The Fifth Ward Settlement: A Tri-racial Marginal Group

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by
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B.S., Louisiana State University, 1970
May 16, 1975
MANUSCRIPT THESES

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The memory of Father Odilo Alt, who was the first to realize the needs of the Freejack people. His more than forty years of devotion to the Mission and School he founded and to the people it served not only brought religion and education to these people, but also began the slow process of removing the social barriers of repression that have persisted for nearly 150 years. His greatest contribution was in recognizing the marvelous warmth, depth of human understanding and compassion possessed by the people of the Fifth Ward Settlement, and, furthermore, by helping those outside the Settlement recognize these qualities by overcoming their own racial prejudices.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Significant contributions to this study have been made by many people. Due to the controversial and volatile nature of this subject, and at the request of those who have helped most, names have been withheld.
"Race" is as much the source of general concern, the cry for social reform, the inflaming issue provoking violence, and the center of unresolved conflicts as any other subject on the American mind. Indeed, the understanding of race remains a paramount problem of our modern world.

Most studies of race deal with cultural contrasts, with some emphasis perhaps on the processes of interaction. These studies are based on the premise that an individual is either a member of race A, race B, or race C and behaves as such. Although contributing to an understanding of certain aspects of racial differences, these studies often tend to reinforce the erroneous concepts of racial categories as part of "the natural order." They generally ignore those individuals who are mixtures of A and B and C, and scarcely entertain the possibility that race is in actuality an arbitrary, rather than natural, category.

It is difficult to refute the argument that most racially mixed individuals will conform to and identify with one of the races; therefore, they behave as though they are pure (full-blooded) A or B or C and do not significantly alter the norms of either culture. However, when entire communities or settlements of mixed-blooded people appear, they are not so easily dismissed. One is forced to re-evaluate the definition of race,
for a new category--neither A nor B nor C--has arisen. A group is established that conforms to none of the "natural" rules defining race and, instead, establishes its own microcosm of social interactions.

Perhaps, then, the studies of racially-mixed peoples will give another perspective to the age-old problems of race relations, thereby adding a new dimension to our understanding. This may not solve all the problems concerned, but, as Griessman states (1972:694) "the studies will [at the least] further indicate how arbitrary, but how formidable is this human boundary called 'race'."

Certainly redefining race outside the realm of the "natural order" is no simple task. This study of the Fifth Ward Settlement, and the other studies summarized herein, are attempts to tackle the difficult and complex questions concerning race, in light of the unique place that a tri-racial, marginal group holds in the larger American society.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................. iii
FOREWORD ...................................................................................... iv
ABSTRACT ...................................................................................... viii
INTRODUCTION ............................................................................... ix

Chapter

I. CONCERNING MARGINAL PEOPLES: AN INTRODUCTORY SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE ........................................... 1
   Distribution ................................................................................... 4
   Social Stratification ....................................................................... 5
   Origin and Development ............................................................... 7

II. PROBLEMS, METHODOLOGY, AND LIMITATIONS ................. 13

III. ANALYSIS OF THE SETTLEMENT NAME .................................. 23

IV. SETTLEMENT ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT ............................... 33
   The Early Days .............................................................................. 33
   Post Bellum .................................................................................. 39
   The Mission ................................................................................ 46
   World War II ............................................................................. 48
   Integration of Public Schools ...................................................... 49

V. THE SETTLEMENT AREA ............................................................. 51

VI. DEALING WITH MIXED RACE .................................................. 57

VII. STRATIFICATION .................................................................... 71

VIII. CHANGE ................................................................................. 80
ABSTRACT

The Fifth Ward Settlement is the name of a community inhabited by "Freejacks," a tri-racial (Negro, White, Indian) marginal group comprised of at least 2,000 individuals. The etymology of the name "Freejack" and the development of the Settlement itself go back to the early 1800's. Tracing the development of either is a very complicated and, at best, speculative process.

Due to the racial mixture—especially the Negro element—the Freejack finds himself in social limbo, somewhere between the White and Black. This middle ground has positioned the people of the Settlement into a "marginal" existence: that is to say, at the edge or margin of both the White Society and the Black Society, but not in the mainstream of either.

Within the Settlement, various social strata have developed, based mainly upon an individual's ability to pass as White. This race-conscious group has developed complex and elaborate means of dealing with their mixed-blood heritage. By studying the intragroup stratification and ways of coping with the marginal existence, it is hoped another perspective can be added to the understanding of race as a social category.
INTRODUCTION

The "Fifth Ward Settlement" is a fictitious name for a tri-racial marginal community. Like most racially-mixed groups, the inhabitants of the Settlement are extremely sensitive about anything having to do with their area. They do not like any "outsiders" and react violently to any mention of their racial mixture.

The Settlement is perhaps analogous to a hive of bees. They work hard, go about their business, bothering no one; they carry out their activities in a mysterious and captivating way. But if disturbed, especially if hurt, the swarm can change from its peaceful, unobtrusive nature, into a maddened mass.

Not only is the name of the Settlement fictitious, but also the family names of the residents are pseudonyms. The major reason for the use of pseudonyms is a concern that much of the information contained herein might hurt individuals in the Settlement.

Although this study is primarily an analysis of the Fifth Ward Settlement, the writer cannot lose sight of the individuals within the group who have been hurt enough throughout their lifetime and do not need any additional persecution. Jenkins states in his thesis, "The People of Hybrid Island" (1965:6), that "much of the data collected, if used
indiscriminantly, could have considerable ill effects for some of the area inhabitants as well as for others who have been integrated into the larger society."

The only name that is not fictitious is the label attached to the inhabitants of the Fifth Ward Settlement. They are called "Freejacks" by other area residents and have apparently been known by this term of derision for at least one hundred years. A discussion of this name will follow, but it should be clearly understood from the onstart that this name is derogatory. When used in reference to or in discussion with a Settlement member, this name will either offend or inflame.

There have been three attempts to study the Freejacks. The first two were attempted prior to 1960: both resulted in the researcher being literally run out of the Settlement. Both researchers had begun their studies by making the serious mistake (a nearly fatal mistake in one case) of inquiring about background, race, and family ties. The most recent attempt was completed in 1965 by Jenkins with some success. He managed to avoid the "taboo" issues, but relied heavily upon life histories and stories advanced by White "natives" of the area. Other than Jenkins' work, however, there is virtually no literature on the Freejacks. Even Price's (1962) excellent and comprehensive study of mixed-blood populations fails to include this group.

Although the name Freejack is well known in the parishes surrounding the Fifth Ward Settlement, it is unknown throughout the rest of the state.
The name is little known even in the nearby large cities, except in the State Bureau of Vital Statistics, where the Freejacks' reputation and struggle for White identity has been dealt with for years.

It is precisely for these reasons that this writer selected the Freejacks for study. Working with a group that had literally not been penetrated and trying to understand these "mysterious and puzzling people," to use Hudson's terms (1971:8), were the necessary stimuli to complete this study.

Before beginning a discussion of the Fifth Ward Settlement, however, it is necessary to place this tri-racial marginal group in a perspective relative to other mixed-blood groups.
CHAPTER I

CONCERNING MARGINAL PEOPLES: AN INTRODUCTORY SURVEY
OF THE LITERATURE

From the very beginning of this country there has been intermixture between races due to their side-by-side existence. Mixtures occurred of White and Indian, White and Negro, Indian and Negro, and all conceivable combinations of combinations. "While the offsprings of such unions could not be biologically classified (and by their existence defy the popular meaning of race), many of them did undoubtedly become accepted and identified with one of the three recognized stocks; but in certain areas, these offsprings became 'marginal people' who fell outside of the three established circles. In time, these pockets of humanity came to occupy distinct areas, with more or less recognizable, if variable, physical features, a name by which they were known in the surrounding community, and often a reputation as well" (Pollitzer 1972:719).

Thus, explains Werner, (1974:3), "A person classified as White who claims some Indian ancestry--perhaps the proverbial Cherokee grandmother--is not thereby classified as a member of one of these mixed categories, neither is a person who is legally Black, but who actually has some White or Indian ancestry. Rather, we are dealing with small,
named populations with hereditary membership, reputedly but seldom actually endogamous, whose residence may be restricted to a specific area, who are believed to be genetically and culturally distinct from their neighbors, and who occupy a distinct--usually low ranking--conceptual position in their neighbors' categorization of races."

In the most definitive work to date on racially mixed isolates, Edward T. Price (1962:5) succinctly outlines three criteria for such groups:

1. The people must be racial mixtures of White and non-White groups, Indian and/or Negro peoples presumably constituting the non-White element;

2. They must have a social status differing from that accorded Whites, Indians, or Negroes in the area such as to throw them generally together in their more personal social relationships; and

3. They must exist in such numbers and concentrations as to be recognized in their locality as such a group and usually to be identified by a distinguishing group name.

The criteria for these groups is generally agreed upon; however, a multitude of names for this type of group has developed over the years. The older term "racial island" is sometime used. "Submerged races," "quasi-Indians," "micro-races," and "middle people" are also common (Griessman 1972:693). Brewton Berry prefers the name "mestizo" (1963:40), although the term is more typically reserved for mixed peoples with Spanish blood. "Mestizo" has been used in mixed groups in general, however, since as early as the 1854 U.S. Census. Pollitzer (1972:719) and Griessman (1972:693) prefer the term "marginal peoples." Werner
(1974:1) uses "interstitial" to describe the peculiar position of these peoples between social spheres.

The author feels that the term "isolate" is perhaps the best term when discussing the historical development of groups such as the Fifth Ward Settlement. In recent years, however, social change has been so rapid, accompanied by the breakdown of many racial barriers, that this term no longer accurately reflects the status of these racially-mixed groups. "Marginal" or "interstitial" seems to be the most descriptive in that these terms incorporate the differing social status required by Price's criteria, yet allude to their increasing interactions with the mainstream of society. In addition, the terms "marginal" or "interstitial" do not limit the scope of this type of study strictly to tri-racial groups. In fact, the actual racial composition of most groups, including the Fifth Ward Settlement, is probably quite varied and speculative.

Certain of the groups herein represent a mixture of only two races. But, as Hicks and Kertzer point out (1972:8), a "bi-polar model" is quite prevalent in the American "ideology of race." This is especially true in the South, where a rigid hierarchy has been established based on the presence or absence of Negro blood (Fischer 1968:135; Hicks 1964, 1965; Nash 1962). "They" is anyone who is not White (Werner 1974:89). Thus, regardless of the specific mixtures—i.e., whether Indian is part of the mixture—the place of mixed-racial groups in the stratified society, is the same: "middleman of a three-tiered hierarchy, with White occupying the..."
level above, and the Negro the level below (Stanton 1971:82)." Certainly this is, in general, the proper categorization. This is not strictly the case with the Freejacks, however, for certain of their number actually occupy a lower strata than even the Negro. (See page 78 for a discussion of this point).

**Distribution**

Marginal peoples are widely distributed geographically. Their locations vary almost as widely as do their names, manners and customs.

Two basic generalizations can be made about these people: (1) They are determined not to be Negroes, and (2) they detest the epithets others have applied to them (Berry 1963:32).

"The mixed-blood groups are not closely associated with particular physical refuge areas in most cases; however, they live in areas generally marginal in soil fertility and irregular in utility, accessibility and settlement (Price 1953:149)." "Perhaps significantly," states Werner (1974:36), "these populations still tend to be found in marginal areas--swamps or mountains--that are not considered particularly desirable by the surrounding Whites." Stopp (1971:12) also points out that for the Alabama Cajuns, "the geographical isolation provided by the dense woodlands and swamps made this [area] a perfect location for this different kind of people to develop an increasing sense of social isolation."

The Fifth Ward Settlement, until the recent opening of the Causeway
to New Orleans, was a very isolated area. The land occupied by the Freejacks is marginal in fertility and has traditionally been accessible only via rough dirt roads. Thus few people were interested in exploiting the land in the Settlement area.

Social Stratification

The most important issue in discussing mixed-racial groups is that of social status or stratification. "Social stratification has been defined as the differential ranking of the human individuals who compose a given social system, and their treatment as superior and inferior relative to one another in certain important aspects. Every society known has some type of classification of the relationships among its members (Roy 1959:31)."

The terms for mixed-blooded groups are not merely labels for genetic mixtures. These terms signify an actual social category (Hudson 1971:8). The ambiguity of the category, however, makes its use unclear and uncommon for most of mainstream society. Since these peoples do not fit into any of the "pure categories" of White, Black, or Red, marginal peoples have always been regarded as puzzling and mysterious (Hudson 1971:8).

Matters are complicated even more by the crossing of racial boundaries by the certain members or former members of the group. "They are obscure people in American life and many of them would prefer to remain unnoticed because they are keepers of secrets. Some of them or their
children, or their relatives, have crossed racial boundaries so that it would not do for them to receive much attention (Griessman 1972:693)."

Although the marginal communities are in close geographical proximity to White and Black communities, there is little inter-group contact. "The situation is not tense or marked by hate or strife, but it is not one of accord either. Jealousy, discontent, scorn, and rejection, are not far below the surface" (Stanton 1971:83).

Parenton and Pellegrin (1955:152) summarize the place of mixed racial groups in society by using the Sabines as an example. "Racially and culturally they are a marginal people. Rejected by the White society and unwilling to fraternize with the Negroes, the Sabines stand aloof--an endogamous group--suspended, so to speak, between two social worlds, reflecting in their lives the tragedy of a people doomed to racial isolation."

The only way out of this social limbo is by "passing." This term refers to passing as White. Of course, regardless of individual characteristics, these people are not socially accepted in places where they are recognized as members of a certain marginal group. Hence, the anonymity of a large metropolitan center is particularly attractive to those wishing to "pass" and who are willing to migrate (Parenton and Pellegrin 1955:152). New Orleans and Baton Rouge are popular areas to which the Free-jacks can "escape."

"All cases of successful passing...indicate that the adoption of certain values and the exhibition of a style of life signifying some financial
success is necessary" (Jenkins 1965:149). Most often, passing in the Fifth Ward Settlement is achieved through marriage. A "good marriage," or marriage to a mate already accepted as White, is the best way to improve one's status. Whatever the process, however, "passing" is the major factor affecting social mobility.

Origin and Development

There is no single, simple explanation for the origin of marginal peoples; if, indeed, there can be found any explanation at all. Each group seems to have its own traditions and stories about its origin. However, all seem united in trying to deny any Negro heritage.

One such story is that of Frilot Cove, St. Landry Parish, Louisiana. These marginal peoples "...cherish a legend which explains and dignifies their origin. Early in the Nineteenth Century, they say, around 1836, their community was established by four French settlers.... These, they report with pride, were like White men, well-educated, who spoke and wrote pure, beautiful French. Their ambition was to found an ideal society. The settlement did indeed prosper, and it became the pride and envy of the entire State. Though they themselves were White, they took quadroon women for their wives. The people of Frilot Cove talk freely about their male forebears, but have little to say of the female" (Berry 1963:169).

Berry points out (1963:170), however, that the truth of Frilot Cove,
and other similar communities, is not known. Certainly the explanation retrieved from the oral traditions of the community is a viable possibility, but there are many other possibilities as well.

In the South, especially in Louisiana, there was a considerable population of Free Men of Color. "Among the Free Colored the females outnumbered the males, whereas in the White group, the males were greatly in the majority. It is not surprising then that many of the White men took the females of the mestizo class as their wives" (Berry 1963:171).

Before the Civil War there were many "Free Men of Color" who owned plantations and slaves, and enjoyed considerable prestige (Berry 1963:170). "Local records which document the participation of the Free People of Color indicate their inclusion in exclusive or elite social organizations. Their domination of many spheres of social and economic life indicates the historical lack of color prejudice and the ease of passage into larger society" (Jenkins 1965:60). "It is therefore not surprising that these people were quite unwilling, when slavery was abolished, to see themselves relegated to the category of 'black masses' and they therefore withdrew to themselves. In such a manner was the Frilot Cove community formed" (Berry 1963:170). "This was probably also a major factor in the formation of the Alabama Cajun settlement" (Stopp 1971:10), and was most certainly important in the development of the Fifth Ward Settlement.

In the slave states the mixture of Black and White took place as a rather common occurrence on plantations. The taking of Black mistresses
by the slave master was often a source of great pride\textsuperscript{1} (and satisfaction, no doubt) to the master. After the Civil War it was not uncommon in some parts of the South for the plantation owner to use both Indians and Negroes for labor (Jacobson 1954:16). Thus, tri-racial populations grew up around these plantations.

White men were not the only people to keep Black slaves. Hudson (1971:7) reports the use of the Black slaves by the Cherokees. The Chickasaw are also reported to have carried out frequent raiding parties in Louisiana for Negro slaves (Willis 1971:109). Both reports confirm that White masters were not the only ones to have slave mistresses; thus, racial mixing also occurred between Black and Indian.

Most "Indian" groups today have considerable White and Black blood mixture. As Berry (1963:7) states, "....the term 'Indian' nowadays has very little relation to racial purity. Officially classified as Indians are many individuals whose ancestry is largely that of other races."

Some of the derision and rejection by the "good people" of White and Black society resulted from the bad reputations of communities which originated as "refuge areas." Runaway slaves, military deserters, fugitives from the law—all were often accepted by remnant Indian groups or already established hybrid isolate groups (Stanton 1971:82). This was

\footnote{See Bastide (1971:33) and Herskovits (1928:3) for a detailed discussion of racial mixing in the American Negro population.}
especially prevalent in the Fifth Ward Settlement area, where during the colonial period lawless elements were even encouraged to settle in a territory where little enforcement of the law existed (Jenkins 1965:39).

An overview indicates that there are at least five major ways that groups of marginal peoples were established:

1. The inevitable racial mixtures resulting from the three races coexisting side-by-side,
2. The taking of wives of mixed blood by early White settlers,
3. The retreat of Free Men of Color from White society after the Civil War,
4. the relationships established between slave holders and slaves, and
5. The establishment of "refuge areas."

"The simplest space relationship occurs when the racial mixing and the growth of the groups have both taken place in the area in which the group is now found" (Price 1950:24). Unfortunately the study of all marginal groups cannot follow this simple form because some groups have migrated as a group from their site of origin to other areas.

Migrations of mixed-blood groups most certainly took place; the most common form of migration, however, seems to have been of individuals or small family units rather than entire communities. "Census and current data on the distribution of surnames suggest the past existence of a connected mixed-blood society in Virginia and the Carolinas, whose emigrants settled in other recognized sites on moving westward" (Price
1950:1). The Redbones of Louisiana is one group that exhibits the in­fluence of migrations of marginal peoples from South Carolina (Price 1953:143). The Fifth Ward Settlement would appear to be another.

The key factor in the establishment of marginal groups is isolation. This isolation "may be expected by some kind of topographic barrier or by the occupation of undesirable areas" (Price 1963:24). Not only does isolation help explain the origins and the economic situation of these people, but is also the key to survival. The Coe Ridge colony of Tennessee, for example, "survived only as a product of its own time, favored by the conditions of poor communication and transportation typical of the entire surrounding areas" (Montell 1972:4).

There were other factors, aided by the isolation of the groups, that also functioned as forces allowing these communities to persist. "Generally these forces were (1) legal, (2) religious, and (3) educational" (Dane and Griessman 1972:699).

(1) From a purely physical standpoint, the legal forces were of the utmost importance. These laws delineated race and prevented marriages of Whites to Blacks. Thus, due to the hatred for Blacks, marginal people were forced to marry within their group (Dane and Griessman 1972:699).

(2) One of the focal points of social life for marginal people, as for other rural people, were the churches. "Yet the status of the... churches is as ambiguous as is the social status of their members" (Dane and Griessman). It can be said, however, that the church has been a
very strong force in the preservation and stability of these groups. Like most rural communities, the church is a major center of meeting for the community. In recent years especially, "....where separate schools have been closed, the church is usually the only formal social arrangement of the mixed-racial community, and that reinforces the endogamous marriage patterns of the past" (Beale:707).

(3) Often an outgrowth of the church was the school. Education has been probably the strongest course of unity in the marginal communities (Dane and Griessman 1972:700).

The preceding discussion is intended, mainly, to give a brief overview of the literature concerning these groups as well as to emphasize a few points basic to all marginal groups. The Fifth Ward Settlement shares many of the characteristics of other tri-racial groups. Yet the development of the Settlement is unique and certain aspects of the mixed-blood society is manifest in the Freejack Settlement that has not been observed in other groups. This thesis deals with those unique characteristics.
CHAPTER II

PROBLEMS, METHODOLOGY, AND LIMITATIONS

Studying marginal groups is not as simple as going into the community and announcing that a study will be made. Establishing the right contacts within the group is always a problem; in fact, making any contacts at all is a problem in a marginal community (Price 1962:18). Any outsider is viewed "with attitudes varying from doubt to hostility" (Stopp 1972:2), and many anthropologists have experienced the latter. In one of the most recent attempts to investigate a mixed-blood group called Melungeons, Werner (1974:5) discovered that firsthand ethnographic material was impossible to gather for fear of being "rocked" or "thrown out of town at gun point."

"In many ways a person who studies these peoples is like a surveyor who gets into an area where there has been a boundary dispute. Some of the principals would prefer that he would stay away and let matters be. The reason is that through the years boundaries have been formed and agreements have been reached. An investigator, even though careful and fair, can disturb or threaten these arrangements. Closely guarded secrets may be exposed, sometimes especially volatile when
the secrets have to do with racial impurity" (Griessman 1972:694). Thus, racial classification and anything related to race are extremely important concepts to these groups (Stopp 1972:5); in fact, they are first on the list of potentially explosive topics an outsider should avoid. Because of this situation it is difficult to find informants willing to share the secret of the community; or, if such sources are found, they may not be willing to be identified as such.

This, as previously mentioned, is the case of the Fifth Ward Settlement. All informants agreed to impart information, if--and only if--their anonymity was guaranteed. It is difficult for an outsider to imagine the seriousness or volatility of mixed-racial groups over their place in society. The Freejacks have worked very hard for many years to maintain the delicate balance establishing their position of "dignity" in the larger society, and they are not about to let anyone upset this balance. There are no measures too extreme that can be taken to insure the security of the community. Three times the life of this researcher was threatened by three different individuals of the Fifth Ward Settlement. The first two threats were taken lightly, for, even though this writer had been made aware of the potential dangers of this study by many White "natives" of the area, it was impossible to believe that the circumstances were as serious as had been represented. The third threat, however, was dramatic and sufficiently convincing to require that several precautionary measures be taken. When consulting a White
informant at the Court House, the writer was amazed to discover that the informant had already been told of these threats through people from the Fifth Ward Settlement "who knew"! He had already alerted the sheriff, and then asked that the researcher deliver to him a sealed envelope containing the names of the persons who had made the threats. "It won't be opened," he promised, "unless something happens to you." After those encouraging words, he then insisted that a daily schedule be left with a roommate listing the places to be visited and the time of return. If return was not as scheduled, "have him (the roommate) call me. I'll call the sheriff, he knows what you're doing and he'll know what to do."

Later that day it seemed appropriate to visit the house of one of the most trusted Settlement informants, and a well-respected leader in the area to discuss these threats. "Son," he said, "there are some folks around here who'd like to kill you—and you don't know how close you've come. You ask too many questions and folks don't like it—you got to be real careful the kind of questions you ask. Now, Son, you've told me what you're trying to do here—collecting information about old times and all—and I believe you. People around here believe in me and I've told them you're all right. Now if anything ever happens to prove me wrong, you're gonna have a lot of folks after you." The informant was assured that no harm was meant and there was no intention to hurt anyone or anything.

"Anyhow," he sternly added, "you'd better stay away for a week or
so while things around here settle down." His advice was heeded and upon return to the community after an absence of ten days, "things" had indeed settled down. In fact, thenceforth, cooperation was markedly better and Settlement informants were more open, assured, and trusting.

This experience occurred in the early stages of the field work. It is cited here to emphasize four very important points. First, this type of research is serious business. Even the author, who felt fairly knowledgeable about the problems one could encounter in studies of mixed-racial groups, had no notion of the full impact of the hostility that can result from being a "meddling outsider."

Second, racially-mixed communities have put up a long and difficult struggle to obscure their racial heritage. Thus, seemingly routine questions by the field worker concerning "history," "race," "background," "kinship," and similar terms, may take on much different connotations with the community than is intended by the researcher. Questions or comments made using such terms automatically trigger reactions much different than if the same were used in a White or Black community.

Third, the importance of the proper selection of informants within the community cannot be underestimated, nor can the influence of these informants within the community. Thus, how a fieldworker selects and later gets along with his informants can have a great deal to do with how he gets along with the rest of the group.

Fourth, the reason for the fieldworker being in the community is
extremely important. This reason or purpose must be able to withstand the closest scrutiny and fit into a "safe" or "acceptable" category of the group being studied. The very presence of a fieldworker is a threat, but if his stated purpose is accepted as tenable by key leaders in the community, then he can make progress in the study.

Due to the special problems involved in studying marginal groups, it is necessary to modify traditional approaches to community studies. Research models have, on the most part, been built around the fact that marginal communities are hard or impossible to penetrate. The writer was at a great advantage over others who had previously tried to study the Fifth Ward Settlement. Having spent much time in the area over a period of eight years previous to making this study, most of the area and many of the Freejack names and faces were familiar.

Introduction to the Fifth Ward Settlement came through a college friend, who is the son of a well respected White farmer of the area. This friend had taken the writer to places that would have otherwise been disastrous to attempt to enter alone. Because the friend is well liked, and his family among the few trusted White families of the area, we were welcome and able to visit Freejack bars, dances, parties, rodeos, stores, and churches in a routine manner. Thus, by the time this study was begun, the fieldworker was fairly well known in the Settlement, and, through association with the college friend, considered a "safe" outsider.
Before actually approaching people and thus beginning the process of selection of informants, considerable background work was done. Visits with local historians were first on the list. These visits led to their eliciting support of the researcher in helping to prepare articles for the Bicentennial Commission on folk tales, and another for the local Historical Commission on oral history of the area. Consenting to help with both of these projects gave the perfect reasons for being in the Settlement area—as well as establishing a purpose within an "acceptable" category and association with "safe" groups.

A search for parish records of the Settlement's Catholic Mission led to the local Abbey and a third request to assist in compiling a history of the Mission. This gave yet another reason for asking questions about the Settlement. I soon found, however, that this line of questioning led to distrust once the fieldworker tried to get off the subject of the Mission. Therefore the two previously mentioned "reasons" were used in preference.

Officials at the Abbey did, however, furnish a wealth of photographs, articles, journals, and notes concerning the Mission and its founding. In addition, acquaintance was made of a Sister at the nearby Convent, who had taught at the Mission School for many years. It was through this woman that penetration of another rather large segment of the Settlement was attained, which would have otherwise been quite difficult or inaccessible.
Mention has been made about informants and informant selection, but perhaps more should be said concerning data collection in general or, as Pelto calls it, the "facts of research" (1970:89). There are two major categories of data based on the sources from which the information is obtained: (1) primary, which is collected directly from living sources; and, (2) secondary, which is obtained from documents.

The four sources most commonly used in obtaining primary data are:

1. informants outside the group,
2. oral history,
3. participant—observation, and
4. informants within the group.¹

The latter two of these methods are available to anthropologists only if contacts can be established within the community and some degree of acceptance secured. Not all studies have been able to achieve this degree of acceptance by an outsider.

According to Price (1962:12), "mixed-bloods know little or nothing of their origins and that what they may believe has already been communicated to their white confidants." Therefore, a great deal can be learned about the origins and developments of their groups by using the information obtained from local White and Black people. Interesting

¹For a detailed discussion of these methods, see Pertti Pelto's *Anthropological Research* (1970:89-149).
contrasts in viewpoints can also be obtained through the use of informants from all social strata.

This study relies very heavily on all four of these methods of primary data collection. Secondary sources are also considered important by the writer, especially in trying to unravel the complex origins and development of the Fifth Ward Settlement.

A surprisingly extensive collection of lawsuits, conveyances, successions, civil suits involving name changes, maps, land and tax records are available at one of the courthouses concerning the people of the Settlement. After much digging and comparing, and with tremendous advice, assistance and encouragement from the knowledgeable woman in charge of the "archives," a fairly concise picture of the origins and subsequent changes within the Settlement began to emerge. It is interesting to note the contrast in availability of materials at this courthouse as compared to that of the neighboring Parish. Many, in fact most, pertinent records had "mysteriously disappeared" from the records of the other courthouse. Later it was learned that a past parish official had "arranged" for this disappearance because his wife was a Freejack. It was reported that materials had to be hidden in the first courthouse mentioned to protect them from being "borrowed" by the Clerk of Court of the neighboring parish; furthermore, the lady in charge of these records reported she had been "backed up against the wall" numerous times by various Settlement individuals who wanted these records destroyed.
From the ante-bellum period until relatively recent times, racial classification was recorded in conjunction with any legal transaction. Thus, it is possible to trace via these documents the varying status of the same Settlement family. Census schedules and the records of the State Land Office and the United States Bureau also give a great deal of evidence concerning origin and development of the Settlement. Many problems result from the use of such data, however, for a considerable degree of confusion results from a lack of a uniform standard for "Free Men of Color." One census report would report a family as White, whereas the next census might record the same family as Free Colored or Mulatto (Jenkins 1965:65). There was also confusion over names of these marginal peoples. "Most...were illiterate in the days when the census records were taken; each census taker spelled the names as he heard them pronounced.... Whether the people knew their ages and birth places is sometimes doubtful; variations in the item from census to census and duplications of whole families in different subdivisions of each county constitute observed proof that records are not perfect" (Price 1962:13).

Outside of the public records, however, there is a general lack of records of any sort. The isolation of these peoples and the derision of the White literate society certainly did not earn the Freejack a place in the local newspaper or history books.

There are far more perplexing limitations, however, than the
shortage of reliable secondary data sources. Not the least of which is the ever-present peril of the fieldworker: lack of time. When the priest began the Settlement Mission School, he instructed the two nuns who were to teach that it would take them five years to understand the people—just to understand them. "For them to trust you," he reportedly continued, "it will take a lifetime."

The writer does not pretend to understand fully the people of the Fifth Ward Settlement; in fact, only the surface of the Settlement has been exposed. Nor does the writer believe that he is a trusted member of the community, eligible to receive all the "mysterious secrets" of the Freejacks. The writer has been a sporadic visitor to the Settlement for nine years, and a quasi-resident for six months. The purpose of this thesis is to report what has been observed during that time in hopes that some light may be shed on the racially-mixed marginal group herein called "The Settlement."
One of the three major qualifications for a community to be classified as a racially-mixed isolate or marginal group is the development of a distinctive group name. Recalling one of Price's criteria (1962:5), "They must exist in such numbers and concentrations to be recognized in their locality as such a group and usually to be identified by a distinguishing group name."

This is not simply an arbitrary statement resulting from a generalization about mixed-groups, but a very real requirement for development and maintenance of the community. For only when there are enough individuals of mixed-race to receive a name, can these people assume a group or community identity.

The assumption of a group identity, as has already been pointed out, is often imposed upon the marginal group against its will and, indeed, usually with serious objection. Nonetheless, the identity has been established and is made viable through continued use by the other population strata. A formalization of the group's existence is then
followed by a solidification of social boundaries. ¹

This undoubtedly comes about because it is much easier to perpe-
trate generalities about a group than it is to create prejudice against
many individuals. Once a name for the marginal group has been estab-
lished, other strata of the society find it easier to attach labels, develop
stereotypes, and advance derogatory generalizations about the groups.
Naming can also signal to scattered individuals of mixed-race the ex-
istence of a group of "their kind."

Perhaps it is advisable to reiterate at this point Hudson's insistence
that the names for mixed-blooded groups are not merely labels for genetic
mixtures, but rather signify an actual social category (1971:8). For the
inhabitants of the Fifth Ward Settlement, however, the name "Freejack"
not only denotes a particular genetic mixture and social category, but
also pinpoints an exact geographic location—a specific community. This
is not always the case. The term "Redbone", for example, refers to a
racial and social category of mixed-blooded peoples scattered over a
tremendous area of western Louisiana. The "Melungeons" illustrate an-
other somewhat different example. Several "Melungeon" communities
are described in a limited area of Eastern Tennessee and Southwestern
Virginia, but which, according to Werner (1974:83), may not actually be
related to "true" Melungeons at all. "The fact that the term "Melungeon"

¹ For a discussion of social boundaries see Cohen (1969:103).
most exactly coincides with this geographical area seems to indicate more about cultural unity in this region of the state than biological unity among all the people to whom the term applies."

A sharp contrast to this is noted with the Fifth Ward Settlement. There are at least three additional communities of people with similar racial mixtures within thirty miles of the Settlement. Yet only in the Fifth Ward Settlement are the inhabitants called "Freejacks." In contrast to the Melungeon or Redbone then, the use of the term "Freejack" would seem to indicate a community that has not only a high degree of cultural unity, but also a high degree of biological unity.

The name "Freejack" is derogatory. As for other racially-mixed groups, it encompasses all the prejudices and biases ascribed to marginal peoples. The term is primarily used by Whites, and as one White informant stated: "I don't know for sure how they got that name 'Freejack,' but I know it sure describes that group real well--and when you say 'to somebody around here 'Freejack,' they know what you mean exactly."

Black informants indicated that "Freejack" is used between Blacks when discussing people of the Settlement, but only when privacy is assured. The name is never used by a Black in talking with a White, however, unless the White can unquestionably be trusted. Blacks have most often been the object of the wrath and volatility of the "Freejacks," and they strive very hard to avoid any confrontation.
Using the term "Freejack" indiscriminantly—or even being overheard using it—would assure trouble. Nonetheless, Blacks attribute the name "Freejack" to the Whites, and more often use their own designation for the Freejacks—"Crackers." "Cracker" is in rather common usage by Blacks in the South in referring to the traditional "poor white trash."

However, in the Settlement area, "Cracker" takes on a slightly different meaning. When asked why "Cracker" was used to describe these people, one Black explained: "because they are like those soda crackers—all white and all, but with little brown spots." Thus "Cracker" has been taken and modified into a term that reflects the Black's knowledge about the Freejack's mixed blood and is limited to describing Settlement inhabitants; the term is not used to describe any other white group or individuals.

"Freejack" is never used jokingly by anyone in the Settlement. One Settlement member would never call another a "Freejack" unless a fight was in order. One incident was witnessed in a crowded bar that resulted from an inhabitant calling another a Freejack. Pistols were drawn and participants squared off. Fortunately, some sobriety rallied from a few bar frequenters and those riled were hustled outside to settle things with their fists. As usual the barkeeper himself was too drunk to be thankful that his establishment was not dirtied with blood and bullet holes, but the writer, not more than four feet away, was immensely relieved.

There are several stories used to explain the origin and derivation
of the term "Freejacks." These explanations offer some insights into attitudes about inhabitants of the Fifth Ward Settlement.

(1) The only thing of any type published about the Freejacks is a small tourist-type book called Why Louisiana Has (1947:34). In this booklet, Andrew Navard (pseudonymed "André Cajun") claims that the term 'Free Jack' originated from an old Louisiana custom. "In the early days a group of farmers who desired to raise mules, pooled the necessary amount of cash and purchased a Jack (a male donkey), and turned the animal loose on open range. When a farmer required the services of the animal, he would round up the Jack, and after a period of time drive it back to the open range to be at the disposal of another farmer—hence the term "free jack."

There is no historical basis—folk or otherwise—to add any credence to this explanation. If the story itself is not enough to lead one to dismiss the factual basis of this tale, certainly the author's pseudonym would remove the last vestige!

(2) A second explanation is equally amusing, though a little more colorful. It was related by a well-respected White rancher in the Settlement area. Fancying himself as a local historian, he began to explain: "You see, son, when them Indians lived round here—and that wasn't too long ago—those young warriors'd go off on raiding parties for months at a time and they'd leave their women behind. I mean to tell you, son, some of those Indian women were beautiful—that long black hair and
dark eyes and pretty complexion. Well, you see they got kinda lonely--
you know what I mean--for their menfolk and they kinda liked White men, too. So the menfolk around would venture off to the Indian camps for some free "jack." "What's free jack?" I asked with programmed naïveté. With semi-disgust he replied: "Jack is what you have to pay to get down at those bawdy houses in New Orleans!"

There may be some factual basis to this explanation, but probably very little. This story was related by two different individuals, so it apparently has a few devotees.

(3) By far the most popular explanation for the origin of the name "Freejack" concerns Andrew Jackson and the Battle of New Orleans. Of the thirty Whites asked about the derivation of "Freejack," twenty-four of them advanced this story or a variation thereof.

When Andrew Jackson came from Tennessee to help defend New Orleans in the War of 1812, he and his troops traveled the Natchez Trace. The Trace ran from Nashville to Natchez and an extension, called the "Turnpike," continued on to New Orleans.²

The Turnpike ran through the center of the Fifth Ward Settlement--or, more correctly, the Settlement grew up along the Turnpike. Jackson and his generals, especially General Coffee, needed labor to assist with paramilitary activities (i.e.,--to be carpenters, blacksmiths, __________

² See Watson (1965), Hyde (1964), and DeGrummond (1961:79).
cooks, etc.). Slaves were acquired (some informants say they were bought, others say they were donated) from local farmers to perform these tasks. After the successful expulsion of the British in the Battle of New Orleans, Jackson freed these slaves and gave them land grants in the Settlement area as a reward for their services. To prove their freedom, the former slaves were given slips of paper with the simple notice—"Men of Color, Freed by Jackson." According to informants, Jackson's signature was said to have been hurriedly scrawled so that only "Free Jack" was legible.

There is absolutely no historical or factual basis to this account. Neither courthouse records nor the American State Papers bears out the notion that any land was granted to these "former slaves." Likewise in none of the numerous histories of Louisiana or the Battle of New Orleans is there any evidence whatsoever to substantiate the notion that Jackson freed any slaves, nor even had the power to do so. There is also a major conflict of terms in this explanation. "Men of Color" were already free and themselves could own slaves, therefore, "Men of Color Freed..." is a contradiction. The lack of distinction between Men of Color and slaves is a post-Emancipation Proclamation development and is unfortunately still prevalent in today's writings about the ante-bellum South. Therefore, this explanation is probably a relatively modern development.

(4) A somewhat different account seems historically and factually more possible. According to two White informants, the name "Freejack"
is derived from "Men of Color who fought for Jackson." A search of Casey's (1963:ixii) compilation of men who fought in Fortier's (Lacoste's) First Battalion of Free Men of Color, shows no less than twenty-three individuals who later reappear as residents of the original Settlement. Thus, even though this explanation was advanced by only a few White residents, it seems to be supported by documentary evidence. One major fallacy, however, makes this explanation tenuous: Casey's list does not show a single member of the Rahab family, which was the nucleus for the Fifth Ward Settlement.

(5) Another account is heard that is quite simple, yet historically feasible. In the South, "Jack" was a common name for Blacks and was used by Whites to refer to Black males in general. Thus, people who were mixed-racially, but who were not slaves, could quite logically be called "Free Jacks." The writer favors this explanation as being the most feasible.

The correct explanation of the origin of the term Freejack is impossible to determine. Local documents and historical records, however, point rather conclusively to a combination of the last two accounts. Unravelling the origin of the term is not as important as analyzing why

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3 For information concerning the role of Free People of Color in Jackson's defenses of New Orleans, see McConnell (1968) and Christian (1965:19).

4 See Collins (1972:1289) and Cohen (1971:90-91) concerning use of the term "Jack."
certain explanations predominate over others. It is indicative, for example, that the most prevalent account of Whites—that Freejack means "men of color freed by Jackson"—is the least plausible based on historical evidence. It is also significant that this explanation is most evident in members of the White community under fifty years of age. Older persons believe that Freejacks were simply "free-niggers."

This may indicate that the former explanation was later in its development, or perhaps more accurately, later in general acceptance. The tendency for younger people to adhere to the "freed by Jackson" account is possibly due to a change in attitudes toward these people. To older generations, Freejacks were indeed the "scum of the earth," and it was harder to be scummier than "free-nigger" to middle class White Southerners. Today, Freejacks, although in a social strata lower than that of the White, are thought to have made considerable advancements and are admired by some Whites for their hard work and honesty. Thus, the idea that they are "men of color freed by Jackson" satisfies both needs of the White in summarizing the status of the Freejack. A degree of honor is afforded anyone who fought for Andrew Jackson in the famous Battle of New Orleans and is worthy of praise, but the ever important stigma of being a descendent of a Negro is preserved.

The support that this notion gets from Whites is even more interesting in light of the contrast with Black ideas. Without exception, all the Blacks encountered advanced the explanation that Freejacks were simply
freed Negroes. This is not surprising, for Blacks contend that the Freejacks are, according to one informant, "just colored people trying to pretend they ain't."

One perspective is missing: How do the Freejacks account for their name? In a fortunate and rare interview, one Settlement inhabitant talked about being a Freejack and explained the derivation of the name as follows:

(6) "The first settlers in these parts were English. They came to America as indentured servants and settled in these parts. That's the only way they could afford to get over here. They had to work for a long time and then after they'd worked off their indenture, they'd be free to do what they wanted. So I guess when they were free—lot of 'em would be called 'Jack something'—and they'd just say to him, 'you're free Jack,' and that's how most of our families got that name."

This amazing story gives a third angle of insight into naming. There is no mention in this account of any racial mixture; quite the contrary, acceptable English ancestors are used to explain the origins.

These six accounts are, therefore, more than simple attempts to explain the origins of a term. They represent the contrasting attitudes of the three strata of society in the Settlement area, and they point out that a name is considerably more important than just to help indentify a group of people.
CHAPTER IV

SETTLEMENT ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

An historical perspective of the Fifth Ward Settlement offers some of the answers as to why it remains unique despite its associations with and close proximity to other racially-mixed groups. The following discussion is a brief description of the origin and development of the Freejack community.

The Early Days

In 1785 a Spanish land grant was awarded to Jean Baptiste Raab, who settled on the coast and established the oldest village in the area (Schwartz, 1963:5-8). He had five sons, two of whom established consensual unions with Free Women of Color and produced at least seven acknowledged children each. A third son liked to "wander," and was said to have had a different "wife" for each night of his weekly hunting trips up and down the nearby river.\(^1\)

Since miscegenous marriages were not recognized in the state at

\(^1\)This is a widespread local legend among Whites and is also told by Freejacks. There is some evidence that this may have actually occurred: See Case #117 (8th Judicial District Court, 1850).
this time, the progeny of these three Raab brothers were declared illegitimate and, therefore, non-heirs to their fathers' relatively wealthy estates. Some of these children remained in the original or Coastal Community, but most of the males migrated up the river to fend for themselves.

By 1840, several of the Raab family had been granted American patents to homestead land in what is now the Fifth Ward Settlement. In addition, four other families of Free People of Color from the Coastal Community had intermarried with the Raabs and had also applied for land patents. Mystery surrounds these other four families. Local legends maintain that they were descendent of LaFitte's Baratarians; indeed, that one family descended from one of LaFitte's pirate captains. It is very possible that there is some factual basis to this. The majority of the Free People of Color, however, entered the state during the slave

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2 For information on the laws restricting Blacks and forbidding miscegenous marriages, see Rousseve (1937:24) and Castellonos (1859: 300-301); also see the Civil Code, Article 95 (1878).

3 This account is based on successions filed in the courthouse in 1848, 1852.

4 Land transactions are carefully recorded in courthouse records. For information about original colonial grants from England, France, and Spain that were recognized by the American government, see the American State Papers.

5 Jane DeGrummond, in The Baratarians and the Battle of New Orleans, touches on the activities of the Baraterians in the Settlement area in the first two chapters of her book.
rebellions in Haiti (1791-1809), where even inhabitants of mixed-blood were driven out or massacred in order to reestablish a pure Negro state. Many of these people came to Louisiana and the four family names in question are typical of those refugees. Whatever their origin, these five families formed a nucleus for the Settlement population which must have been fairly dense for the frontier piney woods of the early 1800's.

Already in the Settlement area were two other families (recipients of Spanish grants). Interestingly enough, both family names are quite common in many mixed-blood groups of the Old South. One name in particular is spelled so peculiarly that it is difficult to dismiss the possibility of this family's migration from South Carolina, where the family name is spelled the same peculiar way. Many of the Freejacks believe their ancestors came from South Carolina and Georgia and both families in question are today considered mixed-bloods. There is simply no proof one way or the other, however, as to when their mixture occurred.

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6 Both Rightor's and Gayerre's histories of Louisiana record in detail this event. For a short summary of the revolt and its effect on Louisiana, see Nicaud (1973:285-305); Stahl (1942:301-302); and Costellonos (1859:300-301). For an interesting early interpretation of these events, see DeBow's Review, Vol. VXXVI, Article III (1859), pp. 526-538.

7 Edward Price (1953:138-155) believes migration of these mixed-blooded people took place very early and traced some of the family names to prove his point. It is possible that these two families were already racially-mixed before settling in the area. Court records (Case #1140, 26th Judicial District) show that these families were indeed from South Carolina.
Most of the settlers established rather profitable farms and were wealthy enough to own slaves. The distinction between Free People of Color and Freed Negroes becomes extremely important at this point. Free People of Color entered the state as free; they had never been slaves. Quite the contrary, many were well-educated and enjoyed a very high and privileged social status. They never associated socially with Blacks (freed or otherwise) and considered themselves far superior to any Negro, even though they themselves were part Negro. A "Freed-Negro" on the other hand, was a former slave and, therefore, was considered by the Free People of Color as being of very low status. However, as Anglo-American influence became more prevalent in the French-Spanish culture of the state, the bipolar ideas about race came to predominate. In addition, the South was panicky over the threat of a slave uprising as had occurred in Santo Domingo. Southerners erroneously felt that if such an occurrence came about, Free People of Color—because they were part Negro—would join in the annihilation of Whites. Therefore very

8 For a list of slave-owning Free People of Color, see Free Negro Owners of Slaves in the United States in 1830 by Carter Goodson (1924).

9 The importance of this distinction cannot be overemphasized, although it is seldom realized in histories of the state. Several important studies have been written about this very critical point: see Stahl (1934) and Sterx (1972).

10 Van DERM BERGHE wrote about the differences in the Anglo-Saxon, Germanic culture as compared to the tolerant Catholic, Latin cultures. He maintains these differences are extremely important (1963:424).
repressive laws were enacted to restrict severely the liberties of the Free People of Color, who had previously enjoyed all the freedoms offered to Whites.¹¹

This attempt to lower the status of the Free People of Color to that of the Negro led to a retreat by many into isolated communities of others in their category. The Fifth Ward Settlement increased in size due to this situation. At the same time, Anglo-American settlers were rapidly homesteading land surrounding the Settlement. By the Civil War the Settlement was totally encompassed by settlers primarily from the Carolinas and Georgia. With their Anglo-American racial conceptions, the people forced the Settlement to become geographically and socially more isolated, thereby developing an even greater sense of community and group identity. These settlers had no conception of the difference between a "Freejack" (for undoubtedly the name had been developed long before) and a Negro: "One drop of nigger blood makes a nigger," as the old saying goes.¹² This situation probably explains partially why the Fifth Ward Settlement is distinctly named. Other racially-mixed communities in the area were not surrounded by Anglo-Saxon settlers, but

¹¹See Costellonos (1859) and Stahl (1942:301-303), also especially Rousseve (1937:46-48).

¹²This distinction is actually more than a saying. In the state, any traceable Negro ancestry whatsoever, was all that was necessary to classify an individual as Negro. This law held true until 1970 when the legislature redefined a Negro (Act 46) as any individual with greater than 1/32 Negro ancestry.
rather the more racially tolerant Spanish-French (Creole) natives. In addition, the coastal settlements were somewhat older and had developed during less repressive times. There were few White families in the coastal areas who were not in some way related to the racially-mixed coastal groups. It was, therefore, more difficult for a coastal White family piously to denounce the racial hybrid than it was for those of "pure Anglo stock" surrounding the Settlement.

Another primary distinction of the Settlement over the Coastal Village was the additional mixture with the Indian. The Indian element is impossible to document. There simply is no evidence, other than oral history, to shed light upon this subject. It is known that Choctaw and/or Acolapissa were numerous in the Settlement area during the early history of the state, and undoubtedly the remaining vestiges of Indian culture in the area stem from these tribes.

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13 "Creole" is a common word in the South, but often misused. Here it is used in its original sense--anyone born in the state of French or Spanish parentage. An interesting discussion of the word and its use, see: Cabel (1884), Rightor (1900:185), and Gayarre (1903); also DeBow's Review, Vol. XXVIII, Article X (1860), pp. 98ff.


15 Bushnell (1909) and Swanton (1911) documented what information remained about these tribes. Bushnell specifically recorded much about the culture and traditions of the Choctaw community nearby the Settlement; also see The Louisiana Quarterly, Vol.1 (January 1917), p. 11.
Informants talk about Choctaw grandmothers and great-grandmothers—never about Choctaw grandfather or great-grandfather. Even today, several inhabitants claim Indian wives. One woman, who married a Settlement resident over fifty years ago, is a descendent of the last chief of the nearby Choctaw remnant community. In at least one important respect, the Fifth Ward Settlement is distinctive from other nearby mixed-blood groups: the Black-White mixture, which in itself held a distinctive place in ante-bellum Southern society, was well-established prior to the introduction of Indian blood. The Indian community a few miles away resulted from a remnant Indian population that later mixed with Blacks and Whites. The Coastal Village, a third mixed-blood group, is in some respects considered the "parent" of the Settlement, although no Indian ancestry is claimed in or by this group.

Phenotypically, there is little difference in these mixed-blood groups. In fact, if biological comparison could be determined, the differences in the Black-White-Indian genetic proportions would undoubtedly be negligible. Yet, the three are considered unique and separate by area locals, and are known by different terms. Thus the differing origins and developments of these communities has a continuing effect on the attitudes held by area residents.

Post Bellum

The repressive laws against Free People of Color prior to the Civil
War brought financial and social chaos to the Settlement. After the Civil War, when legal distinctions between Free People of Color and Freed-Negroes were completely eliminated, total economic and social disaster occurred. There were no longer any legal distinctions to protect them from being officially placed in the category they so despised—"Colored."

In 1908 a landmark case (#1140, 26th Judicial District Court, later Supreme Court Case #17500), the tragic legal struggle of the Freejacks to prove their White identity is best expressed. Two young girls (ages 7 and 9) boarded the White coach of a train to return home from the town. The conductor refused to allow them in the White coach and removed them to the "Colored" coach. When the train had started its journey, the young girls walked back to the White coach. After complaints by some of the riders in the White coach, the conductor demanded that the girls return to their "proper" coach or get off the train.

"Of course before we would go into the Nigger car we got off!" explained one of the girls in the court testimony.

The entire case testimony reads like a book documenting racism typical of the Jim Crow days. The attorney for the railroad, which was being sued for $15,000 in damages, tried to prove the girls were "Colored."

Q. "Is it a fact that your family associates with Colored people?"
A. "No, Sir!"

Q. "Don't the Colored people come to your house and visit and eat
meals there?"

A. "No, Sir! The best of people come to my father's house and eat there...."

Q. "Is it not a fact that you and your sister, your father and your mother, associate with Colored persons on terms of social equality?"

A. "No, Sir!"

Of the girl's father, the railroad's attorney asked:

Q. "Are you a White man!"

A. "Yes, Sir! I have always passed for a White man."

Q. "Is your wife a White woman?"

A. "I married her as a White woman and got a license for her to marry as White...she comes of a mixture--my mother said she was of Indian blood."

Q. "What was your father considered?"

A. "A Creole man."

Q. "Do negroes come to your place to eat at the same table on social equality with you?"

A. "No, Sir! They do not eat with us. After we are through they eat at a different table."

It was the girls' grandfather that became the focus of the case. He was one of the original Raab family settlers. The attorney then asked the grandfather....

Q. "Who was the girl's maternal grandfather?"
A. "Noah Raab."

Q. "What race did he belong to?"
A. "They always said he was Indian and Spanish."

Q. "Was he Negro?"
A. "I could not tell you, but he wasn't no 'colored-nigger'."

Q. "Was he darker than a Spaniard or an Indian?"
A. "Well, yes. A color between Spanish and Indian and that of a Negro, but not a 'black nigger'."

Q. "And his wife, what was she?"
A. "Said she was an Indian; she was called 'Squaw'."

Q. "Was he colored or not?"
A. "It's hard to tell...he was classed strict honest man...everybody looked up to him as a strict honest man...upright in every respect. But anything 'bout that race business, I don't know. Folks didn't inquire about such things as that then as they do in these days."

The attorney for the young girls called witness after witness to testify that the family did not associate with Negroes. He showed that the girls had gone to a White school in Mississippi and played with White children. All of this to no avail: the finding was for the defendant.

The judge cited the reasons for his decision were based on old records that reported Noah Raab, the girl's grandfather, to be a Free Person of Color. "Therefore," he wrote, "they were subject to be put in the Colored coach, under lack of definition in Louisiana as to what is
'colored'—I hold that any negro blood whatsoever makes one a 'colored person'."

This case was important, not simply because it was a very early court test of the Jim Crow Laws, but because it struck a hard blow at the dignity of the Freejacks and to their struggle to become recognized as White. Perhaps more importantly, however, it firmly established in the Freejack minds the importance of attending White schools or none at all, as well as reestablishing the old principle: a man is known by the company he keeps. This case undoubtedly reinforced the Settlement's determination to have no contact with people considered Black. It also pointed out that they were not safe as long as courthouse records existed proving that their ancestors were Free People of Color. Thus, systematic destruction of public records has rather effectively removed any documentary evidence in one of the courthouses.

The Freejacks were reduced to a level of poverty equal to that of the poorest Negro, and a position in which most remained for nearly fifty years. "We ate hawks, crows, buzzards, armadillo--anything that ran or flew, or moved, for that matter," explained one 93 year old resident. "Daddy grew everything else we needed--corn, potatoes, peanuts, rice, a few hogs and cattle, and sheep for wool and cotton to make our own clothes. Mamma wove cloth and grew her "bacca"; we made our own syrup, and--well, I reckon--the only thing we bought was a little coffee, and that weren't but once a year. We's as pore as could be...never went no
whar and never wanted to."

Indeed the Freejacks stayed to themselves on their farms and rarely ventured out of the Settlement. Little good it would have done, for most of the places of business in nearby towns refused to serve them, or even if they did take the Freejack's money, they did so swiftly and curtly in order to complete the transaction before a "decent" White customer arrived. In 1920, a priest, who ministered to the Freejacks, recorded in his journal: "Freejacks aren't allowed to be in a store with a White person. They have to wait until all the White folks leave the store. Of course, they aren't allowed anywhere near the hotel or stores other than the general merchandise ones, and only one of those really caters to them."

In the late 1800's the turpentine industry arrived in the Settlement area. This offered the Freejack an opportunity to do what they call "public work" and to raise somewhat their standard of living. With the turpentine industry came another wave of mixed-bloods, known locally as "turpentine niggers." Many of these people passed as White and attempted to associate with the Settlement natives.

Residents of the Settlement resented these newcomers; even those who successfully passed for White were shunned by the Freejacks. Their descendents even today occupy a lower level in the complex social structure of the Settlement.

Perhaps this rejection was a natural reaction to outsiders competing
with locals for jobs, but more probably the Freejack feared that association with "turpentine niggers" might further jeopardize their progress toward equality with Whites. Despite the efforts of the Settlement natives, Whites soon lumped the newcomers into the "Freejack" category.

As the turpentine industry began to fade, timbering followed in its place. This change attracted additional outsiders, but primarily Black laborers. There were few mixed-bloods or at least none that tried to pass as White in this influx of new people to the area. As the timber supply also began to fade in the 1930's, two large Black communities, (which had formerly been turpentine and later lumber camps) were left behind. One is in the center of the community; the other lies near the Northeast corner. These Black communities became a nemesis to the Settlement, for interracial mixing again occurred. Thus, the number of close blood relatives—one Black, the other White—who did not admit kin became more numerous.

It would be deceiving, however, to imply that all Freejacks were dependent on doing what they call "public work" (work outside the Settlement) to augment their subsistence farms. On the contrary, many were excellent stockmen and had accumulated good size herds of cattle and sheep, which grazed on the open range lands in the area. Additional income was derived from small patches of cotton and sugar cane.16 As

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16 See Atherton for an analysis of agriculture in the Settlement area (1947).
their families grew, additional land was homesteaded until some Settlement families held extensive land holdings. This land was truly the one thing that was theirs; no one could take it from them. Although land was nearly worthless in monetary value, they held tenaciously to it. This helped maintain the geographic isolation of the community and controlled when and if outsiders moved into the Settlement.

The Mission

In 1920 a priest came upon horseback into the Settlement inquiring if any Roman Catholics were in the area. To his amazement he discovered, in what he thought was a totally Protestant area, several families claiming to be Catholics. "I was told of... 'traditional Catholics' living on small farms scattered throughout the forest," he wrote to his archbishop. Further questioning, however, revealed that they only called themselves Catholics because their grandparents were Catholics. A few prayers taught by a good old grandmother and some antique holy pictures were their sole Catholic inheritance.  

The priest soon received a $500.00 grant to build a Mission Chapel. Over one hundred Catholics were found and many others were converted, according to his journal.

The poverty of these people is reflected throughout the journal: "The

17 The priest's journal offers insights into his ideas about the Free-jacks. It was made available by the Abbot of the local Abbey.
average weekly collection is 70 cents," he recorded. In 1920, "After Mass, I also baptised two boys. The parents gave me for Baptism fee a half a sack of sweet potatoes. They give what they have!"

The priest took great interest in these people, not just because they were new converts, but because of their "amusing ways and curious racial heritage." He was shocked at their ignorance: "When I told them the earth was turning they were frightened. Their illiteracy is alarming. They must get a school."

Sisters from a local convent helped the priest start a school. Even though classes were held in the small Mission Chapel, and students sat on rough wooden benches, it was the first schooling any of the children had ever had. One article records that "five members of one family, the oldest a girl of 21, and the youngest a boy of 8, with ages 17, 13, and 11 years ranging between are now attending the school...for the first time [in their lives]. A 12 year old boy walks six miles to reach the mission school each day, and a small five year old girl thinks nothing of her four-mile daily trek to the schoolroom" (Sneed: 1940).

Despite the efforts of the Ku Klux Klan, the Mission Chapel and the school continued to grow and prosper and soon moved into new and larger facilities. Eventually nearly sixty-five students per year were enrolled

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18 He refers to these people as "Freejacks" only once in his writings. Several times he calls them his "White Niggers" or "White Darkies." A favorite term, however, was "Tutti-frutti," meaning they were racially all mixed together.
in the seven grades of the Mission School.

In 1964, public schools in the area were ordered to be integrated. With the primary purpose for the Mission School's existence eliminated, and due to a shortage of funds in the Diocese, the Mission School closed its doors in 1965. The Mission Chapel remains, however, along with the vacant buildings of the school as a silent reminder of the work of the priest. He had done much more than bring religion and schooling to the Freejacks. He was the first to reopen to them the outside world. He urged them to seek employment outside their community, he encouraged them to visit other areas, he insisted they improve their living conditions and he helped them learn to stand for their rights. He also helped them to accept their racial heritage. "Don't try to pretend you're White," he reportedly said to one Freejack, "you know you're 'tutti-frutti' and that's that! So what? You're still a wonderful person and that's all I ask. Don't try to hide what you are--be what you are and be proud." His fifty years of work with the Fifth Ward Settlement apparently had some profound effects, for the Freejacks gradually began to emerge from their strict isolation.

World War II

The real "opening" of the Fifth Ward Settlement came about suddenly with the onset of World War II. Not only did many of the Freejacks travel outside their home area for the first time, but many also took wives
from outside the Settlement or even outside the country. Until this period, the Settlement was highly endogamous. First cousin and double second cousin marriages were common, as was polygamous cohabitation.

The war, however, brought about exposure to other ideas, influx of new White blood, and knowledge about other cultures. In addition it offered jobs and opportunities in outside areas and provided the Freejack men with new vocational skills. Moreover, most of the Freejacks—who easily passed for White in the Armed Forces—returned home more determined than ever to be accepted as White.

Integration of Public Schools

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, was a major milestone in the life of the Fifth Ward Settlement. Integration of the public schools led, not only to the closing of the Freejack schools, but also to a general breakdown of traditional cultural, social, and even geographical boundaries. Prior to the implementation of the act in 1965, Freejack children were bussed from one parish to the next in order that they would all attend the same Freejack school. After 1965, this was stopped, and students were not allowed to cross parish boundaries to attend school. 19

This geographic separation has already had far-reaching effects on the Settlement, and will undoubtedly continue to put unusual strains on

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19 The parish line is the river, which divides the Fifth Ward Settlement into two parts.
the community. However, the western part of the Settlement, which comprises approximately two-thirds of the whole, was not drastically changed. Freejack children still attend their same schools. There are very few Black children in the school district, and most of the White children attend private schools. The far-reaching changes due to the impact of the Civil Rights Act upon public attitude toward race are, therefore, the most important—and yet most difficult to measure—effects of this legislation.
CHAPTER V

THE SETTLEMENT AREA

The Fifth Ward Settlement is divided along Civil Parish lines into two parts by a river the Choctaws called the "Kefonctei." Approximately two-thirds of the Settlement lies on the western bank of the river. The earliest settlers built their log houses along the "Turnpike," an early extension of the Natchez Trace that connected Natchez to New Orleans. The Turnpike crossed the river near where the present paved road connects the two parts of the Settlement. Some early inhabitants selected sites up and down the river, but near the Turnpike, to start their homesteads.

The original 160 acre homesteads were established in the early 1800's and, as the families grew, sons and daughters of the original settlers applied for additional land patents. Almost all the land in the Fifth Ward Settlement was homesteaded, and patents continued to be granted up until 1910. After this date, land was available only by purchase. The Settlement continued to grow in numbers, however, for a family of seven children was considered to be ideal. Large families were necessary to work the farms and tend the stock. It is not uncommon to find families with seven to eight children even today.
The boundaries of the Settlement are rather easily defined. Entrance into the Fifth Ward Settlement from the east is signalled by the appearance of a small store in a rather unlikely spot in the country along the paved road; from the west, a visitor is struck by three small general stores, in rather close proximity, and a strangely named bar. There are no major approaches from the south. The northern approach is not as distinctively marked for the community has spread in recent times in this direction, and there are no bars or stores to indicate arrival at the Settlement. Characteristic Freejack house-types and "core" names, however, plainly announce to people familiar with the area that they are approaching the Fifth Ward Settlement.

Today, the geographic boundaries are somewhat nebulous and tenuous in the minds of most area residents. Twenty years ago, however, the limits were distinctive and important. A middle-aged White educator explained: "When I was growing up, it was like having a brick wall around that community. People knew exactly where the boundaries were and you didn't go across them unless you wanted trouble. I mean none of the "Jacks" came out, and none of us—or the niggers for that matter—went in unless we were ready to fight."

All to the north and south of the center of the Settlement, vast swamps form a buffer between other White communities in both directions. These swamps, along with their abundance of wildlife, have allowed the Freejacks to carry on many traditional activities, including hunting and trapping.
So dense are the swamps that "moonshining" became a major source of income for many residents, and still occupies a prominent place in local lore. Whisky stills are not entirely relegated to the pages of history. This writer had the privilege of consuming some extremely good "light'n", colored a rich, deep reddish-brown through aging with red oak chips. The swamps have also offered refuge from the law. One near legendary character, who reportedly killed twelve men, retreated to the swamps on numerous occasions until he was gunned down on a street in the courthouse city only a few years back. Even the drums of Black voodoo rites have been heard echoing out of the swamps.

Within the Fifth Ward Settlement there are two Baptist churches, one Holiness Church, and one Roman Catholic Church—all primarily for Freejacks. A third Baptist Church and another Roman Catholic Church serve both Freejacks and Whites. The area has five small general stores, all of which are frequented by Freejacks, three of these are owned by Settlement inhabitants and cater specifically to them. Two Freejack bars and two Black bars are also in the area. A third bar is in conjunction with a dance hall and campground; it is very new and is frequented mostly by Freejacks, although some White people can usually be seen there. A rodeo corral is also located at the south edge of the Settlement and is a regular center of activity. Schools for the Settlement are located in the White villages on the eastern and western edges of the area.

Pine trees, planted by large paper and lumber companies, are found
throughout the area. A few small dairies dot the roadside, although not every Freejack family has a dairy as was the case a decade ago. Greenhouses and nurseries are now a major source of income for their White owners, but they produce jobs for many of the Freejacks, including the Settlement women.

Roads around the Settlement area are paved, but those within the Settlement are rough and gravelled. Thus, travel by sightseers is difficult and few outsiders venture into the Settlement unless there is good reason. Just fifteen years ago, roads in the Settlement were not even gravelled, and roads leading to the Settlement made even travel to nearby villages a major undertaking.

Now, however, Freejacks think nothing of driving six miles into the village or even twenty miles into the nearest town to shop or to work at the concrete plant or shipyards. With the opening of a causeway across the lake in 1965, some Freejacks commute the ninety miles round trip to New Orleans to work at the shipyards.

The Settlement is bounded on the east side by a White community and small village, where inhabitants are primarily descended from Anglo-American settlers. To the northeast is a thickly populated Black community, originally established as a turpentine camp. A small segment of this community extends into the Settlement area. This is the result
of a "negro first-cousin" situation,¹ as are three other isolated plots in the middle of the Settlement held by "Negro" branches of Settlement families.

A second Black community, also the remnant of a turpentine camp, is situated in almost the exact center of the Settlement. It is called "Sudsville," and is also heavily populated. The center of this Black community is a Baptist Church, two bars, and a small store.

To the west, another predominantly White community and village borders the Settlement. The residents are descendents of German immigrants, although--unlike the eastern community--many of these families have intermarried with the Freejacks. It is here that establishing ones family as "pure" White becomes most important and several family name changes have taken place to avoid confusion with Freejack or Negro branches of the family.

To the northwest, recent expansion in the Settlement has extended its geographical limits for some distance. This growth has followed paved highways leading to the courthouse city. It is in this segment of the community that one finds other than "core" Freejack names, for these Settlement inhabitants are a result of recent marriages (since 1880) between descendents of early White settlers and Freejacks.

¹ See Chapter VII.
CHAPTER VI

DEALING WITH MIXED RACE

There are as many ways of coping with being racially-mixed as there are Freejacks; but one thing is in common for each inhabitant of the Fifth Ward Settlement--sooner or later each individual is forced to deal with his racially-mixed ancestors. Perhaps the most valuable insight into the complexities of the marginal life and the formidability of the racial barriers can be acquired through looking at some of the ways individuals handle their plight.

It is near impossible to engage a Freejack in a discussion about family history. The entire subject of ancestors and family relationships is carefully avoided. When the researcher was successful in evoking such conversations, only certain ancestors were "known" or "remembered." Others--those with Negro blood--were never mentioned.

The majority of Settlement inhabitants claim French and Spanish ancestors. One family traces ancestors to Portugal; one family claims to be of Greek origin; and several claim to be of English (via Georgia and the Carolinas) descent.

Members of one family with a Spanish name, attempt to explain their
"darkness" as being typical of the Spanish people. Darker skin color is generally common to those of French-Spanish ancestry. Thus, dark skin color—unless excessively dark—is easily rationalized as having other than Negro origins. Other facial characteristics—thick lips, big nose, etc.—are similarly attributed as typical Spanish and French features.

Hair is of primary concern. Outsiders may accept non-Negro explanations for other characteristics, but not for kinky hair. Children and adults who turn out "burr-topped" keep their hair cut extremely close to the head. Men wear caps or hats continuously, and women are seldom seen without bonnets. In fact, the wearing of bonnets is recognized by locals as being a Freejack trait. Within the past ten years, the local White beauty parlors have begun to serve the Settlement women. Hair straightening is reported by one beauty parlor operator as being in popular demand, but, she said, "no matter what they do, you can always find a little kink at the base of the hair." That "little kink," whether existent or not, is often the only thing Whites can cling to in order to try to prove the racial mixture of the Freejack.

Only under the most unusual circumstances would a Settlement member admit to being Freejack. The researcher observed two such occasions. The first occurred at a local bar, where a drunk claimed to be "one of those damn Freejacks." "What is that?" asked the researcher. "That's what they call us, cause we're all mixed-up. But I don't give a
damn. We're no more mixed up than the rest of the people round here! They say my grandfather took one of them mulatto women—an, I've seen some of them women, and I don't blame him a bit. About all those wealthy dudes had mulatto women in those days."

This account illustrates three basic, and probably typical, justifications for racial mixture: (1) the grandfather was a wealthy man, (2) whose actions were justifiable because he did what was a normal thing for a man of his time and station to do--take a mulatto mistress. Even so, (3) the resulting mixture is no different than for everyone else in the area.

A second event occurred at a crowded local general store. A woman of Italian descent, who married a Freejack, was accused of being a "Wop." Many of the Italians in the parish are relatively recent immigrants and have traditionally been the subject of much discrimination. "I'm not a goddam Wop, I'm a Freejack like everybody else around here," she proclaimed to everyone in the store. The implications of this outburst are that there are White groups of lower status than the Freejacks. Freejacks consider themselves better than Italians. The woman mentioned is the only Italian mate in the Settlement and she was not considered a proper match. Her actions in the store were apparently considered inexcusable by the Settlement; since this incident she has been virtually ostracized. In addition, she has been harrassed by a neighbor who refuses to grant her access from the road to her property. During a recent
visit to the Settlement, the researcher was warned to stay away from her house because she had shot at some people the day before. The single event in the store may not have been the sole reason for these actions, but area residents seem to think it was the catalyst.

Elements of this type of justification seem to carry over to the children. A nun who taught at the Mission School for many years explained that the children rarely spoke of their family relations. She remembered one incident when talking about Indians in the class, one little seven year old girl raised her hand and said, "Yes, Sister, my Mommy says I'm part Indian, but I've got just a little bit of nigger blood in me, but so does everybody else." The defense of maintaining to be "like everybody else," seems to be sufficient justification for young children and some few adults. This represents a rather logical adaptation to one's situation, but apparently not every Freejack finds this sufficient. More elaborate defense mechanisms are often used.

When do children actually realize they are racially mixed and understand about the racial barriers surrounding them? Local educators believe that prior to integration, it began in the 7th grade when the Freejack children were first exposed to Whites from other areas. Now, however, they are in contact with Whites and Blacks much earlier, and it is difficult to say when they first understand they are not "just like everybody else."

It may be definitely said, however, that this realization can be
quite traumatic. One example, which occurred only three years ago to a thirteen year old girl, represents the ultimate tragedy of discovering one's racial mixture. A Freejack man had joined the Armed Forces and married a White woman from another state. Their daughter, thirteen years old at the time, was being brought back to see her grandparents for the first time. The girl had grown up in a White racist society, never suspecting she was part Negro. When she met her grandparents, their pronounced Negroid features evoked a tragic reaction. According to one informant, she "ritualistically defiled" the altar of the Mission and then attempted to burn the entire Chapel, which undoubtedly was a symbol to her of the racial mixture of her own family. She then attempted to commit suicide. Fortunately, neither the burning nor the suicide was successful, but the trauma left an indelible mark in the adolescent's mind. She was committed to a local mental hospital.

The adolescent Freejack reaction to discovering his racial identity is not always as traumatic as the one just described. Nevertheless, a long list of sad and tragic examples could be made. This traumatic experience is an inevitable one for the Freejack. It may, in a way, represent a rite de passage, for—as ugly as the realization may be—this experience is necessary before a child begins to associate with and accept the marginal identity. The defense mechanisms begin to appear after what the writer prefers to label the "identity trauma." While at school, the child has three choices: (1) stay with the other schoolmates who are
also identified as Freejacks, (2) withdraw into oneself and avoid other children, or (3) demand respect by fighting anyone who even mentions "Freejack" or implies racial inferiority. All three of these defenses are common in school children, and carry over to adults. As the Freejack child grows older, however, his defenses grow even more elaborate and complex.

Rather than generalize as to the various adaptations, several examples will be used to show the wide spectrum of ways in which Freejacks deal with the stigma of a marginal identity. All examples are assigned pseudonyms, but are based upon the lives of real people, who are living today in the Fifth Ward Settlement. The ways in which these people cope with the collective identity of a Freejack points out clearly and vividly the unique problems and situations encountered daily by marginal peoples, and the extent to which individuals will go to overcome the formidable racial barriers.

**John:**

John is a man who is well-respected in the Settlement. He is also accorded much respect by Whites and Blacks in the area. He is successful in his small rural farm-related business. It is well-known that he is a Freejack, but it is also well-established that he becomes violent when anyone even hints of his racial-mixture. Not too many years ago he shot a White man for calling him a "Freejack"; since that time no
one has given him cause to shoot again.

Jim:

Jim is a hard-working, middle-aged man, who married another Freejack and lives to himself. He is of considerable Negro and Indian mixture. Although a near-alcoholic, he poses no threat to anyone. He is well-known throughout the area, however, for getting drunk and crying because of his mixed-blood ancestry.

Joe:

Joe is nearly seventy years old, yet has never married and remains at home to tend his aged father. He stays close to home, rarely going outside the community. His face and hair have a pronounced Negroid appearance. Whites say he was too Negro-looking to marry a White woman and would not marry a Black. Apparently there were no eligible females of the same appearance to marry. He keeps his hair cut very close, and is always seen with an old felt hat covering his head. According to one local White, he is also very conscious about his large feet. (Whites in the area believe that Negroes have big-flat feet and this trait, like kinky hair, proves Negro blood). According to a local White shoe store owner, he always buys shoes too small to fit properly.

George and Gerry:

These are two first patiriparallel cousins. George's father married a
woman considered too dark by Freejack standards. Gerry's father married a "bright" Freejack woman. They do not claim kin nor associate; in fact, the Settlement individuals tried to prevent George's children from attending the Mission School. George himself was threatened and his house was nearly burned. He did not back down, however, and his seven children all attended the Mission School. They were, nonetheless, ostracized and George and his family still live almost entirely to themselves. They do not associate with Negroes for they do not consider themselves Negro, although the Freejacks refer to them as such.

There are several cases similar to this one. Two sisters— one being able to pass for White, the other not so fortunate— married accordingly. One married a White man, the other to a Black man. The "White" woman claims she has no sister; the "colored" sister speaks bitterly of her White relatives and their treatment of her. The "colored" sister speaks frankly about the Freejacks and offered an unusual insight and perspective into the methods of dealing with race by adults and children within the Settlement.

Bill and Bob:

Bill and Bob are brothers. Both married well; they both took White women from outside the Settlement area. Bill made the mistake of bringing his new bride home to meet his parents. The features of the parents are clearly indicative of Negro ancestry. The shocked
bride began proceedings to seek a divorce almost immediately.

Bob, learning from his brother's mistake, has never brought his wife home to meet the parents. Local informants believe he has told her his parents are dead.

Mr. and Mrs. Jones:

Mr. Jones has a reputation of being a rough man, who would "just as soon shoot you as look at you"—especially if he were called a Freejack. He had his name changed over forty years ago, and since that time has insisted upon being considered White. He married Mrs. Jones several years ago. She has a dark complexion and the whites of her eyes are yellow (a sure sign of Negro blood, claim local Whites). Her hair borders on kinky. Mr. Jones's marriage to Mrs. Jones was not considered a good match by locals, because the Freejacks say Mrs. Jones is part Negro. It was well-established, however, that no mention of her background was ever to be made around Mr. Jones. He had threatened to shoot any man who had slandered her, and no one doubted that he would carry out his threats if provoked. About two years ago, Mr. and Mrs. Jones's marriage began to deteriorate. They soon divorced and Mrs. Jones married a Negro. She and her Black husband did not need to be told to leave the Settlement area and they have not been back since. Mr. Jones, on the other hand, was faced with quite a severe dilemma. The fact that his former wife had married a Negro might prove what Whites had always
said—he was part Negro. Rather than take the chance of being so labeled, he also left the area. He reportedly has returned only once to visit the Settlement.

**Mr. and Mrs. J. Davis:**

Mrs. Davis is in her late sixties and was a member of the Raab family before marrying into a local White family. After marriage in her early twenties, her husband joined the Army and they left the Settlement. They have lived all over the world, but spent more time in Virginia than any other single place. While in Virginia, Mrs. Davis joined the DAR and the UDC (United Daughters of the Confederacy) through her husband's family. She lived in upper-middle class White society most of her life. When she and her husband retired, they moved back into the Settlement area where they owned property. After being free from the racial stigma for so long, Mrs. Davis has found the old prejudices still prevalent in her home area, much to her disliking. Due to her fortunate marriage and seven filing cabinets of genealogical material proving she is White, she has managed to fit into the White community, but not without difficulties and persistent rumor. The researcher's presence in the community proved quite a threat to Mrs. Davis, and it was due to her mentioning of the researcher's interest in genealogies to the "right people" that the threats upon the researcher were prompted.
Mrs. Smith;

The tragedy of the marginal person is perhaps best epitomized by Mrs. Smith. She is now ninety-three years old. Her husband died only two years ago at approximately one hundred and three years of age (no one knows his exact date of birth, but some say he was born as early as 1864). He homesteaded the land and built a log house, which is still in use—complete with mud-brick chimney. Mr. Smith was half Indian. Mrs. Smith is extremely dark, but does not have any other Negroid features. Mr. and Mrs. Smith had several children. They all have Negroid and/or Indian features, except one, who has no trouble passing as White. He married quite well and moved to a peripheral area of the Settlement. His son, who also took a White wife, has several blond-headed, blue-eyed children. The children have never seen their great-grandmother and she has never seen them—except at a distance.

When the researcher inquired about her grandchildren she produced pictures of them and a tear came to her eyes: "Those are some of my great-grandchildren—I've never seen them. They live a long way away from here."

In actuality, they live less than five miles away. Their parents have chosen not to let them know they have a great-grandmother rather than run the risk of their children's adverse reactions to a "Negro" grandparent. After all, they probably reason, in only a few years the lady will be dead and the family will be safe from the damaging evidence of a
Black grandmother.

These are only a few examples of the ways individuals cope with their marginal existence. There are as many other variations as there are Freejacks. Yet these adaptations have grown out of similar experiences necessarily undergone by all Settlement inhabitants at various stages in their lives.

The initial experience of any individual is that of group awareness. The age at which inhabitants realize their special group identity varies, but few have escaped this by the time their teen years arrive. This experience is necessary before the youth realizes he and his group are classified separately from either Whites or Blacks of the Settlement area. The process of identification with the Settlement may occur gradually or it may occur quite rapidly. Many events may build up before a sudden awareness produces the identity trauma previously described.

Whatever the degree or timing of this group awareness, the important point is that this experience, undergone by every Settlement member at one stage in his life, initiates the actual processes of proliferation of the mixed-blood group. This process depends upon an initiator and a receiver. If either disappears, then the group is without a means of extending its existence. If White or Black individuals quit imposing the unique interstitial categorization and naming upon the Freejacks, or if Freejack children were to be isolated from individuals so inclined to promote the marginal stigma, then the Fifth Ward Settlement would be short
lived. There are no signs that either of these factors will change in the near future; therefore, individuals will undoubtedly continue with the second series of experiences that follow group awareness—coping with their marginal identity. There are not many alternatives for the mixed-blood individual. He may (1) accept his fate and rationalize his marginal position, (2) he can withdraw from the Settlement community and society in general, (3) he can wage an unending battle to be accepted as White by the Whites in the area, or (4) he can leave the Settlement area, breaking away from the stigma of his home and family.

Just as the identity trauma was described as the ultimate reaction of an individual to the group awareness experience, this fourth alternative is the most drastic means of coping with one's mixed-blood heritage. If selected, this option requires a difficult decision—family or freedom.

Family ties are close with Settlement families and a high value is placed on having large, close families. Yet the ultimate goal for success by individuals within the Settlement is to pass for White in the larger society. Success in passing is not only an achievement for the individual, but also for the family and ultimately has an elevating effect on the entire community.

Thus conflicting goals lead individuals into situations seldom experienced by other than marginal peoples. The decision to forsake family and community ties for freedom outside the community probably occurs in less than 10% of the Freejacks, but it is this 10% that best illustrates
the formidable boundaries of racial categories. The fact that any indi-
vidual at all would take such an extreme measure is a harsh and remote
thought to most Americans. Yet it does occur, and of greater amazement
is that this is considered a viable and reasonable option by members of
the individual's family. They accept his decision and, though the price
is high, see it as simply another measure that must sometimes be taken
to overcome the oppression and stigma of being a Freejack.
CHAPTER VII

STRATIFICATION

It is an oversimplification to suggest that the only stratification in
the Fifth Ward Settlement area is the Black/White/Freejack distinction.
Within the Settlement itself, the residents recognize several important
social strata that function to maintain differentiations between families
and individuals. This is not at all surprising, for the understandable
obsession with racial heritage and the ultimate of success being one's
ability to "pass" are the basis for these distinctions. "They never quit
being concerned about each other's background. They segregate more
than we [the Whites] do," said a local educator. "It's on their con-
sscience, I guess, and they don't want to get mixed up again."

These emic categories often coincide with certain family groups.
Individuals, however, often find themselves placed in a category sep-

crate from the rest of the family because of (1) particular physical char-
acteristics, (2) determination and tenacity in acquiring a higher status,
or (3) as is most usually, the case, due to marriage. Individuals can,
however, be relegated to a lower (or higher) strata depending on their
Negroid features (or lack thereof) or by selection of a mate in a different
strata.
The categories are listed below, with those categories representing higher rank being described first. Categories 1-7 tend to be lumped together by Whites into the single group "Freejack or Colored." Categories 1-6 would likewise be considered by Blacks as being one group—"Freejacks" or "Crackers." Category 8, on the other hand, is distinctly separate, recognized, and ostracized by Whites, Blacks, and Freejacks. The categories here to follow are emic and therefore operable and recognizable primarily within the Fifth Ward Settlement.

**Category 1.**

In the past forty years, a number of Freejacks have married into local well-respected White families. These Freejacks are necessarily very "bright" and have no obvious Negroid features. They are accepted into White society by virtue of their marriage and because they do not have any physical characteristics considered undesirable. Nonetheless, Whites recognize that these people have some "colored" ancestors, but generally agree that the mixture is of such a minor percentage that the risks of offspring inheriting Negroid features is minute. Some of the oldest and most prominent families in the area have close relatives who have married into the Settlement group, which is considered the "trashiest" possible marriage. The children of these marriages are said to be "touched with the tar brush," or simply to be "dipped." Otherwise, they fit into the larger White society with little trouble. They have
always attended White schools and some have gone to college.

This is the most important strata affecting the overall status of the Fifth Ward Settlement. Not only has marriage into the surrounding White families greatly enlarged the Settlement in recent years--in geographic area and in population size--but it has also demanded that previously all-White families reconsider their traditional prejudice against the Freejacks. Most families chose to ignore or ostracize their alien relatives who have "gotten mixed in," but as the numbers of these individuals increased, this has become correspondingly difficult. About five per cent of the Settlement area is composed of people in this category.

**Category 2.**

Of nearly equal status, but slightly below, are branches of Freejack families that have consistently married well outside the Settlement area and are four or more generations removed from any Negro ancestry. These people are characterized by a desire to have their family name legally changed. Thus the branch of a "White" Rahab family becomes the Rahb family; the Leeds become the Leids. This group becomes irate when their newly adopted legal name is not used. They do not want to be confused with their "colored" relatives. Of course, they do not consider themselves Freejack, nor part of the Fifth Ward Settlement, although they may actually live in the Settlement area. They refuse to admit any family ties whatsoever with the branch of the family that spells its name the
original way. They have traditionally attended White schools and White churches and strive to be seen with White relatives. They have no trouble passing as White, and are accepted—to a somewhat limited extent—into White society. They are, however, shunned by the well-respected Whites and individuals in Category 1. They are spoken of in bitter and derogatory terms by other Freejacks because they disavow their Settlement connections. Approximately five per cent of the Freejacks are in this category.

**Category 3.**

These are the Creole people. They are descendents of wealthy and respected founders of the area towns and still own much land—some of which is part of the original Spanish land grant. They are characterized as hard working, generous people—leaders in the Settlement. They stay to themselves and do not bother anyone. They were influential in helping the priest build the Mission Church and School. They are still a main force in the maintenance of the church. Many of this group have Negroid features (primarily kinky hair), but only a few have trouble passing as White. They were the first to take jobs outside the Settlement, and most have married well. They have considerable Indian blood, however, and traditionally took mates from either the Coastal Village or the nearby

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1 "Creole" is used here with its modern meaning. See footnote on page 38.
Indian community. Recently, however, several have taken foreign (primarily German and French) mates and have also been responsible for breaking some local barriers by marrying into prominent area White families. This category represents about twenty per cent of the Settlement.

**Category 4.**

This particular group has no problem passing for White, although they frequently exhibit Indian characteristics. They are, however, looked down upon by upper strata Freejacks, because they have married into "poor White trash" families. They live in a rather confined area of the Settlement, and form a peculiar "political faction" that rivals that of a Category 3 group. If one faction supports one idea or individual, the other automatically takes the opposite stance. This is seen as "political rivalry" by outsiders, but in actuality this division reflects a basic rejection by the Category 3 group of the lower rank group. Thus, even though individuals in Category 3 and 4 are equally capable of passing as White, they differ in their marriage trends: many Category 3 individuals have married into local well-respected families, while most of those in Category 4 have gone outside the Settlement area to take low class White mates.

This group rarely exhibits Negroid features; quite the contrary, they are nearly all light complexioned, with blond hair and blue eyes. They do not participate in most Settlement activities, and few are even associated
with a particular church. They generally work outside the community and remain to themselves when they are within the Settlement. Few finish high school and the majority of truancy in the Settlement is attributed to this group. An estimated twenty per cent of the Freejacks are in this category.

Category 5.

This category represents the largest single strata of Freejacks—about forty per cent of the Settlement. These are the people who have pronounced Negroid features and find it difficult to pass as White in area towns. They have been identified as Freejacks for several generations, but their families became part of the Fifth Ward Settlement later than the original settlers. They are very cognizant of the necessity to improve themselves socially and economically. They do not have the land of the higher strata families and generally have a lower standard of living.

They still marry mainly amongst themselves or into corresponding strata of nearby mixed-blood groups, but many are able to take mates in a higher strata outside the Settlement. They have a low level of education and, whether they finish high school or not, the men inevitably join the armed forces. The women generally do "public work" in local plant nurseries or as maids or cooks. Their life style is less affected by the outside than other groups previously described.

A few individuals find it impossible to pass as White and are
consequently forced to marry a "bright" member of a Black family. This leads to the splitting of families and the unusual circumstances of brothers or cousins who do not claim kin. These individuals are ostracized by the entire Settlement and occupy the lowest of any in the stratification (see Category 8).

**Category 6.**

These are individuals who are caught in a great dilemma. They are considered by the Freejacks as Black, yet they consider themselves White. They are also rejected by Blacks in the area and would find it difficult to fit into Black society or culture even if they so desired. Their physical characteristics are predominantly Negroid, consequently, they would not be able to pass as White under any circumstances. All have Settlement relatives—some with very close blood relations—who pass for White. Occasionally a child will be born "bright" enough to pass into an upper strata of the Settlement, but this upward movement is difficult and rare. Those who can, take mates from the same category within the Settlement, or a similar strata in the nearby mixed-blood communities. Those who cannot find an appropriate mate in the same or higher strata either do not marry at all, or accept the fate of being ostracized by Blacks, Whites, and Freejacks (see Category 8). These people are caught in the most bitter struggle for identity: they would gladly choose the Freejack identity over the Black label. Individuals in this
category were good informants because they are most likely to discuss the problems of marginality and the identity crisis. These people have experienced much racial harassment and discrimination by their Freejack relations, who are themselves relegated to a social limbo. Thus, the ultimate of a long series of paradoxes is revealed through studying this category, which composes about five per cent of the population.

**Category 7.**

This is the Black, considered as such by all elements of the Settlement area. There are several studies dealing with the substratification in Black society, the discussion of which is beyond the scope of this thesis. This category is mentioned simply to emphasize that Blacks do not occupy the lowest strata in the Settlement area. That dubious distinction rests with those Freejacks who have recently married back into Black families.

**Category 8.**

These are the outcasts of all—the Whites, the Blacks, and the Freejacks. If "passing" is the ultimate goal of the Freejacks, then marrying a Black and thereby becoming associated with Black society would be the ultimate failure. It is not surprising then that this group would be ostracized by the Freejacks. It is more difficult to explain why Whites and Blacks relegate these newly mixed individuals to the lowest strata. Yet such is the case. Perhaps it is because there is some compassion for
individuals whose unlucky birth is the cause for their misfortune (as in Category 6). Yet, an individual who deliberately mixes back into a Black family--without the historical justification accepted by the Freejack--has committed treason, not just against his family, but the entire community.

Passing for White has an elevating affect upon the whole community (see Hicks and Kirtzer 1972:9). The more individuals that can pass as White, the better off is the entire Settlement. On the other hand, if a single individual marries someone considered a Negro, the notion of the original racial-mixture of the entire Settlement is re-established. Thus, this harsh ostracization of individuals in this category is actually an important and necessary sanction to discourage other individuals from impeding the upward movement of the mixed-blood marginal group toward a White identity. Fortunately only five per cent of the Freejacks are relegated to this strata.

Although these categories do represent levels of rank--the first being the highest, the last the lowest--an individual may skip several intermediate categories based on marriages. Mate selection is all important to Settlement individuals, for marriage is the primary process affecting a change in rank. Generally the status of the male determines the category into which the couple (and their children) will be relegated. Thus, upward mobility is usually attained via the action of the male.
CHAPTER VIII

CHANGE

Just as the Fifth Ward Settlement is itself a series of contrasts and paradoxes, so appears the future of the Freejack community. Unravelling what has already happened and what is now happening is complex enough; predicting the future is even more tenuous.

The two recent events having the most profound affects upon the Settlement are: the integration of the schools, and the completion of the causeway connecting New Orleans with the Settlement area. Both events took place in 1965; both are having far-reaching effects on the Settlement.

School Integration

The affects of school integration are the most difficult to evaluate. As has already been stated the Settlement has been geographically divided along the river (the Parish boundary) as one major result. The eastern portion of the Settlement is integrated into a much larger urban oriented system. The western part remains fairly intact, rural-oriented, and with the children attending the traditional Settlement schools. Coupled with this geographical separation is a communications split due to
the corresponding division of the phone system. Two exchanges now exist so that a long distance call is required to talk with a member of the Settlement on the opposite side of the river. Change in either part of the Settlement, therefore, takes on a different perspective. It is difficult to delineate the contrasts in the two parts at this time, but the future contrasting courses of change in the two Settlement sections merit further study. It seems inevitable that the two parts will soon become separate communities—an apprehension already expressed by several Settlement inhabitants.

The most far-reaching effect of integration (and in general, the Civil Rights Act of 1964) is the long range change in general attitudes concerning race. Although impossible to predict the outcome of the public's changing views on racial groups, many of the prejudices and social barriers have already been removed. This has been evidenced by the "opening up" of the Fifth Ward Settlement and a more general acceptance of its inhabitants in a wide range of activities. Even the term "Free-jack" is not heard as often as it was only five years ago.

The Causeway

When the causeway was opened less than a decade ago, a long series of reactions began. The end result has been extensive and rapid change in the Settlement area. Although both sectors of the Settlement have been affected, the most vulnerable has been the eastern section.
It is the closest to the causeway and New Orleans. Ten years ago it took two and one-half hours to drive to New Orleans, now it takes under one hour. City conditions—a growing crime rate, school problems, un-ending traffic snarls, overcrowding—are sending a surge of city-dwellers looking for a "country place." To most city people an hour drive to work with relatively little traffic seems a small price to pay for the quieter, more leisurely, and less crowded country life. Many newcomers, as well as an increasing number of Freejacks, are now commuting the one-hundred miles round trip to New Orleans.

This new demand for land has caused prices to soar. Land that sold for two-hundred to three-hundred dollars per acre fifteen years ago, sells for two-thousand to three-thousand dollars per acre today. The "poor" Freejack farmer has suddenly found himself much wealthier than he ever suspected.

The elevation of land prices and a rapid influx of "outsiders" has triggered many changes in the Fifth Ward Settlement. The level of income of most Freejack families has increased, resulting in better vehicles and improvements in the home. Expensive summer houses, weekend camps and permanent homes of newcomers are appearing dispersed among the older, simpler Freejack homes.

Soaring land prices have made it nearly impossible for a farmer to make enough profits to justify the purchase of additional land. Yet, farming trends in the area no longer favor the small family farm. In fact,
only a few older Freejack families still depend entirely upon farming for their income. Until recently, most farmers subsidized their income by maintaining small dairy barns. Now, however, small dairies are not profitable, and dairymen in the area are forced to either "go big" or "get out." As a result few have remained in business.

Nurseries are also feeling the economic pinch. This is mainly due to the lack of cheap labor. Like farms and dairies, nurseries cannot offer a wage to compete with the nearby blue collar jobs at the shipyard or concrete plant. Thus, agriculture as an economic basis for the Settlement is competing with strong opponents. This implies massive change, since the community has a century-and-a-half tradition as a rural, agricultural community. But, of even greater significance, this change affects the all-important isolation of the Settlement. As more and more inhabitants begin holding jobs out of the community, the community comes in greater contact with outsiders and, therefore, is more vulnerable to outside ideas.

With the infiltration of outsiders into every phase of the Settlement, it is understandable that the sense of community, so characteristic of the Fifth Ward Settlement, is disappearing, and with it loss of identity as a community. The traditional Freejack churches, bars, and stores are being penetrated by these newcomers, and with them come fundamental changes in values and attitudes. The rural agricultural lifestyle are being substituted for middle-class urban lifestyle. Even the
schools, according to the principal of the elementary school in the eastern section, have fifty percent of the students who are recent transfers from the metropolitan area.

The newcomers are not as aware of or concerned about the mixed-racial background of the Freejack. Most do not understand the bias expressed by White natives. Freejacks are finding it easier and easier to "marry well", to find jobs, and to fit into what in essence is a suburban, commuting area.

The Freejacks are close to achieving what they have worked so long and painfully to achieve—total acceptance into White society. Yet the price is the loss of their community and their life style. There is lamenting by young and old alike for the simpler, slower-paced, traditional way of life that so rapidly has neared extinction in the eastern section of the Fifth Ward Settlement.

"It used to be so quiet and peaceful up here," explained one middle-aged resident. "Never saw a car on this road—if something went by after eleven at night, we knew something was wrong. Now they zoom by here all hours of day and night."

A seventy-eight year old lady recalls, "used to be folks'd get together to help each other. Not no more. You can't trust nobody no more and you don't know who's gonna come up to your door to knock you in the head. I reckon it'll soon be here just like everywhere else--won't be safe in your own home."
The daughter of one of the most respected Freejacks recently moved back to the Settlement with her White husband. She observed several changes upon her return. "When I left ten years ago there weren't any new houses anywhere, and everybody had lived here all their lives... all this land was homesteaded by the same families as lived here. This road wasn't paved--none of them were--and we didn't go to town but once a week; never went to New Orleans. Now they got new houses going up and half the people I don't know. Ten years ago, everybody wanted to leave the country; now-a-days people'll pay outrageous prices to buy a country place. Lots of the younger generation are coming back up too. My husband and me are building a house just down the road on Papa's place. We plan to stay here."

It is necessary to emphasize that there are many forces working to maintain the Fifth Ward Settlement. New racists are still being born and there are plenty of old ones around to instruct the younger generations in the traditional prejudices. The term "Freejack" is likely to be heard for a long time, and with its persistence goes the stigma attached to the mixed-blood marginal group.

Of great significance is the difference in the two Settlement sections. The eastern portion is the one most susceptible to change. The western portion, which comprises at least two-thirds of the total community, remains a very stable and conservative area. Land prices are significantly less as soon as one crosses the river, and the few extra miles
further from the causeway seems to be a significant deterrent to commuters. Churches, stores, bars, and schools remain relatively free from newcomers or outsiders.

There are other forces still working within the community to maintain the Fifth Ward Settlement. A return of many of the younger generation is an apparent trend. According to the county agent, "trends also seem to be toward a revitalization of the rural way of life—the simpler life style, family gardens, traditional ways—and these people [of the Settlement] will be there a long time. They're becoming more and more reluctant to give up their community. "I think," he continued, "they are seeing what's happening across the river the eastern portion of the Settlement and don't want to give it all up, their community and way of life, that is."

Real estate agents and local residents seem to think that the land boom has peaked. There really never was a tremendous amount of land available in the Settlement, even in the eastern portion. "About all the land that's available has been sold," remarked a local real estate agent. "If we could have found more to sell, we could have sold it in no time. Most of the [Settlement] families hang onto their land; only some of the really old people who don't have any children to take care of them have had to sell. The rest hold onto what they got; I guess they don't really want or need the money."

It is impossible to extrapolate the contrasting developments of the
two sectors of the Fifth Ward Settlement. If change continues at its present rapid rate, another decade could well reveal striking differences in the divergent sectors. It is alarming to many Settlement inhabitants, and as one aged Freejack wisely observed: "The trouble with this place today is that Father Time has exchanged his sickle for a bush-hog."

For certain is the strange, but revealing paradox: desiring to be accepted into White society, yet longing to keep the identity with and strong sense of community in the Settlement whose very existence has pelted its inhabitants with one hundred and fifty years of persecution and ostracism.
CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Fifth Ward Settlement, now consisting of at least 2,000 inhabitants, has an interesting and complex history dating from the early 1800's. Its people are a tri-racial mixture of Free People of Color (Black and White) and Indian. These mixed bloods occupy a social strata below the Whites, but above the Blacks.

The term "Freejack" is used to identify these marginal people. It is a derogatory term and is used primarily by Whites when referring to members of the Settlement. "Freejack" then denotes: (1) a genetic category (mixed-bloods), (2) a social category (marginal to either Black or White society), and (3) a geographical locality (the Fifth Ward Settlement).

Isolation—both geographic and social—has played a major part in the maintenance of the Settlement. Churches, bars, stores, and schools, established especially for Freejacks, have reinforced this sense of community.

The bipolar racial model recognized in the Anglo-American south led to the discrimination against these mixed-bloods, especially by Whites. The ultimate success of a Freejack is, therefore, to "pass" successfully.
as White and to function within White society. Seven emic substrata within the Settlement area can be described, determined basically by the ability of an individual or a family to "pass" as White. Dealing with being "dipped" is a major concern for every member of the Fifth Ward Settlement. Methods of handling problems inherent with a mixed-blood group have lead to a complex system for helping individuals, families, and the community cope with their racial mixture.

Living in an historically backward and poor region, Freejacks have not enjoyed a high standard of living. Recently, however, an influx of city dwellers has caused land prices to skyrocket. By selling small parcels of land, and by taking blue collar jobs outside the Settlement, most Freejack families now enjoy a standard of living well above the Blacks, but still less than Whites in the Settlement area. The major affect of this change, however, has been the infiltration of newcomers into every area of the previously entirely Freejack community. A loss in sense of community has necessarily resulted.

Change in the Settlement cannot be considered, however, without realizing the recent geographical division of the community into two sections. The eastern section appears to be rapidly assimilating into an urban-oriented White society. The western section remains rural and relatively unchanged. The future of both segments, however, rests on the far-reaching affects of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and changes in the general attitudes about race in the South.
Whatever the future of the Settlement sections, an underlying lesson is evident: "race" is not a natural category, but rather an arbitrary social one. Freejacks are not classified as "Negro" because of their physical appearance or their cultural distinctions. They are, on the contrary, susceptible to racial bias, prejudice, and discrimination because of a culture tradition. Their social category—"anybody with a drop of nigger blood is a nigger"—is arbitrary and tenuous, imposed by traditional White society. When Freejacks "escape" to another area where his family history is not known, most have no trouble passing for Whites—some may even get into the D.A.R.—in a White society that would be appalled at its blunder, if the true racial background of the individual was discovered.

The study of the Fifth Ward Settlement, if nothing else, is a perfect illustration of how arbitrary the category "race" can be, yet it points out the importance of the social category. A century and half of struggle against racial prejudice, the tearing apart of families, the sadness of alienated grandparents, the tragedy of a woman who spends her entire life trying to prove she's White are not just historical footnotes. They exist today, alongside a volatile community ready to threaten anyone or anything that would upset the delicate balance between the Black and White social strata. This type of study may not solve any of the problems of race relations in the world, but perhaps, it will help us to understand how arbitrary, but yet how formidable is this human category called "race."


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Date of Examination:

October 11, 1974