Wilson v. Board of Supervisors of LSU A&M*, was filed to federal court in Louisiana by Marshall and Tureaud, Sr.—a class action lawsuit that argued Black students

[19] The official visual identity guide of Southern University explicitly states that the University should never be described as "Southern University at Baton Rouge" or "Southern University-Baton Rouge." It is either Southern University or Southern University and A&M College. Scotlandville was incorporated into Baton Rouge in three phases between 1978 and 1980.
"Baton Rouge Annexation History," Open Data BR, accessed December 7, 2023, https://data.brla.gov/Government/Baton-Rouge-Annexation-History/3xd7-twu2.
[20] "Southern University History," Southern University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.subr.edu/page/southern-university-history.

should be admitted to LSU under the auspices of maintaining the "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896).[21] The Black lawyers argued that Southern, being recently established, with less investment made to its facilities than LSU, and having no accreditations, was not in fact equal. LSU admitted three students after the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the lower courts' decisions, denying LSU's appeal, not including Roy S. Wilson, the named plaintiff. He withdrew his application after learning that LSU had investigated his mental health history during his time serving in the military during the Korean War.[22]

Three Black students enrolled at LSU Law School that fall of 1951. Of them, Robert F. Collins and Ernest N. Morial were the first Black students to graduate from LSU's Law School in 1954. LSU did not change its policy of excluding Black students from enrollment, and it would be until 1969, when two students, Bernette Johnson (neé Joshua) and Gammiel B. Gray graduated as the first Black women from LSU Law. Morial became the first Black mayor of New Orleans, Collins became the first Black Louisiana federal judge in 1978, and Johnson became the first Black chief justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court in 2013.[23]

I spotlight these cases because they establish a few things. First, at one point, three Black lawyers practiced in the state of Louisiana during Jim Crow. Just under a century since the Civil War and Reconstruction, when highly educated Afro-Creoles and Black and Creole men held elected office, to have so few Black lawyers may be surprising. Such was the success of Jim Crow and the rise of white supremacy in Louisiana. Second, in order to study and practice law at

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[21] Reminder from Chapter 1: this is the Supreme Court case in which Plessy, a light-skinned Creole man in New Orleans, boarded a whites only train car to challenge the state law barring his entry as the white-Black colorline was being built and enforced.

[22] Gail S. Stephenson, "The Desegregation of Louisiana's Law Schools: A Slow and Tortuous 23-Year Journey," *Louisiana Bar Journal* (October/November 2021): 221.

[23] Gail S. Stephenson, "The Desegregation of Louisiana's Law Schools," 221.
Stephenson's article is the most comprehensive look at the cases that resulted in a public law school that served Black students in Louisiana and that desegregated LSU's Law School.

a public institution in state, these Black students used the law to both force the state to create Southern's Law School, but also to allow entry to LSU's Law School. And finally, this battleground was fought in Baton Rouge for Baton Rouge. The students and lawyers who took on their cases, contributed to the changing landscape of not just legal practice in the state, but also in the cultural performance of protest and transgression. To do so took great risk, but as evidenced by their eventual positions in courts and city governments, they took on roles that reshaped cultural standards over the long term throughout the state.

Education in Baton Rouge: Snapshots

LSU's early days began far away from the big cities of New Orleans and Baton Rouge. The institution got its start as a small military school called the Louisiana State Seminary of Learning and Military Academy, near the rural town of Pineville, Louisiana, near Alexandria, in the central part of the state in 1860. Louisiana's secession from the Union led to the closure of the school. Superintendent William Tecumseh Sherman joined the Union and most of the students joined the Confederate side. When the school reopened in 1865, a fire forced it to move to Baton Rouge, where it struggled financially for the first two decades. In 1886, he newly named LSU A&M moved downtown, to the former military post, and acquired ownership of the 200-acre site.

The school grew over the next few decades, as the university added new buildings and expanded course offerings. The Law School was created in 1907, which was also the first year that LSU admitted women. By 1915, LSU had no more room to expand on its current site. In 1918, then President Thomas Boyd, with financial support from faculty and Baton Rouge white citizens, purchased an option to buy Gartness Plantation, along with portions of two other plantations, Arlington and Nestledown, until the state could provide funding for full purchase.

Building began in this area south of downtown on March 1922, and the first building to open was the dairy barn in 1925, followed by other agricultural buildings. Some classes began on the campus in the fall of 1925, and the campus was formally dedicated on April 30, 1926. Governor Huey Long made LSU a funding priority when he took office in 1928, and the campus (and scandals) grew under his attention, aided by funds from the Works Progress Administration and the New Deal programs of the 1930s.[24] The once struggling school had become the premiere public university in the state.

In 1946, the first Black students attempted to enroll at LSU, some of them World War II veterans in hopes of using their GI Bills at the institution. State law required that they attend an HBCU like Southern or Grambling University in north Louisiana. In 1950, federal courts declared that Black students should be allowed admittance if their graduate course of study was not available at an in-state HBCU, leading to a series of federal suits filed against the university until 1964, with the passage of the Civil Rights Act. These suits required Black prospective students to show reason why they should be admitted.[25] In 1953, a similar provision extended to undergraduates, but A.P. Tureaud, Jr., from a Creole family in New Orleans, was the only student admitted that year and was removed from enrollment 55 days later following a legal challenge to his father's case made by LSU. In 1956, LSU was determined to have violated his rights under the law by the U.S. Supreme Court.[26] In that time, Tureaud, Jr. became a student at Xavier

[24] "History of LSU," *LSU Libraries Special Collections*, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.lib.lsu.edu/special/archives/historical-information.
[25] "History of LSU," LSU Libraries Special Collection.
[26] *Board of Supervisors of Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College et al., Appellants, v. Alexander P. Turead, Jr., a Minor, by Alexander P. Tureaud, Sr., His Father and Next Friend, Appellee, 228 F.2d 895 (5th Cir. 1956).* Justia US Law, accessed November 30, 2023, https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/F2/228/895/404405/.

University in New Orleans, another HBCU.[27] In 1964, LSU was forced to allow enrollment to Black students as the Civil Rights Act, passed under President Johnson, laid out plans for desegregation of public services and institutions across the country, particularly in the South.

I share this information for a double purpose: first, because it will serve helpful to understand the ways that civil rights activism in pursuit of desegregated and equal access to education was established by Black and Creole Louisianians in the 1950s and 1960s for the next chapter. Second, jumping to 2021, a previously unreleased archive of letters of former LSU President Troy Middleton was released in the LSU archives. These letters revealed his role in continuing the practice of segregation at LSU. Following their release, the LSU removed Middleton's name from the LSU Library building. This followed a similar action in 2017 of renaming a street on campus that had previously been named for a Confederate soldier, though "modernization" was the official reason for the change. Buildings that bear Confederate soldier names still remain on campus today.[28]

LSU has thus played a significant role in the way that race and community have been shaped in Baton Rouge. The necessary thing to remember is that creolization happens because of the connections and collisions of different cultures in the same place and time. LSU and Southern shaped each other through a long dance of cultural performances across the first half of the twentieth century. Neither school would exist the way it does today, without this shared

[27] Joshua Jordan. "Guest Opinion: Legacy of segregation era lives on today at LSU," *The Reveille,* July 30, 2021, https://www.lsureveille.com/opinion/guest-opinion-legacy-of-segregation-era-lives-on-today-at-lsu/article_1ac67a42-f160-11eb-880e-7b3d6c8a55c9.html.

[28] Mark Ballard, "LSU Renames Well-Known Campus Street Named after Confederate Admiral as Part of Modernization Plan," *The Advocate,* November 27, 2017, https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/education/lsu-renames-well-known-campus-street-named-after-confederate-admiral-as-part-of-modernization-plan/article_88019a04-d398-11e7-8323-730f74dc7d02.html.

history. Additionally, the Creole protest tradition and transgression displayed by Black and Creole Louisianians resemble others highlighted throughout this dissertation in other locations.

Southern University: Protest Tradition

That protest tradition is seen acutely in Southern University students who risked much to engage in peaceful protest during the Civil Rights era and into the 1970s. Locally, in addition to the cases discussed above, activists challenged LSU time and again to enroll Black students and to force the state to provide accommodations to expand the number of Black lawyers, teachers, and more. The city beyond the campuses saw other activist movements and events. In 1953, beginning June 19, the first municipal bus boycott in the nation started in Baton Rouge, as Black riders sought integration of public transportation. For six days, a free ride share was created to assist Black workers and citizens journey across the city, while others walked or rode bikes. The boycott was held in response to City Ordinance 222, a rule that allowed Black riders, who made up 80% of the usual customers, to sit at the front of the bus, as long as they did not sit next to white riders. The all-white bus-driving staff had refused to enforce it and went on strike, and the ordinance was overturned after four days. In response to the resulting boycott by Black riders, the city changed how seating occurred again, having white riders fill from the front back, Black riders from the back to the front, and no mixed-race seating on the same row. Though the boycott did not end segregation in local transportation, it did serve as an example of a successful protest that influenced the later, more recognized Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955.[29]

[29] "Baton Rouge Bus Boycott Chronology, 1950-1955," LSU Libraries, accessed November 30, 2023, https://www.lib.lsu.edu/sites/all/files/sc/exhibits/e-exhibits/boycott/chronology.html.
Christina Melton, "Baton Rouge Boycott," *64 Parishes,* updated March 9, 2022, https://64parishes.org/entry/baton-rouge-bus-boycott.
Mary Price, "Baton Rouge Bus Boycott Background," LSU Libraries, accessed November 30, 2023, https://www.lib.lsu.edu/sites/all/files/sc/exhibits/e-exhibits/boycott/background.html.

In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruled racial segregation in public schools as unconstitutional, a decision that overturned the previous case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) which had established that public facilities and services could be separate, as long as they were equal in quality. As seen above, over the next decade, major changes happened across Louisiana, the South, and the country, as Jim Crow laws began to fall through Supreme court cases and various legal challenges to violations of those new provisions. In 1960, Southern University students conducted sit-ins of local businesses including Sitman's Drug Store and the Greyhound Bus Station. On March 28 of that year, seven Southern students sat at a whites-only counter at the Kress Department store; they were then arrested. Other sit-ins followed. All said, over the next two weeks, police arrested sixteen students and Southern's president Dr. Felton Clark subsequently expelled them. The students challenged the expulsions, arguing that their rights to due process under the 14th Amendment had been violated, but they lost every case and appeal. In *Garner v. Louisiana* (1961), a case argued by Thurgood Marshall, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that Louisiana could not convict the student protesters under the states "Disturbing the Peace" laws. In May 2004, thirteen of the sixteen expelled students were awarded honorary degrees from Southern University.[30]

On November 16, 1972, two Southern students, Denver Smith and Leonard Brown, were shot and killed during a protest at the administration building on campus. Student groups had organized peaceful protests of the campus's accommodations and course offerings, asking for better quality in the weeks previous, participating boycotts of class and a sit-in on the football

[30] "S.H. Kress Department Store," United States Civil Rights Trail, accessed November 30, 2023, https://civilrightstrail.com/attraction/sh-kress-department-store/.
James Wilkins, "How Southern Student Sit-ins Fueled a Civil Rights Push—and How Louisiana Will Honor Them," *The Advocate,* March 31, 2023, https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/louisiana-honors-1960s-su-student-lunch-counter-sit-ins/article_091c892a-cf0e-11ed-aced-5bd54fe692ab.html.

field during a home game. These protests resulted in the arrest of several students and warrants for more requested for others identified as disrupting campus. Southern's President at the time was George Leon Netterville. The university expelled four students due to the protests, following the arrests. Students gathered in and around the administration building, asking for Netterville to assist in releasing the students still being held in the Parish jail down the road from Southern's campus. The group of students were met by state and city police alongside an armored vehicle named "Big Bertha." Law enforcement shot gas grenades and bullets into the crowd, and the police shared a rumor that the students had a campus staff member held hostage (which was never substantiated). In the melee, two students were shot and killed as students ran from the attack. No one was ever convicted of their deaths, and how live rounds had been loaded was never determined.[31] Southern University issued posthumous degrees to Smith and Brown's families in 2017. Not until 2022 did the Southern University Board of Supervisors vote to end the campus ban of the students who were expelled.[32]

In all of the cases of protest and activism above at Southern and in and around Baton Rouge, each of the individuals who challenged the rules and laws of the universities, city, state, and nation did so with the threat of great risk. Their work and lives helped carry on the egalitarian ideals set forward by the Afro-Creoles of the late 19th century, as they called for equal—not separate—access to education, transportation, and other public services and accommodations. Some proved successful, some were not, and some made progress, despite disappointments in falling short of the originally intended goal. As discussed in Chapter 1,

[31] Piper Hutchinson, "Southern University Board Overturns 50-year Campus Ban on Student Protestors," *Louisiana Illuminator*, October 21, 2022, https://lailluminator.com/2022/10/21/southern-university-board-overturns-50-year-campus-ban-on-student-protestors/.
[32] LSU Manship News Service, "What Led to the 1972 Shooting Death of Two Southern University Students During a Protest," *Louisiana Illuminator*, November 2, 2022, https://lailluminator.com/2022/11/02/what-led-to-the-1972-shooting-death-of-two-southern-university-students-during-a-protest/.

Louisiana Black and Creole residents cannot be separated from each other in many ways, as work was done, to varying levels of success, to ally Creoles and Black freedmen and freedwomen in the decades following the end of the Civil War. As discussed in Chapter 1, it is also difficult to determine absolute boundaries between Cajun and Creole cultures. Additionally, Baton Rouge had a significant population of free people of color in the 19th century.[33] All of these actions help shape the culture that results, whether rural in Acadiana, urban in New Orleans, and both in the greater Baton Rouge area. In determining how the protest- and civil rights- minded cultures emerged and continued to develop in Louisiana, it would be remiss to not acknowledge that protest was growing throughout the South, particularly in the century following the Civil War. Through individual and community activism, Louisiana's creolized culture emerges in Baton Rouge as the legacies of Louisiana Creole advocacy evolved to challenge Jim Crow.

The larger regional experience of the South, too, is important to consider in contextualizing how creolization happens in Louisiana. Louisiana and Baton Rouge experienced changes in population that impacted the way culture developed in the city in a kind of ebbing manner. Significant population changes have affected the area for many reasons. The Great Migration saw Black southerners moving to other industrial cities outside of the Jim Crow states. Jobs in oil, shipping, and other industries also impacted the region, as Baton Rouge saw a decrease in population across all demographics during the oil bust of the 1980s. Environmental and climate change realities as the coasts of Louisiana recede and hurricanes grow more intense prompt other movements. Finally, finding access to the public institutions of higher education also factors into residents' movements. As in any other city or region, change is inevitable.

[33] "Free People of Color." *LSU Libraries*. https://lib.lsu.edu/sites/all/files/sc/fpoc/

One specific example of a significant change in the population in Baton Rouge is the year following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In a very short period of time, Baton Rouge took in tens of thousands of evacuees. Many were bussed to cities across the state and further into other states like Texas. The numbers of people who remained in Baton Rouge as New Orleans worked to rebuild have been difficult to pinpoint due to the nature of the U.S. Census and other sources. Elizabeth Fussell, a population researcher, estimated that a spike of 17,500 people could be seen at the end of 2005. In the decade following Hurricane Katrina, the Baton Rouge metropolitan area boasted a gain of almost 90,000 people. Sixty percent of those residents moved into the nearby suburbs of Ascension and Livingston Parishes, and 36% settled in East Baton Rouge Parish.[34] In the most recent Census estimates for 2022, Ascension Parish was 71% White alone and about 26% Black alone. Livingston Parish was 87% White alone and just under 10% Black alone. These stand in high contrast to East Baton Rouge's estimates of 47.3% White alone and 47.2% Black alone. In population change estimates, Ascension and Livingston Parishes showed growth of 3-4% from 2020 to 2022, while East Baton Rouge had a 1.4% decrease and Orleans Parish had a 3.7% decrease.[35]

Today, the racial lines of the city's history remain visible. North Baton Rouge refers to anything north of Florida Boulevard, a predominantly Black part of the city that houses Southern, Scotlandville, and much of the east side of the river's industrial facilities. In fact, Standard Oil opened its refinery in 1909, now Exxon Mobil refinery,[36] just south of Southern's campus. On the southern side of downtown, nearing LSU's campus lies another traditionally

[34] David J. Mitchell, "Baton Rouge Grew after Katrina While Forging Closer Ties to Recovering New Orleans," *The Advocate*, September 1, 2017, https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/baton-rouge-grew-after-katrina-while-forging-closer-ties-to-recovering-new-orleans/article_4871291f-0606-520b-a6b5-df73c446c750.html.
[35] Census.gov.
[36] Justin P. Theriot, "Standard Oil," *64 Parishes,* Updated February 18, 2022, https://64parishes.org/entry/standard-oil.

Black neighborhood—one of the oldest in the city. Old South Baton Rouge resembles Treme in New Orleans, at least in its history. Once the Black business district, connected to a part of the city called Catfish Town,[37] it was cut off from downtown when IH-10 was constructed through it. Much like the creation of IH-10 high rise highways cut through Claiborne St. in New Orleans, Old South Baton Rouge, called the Bottoms by some who grew up there, begins where the giant concrete pillars of the highway run east and west. From there, the neighborhood runs south along the parallel roads of Highland and Thomas H. Delpit to the east and Nicholson at the west.[38] The schools in Old South Baton Rouge are primarily Black-serving today, and always have been. McKinley High, the first Black High School in the parish, had four graduates in 1916, who claimed to be the first black high school graduates in Louisiana. The original building that housed the school is now the McKinley High School Alumni Center. The elementary and middle schools that serve the neighborhood are also called McKinley. McKinley High is one of just two gifted-and-talented public programs in the city, and it has a total minority enrollment of 96%.[39]

Old South Baton Rouge is a smaller neighborhood than the sprawling North Baton Rouge and Scotlandville/Baker areas. Cut off from downtown, and bordered by LSU, it is a concentrated pocket of Black and Creole culture. Community-loved restaurants of the north side of the city have moved to the area in just the past few years—there are three chicken places

[37] Catfish Town was a residential neighborhood and warehouse district prior to IH-10 being built at the site of the New Bridge in the 1960s. Local legend says that it got its name from the yearly flooding from the Mississippi River that allowed residents to catch catfish off their porch, prior to the expansion of the levy system. I cannot substantiate this.

[38] Delpit is named after the Thomas "Tommy" H. Delpit, the Black creator of Delpit's Chicken Shack, which is now a local favorite fast-food walk-in, counter-order restaurant, but in the 1950s and 1960s had white tablecloth seating service and even deliveries. Until just recently, the only Chicken Shack marked the cross into North Baton Rouge along Acadian Throughway past Mid City. About a year ago a Chicken Shack opened on Highland at the edge of Old South Baton Rouge nearing LSU as well, though it seems to have closed. Hendry and Edwards discuss Chicken Shack and other OSBR establishments in more detail in *Roots of Hope* (2009).

[39] USnews.com: Baton Rouge Magnet High School, the other GT program, in Mid City, has a minority enrollment of 60%.

within a couple blocks of each other.[40] Friday night home football games for McKinley High are a big draw into the neighborhood, and over the past few years, a growing interest in seeing a revitalization of the area has emerged. A group called the Old South Baton Rouge Economic Redevelopment Group has been created, and they have sponsored an annual Juneteenth Art & Culture Festival, Pop Up Markets featuring local artists and makers, and community events that are working to preserve the history of the district and re-develop the area for the future.[41] Though this area and North Baton Rouge are separated by a large portion of the city, there is lots of crossover in business, education, and community connections.

The Human Jukebox and The Fabulous Dancing Dolls: Pageantry Traditions

On the whole, HBCU bands are a bit younger than their PWI (Predominantly White Institution) counterparts, mostly because they're newer than white universities. Florida A&M University is generally credited with hosting the first of what we would today recognize as HBCU-style bands. In the 1960s, as civil rights laws shifted and affected higher education, HBCU bands reacted to those shifts even as they absorbed changes in popular music, innovating new trends in how marching bands present on football fields. Many of these bands existed well before the shift, mostly from the two decades prior following the return of veterans in the Post-World War II decades. In the South, HBCUs began to move from the more military or drum-corps-style band to one that incorporated popular music into its repertoire and danced on the field or in the stands with their whole bodies. By the end of the 1950s, a new style of dance

[40] Chicken Shack opening on Highland caused some excitement, as Triplet's Blue Store II had opened just down the block previously, the first location outside of Scotlandville-based (North Baton Rouge) Triplet's Food Store. In 2000, the store's new owners painted bright blue over the previously light blue and yellow Jaguar Nation exterior, and Southern students and local residents started referring to it as the Blue Store. The store has expanded across Baton Rouge since, serving Creole-style fried chicken wings, potato logs, fried rice, boudin, hot sausage, and egg rolls.

[41] Old South Baton Rouge Economic Redevelopment Group (@OldSouthBR, Facebook), https://www.facebook.com/OldSouthBR/.

troupe had emerged alongside the marching band. Today, there is still a noticeable gap in the research about these innovative directors and groups, but the body of literature is growing. As with many understudied sites, a kind of folk lore has grown around the history, myths, and practices of the bands discussed. Oral histories by scholars and reporters are some of the best records for working towards more specific details about the bands and troupes. I thus proceed cautiously, leaning on qualifiers such as "generally" or "mostly" to characterize my descriptions here.

I rely heavily on one particular study by Claire Milburn because the histories of the bands haven't been given much attention yet. Milburn interviewed band directors from over several decades who had worked at Southern University and Jackson State University. Her work attempts to place some more difficult-to-obtain timelines on the mythology of the bands by collecting oral histories from the men who experienced them. The Southern University "Marching Band from Jaguar Land," or officially, The Marching Counts of Sound, became the Human Jukebox after Dr. Isaac Greggs became the director in 1969. Milburn points to a contemporary student publication from Southern's campus whose interviewee remembered that the band was like a "human jukebox," playing anything, including top 40 hits, perhaps after a game with Alcorn State in 1971.[42] Southern's Human Jukebox website history does not pinpoint the date either. The Fabulous Dancing Dolls, the Southern dance troupe, is also one of the first of its kind to dance without baton, flag, or pom-pom. While some may claim it was the first, Alcorn State also claims this, and general consensus does seem to agree that they may have had the first

[42] Claire Milburn, "The Development of Marching Band Traditions at Historically Black Colleges and Universities: The Human Jukebox versus the Sonic Boom of the South," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 43, no. 2 (2022): 216.

routine of the kind in 1969,[43] though message boards and comment sections in relevant online groups occasionally erupt with defenses for their alma mater as title of first.

Assistant Director Paul Adams credits that game against Alcorn State for the change in style in the Human Jukebox. Playing "Hey Look Me Over," the band got booed, as it was recognized by the crowd as an LSU fight song. Greggs and his assistants put together a more unique drill for the next game against Tennessee State University.[44] It was also in these early years of the 1970s that Adams helped make the change in stadium seating that is still seen across HBCUs today: the tubas were split and set along the sides of the band, and percussion moved to the back. The move proved better for R&B sounds, while also highlighting the sound of the tubas and making the drumline more visible.[45] Such a set up allows the band's movement and dance to be seen more clearly. The Human Jukebox's particular march style is called the Jaguar Rock, a "jazzy marching with a high knee lift," led by the drum major.[46] The Dancing Dolls usually lead, helping set the pace with more fluid movement during the marching in and marching out of the stadium. The drum major, traditionally a tall, slim young man, leads the band with the most exaggerated of swaggers on the field, sometimes with additional high-stepping and dancing bandmates following. In some performances, the cymbal players are choreographed as a back up team. While done by drum majors across HBCUs and PWIs (likely originating at the Ohio State University), the backbend is traditionally performed as the drum major reaches the center of the field. The full inversion of the spine ends with his busby touching the field, as he holds the bend for an extended moment.[47] At times, the cymbal players do a modified, less extreme backbend as

[43] Antron D. Mahoney, "Reclaiming the Beat: The Sweet Subversive Sounds of HBCU Marching Bands," *Southern Cultures* 27, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 89, https://doi.org/10.1353/scu.2021.0059.
[44] Milburn, "Reclaiming," 216.
[45] Milburn, "Reclaiming," 217.
[46] Milburn, "Reclaiming," 217.
[47] Danille Christensen Linquist, "'Locating' the Nation: Football Game Day and American Dreams in Central Ohio," *Journal of American Folklore* 119, no. 474 (2006), https://www.jstor.org/stable/4137650.

a chorus behind the drum major. However it happens, the crowds love it. The community response helps feed the energy of the band, and vice versa. As Antron D. Mahoney calls it, the "house" is a type of audience integration that goes beyond just cheer and admiration, moving into a more engaged and participatory singing and dancing.[48] Like the Creole folklore storytellers of Acadiana, the audience's reactions help guide the shape of the performance in some settings. The crowd are not just spectators, but active participants, bearing witness while physically and socially responding to the eccentricities and careful spontaneity of the performance.[49]

One of these marching ins led to the zero quarter, a practice credited to Southern, and practiced by other SWAC HBCUs. In a 1997 game against Jackson State University, Southern entered the stadium first and then disrupted the Sonic Boom of the South's marching in by playing a different tempo song over theirs. Bands had already been playing before games, especially with changes in play time during televised games, but "Southern would get to the game early. And …if you're late…they'd already have your fans on their side," JSU Director Dr. Lewis Liddell explained.[50]

The fifth quarter is another practice shaped by Southern and rooted in the HBCU band culture of Battle of the Bands. The practice dates to sometime in the 1960s, but in October 1972, a competitive edge emerged. In a Southern game against Alcorn State played in Lorman, Mississippi, the bands stayed in the stadium alternating numbers after the end of the game as they traditionally did. This time, though, neither band backed down. Southern had an extensive "book," or set of songs they could perform each season, usually around forty separate pieces. As Alcorn finished one song, Southern moved to another. Eventually, Alcorn ran out of songs to

[48] Mahoney, "Reclaiming,"84.
[49] Mahoney, "Reclaiming," 85.
[50] Milburn, "Jukebox v. Boom," 223.

play, and they sent folks to pull music from the band hall. As the decades progressed, other HBCUs adopted the battle of the fifth quarter in their practice, and Southern continued to pride itself in being able to force the home team out of their own stadium first.

In 1995, though, Southern was served by Jackson State at their annual Boombox Classic.[51] That year, Liddell explains, JSU came to the game with a book filled with more than 80 songs. After every song played, the bands paused and then began playing scales at each other, staying so long that the lights were turned off in the stadium and turned on the sprinkler system. Both bands lost money to missed dinners and bus delay penalties, but JSU remained unbothered, as they emerged as the first in decades to "shut Southern down."[52] The literal cost of that extended fifth quarter led to the practice of establishing a set number of songs for the fifth quarter, relying on house response and feedback to determine the "winner" of each battle.

Many of the practices of the Human Jukebox and the Dancing Dolls are borrowed and adapted from other bands, dances, and musical types—but there are practices like those detailed above that have emerged as unique to Southern. Because of the long history of segregation in higher education and the slow development of musical graduate programs in southern HBCUs, many of the early SWAC band directors earned their graduate degrees at PWIs in the North. They are proud to remind others that their bands are musically gifted, not just "dance bands." As former Southern band director Ludwig Freeman said during his tenure from 1965-1969, they were "not as good as, but better than."[53] As Milburn points out, only Florida A&M University has been awarded a nationally-recognized prize for their performances; most band competition

[51] Milburn, "Jukebox v. Boom," 208.
Milburn notes that this is the only football "classic" named for the bands and not the football team or fan rivalries.
[52] Milburn, "Jukebox v. Boom," 221-222.
[53] "The History of the Southern University Marching Band," Southern University Human Jukebox, accessed November 30, 2023, https://suhumanjukebox.com/legacy-of-the-human-jukebox.

awards goes to PWI bands.[54] The bands have gained wider fame, however, through invited events like Super Bowls, Rose Bowl and Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parades, and features in pop videos and films.

Southern University has had band festivals and band days for decades, encouraging young students to consider pursuing music in secondary school and further into college. The musicians are often also in symphonic or concert bands, developing their musicality, and the "cranking," or discordant, sometimes offbeat, riffing of songs happens because of their skill. Without training and understanding of the limits of their instruments and bodies, they would not be able to play against the rules. Every performance stands as both an affirmation of their ability, while also resisting the status quo. Their tradition is going against tradition.

Southern University v. Louisiana State University

On Saturday, September 10, 2022, Southern University's football team played LSU's for the first time in history. The entire week had a shared itinerary of events, from service projects to concerts and parties. On the Friday night before, The Forever Dolls, the alumni of the Fabulous Dancing Dolls, were honored at the Capitol Park Museum with an event that recognized their decades of sisterhood, art, and personal successes gained through their Southern education and shared community. The museum had placed uniforms from both the Dancing Dolls and the Human Jukebox into their permanent collection in an exhibit called *Experiencing Louisiana: Discovering the Soul of America*, that preserves and celebrates Louisiana culture and its contributions. The event was advertised as the perfect way to kick off the historic Southern v. LSU weekend.

[54] Milburn, "Jukebox v. Boom," 213.
The Sudler Trophy was awarded to FAMU in 1985. This is the only time an HBCU has been awarded the prize.

As Saturday began, tailgates popped up across LSU's campus, with an estimated 200,000 people filling in on grassy areas, sidewalks, and in parking lots as they prepared for the game. Purple and Gold and Columbia Blue and Gold were seen in every corner, and sometimes even in the same tents or on the same shirts, as families repped their split allegiances. Smokers and catering pans filled with local cuisines like boudin, jambalaya, and local sausages. An electric energy buzzed in the air, as people from all over the city communed on the campus. In front of Peabody Hall, facing the Mounds, a large sheet with hand-painted lettering urged, "Let the Band Play Neck!" This is a reference to the 1982 song "Talkin' Out the Side of Your Neck," originally by the band Cameo, and later remixed in 2008 by Dem Franchize Boyz, an Atlanta-based hip hop group. The song is a staple of HBCU bands, dating back to just after the song's original release, when Norfolk State University played an arrangement of the song in 1984.[55] Southern has played the song in its book for decades.

LSU also has a colorful history with the song. The Golden Band from Tigerland played the song beginning sometime after Dem Franchize Boyz released their cover of the song, but it didn't take long for LSU students and fans to add a chant over the arrangement. The original chorus lyric is the title of the song, but LSU students changed it, yelling, "Ay-Oh. Suck that tiger dick, bitch!" at a game in 2010. The school subsequently banned the song from the band's repertoire, as it could be heard on national television and, and as rumor or legend puts it, LSU could incur FCC fines. Whether that is true has been difficult to prove, but the legend has helped the song grow a kind of mythos and reverie over the years. Even local news station WBRZ

[55] Gerald Huggins, "The Origin of 'Neck': How Cameo's Hit Became an HBCU Band Anthem," *HBCU Gameday*, December 30, 2019, https://hbcugameday.com/2019/12/30/cameo-neck-hbcu-marching-band-starts-norfolk-state-spartan-legion/.
Like other HBCU band legends, this history depends on oral history of someone in Norfolk State's band at the time. Even in the article, various sources attributed the origins of "Neck" as a band staple to Southern or another SWAC in the 1990s.

speculated that LSU might be charged a fine for an October 2018 instance when the band didn't play the song, but the student section began the chant anyway.[56] Celebrities like Odell Beckham, Jr., a former LSU football player, and ESPN's Scott Van Pelt have offered to pay the fine for the band to play "Neck."[57] It was played in the 2020 National Championship Game against the South Carolina Game Cocks at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans, or so the internet and home viewers believed. The chant was heard, but band members clarified that they had played Panic! At the Disco's song "Say Amen! (Saturday Night)" instead, with the crowd inserting the chant over it.[58] The legends are a bit of a tall tale, with details hard to pin down.

With that history in mind, Southern engaged LSU in its own traditions at the showdown, leading into the game with a zero quarter that ended with the song, "Neck." Southern hadn't been banned from playing it, and they began playing it before the national airing of the game began.[59] The crowd went wild. Southern had gained the sold out house—more than 100,000 people in Death Valley that night, and the Human Jukebox offered a gift of the song that has legendary importance to both schools. I attended the game, having purposefully bought my tickets for the visitors' side on the southern end of the stadium. From my seat, I could see the band clearly in the corner of the southeast side of the stadium, and the LSU band on the north end. Game play began, and as usual, the bands played at the appropriate times, but with more vigor than usually seen with other opponent teams.

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[56] Bess Casserleigh, "LSU Likely Facing Hefty Fines for Behavior of Ecstatic Fans," WBRZ, October 14, 2018, https://www.wbrz.com/news/lsu-likely-facing-hefty-fines-for-behavior-of-ecstatic-fans/.
[57] Erik Hall, "ESPN's Scott Van Pelt Offers to Pay Fine if LSU's Band Plays Banned Song 'Neck,'" *St. Louis Post Dispatch,* October 21, 2022, https://www.stltoday.com/sports/college/espns-scott-van-pelt-offers-to-pay-fine-if-lsus-band-plays-banned-song-neck/article_f5840240-2899-5f34-9f81-b38cc196a682.html.
[58] Ben Breiner, "How LSU's Notoriously Profane 'Neck' Chant Happened at National Title Game—by Accident," *The State,* January 14, 2020, https://www.thestate.com/sports/college/acc/clemson-university/article239267383.html.
[59] According to reports from friends who watched it at home, a small portion of the chant could be heard at the very beginning of the broadcast.

Halftime came, and by a kind of miracle only achieved through this being a celebration of Baton Rouge and its home universities, the majority of the stands stayed filled throughout.[60] And what a show it was! Both bands played their individual sets displaying their individual styles. Southern's Dancing Dolls did a lively and energetic routine downfield of the Human Jukebox, who also joined the routine's moves with the entire band joining the drum major in a kneeling jump that moved them closer and closer to the sidelines. Southern's formations moved from "SU—LSU" to their halftime tradition of displaying the score on the field, "51-00" in LSU's favor. From there, they watched LSU's Tigerland band display their own personality for the crowd, a bit more subdued, but equally energetic. Next, the bands, mixed together across the field, broke down into a rendition of the "Cupid Shuffle" (2007) by Cupid. The song, by the Lafayette singer, is a standard at weddings, proms, and Mardi Gras balls across the Gulf Coast. Southern, known for marching the score numbers of the current game, put that skill to use alongside LSU's band with the first formation being a heart and the number 225, the parish's area code. The entire halftime show, a celebration and embrace of South Louisiana, and specifically Baton Rouge culture was a showstopper. As the LSU *Reveille* reported the following day, the halftime spectacle and the entire week's events were "bigger than football."[61]

The game ended with a win for LSU at 65-17, but that didn't end the night. Southern and LSU stayed in the stands and had their very own, twenty-five-minute fifth quarter.[62] The night's performances have been preserved not just in part by local news stations, but also in their entirety by the Human Jukebox YouTube page, which shares several videos from every game and

[60] Halftime is for bathroom breaks and concessions purchasing at LSU. Some folks religiously stay and watch the halftime show, but not with the regularity seen in HBCU stadiums.
[61] Peter Rauterkus, "Bigger than Football: LSU and Southern Put on Spectacle for Baton Rouge," *The Reveille,* updated September 10, 2023, https://www.lsureveille.com/sports/bigger-than-football-lsu-and-southern-put-on-spectacle-for-baton-rouge/article_2bc5e0ec-3216-11ed-ae8e-ab83312a8acc.html.
[62] @su_humanjukebox, "5th Quarter | Southern vs. LSU 2022," Human Jukebox Media, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ljy7tM5uCac&t=4s.

parade they play. In true Southern battle of the bands style, they traded turns showing off their respective techniques, personalities, and variety of musicality. LSU's Golden Girls remained in the stands, as they do for a traditional game, in a line below and in front of the band. Their movements are synchronized and contained. The band still uses the traditional seating arrangement with the tubas in the back and the drumline in the center of the band. In one song, they moved together as they played, showing Southern that they too can choreograph a standing number with skill. Southern's Dancing Dolls danced on the field throughout their numbers. Southern demonstrated their tradition of singing some of their songs before moving to instrumentation. LSU did too. Only a small crowd stayed, but they were engaged and enjoyed the show. Southern allowed LSU to end the battle—they did a beautiful concert/march hybrid arrangement of "Let Us Break Bread Together," a traditional negro spiritual that has been sung in Black Catholic churches during communion for almost a century.[63] The symbolic steps of bringing two different communities, related by love of place and music was recognized as a gift not just for the bands but also for Baton Rouge. The weekend didn't solve all of Baton Rouge's problems around race or completely heal more than a century's worth of pain from segregation, but it did serve to show the ways that the community can and could come together more closely, with the right efforts and attitudes. The potentials of this city's progress are evident in the ways that those in this creolized cultural performance recognized their shared contributions and gains. LSU hosted Southern on their campus, and Southern brought their gifts to share. Progress is

[63] "'All Are Welcome' Not a Welcome Hymn at Mass, USCCB Committee Says," *Catholic News Agency,* December 10, 2020, https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/46872/all-are-welcome-not-a-welcome-hymn-at-mass-usccb-committee-says.
The song was recently left out of the Black Catholic hymnbook after the American Catholic Church questioned the Eucharistic liturgy of the song.

slow, sometimes moving backward, but in that weekend, it marched forward and created a new cultural tradition that will hopefully return in future years.

Conclusion

Baton Rouge is Creole, too. The city's development was not somehow immune to the Creole and creolized developments of the rest of South Louisiana, as might be believed by the relative lack of scholarly treatment of the city/parish in discussions of Creole culture in the region. Baton Rouge serves as a kind of political, cultural, and geographical crossroads (and cross-river) in the area, traversed by Creoles and Cajuns from one side to the other. Many of the state's residents have lived here for a time, whether for work, political reasons, weather-related evacuations, or to attend university. The flow of people in, out, and around the Capital-region have left their mark on the cultural landscape of the area, just as the coastline of the rivers and the Gulf change due to the flow of water and time.

Like the changing coastlines of the state, though, Baton Rouge has encountered man-made issues in its history, as evidenced by the issues of race and segregation detailed in the discussions of the city's two universities. Southern University and Louisiana State University have both been involved in the development of the city's cultural and racial landscape. The protests of the Civil Rights era and later brought Creole and Black Louisianians to the courtrooms of Baton Rouge in order to gain access to the classrooms of Southern and LSU. The parish also houses Angola Prison, an ever-present reminder of the carceral state of Louisiana and the disproportionate imprisonment of Black Louisianians. Baton Rouge still remains the site of much of the state's courtroom battles, as organizations like the Freedom Project work to release those who remain in prison despite the indignities of unfair trials, lack of evidence, and other

reasons.[64] The city, despite bright spots like the Southern at LSU game, still bears the scars of segregation in its neighborhoods and the continuing of white flight into neighboring communities and suburbs, as well as the divide between public, private, and charter schools. Despite these tensions, and perhaps because of them, the city continues to be shaped into new formations of Creole culture. For every attempt to divide white and Black people further, there are also attempts to bring people together into better understanding with each other. Like the work of the Cajun and Creole organizations in Southwest Louisiana, these efforts meet varying levels of success. After racist signs decorated parade floats in the Spanish Town Mardi Gras parade in 2016,[65] a group of residents and business owners formed Mid City Gras along Government Street, Ogden Park, and North Boulevard, right at the dividing line of North and South Baton Rouge in a neighborhood called Mid City. The parade became a family-friendly and racially-inclusive parade for the city, with one of its first organized events happening in Old South Baton Rouge, solidifying their aims to be inclusive of the city as a whole.[66]

As a local when the Southern and LSU game was announced a year prior, I saw a mixed reaction of excitement and suspicion towards the planned event. Overwhelmingly, the general consensus seemed to be positive, but I also remember hearing people express "concerns," that amounted to racist presuppositions about how the matchup would go down. Concerns about increased violence seemed to be the predominant echo, which of course, didn't materialize. Instead, those who wanted to be there showed up. They played and drank and ate together. They shared in music and the festival of tailgate. They learned more about the other's cultural

[64] For more on the carceral state in Louisiana and Angola Prison, see the works of Bryan McCann and Kathryn Morris.
[65] Erica Evans, "Months Before Alton Sterling Was Shot, Baton Rouge Parade Floats Seemed to Mock Black Lives Matter," *Los Angeles Times,* July 5, 2016, https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-baton-rouge-float-20160706-snap-story.html.
[66] Mid City Gras, midcitygras.org, accessed December 17, 2023.

practices and performances. And was it perfect? Did it fix the racial tensions that still reside in this area? No. But it became an example of the ways that those cultures are intertwined, part of the same place and history. This game could not have happened anywhere else or in any other time. In its own way, by Southern doing their thing and sharing that with LSU, those of us who participated were let in on the potentials of the ways that Baton Rouge's future may continue to change under the influence of its Creole culture.

Chapter 4. *Caroline, or Change*: or Creole

Grandma and Grandpa Gellman:
"Negroes in Louisiana
aren't like in Mississippi,
not as mad as Alabama."[1]

In the musical *Caroline, or Change*, Tony Kushner (with music by Jeanine Tesori) centers the story around the lead character Caroline Thibodeaux, a Black maid working for a Jewish family (the Gellmans) in Lake Charles, Louisiana, in the late fall and early winter of 1963. Caroline, divorced with four children, has roots deep in the swampy underground of southwest Louisiana. All around her, storms are brewing as others' hopes and possibilities start to beat against her steadfast, unchanging place in the world. In this chapter, I analyze an often-overlooked aspect of Kushner's treatment of race and difference in *Caroline, or Change*—the importance of its Louisiana setting. Caroline is Southern, but also something else, something more—she is a Black woman from Louisiana, a place with a particular culture, as I've demonstrated throughout this dissertation. In this chapter, I offer another way of looking at Kushner's depictions of race as an exercise of creolization and depictions of Creole cultural performance. Kushner shares the Black and multi-ethnic Creole culture of South Louisiana in telling the story of Caroline Thibodeaux. Kushner's telling of Caroline's story pushes against traditional outsider views of Louisiana, which can often be lumped together with the rest of the Deep South by those not privy to the distinctions. A dramaturgical lens with special attention paid to Creole cultural performances unlocks new dimensions of the play when the specificity of Louisiana and its racial, historical, and cultural roots are considered.

[1] Tony Kushner and Jeanine Tesori, *Caroline or Change* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2004), 85.

As the Gellmans discuss during a lively Chanukah conversation about race, Caroline, as a Black woman from Lake Charles, has a different experience than a Black woman in other Deep South states. This is Kushner's childhood hometown, but this region of Southwest Louisiana with both Creole and Cajun cultural influences, creates compelling opportunities for analyzing different elements of the musical: its depiction of and responses to the civil rights movement, the use of folktales and oral tradition, and the folkloric anthropomorphized characters of Caroline's imagination. My reading of *Caroline, Or Change* and the importance of its Louisiana setting draws from Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (1996) and his treatment of history, memory, and performance in conversation with folklore studies that offer deeper understandings of Creole cultural performance. Though Roach's work offers examples of performances in New Orleans, I assert that Caroline Thibodeaux, along with her children, perform the acts of memory and progress that have strong ties to traditional Creole (inter)culture. Additionally, I examine how Kushner uses Caroline, her daughter Emmie, and their family friend Dotty to highlight the tensions of civil rights activism. While Kushner points to national tensions of the 1960s, I emphasize the local, focusing on how these characters represent different engagements of the Louisiana Creole protest tradition.

If the setting of Louisiana and its creolized culture is not considered in discussions of the play and its characters, much of the rich depth and nuance is missed and even misunderstood. As I illustrate throughout the chapter, new understandings of the play and production potentials emerge when we give the setting special attention, exploring its historical and cultural context. Caroline, her children, and the other characters in the play embody these contexts. With a cultural dramaturgical lens, I build a fuller, more nuanced picture of the Creole milieu in the plains of Southwest Louisiana, near the Texas border, at a time marked by volatile social and

political change. In doing so, I interpret the play as a complex telling of difficult topics of race, culture, politics, family, and the interconnections of people who are both alike and not. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters of the dissertation, Louisiana Creole cultural performance takes on different shape based on time and location, but still shares features across them. I highlight the ways that *Caroline, or Change* is inextricably linked to the Creole roots of Louisiana.

Kushner and Tesori's *Caroline, or Change* is not your standard musical. A sung-through musical with an edge of Southern opera, *Caroline's* plot opens in the fall of 1963 upon Caroline, working as a domestic in the basement of the Gellman family. The Gellman's son, Noah, joins Caroline to light her daily cigarette and to say hello. Only heard by Caroline, the appliances around her (such as the Dryer, the Washing Machine, and the Radio) come to life and sing to her. The world is changing, and Caroline doesn't want it to. One such change is Noah's recent loss of his mother to cancer, and his father's remarriage to Rose, who tries desperately to be liked by both Noah and Caroline. At home, Caroline has three children, with a fourth serving in Vietnam. We learn that her second child and only daughter Emmie has begun engaging in protest activities, without Caroline's knowledge. Her friend Dotty has started going to night school. And her youngest two boys are growing up. Everything and everyone around Caroline is changing, but she isn't. One evening at the bus stop, Caroline and Dotty learn that President John F. Kennedy has been assassinated. Change has come. Additionally, change appears in a different way: in the pockets of Noah's pants that Caroline launders. Noah's stepmother Rose tells her to keep it, creating tension for the proud woman, for whom extra quarters would go a long way. After a tense Chanukah dinner, Noah unwittingly leaves his gift of a $20 bill in his pocket, leading to a standoff between him and Caroline.

Kushner and Tesori workshopped the musical with George C. Wolfe beginning in 1999 at the Off-Broadway Public Theatre. The play opened at the Public Theatre in 2003, directed by George C. Wolfe. It transferred to Broadway in the spring of 2004, running for a total of 136 performances. The play was well-received by critics and was nominated for six Tony awards, including Best Musical, despite its short run. In October 2006, the play transferred to the National Theatre where it ran until January 2007. It was awarded the Olivier Award for Best New Musical. In October 2021, the Roundabout Theatre Company revived *Caroline* through January 9, 2022.

Scholars have largely interpreted the play for its representations of Black and Jewish characters. Some critics have characterized Caroline as a mammy-type, though Aaron C. Thomas argues that Kushner takes the archetype and reclaims it as an historical force for political change,[2] a view that James Fisher also argues, using interviews of Kushner discussing the issue as evidence.[3] Ellen Kaplan, in a study of the Jewish Outsider status in *Caroline, or Change*, argues that Kushner forefronts a politics of difference in the musical, asking whether the playwright is successful in bridging the gap between African Americans and Southern Jews.[4] Stacy Wolf, in *Changed for Good*, analyzes *Caroline, or Change's* musical score, pointing to its "variegated" style which "contributes to the performative archive of race on the U.S. stage."[5] All of these readings have informed my own as I have worked to untangle the more difficult symbolic aspects of the play—especially the anthropomorphic characters of the Radio (played by

[2] Aaron C. Thomas, "Engaging an Icon: *Caroline, or Change* and the Politics of Representation," *Studies in Musical Theatre* 4, no. 2 (2010): 199-210. https://doi.org/10.1386/smt.4.2.199_1.
[3] James Fisher, *The Theater of Tony Kushner: Living Past Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
[4] Ellen W. Kaplan, "Unruly Difference: The Politics of Stigma and the Space of the Sacred: In Plays of Tony Kushner, Martin Sherman and Deb Margolin," *Jewish History* 22, No. 4 (2008): 327-351. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40345559.
[5] Stacy Wolf, *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 181.

a pop-trio of women), the Washer, the Dryer, the Moon, and the Bus. Another such quagmire is the song "Roosevelt" sung by Caroline's children, as well as the haunting moment when the Bus informs Caroline and Dotty of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas on November 22, 1963. These elements of the play have been discussed by reviewers as byproducts of Kushner's love of children's stories,[6] and though that may be a part of their inclusion, especially as a musical with multiple child characters, there seems to be something more to it when considering the play's location as well as these characters primary engagement lying with Caroline. I maintain that we see these elements in a new light by understanding Louisiana and Creole culture as important shapers of the play's dynamics, especially considering that the majority of these fantastical characters are only acknowledged in scenes by Caroline—not the children.

On a personal note, I saw the musical in its London run in January of 2007, and the play quickly became a favorite. My memories of the play are so vivid that they almost seem palpable—I had such a visceral reaction to the show then that it has stuck with me over the past almost-two decades. As I sat down to begin reading analyses and critiques of the show, I was struck by the lack of attention given to the magical elements of the play by many. I was also surprised that scholars and reviewers alike usually gesture vaguely to the play's Southern influences. Some restrict their discussions about the importance of Louisiana to an analysis of the underwater basement ("there ain't no underground in Louisiana, there's just underwater") where Caroline spends most of her time. Other critics discuss the play's setting simply as part of Kushner's history, noting that he spent much of his childhood in Lake Charles, Louisiana, after following a move from his birthplace of New York. But, having lived in Texas with strong ties to

[6] Fisher pointed to Kushner's collaboration with Maurice Sendak to explain this.

Louisiana through family and friends, and then eventually moving to Louisiana and experiencing the culture firsthand as a resident for nearly a decade, I see another dynamic operating in this musical. Like my home state of Texas, Louisiana is much more complex and nuanced than outsider perspectives believe it to be. Lumped together with the other southern states in public narratives, the intricacies of race, colonialism, creolization, and liminality in Louisiana are often foreclosed by its status as a Deep South state.

Kushner has done some work to try to open up the view of the state in his speech that he delivered at the March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights in 1993, as well as in other essays and interviews that he has published since *Caroline, or Change* first premiered. In "Copious, Gigantic, and Sane," (the aforementioned speech), he recounts the city and racial relations as he remembers it. He describes Louisiana, and Lake Charles in particular, as a "culture of 'genteel' post-integration bayou-country racism," where the African-American population was "ghettoized and impoverished" and where "countless incidents of discrimination and occasionally bias crimes" occurred.[7] But, he also remembered "a certain white civic pride that in Lake Charles racism was (theoretically at least) tempered by a spirit of cooperation and mutual avoidance, and brutality wasn't something decent people engaged in, even in the name of preserving white supremacy."[8] He continues, "And yet of course, anyone Black in my hometown was like anyone Black anywhere in the United States: feared, subjected to indignity and abuse, dehumanized, Other as Americans understand and have historically responded to the Other—as a negation of good, as Death, as ripe for extermination."[9] Never denying racism, Kushner does broaden the way someone might think about racism in the South, revealing that racism was not

[7] Fisher, *Living,* 49-50.
[8] Fisher, *Living,* 50.
[9] Fisher, *Living,* 50.

just overt acts of violence, but also performed by white southerners in more obscured ways—under the pretenses of a "mutual avoidance."

Kushner's references to a "spirit of cooperation" on the surface (qualified by "at least theoretically") and "bayou-country racism" offer a glimmer of something else at play in 1960s Louisiana. Later in his speech, he speaks of a moment in his childhood that would later become an impetus for the writing of *Caroline, or Change*, as he tells of watching the telecast of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s funeral with Maudi Lee Davis who worked for Kushner's family as a domestic during his childhood. He explained that he felt,

> Frightened and impressed—I felt her powerful grief connected us, her and me and my quiet hometown, with the struggle I knew was being waged in the world, in history. It was an instant in which one feels that one is being changed as the world is changed, and I believe I was.[10]

These moments of connection that Kushner believed existed between among Black and white Louisianans raise questions about the shared experiences across race and culture. In *Caroline, or Change*, Kushner puts these exchanges on the stage as young Noah tries desperately, out of his own grief and fear of the unknown, to force his young mind to grasp for some place to belong after the death of his mother and the remarriage of his father. Caroline struggles with all her might to stay steadfast in her own way, despite the major changes swirling all around her—in her own family, in her city, and in her country. She struggles with her place, as those around her begin responding in kind to the winds of the civil rights movement, protest, and a personal situation that she cannot change. Kushner offers her interior monologues to us through a dialectic with the many "magical" characters of her (and, at times, Noah's) imagination, which take on a

[10] Fisher, *Living,* 50.

new complexity if we read them as the imaginings of a Creole woman. Creole cultural performance is evident in Caroline's identity and place, the Dryer that torments her, the Washer that sets an unrelenting pace to her day, and the three women who emerge to force her to consider the happenings of the outside world.

As stated above, none of the named characters who appear in the play *Caroline, or Change* are Cajun, but their unseen neighbors could be and likely are, especially as the Cajun Renaissance is in its nascent stages. The threat of danger for those responsible for the vandalism of the Confederate soldier statue, as revealed by Dotty, lies in the white, and possibly Cajun, neighbors and fellow citizens of Lake Charles.

Kushner has never explicitly pointed to a Creole influence in *Caroline, or Change*, its Louisiana setting Nevertheless, once you start looking the play's Creole influences become clear: its emphasis on the swamps and water, along with its fantastical, even carnivalesque characters, its use of folk stories and knowledge, and the importance of Black musical forms that developed primarily in the Mississippi Delta and Southwest Louisiana—especially in the mourning song of the Bus on the occasion of John F. Kennedy's assassination. Additionally, civil rights activism took on different forms throughout south Louisiana, influenced by the acts of protest across the Creole state, as well as elsewhere in the South; Kushner's characters demonstrate the varying ways acts of resistance were performed.

Caroline's **Haunting**

In his *Cities of the Dead*, Joseph Roach explains, "The social processes of memory and forgetting, familiarly known as culture, may be carried out by a variety of performance events, from stage plays to sacred rites, from carnivals to the invisible rituals of everyday life. To perform in this sense means to bring forth, to make manifest, and to transmit. To perform also

means, though often more secretly, to reinvent."[11] Caroline, Noah, and Emmie each perform these processes of memory, reinvention, and transmission in order to achieve different goals within the play. The play's setting in Lake Charles is still infused with the cultural systems and interculture described by Roach, with a large Creole population. What follows is an analysis of the ways in which Caroline, Noah, and Emmie work to deal with their own difficulties with life and death and the ways that Kushner allows us more insight into the workings of intercultural exchange within the musical. The play serves as an exercise in the interplay between history, memory, and performance of culture.

Caroline hopes to change, but she resists it due to her relentless hold on the past and the present. Kushner manifests this performance of memory and forgetting by having her interior thoughts sung by the anthropomorphic characters of the Radio, the Washer, the Dryer, and the Moon (as well as the Bus, but he will be discussed in more detail below). In the first scene, set in the Gellman's basement, Caroline sings along with the machines that help her do her work. Catherine Stevenson explains that "the charged political landscapes…shape the lives of the characters and externalize the psychological and familial tensions of the characters' existences."[12] She continues "As the characters undergo personal changes, they find themselves engaged with an ever-wider social world as well."[13] We learn quickly of exactly when and where we are, partly through the song's lyrics as well as through the characterization and costuming of the characters that Caroline shares her space with. Even down in the basement, Caroline is not alone, as her often-contradictory thoughts are put on full display by her betraying confidantes.

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[11] Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press), 1996, xi-xii.
[12] Catherine Stevenson, "Mothers, Change, and Creativity in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America, Homebody/Kabul,* and *Caroline, or Change*," *Modern Drama* 48, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 760, https://doi.org/10.1353/mdr.2006.0038.
[13] Stevenson, "Mothers," 760.

Stevenson offers little explanation for this cast of supporting characters, aside from the psychologically-illuminating role they play throughout the play. She suggests that "the Moon and the Washing Machine serve as opposing choruses offering different interpretations of what has happened in the play: the Moon stresses that 'secret little tragedies' have resulted from the domestic disturbances at the Gellmans; the Washing Machine, in contrast, stresses that these events have produced 'costly, quiet victories.'"[14] Here, I'd like to return to Roach and his discussion of carnival, Mardi Gras, and orature as means of breaking down barriers between performer and audience, making both active participants. Carnival in Louisiana offers opportunities for communities to "dramatize the call for redress of grievances" as well as offering a "ghostly double to the law as a technique to remember the past and reimagine the future."[15] As Roach explains, "Genealogists resist histories that attribute purity of origin to any performance….Orature is an art of listening as well as speaking; improvisation is an art of collective memory as well as invention; repetition is an art of re-creation as well as restoration."[16] Caroline actively performs to the real audience as well as to the staged audience of household appliances.

Kushner ensures that Caroline's work companions are not passive audience to her experience, but rather active co-performers, who push Caroline into a more active state as she resists progress. The Moon, who accompanies her from work to the bus stop and later to her front porch, travels Caroline's daily path, creating her own parade route, offering a perspective of history when Caroline's memories consume her. In an interesting turn, it is only in the eleven o'clock number "Lot's Wife," that we find out that these performances of grievance, redress, and

[14] Stevenson, "Mothers," 771.
[15] Roach, *Cities*, 285.
[16] Roach, *Cities*, 286.

urging have finally pushed Caroline into wanting some sort of change. That song exemplifies what Stacy Wolf calls *Caroline's* "blues-based, highly variegated" sound. Kushner and Tesori's score, Wolf notes, "creates a fragmented mode, a language that refuses to resolve the tensions."[17] At that point, after her tense argument with Noah around the lost $20 bill, Caroline holds the stage completely by herself, having finally been able to internalize and be shaped by her carnivalesque appliances' advice. Caroline's song and realizations, like carnival and Mardi Gras, are bittersweet, as she must recognize that change comes fast, but progress is a slow, tedious process. We are left with an ambivalent ending for Caroline herself as the play ends, not knowing whether she will actually achieve peace with her circumstances and the world around her, but it is left open for the audience to imagine themselves.

The Washing Machine, Moon, Dryer, and Bus could be seen as a form of magic realism, another hybridized form, but in practice these characters take on a closer resemblance to southern Black and Creole folktales. As I stated before, other critics have often interpreted these fantastical elements aligned with Kushner's angels of *Angels in America* or included due to an appreciation for children's narratives. They take on new dimension, however, when read as borrowings (or sharings) of Creole folk stories, especially as the audience witnesses the way that the young boy Noah manages to have interactions not just with the character of the Moon, but also with Caroline as she readies herself for bed each night in her own home. These interactions point to a sharing of meaning and exploration for the characters in a non-realistic way that troubles interpretations of "children's stories." As Barry Jean Ancelet explains, oral tradition relies not just on a storyteller, but on an audience. Questions from the listeners, who then become participants in the story, help shape the unique telling and "assure the continuance of the

[17] Wolf, *Changed,* 181.

performance."[18] This dialectical performance practice, which through the staging and composition of the songs is one-sided on both character's parts, still serve to illustrate the ways that culture is shared. Kushner combines these imagined engagements with the other person-to-person encounters, like Caroline's daily cigarette that Noah gets to light and her involvement in cooking and serving the Chanukah dinner.[19] Such ritual events become touchpoints in the sharing of one's experience, viewpoint, and cultural heritage. Moments like these in the play resonate with the very real ways that culture is shared in South Louisiana.

Kushner also stages how difficult it can be to parse the products of different practices and belief that meet in rituals. Emmie, like Caroline, has several interactions with Noah, both real and imagined. In an exchange during "The Chanukah Party," he asks her if she knows why the latkes she is frying are cooked in chicken fat, to which she replies, "To crisp em up." He shares that, no, there is religious belief tied to the practice, a ritual that symbolizes the "temple oil." Interested, she continues, "How about the goose? Does that mean something?" Noah's response? "That's just food."[20] Here, the sharing of religious and folk customs takes on an educational purpose. Though not a folk story, the use of humor, in the characters' dry, deadpan responses are reminiscent of the jokes seen in Creole and Cajun folk and Jewish religious and cultural storytelling. Children are carrying on the traditions of their elders. Noah's grandparents have delivered such one-liners throughout their time onstage, and he has obviously picked up on it and begun the practice too. Who Emmie's antecedent storyteller is remains unclear, though. Perhaps in a happier time, Caroline shared stories. Maybe her deceased grandmother, lost to cancer, told stories. Or, her father, before his change in personality and subsequent disappearance, shared

[18] Barry Jean Ancelet, *Cajun and Creole Folktales: The French Oral Tradition of South Louisiana,* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), xliv.
[19] Which Noah inserts himself into, asking questions of the three Black women working in the kitchen.
[20] Kushner, *Caroline*, 83.

stories to his young girl. As a family that attends church and whose children attend school, the Thibodeaux children may also have been exposed to stories from any number of people at community dinners, fellowship socials, or amongst their friends and their families. Although Kushner declines to provide a clear teacher for Emmie's humor in the script, the Creole storytelling tradition of Southwest Louisiana itself provides all the education she would need.

However she may have borne witness and begun participating in the folklore tradition, Emmie performs acts of recreation and restoration throughout the play, especially in "Bleach Cup" as she draws on folk stories to teach her brothers a lesson about money and their mother. Caroline's young boys, Jackie and Joe, express a desire to know where Caroline has come up with an allowance for them all of a sudden. The audience knows this audience came from the coins Noah leaves in the bleach cup. Warning them not to ask such questions, Emmie sings about Roosevelt Petrucius Coleslaw, a young boy who continued to ask his mama where she got the extra money, until he angered her so badly that she slapped him dead. He dies and goes to the sky, where he falls in love with the moon. The story involves folk knowledge and oral tradition as discussed above, which might be seen as contradictory when faced with the forward-thinking, pragmatic personality Emmie has displayed in the script thus far. Kushner has her balance practical and hopeful desires for change alongside her drawing on traditional modes of knowledge transmission and memory creation.

Emmie thus emerges as the vehicle for what Roach calls "surrogation." She takes on the role of sharing knowledge with her younger siblings when faced with Caroline's distancing as the older woman tries to come to terms with her own losses and difficulties at work and home. As Roach explains, "How culture reproduces and re-creates itself by a process that can best be described by the word *surrogation*. In the life of a community, the process of surrogation does

not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitutes the social fabric. Into the cavities created by loss through death or other forms of departure, I hypothesize, survivors attempt to fit satisfactory alternates…At these times, improvised narratives of authenticity and priority may congeal into full-blown myths of legitimacy and origin."[21] Emmie, like many other young women in families living in poverty, emerges as a parental-like figure for her brothers, Jackie and Joe. Even Noah (who "magically" joins into the song), follows along as she improvises a story to explain why the children should not ask Caroline about where the new allowances have come from. Such a performance initiates the potential for new routes of cultural transmission for the next generation.

"Bleach Cup" opens with tight rhymes that resemble a particular Louisiana Creole and Black folk story form, toasts, moving into strong rhyming choruses that sound like schoolyard chants.[22] Tesori's composition quickly and deftly slides between musical styles: traditional children's songs, zydeco and blues riffs, and even Jewish religious song motifs, gospel, and contemporary pop rock of the early 1960s. Beyond the wide-ranging, playful musical styles, the song also builds a fusion of different Creole and Cajun folk story styles, themes, and motifs. Roosevelt Petrucius Coleslaw, the songs main character, falls in love with the Moon, which Kushner has made an ever-present character in the exterior night scenes of the play. As Ancelet explains about the Moon in folk stories of the region, the man in the moon is "thrown there as a punishment for working…on Sunday."[23] Elsewhere, the moon comes "to symbolize…the land of fantasy par excellence, 'up there,' where anything can happen."[24] In the so-called Pascal stories, a recurring folk character whose stories are its own type of folk story in the region, the moon

[21] Roach, *Cities*, 2-3.
[22] Lindahl, *Swapping Stories: Folktales from Louisiana,* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 16.
[23] Ancelet, *Folktales,* 217.
[24] Ancelet, *Folktales,* xlii.

also provides a "loosely defined setting, removed from familiar reality, safe from scrutiny, and appropriate for even the wildest adventures."[25] Those who reach the moon have "escaped the mundane existence of this world."[26] Pascal stories are often spontaneous and rely on active participation by the audience listeners who challenge the teller, leading the story to change directions: "Ideal production involves performing with another talker, vying with him for the floor, but taking care to avoid shutting him off completely."[27] Emmie begins the song, and immediately, her brothers become active participants in the lesson-teaching she has initiated. Noah jumps into the song and dance, demonstrating his desire to be included in the surrounding culture of the community, in addition to his explicitly stated goal of being part of the Thibodeaux family. The Moon joins in as an actor in the song, too, moving the musical style and rhythm into a different direction with her involvement. It is also important to point out that Pascal stories are a subset of tall tales, which are predominantly told by men, traditionally. Kushner and Tesori have Emmie defying that tradition in her use of the form, even as they also have her tweak the form's conventions.

In addition to the tall tale, the song could be classified as a magic tale because of the instructive quality of teaching the younger boys about "growing up experiences."[28] This type of folk story is actually less common in American and Louisiana oral traditions than animal tales, tall tales, jokes, belief legends, and others. Belief legends, for example, which can also be identified as a composite part of the oral tradition influence of the song, serve the purpose of warning others of things not to do. In telling the boys not to ask their mother about the origins of the newly acquired allowances, Emmie's song also calls to mind buried treasure stories from the

[25] Ancelet, *Folktales*, xlii.
[26] Ancelet, *Folktales,* xlii.
[27] Ancelet, *Folktales,* xlviii.
[28] Lindahl, *Stories,* 20.

region. Ancelet explains that the various stories about hidden or buried wealth that are common throughout the region may stem from Cajun, and I would also argue Black, distrust of banks.[29] Both groups, having experienced institutional oppression by the State, could understandably be skeptical of placing their hard-earned money into banks that may or may not keep it safe. Another origin of the treasure stories has been situated in the legends of buried treasure left along the coast by pirates, seamen, and even Jean Lafitte, whose wealth was purportedly buried somewhere in the waterways near what became Lake Charles. The warnings in these stories rely on the belief that, once found, the money would bring misfortune upon the finder. In this light, Emmie's story also acts as a warning to her brothers about not just propriety with their mother, but also about the dangers of learning more about something than you wish to know. The whereabouts of money acquired from mysterious means could lead to revelations they aren't prepared for. In this case, the audience knows Caroline carries shame for keeping money from a child who leaves it in his laundry she cleans. Emmie does not know this, but her lesson, performed in a traditional form with fun interaction by her brothers, foreshadows later plot points.[30]

Bridging Folk Practice and Activism, or the Personal and Political

In addition to the play's depictions of personal and familial challenges, the larger, broader conflict points to the looming political changes of 1960s America, particularly in the South. Kushner, as a political dramatist, regularly juxtaposes personal and public upheaval alongside one another, for the audience to see how his characters handle both. Jumping back to the opening scenes, in "Moon Change," we are introduced to the narration of the Moon as she overlooks a conversation between Caroline and a friend, Dotty, as they wait at the bus stop. Dotty gives

[29] Ancelet, *Folktales,* xlv.
[30] Kushner traditionally juxtaposes personal and public upheaval alongside one another in his characters' lives.

Caroline the latest gossip and news (despite Caroline's protestations), telling her about her recent enrollment in night school and the rumblings about the removal of the courthouse Confederate statue by vandals in the night. Caroline has not heard about the situation, as she does not have a tv, a refrain repeated by her and Emmie throughout the play. Not having a television is understandable because of Caroline's relative poverty. Caroline's salary is $300 a week, putting her below the poverty threshold, which would be introduced by the Social Security Administration in 1964, alongside President Johnson's call for the war on poverty.

Dotty fills Caroline in on the news she thinks the older woman should know, particularly about the statue. Caroline expresses concern about the trouble such an act brings, as the "Defender of the South" going missing will surely anger white people in the city and parish. It is important that such a statue did exist in Lake Charles. It was erected in 1915, paid for the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and stood upon a very tall base provided through funds donated by the police jury (a governing council of elected officials) of Calcasieu Parish. The UDC's history includes strong support for the Ku Klux Klan, and the group was responsible for many of the Confederate monuments erected in the South beginning after its inception in 1894. The full name of the statue was the South's Defenders Memorial Monument, and several campaigns emerged to bring the statue down, in 1995, and again in 2020, following the police killing of George Floyd. Both times, the statue fell due to a tropical storm or hurricane in the city. When replaced on its pedestal in 1995, a plaque indicating that the monument stood in "the spirit of healing and reconciliation" was added. The statue also fell in 1918 and 1946. The statue was not replaced following Hurricane Laura in 2020.[31]

[31] Janelle MacDonald, "Should Calcasieu Monument Go?" KPLC News, Updated June 5, 2003, https://www.kplctv.com/story/1304308/should-calcasieu-monument-go/.

Caroline's anxieties about the news are quickly shared by the Moon, who sings of changes, and how they come fast and slow, and with surety. Dotty mourns the changes, the loss of shine she has witnessed in her friend, as Caroline speaks of all the things she needs to do. She is tired from her day, from her life, and while the rest of the world changes, "nothing ever changes under ground in Louisiana."[32] What she has to do, day in and day out, for the family she works for, for her own family who she works for, dictate that, despite the changes in the world, she must return to the basement to launder other people's clothes every work day. Her situation doesn't and can't change. To change is a luxury she cannot afford, in more ways than one.

As the tension builds in the overlapping voices of Caroline, Dotty, and the Moon, change comes fast in the arrival of the late Bus. Singing in a "voice of the apocalypse,"[33] the audience learns that the day is November 22, 1963, because President John F. Kennedy has been assassinated in Dallas, TX. The apocalypse sounds like a long, mournful wail as discordant clanging tones announce his arrival:

> The earth,
>
> the earth has bled!
>
> Woe-singing wind down the neighborhood.
>
> He is gone now! Gone for good!...
>
> The president
>
> Oh blight November winter night
>
> The present is dead.[34]

Susie Neilson, "Hurricane Laura Knocked Down a Confederate 'Defender's Monument' in Louisiana, Weeks After Local Officials Voted to Keep It," *Business Insider,* August 27, 2020, https://www.insider.com/hurricane-laura-toppled-confederate-monument-in-louisiana-2020-8.

[32] Kushner, *Caroline*, 34.

[33] Kushner, *Caroline*, 34.

[34] Kushner, *Caroline*, 34.

Rather than revealing this inciting moment via the Motown-esque Radio singers, Kushner reveals the information in a public place, along a public street through the low baritone sounds of a Black actor performing as the Bus. Interpreted in Creole-specific performance traditions, the Bus serves as a grand marshal, announcing the President's death in a kind of solitary Second Line, or jazz funeral. It is in the rituals surrounding dead, Roach asserts, that "the three-sided relationship of memory, performance, and substitution becomes most acutely visible" (14). Except for a quick expression of disbelief ("That can't be." [35]), Caroline's feelings about the news are not expressed by her, as she stays silent throughout the rest of the scene. On the other hand, we're offered Dotty's take on the assassination, as she sings a duet across space with the Gellman grandparents, who both give glimpses of the differing reactions to the loss of the President. I would like to clarify here, too, that the Second Line of a Jazz funeral, often depicted in film as being accompanied by joyful, raucous brass band and singing, often begins somber, and only shifts in tone after the body is "cut loose." As Roach further explains,

> In any funeral, the body of the deceased performs the limits of the community called into being by the need to mark its passing. United around a corpse that is no longer inside but not yet outside the boundaries, the members of a community may reflect on its symbolic embodiment of loss and renewal. In a jazz funeral, the deceased is generally accompanied at least part of the way to the cemetery by a brass band and a crowd of mourners who follow an elegant grand marshall (or 'Nelson').[35]

The death of President Kennedy serves to force Caroline into a new personal and familial reflection, now magnified, as the larger community and nation's grief pulls them into a kind of

[35] Roach, *Cities,* 14.

liminal space, between presidents and progress. Funeral processions are a communal act, and Kushner's treatment of the moment highlights both community reactions and personal ones. As the Bus's voice hits its lowest registers, the song is interrupted by Rose's alto, upbeat desperate attempts to connect with her stepson Noah. They do not know what has happened. The Moon brings us back to the swirling fears of the night and subsequent days, which could be read as Caroline's internal monologue, or as the realities of the world, or as both:

> Inside, outside,
>
> This ol world change with the tide.
>
> Outside tears and disarray!
>
> Inside children disobey.
>
> Change come slow, come right away![36]

The song takes on a patriotic cast, as the Gellmans and Dotty sing different reactions to the news. The Gellmans sing of the progress for American Jews under JFK, and their perceived belief that he was a "Friend to the colored, friend to the Jew."[37] Dotty speaks of his promises to Black Americans, who he "swore to help…some day," conceding that he was a bit slow in his actions, but she had faith in his desire to do so.[38] She bids farewell to the others with her last line, "Our almost friend has gone away."[39] The Gellmans speak to the successes they have seen and experienced under his presidency, while Dotty recognizes that the impulse may have been there but hadn't fully materialized for the Black community yet. Her disappointment seems grounded in both the hopeful future he promised that now look more uncertain than before, as well as in the fact that they hadn't happened already.

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[36] Kushner, *Caroline*, 37.
[37] Kushner, *Caroline*, 39
[38] Kushner, *Caroline*, 39
[39] Kushner, *Caroline* 40.

Caroline makes it home, and her inner thoughts as shared by the Radio's song are dominated by personal feelings of loneliness in light of the night's news. She has no one to share the complex feelings that have emerged. As the song continues, Emmie arrives home, late from being out with friends. Promises are mentioned again, as Caroline admonishes Emmie to "do like you say you do," and not to give herself options, as "Most folks live without em. Most folks does without."[40] The tensions and fears of the day and night are bubbling up as she tries to teach her daughter lessons about the changes that happen so quickly. When she asks her daughter if she knows about the president's assassination, Emmie replies:

> I know, the radio
>
> Play music anyway!
>
> Just some old white man
>
> Sent Larry off to Vietnam.
>
> Sorry he dead.
>
> I ain't killed him.[41]

Similar to Dotty's reaction, but more pointed, Emmie's response reveals the intergenerational and personal differences between the women and their relationship to civil rights. Dotty had been optimistic though guarded about the future, noting that the day's events will disrupt the progress made and anticipated. Emmie doesn't see President Kennedy as someone who would follow through with the things he said. Calling him "some old white man don't care about the black man," she sings a duet with the Radio:

> Say he do stuff *for* us,
>
> get our vote, he just ignore us,

[40] Kushner, *Caroline*, 41-42.
[41] Kushner, *Caroline*, 42.

same old story, Mama, same tired old lie.

If you got to do it Mama go ahead and cry.

I ain't got no tears to shed for no dead white guy.[42]

Her attitude reveals her position of radical skepticism among Black civil rights activists, who are actively working across the South to bring about change in voting rights, education, industry, and more. Both of these perspectives are triangulated by Caroline, who is honestly tired, and busy, and doesn't have the mental bandwidth to worry about one more thing. She is unable to participate in the changes, besides rearing her children—a task she finds difficult. She is one of those people with no real options. In just one evening, the statue's removal and the president's death, have brought unavoidable local and national change into her home and work, and she can't do anything about it.

She is asked by Noah, who in her mind's eye, declares her President Caroline and asks her what she'd do now that she has the title. She sings that she would pass a law to bring her son Larry back from Vietnam. She would make sure that no woman her age—39 years old—and not be able to read. She would make Nat King Cole come to her house and keep her company. And she would do something for her daughter too:

Gonna pass me a law

that my heathen daughter

don't ever get hurt

nor learn how to mind me,

nor learn how to mind nobody

cept herself.[43]

[42] Kushner, *Caroline*, 43.
[43] Kushner, *Caroline*, 45.

Despite reprimanding Emmie for her being "a unholy priss, and a caution and a sass"[44] just moments before she went inside to bed, Caroline lets on that she loves that strong-willed nature of her daughter. She admires how her daughter does what she wants and knows things. She thinks there's an inherent danger in the way she walks through the world, fearing she will get hurt from it, but she doesn't want it to change. Perhaps she wishes the same for herself, but Kushner keeps this possibility ambiguous. As the night and the song ends we get a glimpse into the overload of things Caroline has to worry about—from being short on the rent because she fed her kids chuck that hadn't been stretched with bread, to the healthcare one of her youngest boys needs, the things she would send to her drafted and deployed eldest son, and the things her other children want but she can't provide. And for herself, she wishes for the night to last longer, as it is the time she spends by herself, above ground and above water.

Kushner reveals more about Caroline's situation and the complex tensions and anxieties she experiences—why she feels so underwater—in the song "Ironing." Caroline is frustrated by Rose's insistence on keeping the child's change. Her discontent further emerges as her mind travels to how she came to this moment, when she once had a husband who she loved, was young and in love, with a new family. Coming back from his service in World War II, he acted and appeared different than before. She wonders if she and her young children are a stressor. He turns to alcohol when employers either close or won't accept Black workers. He hits her, breaking her nose. She can still remember what that pain feels like, as the Radio reminds her that "Pain is white, remember pain? Pain is white, that is its color, bright as sunshine."[45] (72). She returns to work, prays for a white family to hire her to clean, something she started doing at

[44] Kushner, *Caroline*, 44.
[45] Kushner, *Caroline*, 72.

seventeen. Things stay bad, and he never finds work and never stops drinking, and on one "bad day," he hits her again. Together, Caroline, the Washing Machine, and the Radio explain,

> You beat him black and blue
>
> Then
>
> he disappear from view…
>
> And even now your hand can summon
>
> What it like to beat his face in
>
> What his back feel like, his kiss.[46]

Caroline is disrupted from her memories of how her arm had the strength to create such pain, to make such change happen in her life by a twittering Rose Gellman who complains in asides about her unsmiling employee. Once again, Rose reminds Caroline that she should keep the change from the bleach cup by the Washing Machine. Caroline, losing her self-control for a second, snaps that Rose can do what she wants with the "damn money," and asks her to leave so her arm "can swing with this hot iron and not hit anybody" (76). She knows she has put herself and her livelihood in danger, and the Radio and the Washing Machine's songs add tension to the moment as they sing about being fired and the danger of talking like that. Caroline wants time to cool down, but Rose remains, walking back her instigation of the moment and changing the subject. She only leaves after babbling about anything and everything, trying to prove that she's friendly, despite the tense exchange. Caroline is left by herself, but the worst of her imagination joins into the mental anguish of the scene, as the Dryer reminds her that,

> Some folks goes
>
> to school at nights.

[46] Kushner, *Caroline*, 74.

Some folks march

for civil rights.

Some folks prosper,

Then they's those…

….pickin coins

From dirty clothes.[47]

Caroline had explained earlier in the first scene of the musical that the Dryer was made by the Devil himself. Here, the recurrent figure of temptation and damnation in folklore points out the ways that other people are better than her. She has given in to the way that the loose change, taken from someone else, a child, can make her life a little easier. As he tells her that despite being "the queen of keep-at-bay what-was-once or might-have been," she allowed a moment of weakness and loss of resolve and "yesterday came crashin in."[48] He taunts and cautions her for how her mind wandered to the sorrows and grief of her past, allowing a crack in the carefully maintained exterior that hides the constant reflections on sorrow and lack of choice she feels on an everyday basis. He forewarns and foreshadows:

Small domestic tragedies

Bring strong women to their knees…[49]

If she fails at keeping her cool, everything she fears losing control of in the face of change will explode around her. She has to regain composure, no matter what refuses to stay the same.

[47] Kushner, *Caroline*, 79.
[48] Kushner, *Caroline*, 79.
[49] Kushner, *Caroline*, 79.

Change Keeps Coming

But the changes that come continue to shape their everyday lives. As the year nears its end, Caroline, Dotty, and her daughter are tasked with serving the Chanukah dinner for the Gellmans and Rose's father Mr. Stopnick. Rose's father has socialist views, more left than the already liberal Gellman grandparents. As happens in family holiday dinners, the elder adults begin discussing current events. The Gellmans have been singing in celebration of the holiday, their Jewishness, and the country, while Mr. Stopnick serves as an instigator for political debate. Visiting from New York, the elderly man forces the conversation onto the South, and on Black civil rights. He sees the changes coming as an end to the "old world," as long as civil rights leaders let go of their adherence to the principles of nonviolence. In trying to change the subject, the Gellmans declare that

> Negroes in Louisiana
> aren't like in Mississippi,
> not as mad as Alabama.[50]

The Gellmans, here, share a perspective that has multiple shades of meaning and can be open to interpretation in a number of ways. I pause to unpack some of these interpretations before setting the scene of where and how Creole Louisiana fits alongside these other places.

Perhaps the Gellmans' lines exemplify the "genteel" racism or microagressions that exist even in those who claim not to be racist: *Oh no, the Black folks here in Louisiana aren't like the Black people in Mississippi or Alabama.* To be sure, tactics of the civil rights activism in the different states sometimes differed. The threats of danger and outcomes of protest differed as well, leading to different reactions across states. This statement could also be devoid of

[50] Kushner, *Caroline*, 85.

judgment, depending on how it is played. Kushner and Tesori include enough ambiguity to allow the audience their own interpretations. In any case, the Gellmans want to change the subject away from the harsh realities of the current moment, declaring "Let's not dwell on ugly things!" while also wishing their "Negro neighbors well!"[51] The Gellmans are in a position to "forget" for the night, as they have achieved a position of relative safety and comfort as white Jews, even in the American South, especially when one knows that the Jewish community has a long history in Lake Charles, with Temple Sinai being established in 1894 and the synagogue opening in 1904.[52] They have previously sung about the shifts in American attitudes against Jews as they perceive them, and though they have expressed alliance with the Black struggle for civil rights, it is not always at the forefront of their minds.

But Kushner has Mr. Stopnick keep Southern Blacks front and center on this night, as he toasts, "And may Bull Connor roast in hell!"[53] Mr. Stopnick references elected Commissioner of Public Safety in Birmingham, Alabama, who authorized the use of fire hoses and attack dogs in civil rights marches earlier in 1963. Kushner's mention in that scene invites in the wider range of civil rights tensions of the early 1960s in the nation, in the South, and in Louisiana particularly. 1963 also saw the Birmingham Campaign led by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an increase in emboldened KKK and white supremacist violence against Black people, and the September 15th bombing of the 16th Baptist Church that killed four young girls. Alabama was mad and had every right to be. Additionally, the University of Alabama also integrated on June

[51] Kushner, *Caroline*, 85.
[52] "History," Temple Sinai Lake Charles, accessed December 7, 2023. https://templesinai.info/our-history-2/.
[53] Kushner, *Caroline*, 85.

11, 1963, initiating a 24-hour window of profound importance for the civil rights movement in the United States.[54]

On June 11, 1963, then President John F. Kennedy gave his speech on the direction of civil rights in the United States. That night, just after midnight, in Jackson, Mississippi, Medgar Evers, a leader of the NAACP in the city, was shot and killed by a white supremacist and segregationist on the front steps of his home. Byron De La Beckwith was arrested following reports that he had been asking around for Evers's address, but two separate court cases failed to convict him, despite strong prosecution and evidence. Both all-white juries did not result in a verdict. Mississippi was also where Emmett Till had been lynched less than a decade before.[55]

In Louisiana, the fight for civil rights was not new. In fact, the educated free people of color, now identified by scholars as Afro-Creoles had been active in the fight for universal, integrated education, voting rights, governmental representation as elected officials and more. Louisiana and its Black population was no stranger to political engagement and legal challenges. Violence was also no stranger. In 1866, more than 40 Black people were killed in the Mechanics' Institute of 1866 by a group of white men, including police officers, dressed in Confederate uniforms.[56] In the years following the Civil War, Reconstruction saw Black men elected into local and state positions, including Lt. Governor and Governor. In the same state that Herman Plessy rode a white streetcar as a Creole man, the Baton Rouge bus boycott became the first of its kind in the nation in 1953. As the 1950s continued, the state's universities began integrating, beginning at South Louisiana Institute (now University of Louisiana Lafayette) in 1954.

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[54] Barnett Wright. "1963 in Birmingham, Alabama: A Timeline of Events," AL.com, updated January 1, 2013. https://www.al.com/spotnews/2013/01/1963_in_birmingham_alabama_a_t.html.
[55] Denoral Davis. "Medgar Evers and the Origin of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi," Mississippi History Now, October 2003, https://mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/medgar-evers-and-the-origin-of-the-civil-rights-movement-in-mississippi.
[56] Clint Bruce, "Mechanics' Institute Massacre of 1866." *64 Parishes*, updated April 20, 2023, https://64parishes.org/entry/mechanics-institute-massacre-of-1866.

McNeese State University in Lake Charles enrolled its first Black students in 1955. In 1960, the Baton Rouge sit-ins at Kress Department Store led to the arrest of students who were then expelled from Southern University, the city's HBCU.[57]

Across the South, we can find similar moments of progress, but again, not in exactly the same way. Depending on where one lived in the country might lead to excitement and hope about the future of civil rights, while someone else may feel defeated and skeptical. Black Southerners were both the same as and different to each other in the face of the changing political landscape of the day. This is an important takeaway for anyone speaking on Black experiences across the South then and now. There are absolutely similarities that can be seen in every Black community in the region, whether it be love of family and community, desire for better futures for themselves and their children, more equal access to things like healthcare, education, and work, and more. But there are also differences in how those things are experienced at the state, community, and individual level. How change is addressed and enacted may look the same or different, or both at once.

And we see this in Caroline, Dotty, and Emmie.

Later in the play, Dotty takes her opportunity in the kitchen to update the others about the new rumblings about the Confederate statue. It has been found, she mentions, headless in a bayou and wrapped in a dirty Confederate flag. She relates the huge amount of effort put into finding its head: spotlights, diving and trawling of the bayou and the lake front, and even bloodhounds brought in to try to ascertain who might be responsible. "Hoodlums" have been blamed, a very clear reference to young Black men or boys in the area. Though she's worried about who might have done it, Dotty is also excited that it happened, that someone has

[57] Discussed in more detail in the previous chapter on Baton Rouge.

symbolically taken a stand to remind the community that the Civil War has been long lost and over. But, she concedes, trouble will come from it.[58]

Caroline admonishes Dotty after sending Emmie out to serve food, explaining "I don't want my child to hear that. Negroes stealin white folk statues."[59] Such acts lead to danger, "disaster" even, and "We'll be ruint fore this is over."[60] Here, Caroline expresses a knowledge that even individual acts could lead to consequences for the larger community, something that she would be aware of as the oldest of the three Black women. She was likely born in the early 1920s, just a generation or two removed from slavery, without the same access to education and public goods that, even limited, are available to Dotty and her child. Lynchings still occurred in Louisiana in her childhood. Such a trespass as removing the Defender of the South from its perch could incense white supremacists to similar levels of violent retaliation. Though she wants better for her children, she does not see it happening in this way.

Meanwhile, Emmie has challenged Mr. Stopnick for his statements about the Black use of nonviolence, arguing:

> I think it's a Negro thing,
>
> A southern thing,
>
> A Christian thing.
>
> Mister, you don't understand
>
> How Dr. King has got things planned.[61]

She has faith in a movement that achieves its goals through strong leadership and collective action. She believes that these values align with her different identities as a Black, Christian,

[58] Kushner, *Caroline*, 86-87.
[59] Kushner, *Caroline*, 88.
[60] Kushner, *Caroline*, 89.
[61] Kushner, *Caroline*, 90.

Southern woman. Mr. Stopnick warns that "nonviolence will get you burned" (90), which can be seen in different historical moments in both Jewish and Black history. It is a hard reality that both sides have a point. Respectfully, she tells him that nonviolence has already shown success, as "Segregation's already dying!"[62] The progress has been slow, but she is not wrong, there had been numerous successes, like the ones listed above. He compliments her on her optimism while also patronizing her that she isn't realistic. Emmie, not one to allow others to tell her what to do (both to the delight and horror of Caroline, one might imagine), challenges him again:

> I'd like to know how you come to feel
> You know so much about what is real,
> Sitting safe and high and pretty,
> Way up North in New York City?
> I'd like to know![63]

As Caroline tries to get her attention and remove her from the situation, Emmie continues one last time:

> I'd like to know how some guy just off a plane
> marchin in to explain,
> guess you seen it all plain
> from the air?
> It our
> affair.
> Now our resistance
> start to make a difference

[62] Kushner, *Caroline*, 90.
[63] Kushner, *Caroline*, 90.

here come your "assistance."[64]

At this, Caroline loses her composure, yelling at Emmie to hush and go back to the kitchen with the dishes. Emmie does, but Mr. Stopnick tries to keep her there explaining that "since I come South, she's my first real conversation!"[65]Once in the kitchen, Caroline warns Emmie, "You can't talk to folk like that," to which Emmie clarifies, "Talk to white folk what you mean."[66]

In this incredibly fast-paced and intense exchange, Emmie's perspectives on change, progress, and activism crystallize. She is an adherent to the ideals of nonviolent protest, she believes that Black people have made much progress on their own, and she thinks there are white people who are joining the fray only now that real success is on the horizon. Not afraid to debate with an elderly white man, she represents a big, complex fear of Caroline's when it comes to Emmie—she wants her to be strong and assertive, but she get herself into dangerous situations by being too strong-willed and outspoken. Caroline gives her a version of "The Talk," as it's often referred to today, or the conversation that Black parents give to their children to explain to them the ways that they must act, perform, and engage in the world because of their skincolor. She reminds her that in this moment, the Gellmans and Mr. Stopnick are her bosses, and in the wrong place and time, or with the wrong people, she might get "knocked flat" if she "mouth off round white folk like that."[67] The reality of the South then, before, and still today is that young Black men and women have been killed for less, for just walking up to the wrong door to ask for directions, walking down the wrong street with their candy from the convenience store, exercising in their neighborhood, for matching a description that listed their skincolor, or any other reason that white racists have given as excuses for lynching. Mr. Stopnick proves to be a

[64] Kushner, *Caroline*, 91.
[65] Kushner, *Caroline*, 91.
[66] Kushner, *Caroline*, 92.
[67] Kushner, *Caroline*, 92.

safe debate partner, but Caroline can't and couldn't know this. Her daughter, right in front of her, put herself and her mother's livelihood in jeopardy. Feeling angry and betrayed, Emmie explodes at Caroline:

> You tippy-toe till you been paid.
>
> You the spoiled one! A maid!
>
> I'll never be a queen, that's true,
>
> but I'm a damn sight better'n prouder'n you!
>
> Come on teach me what you know!
>
> How to keep my head tucked low.
>
> Come on, come on
>
> Teach me what you know![68] (92-93)

Emmie is silenced by a slap from Caroline, who then puts on her coat and leaves. With her exit, Dotty lets the teenager have it, telling her "You too smart to act a fool. Proud don't talk trash to her mother,"[69] Emmie points out that Dotty has "plans," is working on her education, while her mother "Only angry" (ibid). Emmie reduces her mother down to her anger in this statement, which we know is not all she is. She does have hopes and dreams, but believes they cannot be achieved; rather, her hope lies in her children, especially Emmie. Caroline has done things she's ashamed of, like taking the change left by Noah to give to her children. Later, she will take a $20 bill, a Chanukah gift of Noah's that he leaves in his pocket overnight. She will give it back to him, but not before they both say horrible, awful things to each other that center on things they cannot change about themselves—their race, as a Black woman and a Jewish boy.

[68] Kushner, *Caroline*, 92-93.
[69] Kushner, *Caroline*, 93.

This series of events culminates in Caroline's final full song on stage, "Lot's Wife." Throughout the play, we have seen how Caroline has been strong in the face of poverty, an abusive husband, a changing world, and in raising children. We have learned that she has made things happen, against the odds, to keep her children fed, clothed, and safe. But she does it all by herself. We have been let in on her complex interiority through her ongoing interactions with the machines in the basement, and the commentary/chorus of the Moon. None of this has been simple. Her life has not been easy. She does not have the "option" to do anything other than keep putting one foot in front of the other to continue providing for her children. When Dotty comes to visit, to tell her that Rose has called about her, she also encourages Caroline to change, to open up more about herself to Emmie, to "show her your fire, show her your grit, show her your new face."[70] Dotty admires Caroline, sees something in her that Caroline wants to stamp down, but she also sees her as a woman who will "surrender" to her "fears." Her advice is to learn something new, with the warning that

> I know it hurts to change.
>
> It actually hurts, learning something new,
>
> And when you full-grown, it's harder, that's true—
>
> It feel like you got to break yourself apart,
>
> It feel like you got to break your own heart,
>
> But
>
> Folk do it. They do.
>
> Every day, all the time,
>
> Alone, afraid, folks like you.

[70] Kushner, *Caroline*, 114.

You got to let go of where you been.

You got to move on from the place you're in.

Don't drown in that basement. Change or sink.

Let go, forget, move on.[71]

And in this moment, Caroline is called out. She is laid bare by her friend's exacting diagnosis of what ails her. It comes from love and is meant to jumpstart a shift in her perspective and trajectory, but it fails. Caroline cannot handle it, and resolves to take counsel in just God from here on out. From her damning interaction with Noah, telling him that Jews, like him, go to hell, to hitting her daughter in the face of her growth and confidence, and even in the next few moments with Dotty, she believes she deserves none of it. She believes that all that comes from her into the world and to other people is hate. With that, she tells Dotty that their friendship is over: "We through."[72]

As the song continues as a solo, a lament and resolution for the future of Caroline, she tells the world that "ya'll can't do what I can do/ya'll strong but you ain't strong like me"[73] and she's going to take the iron in hand and crush all the bits of herself that hope, and dream, and love, and desire. She will do what she has to do to make it through to survive underwater, but then she might be free—free of hate, sorrow, evil, grief, and all. Caroline cannot see a way to change. It will not happen for her. She does not see an option for that to happen. As the song ends, she readies the boys for Church, and Emmie and she share an embrace. With this new determination to stop caring, Caroline's "secret little tragedies," become an element of the "costly, quiet victories"[74] heralded by the Washing Machine and the Moon. Her tragedy is not

[71] Kushner, *Caroline*, 115.
[72] Kushner, *Caroline*, 115.
[73] Kushner, *Caroline*, 117.
[74] Kushner, *Caroline*, 123.

little, nor domestic, but societal and institutional. Caroline's chosen and unchosen sacrifices have created the foundation for her children, who in the next decade will see themselves in desegregated schools and public places. In just a year, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 will pass through Congress under the guidance of President Lyndon B. Johnson. Indignities will continue, but her children will witness the change she feared and desired.

Conclusion

And those children end the play. Emmie Thibodeaux tells how she was there when the old, "Evil" statue fell. In her last folk story of the play, she tells the oral history of how that old statue came down, playing herself and all the other parts. She told it:

> "I'm the daughter of a maid,
> In her uniform, crisp and clean!
> Nothing can ever make me afraid!
> You can't hold on, you Nightmare Men,
> Your time is past now on your way
> Get gone and never come again!
> For change come fast and change come slow but
> Everything changes!
> And you got to go!"
> Shout shout Devil on
> Out!![75]

Emmie has learned the lessons that Caroline had hoped to instill in her daughter. She does not have the fear her mother has of change, but a strong desire to help usher her community and

[75] Kushner, *Caroline*, 126.

country into a better place. The strength of Caroline runs in her blood, but also from where she stands

> …alone where the harsh winds blow:
>
> Salting the earth so nothing grow too close; but still her strong blood flow…
>
> Under ground through hidden veins,
>
> Down from the storm clouds when it rains,
>
> Down the plains, down the high plateau,
>
> Down to the Gulf of Mexico.
>
> Down to Larry and Emmie and Jackie and Joe.
>
> The children of Caroline Thibodeaux.[76]

Emmie can face the realities of the world, of the Nightmare Men, white supremacists and the KKK, and institutional racism, and more, because her mother made it so. She is the stuff of legends and folk stories—a woman so strong that men who beat her turned black and blue, that the winds of change could not knock over, whose roots have spread out across the land like that of the Cypress tree, holding on in the marshy wetness of the underwater underground of South Louisiana. Emmie learned that same strength while also learning the lessons her mother hoped she would, even if Caroline couldn't hold onto them for herself.

Such is a strength seen in so many in the American South, but also in Louisiana. While some elements of the lives of Caroline, Emmie, and Dotty may look like many other Black Southern women's experiences, they are also distinct for their place and its cultural influences. Change comes despite Caroline's adamant desire for her to not have to change in its stead. Dotty embraces education and support for the civil rights movement. And Emmie actively joins the

[76] Kushner, *Caroline*, 127.

movement, a legacy of her mother's strength, her community's culture, and the Creole protest tradition.

The depth and changes in understanding about the various characters in *Caroline, or Change* and how they each react to the world around them are opened up through a dramaturgical analysis of the Creole elements I have highlighted throughout. The act of utilizing this dramaturgical practice also does something else, though. For someone not part of a place or culture, it pushes us to do the work of diving deeper into the differences of experience, to resist stereotypes and generalizations. We're forced to stop and assess our own knowledge and biases and to dig into the landscape and context of the characters we're faced with. This practice has practical, everyday use, too, as it lays out a blueprint for learning about others, as I've demonstrated in this chapter and the previous ones as well. Whether the people you encounter are fictional or flesh and blood, there is always room for learning more about their specific experiences.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

Overview

Throughout this dissertation, I have demonstrated through presentation and analysis of Louisiana Creole cultural performances the ways that race and the experience of Black people in South Louisiana are inflected by history, the effects of creolization, and the complexity of ethnicity. Louisiana's culture as seen in these cultural performances proves to be more intricate than official cultural narratives and performances produced by the state illustrate much of the time. Creole cultural performances reveal that Louisiana Creole culture, rich and vibrant in New Orleans, also flourishes in places outside the Crescent City: in Baton Rouge and across Acadiana and Southwest Louisiana. Across the state, a history of migratory movement, political and institutional oppression, and educational consequences have both shaped Louisiana Creole cultural performance while also foreclosing it in favor of Cajun and New Orleans Creole privileging. The processes of various cultural performances have produced distinct and overlapping cultures in the Creoles and Cajuns of the state. Conversations about Louisiana, but also about diversity in the larger schema of the South and the United States benefit from these creolizing connections and their differences. The Creole cultural performances across South Louisiana complicate understandings about Louisiana's culture more generally when recognized alongside those of New Orleans and the Cajuns.

In Chapter 1, as an entry into the state's culture and the ways that race is inextricably linked to conversations about Louisiana Creoles, I gave the example of how a protest tradition begun by the Afro-Creoles of New Orleans established an allyship between already identified Creoles and the now freed former enslaved people of the state. The Afro-Creoles pursued political change, with attention to individual and public rights, through the formation of political

and civil groups that worked to challenge and transgress the newly formed racial lines between whites and Blacks in the city, state, and country. Homer Plessy, a light-skinned Creole man, conducted an act of civil disobedience to push back against the newly formed segregation laws of Reconstruction. His case at the Supreme Court established the next century's adherence to "separate but equal," while also forcing the country to say in no uncertain terms that it was okay with the subjugation of one race under another, even after fighting for the abolition of slavery. In Louisiana, the ever-whitening state government soon squashed progress towards Black and Creole political involvement as elected officials, in favor of maintaining an Americanized white supremacy and eventual Jim Crow regime. Women like Madame Lulu White also challenged political attempts to segregate previously integrated businesses in the sex work district of Storyville, though in the long run she lost her court cases. A Black woman from Alabama, White's persona as a Creole from the West Indies allowed her to embrace the in-betweenness of Creolité in the face of the nascent white-Black color line. Her performance of self confirms that the labels and conditions of culture, even those based in race and ethnicity, can be permeable and fluid.

Chapter 2 pulled us quickly from these early examples of New Orleans Creoles to the rural center of the southern part of the state, where plantations and prairies gave birth to another group of Louisiana Creoles. Over more than a century, the Creoles of New Orleans and the Creoles of Southwest Louisiana have found common ground in their shared languages, experiences, and cultural practices. Nevertheless, difference bubbles up over time and across space as these Southwestern Louisiana Creoles developed distinctive cultural performances. Today, however, both are described as Louisiana Creoles, the convergence across space and the decades pulling them closer together. The state of Louisiana, in its performances of culture to

encourage tourism, neglects the histories of Louisiana Creole contributions to the development of Southwest Louisiana (and, to be fair, in New Orleans as well) in favor of championing Cajuns as the primary ethnic and cultural product of the state's convergence of historical colonialism and settlement. In fact, the rural region of the state labeled Acadiana is the product of the confluence of Creoles, Cajuns, Indigenous tribes, and immigrants from across the globe.[1]

In the state-level tourist scripts, information about Creole contributions like zydeco and certain foodways neglects to name those responsible for innovating them. Local communities in and around the Cajun heartland create and perform different cultural scripts, sharing credit for the cultural gumbo of Cajuns and Creoles in the form of events like Festivals Acadiens et Créoles. Though historically the group always presented Cajun and Creole music, food, and crafts, since 2008 its name and activities have better reflected the shared contributions of both groups. At the more grassroots and individual levels, Creoles and some Cajuns who identify Cajun culture as a type of Creole culture, have leaned into the use of technology to preserve, maintain, and expand the reach of their cultural performances and practices. From transmitting personal and state history, to developing resources to learn Kouri-Vini, these efforts prioritize the repetition and sustained continuance of Louisiana Creole cultural performance. While uncovering the previously hidden and destroyed archives of folk practices and language, the Southwest Louisiana Creoles are forging ahead with a vibrant and dynamic living culture.

Next, Chapter 3 brought us to Baton Rouge, often overlooked in discussions about Creole culture. Situated on the border of Francophone Louisiana, the city region was settled by multiple European nations and long formed a liminal space between urban and rural. I argue that cultural performances emerging in this region—in this case the Southern University/LSU Battle of the

[1] The Vietnamese population in Acadiana has contributed to the always shifting culture, and I hope to see more research around their cultural practices and contributions to the region in the future.

Bands—should be read through a lens attentive to the city's Creole roots. I thus highlight the necessary shifts of culture that occurred from a century of migration in and out of the city, especially as it developed as the capital of Louisiana and became an industrial and educational center of the state.

I underline how the cultures of the surrounding areas on either side of the Mississippi River are not so isolated that they do not cross the imaginary or geographic boundaries around the city. A small city surrounded by plantations along the river and beyond prior to the Civil War, its status as a port city and an important strategic holding for the Union led to its further industrialization and destination for Black freedmen and freedwomen as well as Afro-Creoles from New Orleans over the decades that followed. As the political center of the state, universities moved into the city as well. Louisiana State University and Southern University became two of the state's premiere educational institutions, though their histories, like most things in the state of Louisiana, are intertwined around issues of race, segregation, and legal challenges. The city embodies a kind of bothness in terms of race, being urban and rural, industrial and agricultural. All of these conditions led to the development of a particular flavor of Louisiana Creole culture and cultural performances that are distinct in and of itself, while still maintaining the citationality of the contributing actors from across the state.

Understanding the growth of Baton Rouge's Creole culture of Baton Rouge along the east side of the Mississippi, I argue, is essential to seeing events like the Battle of the Bands through a Creole performance lens. I thus presented a Creole-aware historiographic take on the development of the strained relationships between Southern and LSU, a history often tracked by court cases filed by Black prospective students challenging Jim Crow laws. I emphasize the role of the Louisiana Creole protest tradition. Individuals who understood the risks they underwent to

have better, more equal access to educational opportunities in the state pursued challenges and transgressions across the city's color lines. Those color lines persist in the city's various historical and new neighborhoods, but also in the ways that LSU and Southern have developed separately from each other, despite occupying the same city. One effort to acknowledge the shared cultures of the city was evident in September 2022, as Southern played LSU, the first time such a faceoff had ever happened. More interesting though, was the invitation by Southern's band, the Human Jukebox, for LSU's Golden Band from Tigerland to participate in traditions tied to Southern and other HBCUs. This event didn't solve race relations in the city, but for a weekend, the two universities, their fans, and a large portion of the city's population came together in fellowship and celebration of the creolized culture of the capital city.

Finally, after establishing the different cultural conditions of experience that lead to unique displays of cultural performance in Louisiana Creoles across time and place, I argued in Chapter 4 that a clearer, stronger understanding of the play *Caroline, or Change* by Tony Kushner (with music by Jeanine Tesori) occurs when that cultural or social dramaturgical lens is applied to actual theatre, from where it emerged. Caroline is a Black woman in the American South, but she is also a Creole woman in South Louisiana. The elements of the play are not just Kushner's love of children's stories or an attempt to incorporate Noah, Emmie, and her brothers into the narrative of the play, but a reflection of the cultural elements of folk storytelling and syncretic characters. The anthropomorphic characters don't usually interact with the children, but Kushner most often uses them to embody complex feelings and compulsive thoughts from within Caroline's interiority. Caroline's story reflects that of other Black women in the South, but also more specifically what it might have been like to be a Black domestic in Southwest Louisiana in 1963. Kushner points to the differences in Black experience when pointing out that the Black

people of different states aren't like those in the others. The conditions of their cultures, across Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and beyond dictate that, although they have similar desires, goals, and hopes across the planes of Black identity, how they react, what they do, and what they want differs based on their specific location and moment. Kushner references civil rights efforts in each state to exemplify the ways that across the South, such efforts shared similarities but also showed differences. Characters' reactions to the resultant consequences, both good and bad, differed based on location as well.

Kushner also tracks how the age of a person in a single time leads to different perspectives of the same issues in his triangulation of Caroline, her friend Dotty, and Caroline's daughter Emmie. Each of them reacts to the changing tide of civil rights around them in different ways, highlighting how a heterogeneous and creolized culture responds in a diversity of ways to political and cultural upheaval. Dotty turns to education and a middle-road between change and stasis. Emmie jumps in headfirst to make her mark on the city's commemoration of its brutal racist past. Caroline resolves herself to keep doing what she has to, despite the will to just buckle under all of her life's disappointments. Kushner presents the difficult realities of Southern Black women during a decade that marked a turning point in civil rights. Kushner's explorations of complexity reflect the very real conditions of complicated culture in places like Lake Charles, Louisiana, the South, and throughout the United States.

Possibilities

Through all of these performance sites, despite the recurrent description of relationships of the color line between white and Black people, I stress that none of it is that simple. Race in the United States and in places like Louisiana is never just Black and white. As a larger culture, the tools of white supremacy and the ineffectiveness of those afraid to stand up to it have forced

the discussions of race into a binary. But this binary has both those who fit in it and those who don't. There are some who are both in and outside of it, as we see in Louisiana. The project of breaking race into one or the other comes from Louisiana, as we see in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The ability to exist outside and between categories was a dangerous element then, but within that danger lies potential for the future.

Louisiana Creoles aren't just Black. White people in Louisiana who identify as Creole almost always have a history of mixed heritage and ethnicity. Indigenous and Asian people also contribute to not just the biological heritage of Louisiana Creoles, but in its continued cultural development as the points of connection and collision endure across time and place and people. With Brandi Wilkins Catanese's work in mind, I find myself considering how multiculturalism might resist collapsing race into one single point. Can multiculturalism as a project ever fully break down the hierarchical valuation of one raced body over another? She cautions against ignoring race or removing the meaning of the racialized body from our considerations of culture in an effort to transcend it. Instead, she argues for the possibilities of "racial transgression as a productive alternative."[2] Transgression crosses the boundaries of expected outcome when new patterns are created and negotiated.[3]

Difference and sameness can exist at the same time. Recognition, respect, and celebration of all of the parts of people can be something other than mawkish; these can be truly transgressive acts, pushing on the established binary thinking of the past and breaking down the valuation system of one body's worth over another's. There's potential and possibility in the differences and similarities between people. Such gaps and overlaps create generative energy to create new culture, as we see throughout the creolized world.

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[2]Brandi Wilkins Catanese, *The Problem of the Color[blind] (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press,* 2011), 18.
[3] Catanese, *Color[blind],* 20.

Power, of course, must be considered, and I am not arguing these steps are easy or will happen anytime soon. Nevertheless, US demographic trends dictate that by 2040-2050, the country will be "majority minority." This awkward phrasing points to the ways that "minority," like "race," is a construct. Catanese argues that race is not just biological, not just social construct, but something in between. How many sit in between already? Certainly, that number includes those who identify as Black and white, Black and Latinx, white and Latinx, Indigenous and Asian, and so on. America is diverse. Attempts at insisting on purity along any racial line is hard to defend, as many people have mixed family heritages.

That said, perhaps we can look to creolization and creole cultural performances as a guide for how to talk about difference and similarity in an increasingly multicultural nation. Louisiana Creoles know what it is to be neglected or foreclosed in favor of their neighbors whose culture they share in many ways. Individual contributions can be identified, like zydeco music originating from Creoles, but they can also be shared, in the case of Cajuns who have taken up the form. Gumbo has roots in French technique of the Cajuns, okra of the Africans and Creoles, and filé from the Indigenous tribes of Southwest Louisiana. Sometimes the individual cultural contributions are more difficult to parse—the resultant product masks the various parts that made it what it became. There's danger in that masking, but beauty in the blending. How wonderful to persistently create new things alongside others if they're in service to all involved. Multiculturalism can be a fearsome possibility, but it also opens us up to exciting new potentials. True acceptance and the ability to give credit for contributions help recognize the agency of all in a multicultural society. Of course, the challenging realities of getting past prejudices and hate make this a utopic daydream, but change often explodes out of the impossible dreams of the few before gaining traction with the many.

I am reminded of Jill Dolan's notion of the utopian performative, naming the moments of shared hope in performance. In such moments, Dolan theorizes, audiences can imagine together the ways that a whole host of human-created conflicts, punishing policy, and hatred "might be ameliorated, cured, redressed, solved, never to haunt us again."[4] The possibilities of utopia lie in the moments of shared connection, "when a group of people repeat and revise incremental moments, trying to get them right, to get them to 'work.'"[5] What if we look at Creole cultural performances like the Festivals Acadiens et Créoles or the halftime show and battle of the bands between the local HBCU and PWI as opportunities for these repeated moments, attempts to get them to work? Might a Creole interpretive lens for Kushner's semi-autobiographical play highlight his experiences of being raised in a culture that kept him in contact with people whose beliefs, practices, and values both resembled and differed from his own family and culture? Of course, these efforts require all participants to be in on the same goal and activity, and, as Dolan points out, the achievement of utopia is both unlikely and probably even a little unlikeable if it were realized. She continues, though, arguing that "theatre can move us toward understanding the possibility of something better, can train our imaginations, inspire our dreams and fuel our desires in ways that might lead to incremental cultural change."[6] Dolan ends with a remark on recognizing the sentimentality of the impulse for utopia, how it might not be all it's cut out to be. But she also ruminates on the idea of Victor Turner's communitas, of a kind of inclusivity or generosity, saying:

> This, for me, is the beginning (and perhaps the substance) of the utopian performative: in the performer's grace, in the audience's generosity, in the lucid power of intersubjective

[4] Jill Dolan, "Performance, Utopia, and the 'Utopian Performative,'" *Theatre Journal* 53, no. 3 (Oct. 2001): 457, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25068953.
[5] Dolan, "Utopian Performative," 458.
[6] Dolan, "Utopian Performative," 460.

understanding, however fleeting. These are the moments when we can believe in utopia. These are the moments theatre and performance make possible.[7]

Perhaps in continuing to share spaces in performance together, the act of working together, of sharing culture together, of being generous and respectful towards one another, the transgression Catanese calls for can get us a little closer to something better, though what that looks like still is yet to be seen.

(Re)Commitment to Dramaturgy

I have a couple of practical options that I hope this work sparks for others. I would like to see a commitment (or recommitment) by theatres to utilize the skills of trained dramaturgs and scholars to work alongside production teams—from the designers and director, to the actors and crew—to help them better understand the context of the world they are creating together. The reality of theatre—whether community, educational, or professional—is that time and budget constraints make having someone whose identity aligns with the characters of the play nigh impossible in many, even most, situations. Nevertheless, productions can carry out an institutional and community commitment to work towards "getting it right" marked by a deeper exploration into the various cultural elements—like the performances of culture, law, education, and religion, to name just a few—that make up the constellations of context. Such a commitment and follow-through could go a long way in not just avoiding embarrassment but also in proving that intentions are paired with action when it counts. Cultural consultants also serve some theatres in this capacity. Again, though, there are often barriers that prevent them from being used widely across different types of theatres.

[7] Dolan, "Utopian Performative," 479.

As a dramaturg in many different theatres over the years, I have had good and bad experiences in working alongside a company. The best experiences have fostered open communication and inquiry among dramaturg, director, actors, and even designers. Expectations for the space are set from the beginning, and a kind of generosity must be held for all involved. Hard questions will get asked, and sometimes answers can be hard to determine. My preference is to offer a couple of potential answers, as not to make the decision for director or actor. When working with plays that push actors into situations and characters that they have not encountered before, they should come to the dramaturg and director. In doing so, the company member, if acting earnestly and in good faith, should be able to ask even the hardest of questions that they do not understand or that they would like help further exploring. Of course, actors, directors, and designers can do their own research, and many do, but a designated dramaturg helps keep the entire company on the same page. In one theatre I worked in, once a question's answer had been drafted, it was shared with the wider company, as it would be possible that any other character in the play might also share that same knowledge. If they wouldn't, the actor could choose not to incorporate the information into their performance.

As an educator, I advocate for the teaching of plays alongside their context as often as possible. I taught a specialized introduction to theatre course one summer that paired theatre and society as the primary topics. In this course, I encouraged my students to open themselves up to the ways that the study of theatre (and by extension, performance, literature, and art), tells us something about the person or people writing it, the people depicted, and the audience and actors who would have been engaged as active participants in the production of the play. This sounds like such a simple concept, but it helps make the arguments for why theatre and the arts matter in education. Stories matter, and who tells them and how, does too.

This dissertation grew out of two things happening at once: realizing I left Louisiana folklore lessons wishing we had discussed Louisiana Creoles more, and realizing that *Caroline, or Change* had an element that I hadn't unlocked yet. I saw the play originally in 2007, and though I loved it, I couldn't tell you why the director staged the characters of the Radio, Washing Machine, Dryer, Bus, and Moon the way they did. I couldn't tell you how they made sense not just in the world of the play, but also in the world Kushner set them in, which was quite specific: Lake Charles, Louisiana, in 1963. Over time, as I encountered more of the culture of South Louisiana over what has become eight years, I began to see the strains and patterns of the place in the play. Being here, a part of this place that I have called home for longer than any other place I've lived in my adult life, helped me uncover what was previously mysterious, or explained away with other reasons.

As a lifelong Southerner, I also had selfish reasons for this project. The broad strokes of the South, depending on generalizations and stereotypes offend me. They offend those I care about, too. It's not a perfect place, by any means, but no place is. The diversity of the South has always been one of the most beautiful and wonderful parts of my homes in Texas and Louisiana over the years. Even between the different cities I've lived in, I've been acutely aware of the ways that those cities have shared similarities while also being very different. I've come to expect and love diversity, and find myself in a kind of uncanny valley when I am in spaces that are predominantly white, English-speaking, straight, and so on. The ways that outsiders in the United States view the South often doesn't align with the places I have lived. I wanted to help change those perceptions.

In trying to help change those views of the South, I encountered so much information that I wish I could have presented, if time and resources had been available. HBCU band and dance

culture deserves more attention. They have innovated their styles and continue to shake things up every year, capitalizing on the opportunities of regular fall football games and a culture of battles of the bands to achieve new heights in technique and style. So much of their histories lie uncollected in websites and comment sections and word of mouth. To be sure, these are completely valid as forms of archive and repertoire, but they deserve the legitimacy and respect that scholarly attention offers. Their longevity alone seems reason enough to expand the studies of these groups of artists.

I also think Baton Rouge's parades offer a site that scholars haven't explored fully yet. Scholars have given much attention to the Mardi Gras parades of New Orleans and now Southwest Louisiana (at least the Cajun ones). Baton Rouge, lying between the two, has had far less attention on its offerings of Mardi Gras and St. Patrick's Day Parades. The Spanish Town Mardi Gras Parade, held the last Saturday morning before Mardi Gras, pushes the limits of public decency and morality in a drunken display of bawdy throws and overt political satire. Similar parades in New Orleans would likely roll at night, if only because of the penis- and boob-shaped straws and beads that are thrown to adults, with crowds of children also present. More recently, MidCity Gras, a walking parade that rolls down North Street at the border of North and South Baton Rouge, was created to be a family- and community-friendly parade that welcomes its neighbors of all races and ethnicities from across the city. An older walking parade, Southdowns, is an electric flambeaux nighttime event that rolls through a residential neighborhood near LSU on the Friday night before Mardi Gras. In North Baton Rouge and Old South Baton Rouge, community parades in honor of Juneteenth and anticipation of Christmas roll. Another parade that deserves deeper study is the Wearing of the Green parade that rolls through the Garden District, along Poets' Corner, and into Southdowns on the Saturday closest to

St. Patrick's Day. A celebration of the Irish in the city, it is a truly multicultural affair, with attendees and marchers of all races involved. Founded by local news weatherman Pat Shingleton, the parade features local businesses (who often won't ride in Spanish Town) and school marching bands from across the Parish. Parades have a way of performing what's important to a community, and the various messages Baton Rouge shares about itself are expressed in these parade rituals. Obviously, there are a wide variety of parades that would benefit from more exploration and analysis, especially in the ways that they have emerged both similarly to and differently from the other parades of the region.

I have also been so glad to see a growing body of books and research continue to emerge about Creoles across the state since I began this project. As mentioned before, when I set out to start working on this project, I found it difficult to find much on Louisiana Creoles outside of New Orleans, Cane River, and in various enclaves across Southwest Louisiana. Since then, beautiful books, many of them from University of Louisiana at Lafayette's and LSU's presses, have come out, shining light on the cultural performances and practices of Louisiana Creoles. ULL Press's books are particularly exciting, as they marry scholarly writing with glossy photos of the archival finds of the region. Though not the same thing as holding a record in your hands, the act of preservation that these books accomplish, especially in a place threatened by environmental change and devastation with growing regularity, amazes me. These books are accessible, celebratory, and produced by authors and scholars who encounter the work with a generosity toward the people whose histories and presents they tell.

Additionally, the Kouri-Vini language movement has gained momentum since I began this project, enough so that I felt compelled to include more about it in Chapter 2. There are independent scholars, artist/advocates, and local advocacy group leaders who are all working to

not only preserve the endangered language, but to help new people learn it. They don't shy away from talking about the reasons why the language fell out of use, and I hope more scholarship emerges around the conditions of the Kouri-Vini's usage over time and the progress these varying groups make in teaching it to new speakers.

Finally, I would like to issue a call for more people to do the deep and rewarding work of uncovering the local cultures and performances that get lost in conversations that generalize and stereotype larger places. In states across this country, enclaves of people who are often overlooked have histories just waiting to be shared. We as people like to categorize and create connections, and those things are so important, but they also do damage when they begin to wash over the details of people, places, times, and the unique experiences therein. I don't think it is too much to say that many cultures are at least somewhat influenced by the other cultures around them, and there are so many unique cultural performances around the country to begin exploring.

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Vita

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