

The Emergence of Pan-Créolité

Louisiana at the Crossroads

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*Nègue poté mais dans sa la poche pou volé poule
Milatt poté cordon dans sa la poche pou volé des chevaux
Homme blanc poté larzan dans sa la poche pou trompé fille*

(The Negro carries corn in his pocket to steal chickens
The Mulatto carries a rope in his pocket to steal horses
The White carries money in his pocket to deceive girls)

LAFCADIO HEARN, A GREEK IRISHMAN WHO BECAME JAPANESE, preserved this rhyme late in the last century, as he scoured the byways of Louisiana for the exotic and the outrageous, which he had little trouble finding.¹ Later, he removed to the Windward Islands, where he penned a marvellous account of yet another Créole* enclave.² Hearn was among the very few writers in the American local color tradition who actually grasped the underlying historical sources of the “unusual” subsocieties he described to titillate his mass readership. In the cases of Louisiana and Martinique, he appreciated the besieged mentality of the descendants of early French settlers in what was by then—the late nineteenth century—a “postcolonial” situation within a bourgeois-capitalist, imperialist world. How Hearn would regard the situation of these same creole locales a century later is anyone’s guess. As he characteristically realized, the rhyme above compresses a model of New Orleans’s social structure, together with the popular perception of local class differences. Perhaps the persistence into our own day of the dynamics he noted in the 1880s would surprise him, as it may the reader.

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* Créole is capitalized in this article when it appears as a proper noun. The reference in this context is to those societies and individuals who descend from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French settlers in the tropics, usually in Senegal, Kongo, Madagascar, the islands of the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean Basin, and Louisiana, as well as the popular language and material culture of those places.

Hearn was writing in a period when the Civil War and Reconstruction had left their deep scars on the South, and regional intellectuals often turned inward, to the immediate environment, to discover the causes of the disasters of recent decades. The first self-conscious works of creole authenticity then appeared, writings probing the details of local life—from racial etiquette to analyses of creole speech and folklore. The primitive creolists of America's Gilded Age would be gratified to note today's progress. With the aid of computer technology the far-flung creole societies that so intrigued Hearn have regrouped and formed a pan-creole political agenda, in addition to a formidable stock of popular modern literature. Though the global creole "movement" is as yet essentially literary and historico-linguistic in substance, certain areas, such as Haiti and Martinique, experience popular pressure toward official recognition of spoken Creole as the "national" language. Annual conferences and scholarly journals dedicated to advancing the cultural recognition of postcolonial French societies and writing, whether in the Americas or in Africa, attest to the vitality of a trend unimaginable when Hearn lamented the sun setting over the fading creole world.³

What place, if any, will Louisiana be likely to assume in the emerging global creole discourse and political agenda? We raise the question because, though an American state since 1812 (not to say, a "state of mind" or a "state of being"), Louisiana continued, until roughly a century ago, to be a vibrant outpost of French "post-colonial" civilization. The regional French language has survived, mainly in rural spaces among people over 60, but the state subsidizes the universal teaching of French and is the only officially trilingual state in the United States (French, Spanish, English). Despite this effort and the pervasive popularity of the French language in Louisiana, French writing and publishing—whether fiction, nonfiction, poetry, or journalism—rather faded away by World War I. Only the newspaper *Le courrier de la Nouvelle-Orleans* and the literary journal *Les Comptes Rendus* continued publication in French past World War II, while the *Revue de Louisiane*, an academic journal produced at University of Southwest Louisiana's Centre des études Louisianais since 1971, persists only fitfully. Therefore, Louisiana's participation in the current literary creole renaissance would seem problematic.⁴

Whether Louisiana might have a role in the emerging the pan-creole movement turns on a number of questions: Is there a precedent for such a development (*La Louisiane possede-t-elle vraiment une litterature Française*)? Does cultural *survivance* depend upon a shared ethnolanguage? Is a geographically-based ethnopolitics even possible in media-dominated America? The answer to the first query is affirmative. Louisiana has a solid French literary tradition and a small, omnipresent coterie of creolists.⁵ To the second, our confreres in Quebec would say, definitely yes. It would be hard to imagine a separatist Quebec with-

out the French language. A plausible response to the third query is—unlikely. Creolism has a long history in the Louisiana area, but can be only cursorily remarked here. Whether a distinct culture may persist within a modern nation-state without a separate, unifying linguistic and literary tradition is in question, as South Louisiana itself illustrates. Some observers note that the area is, paradoxically, far less “Americanized” than Quebec province itself, despite the low state of the local French language. What then distinguishes Louisiana from the general American model of life? How might certain differences constitute the basis for a creole revival here? And, to what degree, if any, might the state participate in an ongoing pan-creole program embracing the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe?

As Hearn realized, few cases of cultural and political deviance on a regional or state level will be found in modern America as dramatic as that embodied by Louisiana. Here, and in the larger Gulf Coast region, an elite-managed “French” cultural revival is now a quarter century old, and parallels an expanding body of research into the origins and evolution of the distinctive regional, or “creole” society. Facing a starkly declining economy, the postpetroleum paradise, orchestrated in the main from the corporate offices of major oil and energy companies in New York—and secondarily from Baton Rouge and New Orleans—abjectly slumbers and festers as it awaits some outside initiative to confront mounting poverty and decay. Meanwhile New Orleans’s urban elites have set themselves on the course of selling out the city to the Janus-like chimera of gaming and tourism. Much of the state shares in this same desperation and the fantasy of easy fortune—a mentality planted with the early settlers. Though the two trends—cultural revival (creole heritage as business) and dependency on hyper-tourism—originate in disparate sources and on varying levels, each has come seemingly from nowhere, to intrude upon both local and national mass consciousness. As both economic panacea and ideological reification, each reflects a characteristically “American” short-term approach to deep social and economic disorders.

Literary creolism, in the context just described, raises many more questions than can be treated in the scope of this discussion. Does the concept of “post-coloniality” (borrowed directly from the 1970s debate in political theory over the nature of the postcolonial state) apply to Louisiana? Does the internal colonialism that has characterized Louisiana’s relation to the capitalist center justify cataloguing the region with the “Third” or “postcolonial” world? In an attenuated sense it does, though that discussion will also have to wait. Here we are concerned mainly with establishing the social factuality concerning that segment of the state’s population—a majority—for whom issues raised by both pan-creolism and *créolité* in the narrow, local sense are of inherent interest.

Americans have been made aware of the creole subculture through the

agency of the "Cajun" craze (safely limited to food and music), which has about run its course after some fifteen years. Oddly enough, by experiencing images of themselves, the "Cajun" media consumers have been awakened to the idea of themselves as an entity; the public is now alerted to its unique status as an exploitable subculture. The national Cajun craze has stimulated a recognition among upwards of about two million Francophone people in Louisiana and Texas that they constitute a collectivity and comprise a distinct ethnocommunity.⁶ This knowledge is not new, but has been repressed, inoperative, unconscious—for a century. More than historical remnants, the Cajun/Creole people are part of a very old culture, demographically diffused over a vast area. The "neocreole space," to use an unpardonable phrase, includes much of the lower Mississippi Valley and Gulf Coast, and several Caribbean islands. There are also extensions of the creole population in Chicago and Los Angeles.⁷

As yet, Louisiana's "cultural revival," which has spawned a touristic market at home and much curiosity—not to mention vast sales—nationwide, remains in thralldom to elite political interests. These define local culture not in economic or political terms, but as a vague "heritage," as though creole people were not a living society but curious items in a vast outdoor preserve.⁸ From the perspective of formal history and social science, creole people have been regarded as a mysterious, inscrutable lot who warranted no particular research attention. Belonging more to myth than to history, that is where, until very recently, they have been consigned.

Local and regional institutions did produce, from the 1930s, a wide range of graduate theses on many aspects of local civilization and history, many focused upon the regional French dialect.⁹ Few of these ever achieved publication, however, and at no time have the political implications of the effacement of regional culture been expressed, or publicly acknowledged. The fact reflects the carpet-bag character of the region's leading media, education, and publishing institutions for over a century and a quarter. But ruling-class repression of the regional social reality over this long period has by no means restricted the output of literature directed at the area's unique mythos. In fact, both the state and the city of New Orleans have been the objects of an imaginative literary quest whose sheer volume rivals that inspired by Venice, Paris, or Tokyo, and has no equal in the United States. The bulk of this literary avalanche is best kept at a sanitary distance from discernible readers. As one of Louisiana's foremost scholars reckons:

The supreme irony of Louisiana historiography must surely be that the state's past lends itself so readily to the author's pen that very little of consequence or lasting significance has yet been written about it.

In an even greater failure, the subtleties and shadings of the long and often disruptive process of amalgamation of Latin and Anglo-Saxon cultures that began in Louisiana after 1803 still awaits a proper telling.¹⁰

Though we do not pretend here the “proper telling” of Professor Joseph Tregle’s admonition, let us attempt to set forth a framework of discourse: Most of what is known of the social reality of Louisiana’s creole people from the time of Hearn’s reveries comes from the work of other local-colorists—mainly G. W. Cable and Grace King. To these excellent writers must be added their creole contemporary, “Judge” Charles E. A. Gayarre, the actual standard-bearer of French postcoloniality in Louisiana for nearly a century.¹¹ Because of the largely literary and romantic inspiration of the last century’s writing, little of scientific value survives, so that a rational grasp of what was going on between creole and American groups in the area since the antebellum era must be constructed via correspondence (rare), census, migration, tax, shipping, notarial, medical, and plantation data.

Though some of this work has been executed during the past two decades, it has not achieved popular recognition, in part owing to the persistence of negative myth, on one hand, and the marginalization of creole identity (in good part an effect of the civil rights movement), on the other. No space as yet exists for the development of an alternative, nativist, creole political development, even one limited to literature and “culture.” Further frustrating a coherent regional response to the reality of creole “difference” is America’s endemic pathological rendezvous with the ghost of chattel slavery. Creole people come in all possible colors and classes, and it is at the race/class nexus that a primary breakdown occurs in the development of either a group consciousness or a mass movement—a situation traceable to the late antebellum era. So divisive can race be, that a magazine is produced in Lafayette appealing mainly to black creoles of the southwest prairies.¹²

Despite these and other impediments to a pan-creole consciousness, a small but vital literature has emerged, probing the region’s peculiar social formation. Gary and Elizabeth Mills have shown that just one creole family, the Metoyers, not only exists, but may be found by the thousands, in Louisiana and in many other states.¹³ There are many such “families,” which, taken together, constitute a notable social and cultural entity. Virginia Dominguez has shown how the racial divisions within the creole society, exacerbated by the pressures of Americanization in the past century, led to the political disintegration of the entire group, along a sort of ethnic/racial faultline. She even suggested that white creoles have all but disappeared,¹⁴ perceiving much the same situation as did the French observer Ficatier in 1957:

... en tant que classe sociale, n’existent plus. Il est sans doute facile de trouver à la Nouvelle-Orléans des américains d’origine créole, mais ils ne forment plus une aristocratie française distincte. Le grand majorité d’entre eux, d’ailleurs, non parle plus la français.¹⁵

(As a social class they [Creoles] no longer exist. Doubtless one easily finds in New Orleans plenty of Americans of creole origin, but these no longer constitute a distinct French elite. The majority don't even speak French among themselves.)

Taken with some correlative findings, Dominguez's work may be viewed as a landmark study—the first theoretically grounded ethnography of the essential creole enclave—New Orleans. Still, what applies in the case of the ancient city is not to be extended willy-nilly to the vast creole region, as Dominguez's title may imply. Methodologically, she has set a fast pace and established a beachhead in a notoriously murky area, allowing us the better to sort out the state of research on the creole phenomenon, to explore a previously undeveloped field in regional history and social science (one that has easily slipped through the cracks of academic classification), and to illustrate the corresponding social reality. The category "creole" has suffered so many twists and turns of connotation over three centuries that most of us are justifiably dissuaded from its use at all. And yet the term in recent published works refers to a real social phenomenon—a concrete human reality.¹⁶

South Louisiana has the highest concentration of Franco-Americans in the United States. It also is home to one of the densest African-descent populations on the American continent (though New York is the world's largest black metropolis). According to the 1990 Census returns, New Orleans is about 60% black and about 22% French (if French descent is here meant, the figure is much too small). Washington, D.C., a major black city, reports 30% black. The French-descent population of the South Central U. S. leads the country in fertility and is expected to double in the next decade.¹⁷ Lastly, the lower Mississippi Valley also has the largest concentration of black Catholics in North America, and New Orleans boasts a unique network of black Catholic educational institutions.¹⁸

Given the intersection of French and Spanish colonialism, multiracialism, multilingualism, antique Catholicism, and continuous immigration from Europe and the Americas to Louisiana, it is little wonder that so many *littérateurs* have found the place compelling. Most have had a difficult time, however, viewing regional society from other than the perspective of exotic bird-watchers.

The works of Virginia Dominguez and others signal northern academia's belated acknowledgment of the existence of this *ancienne société*; local researchers will be thus challenged to revisit the vast local archives, to value the extraordinary materials in private hands, to expand upon the published ethnography to date. If academia has long proven shy in its approach to North America's creole culture zone, the native masses have long cultivated enthusiasm regarding their distinctive folkways. The "creole" question has enlivened

the public forum throughout the region for over a century and a half. "Experts" have continuously volunteered definitions of the ambiguous term in a continuous discourse of defensive identity and cultural nostalgia. Typically, the reference comes down to each participant's real and often imagined neighborhood, group history, or community. The colonial legacy of institutionalized segmentation is apparent in this discourse, as revealed over the past decades in the editorial pages of the local *Times-Picayune*.

Though the area's creole people may number several millions, the exact state of communication among them and their level of group awareness are not easy to establish. Their identity formation is complex: they pay allegiance to a nation whose genesis varies widely from their own, and which historically has declined to accord them group recognition, to acknowledge them as a subnational entity. In this age of neoethnicity, pseudoethnicity, and state-sponsored group "rights," it is not a little ironic that in the case of an authentic historical subculture, such as Louisiana's creoles, the American state has urged the silent conviction that they do not exist. Like the Cabo Verdeans of New England, who are American, Portuguese, African, Creole, colored, white and black, all at once, Louisianians learn to function via several more identities than do most Americans. The Phipps Case (1981) publicized this ambiguity. A creole woman, claiming to be white, sued the state for classifying her as "Negro" in its vital statistics. A circus atmosphere reminiscent of the Scopes Trial ensued. A major media blitz blasted the state's "backward" laws, utterly misrepresenting the inherited logic of socio-racial classification and ethnic record-keeping. The media had the last word, thanks to the temerity of local officials and academics, at a loss to analyze the inherited system of record-keeping—a symptom of the primitive state of knowledge of the region's ethnohistory and the prostrate psychology of regional elites faced with "national" criticism. The case also broadcast a poorly kept American "secret"—the conscious desire of nonwhites to be white.¹⁹

This bizarre case has its source in the early stages of state formation and in the complex process of absorbing former European colonies like Florida, Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, and California into an expansionist America. From roughly the 1830s, the demographic expansion from east to southwest and the gradual phasing in of American norms, from language and religion to law and technology, throughout those areas was experienced as a subtle but certain revolution in the stagnant lives of the old settlers. The *ancienne population*, the native creoles of the lower Mississippi watershed, were persistently challenged by the influx of American and European immigrants, who viewed the region as an open frontier and cared little that a Franco-Spanish, Catholic, racially heterogeneous society of ancient origins already inhabited the territory and its European and Caribbean-oriented capital. A golden age of creole productivity just prior to the Civil War was one response to that stimulus.

Local society was already over a century old when the earliest Anglo-Americans appeared on the scene to exploit the resources of the alluvial terrain and the prospects of the port. Creoles gradually lost economic and political control, as reflected in the profusion of Protestant churches, the decline of French in the public and official domain, the increasing rate of exogamous marriages, and the hardening of racial lines just before the Civil War.²⁰ The situation in rural southwest Louisiana and east Texas differed somewhat, as the descendants of the old colonist settlers managed to retain their land, wealth, and speech to a remarkable degree.²¹ The persistence of the *ancienne population* in roughly the areas of original settlement is apparent from West's *Atlas*. The majority of the surnames listed there do not, as any casual reader might suppose, pertain to the plentiful Acadians of southwest Louisiana—rather, more than half of these names are of creole origin.²² This will not mean much unless the distinction is drawn. Acadian names in Nova Scotia and Louisiana are limited in number. Only ten surnames account for half the Acadian-named population in Louisiana. They are easily identified and located.²³

Creoles were an utterly different migration that entered the Gulf-Mississippi region directly from France, the French West Indies, Jamaica, and Cuba (especially the 1809–10 influx of over 10,000). If we stretch the definition of creole to include all the populations of French and Spanish descent that settled in the present USA, we would overextend the parameters of manageable mass, by including the southwestern Hispanos, the *Tejanos* of east Texas (closely allied to French Creoles in northwest Louisiana), all the Canary Islander groups in Texas, Louisiana, and Florida, most of the population of modern Louisiana, much of the population of the Gulf Coast from Houston to Tampa, and even the South Carolina Huguenots. It is unnecessary to be so inclusive to make the germane point. A picture of the distribution of Francophone people across North America since the seventeenth century is rather astounding. Because the population has been generally very thin and dispersed, it has attracted little interest from demographers, geographers, or social science generally. The studies of Louder and Waddell very graphically make this point, showing how these populations have been swept along on the tide of subsequent migration.²⁴ But the Francophone presence, like the Hispanic, gave way to Manifest Destiny only up to the point of effective urbanization. The Mexican border is where it is, and not further south, because Mexican populations along the Rio Grande were dense enough in 1848 to hold claim to their country.²⁵

Though the Creoles of old did not survive as a political entity, they did so in the imagination of creative writers and eager readers. Following an inexorable law, the arts of the Robber Baron age extolled the human virtues that urban industrialism made maladaptive. Popular literature of the past century reveled in the flip side of Robber Baron crudity, apotheosizing the “Lost Cause” and the

vanished ideals of preindustrial honor and fidelity. The romantic, dueling, poetic creole in the 1840s was a stock figure. There was also occasional substance to the myth. At the moment of American ascendancy, the South's creole populations represented an anomaly at best, and a menace at worst. They were attached to a foreign power, an unpopular European Church, a language associated with rationalism, decadence, and revolution, with customs that smacked of scandal, and a cuisine too African to contemplate.²⁶ Until Jackson's descent in 1815, only one of ten people resident in New Orleans spoke fluent English. In some parishes only a handful of American settlers could be found. Spoken French did not die out, as Jefferson and Tom Paine predicted, but revived with the harried influx of more Creoles, the Saint-Domingue refugees, among whom were accomplished legists, printers, publicists, journalists, teachers, and bread bakers. These Creoles moved quickly into the occupation structure and the social life at all levels.²⁷

The largest concentration of Creoles has always been in New Orleans, though they were present in every rural post and plantation north and westward to Texas and eastward along the Gulf Coast to Pensacola. Their settlements persisted up the Mississippi Valley to Missouri and Illinois, where clusters of their characteristic architecture are still preserved. Their population grew steadily through the early nineteenth century, as they were demographically submerged, at first in farm districts through Rapides, Avoyelles, and other central parishes; and ultimately in New Orleans itself, where by 1830 the ethnolinguistic friction required the city's division into three municipalities along national lines. The perduring structures of a century and a half of creole ascendancy, from stately mansions to shotgun cottages to Indian fortresses that today dot the Gulf and the Mississippi, attest to a material culture in no wise inferior to what succeeded it.²⁸

Liliane Crété has essayed genially on this early period, emphasizing the stark differences in temper and taste that divided the American and creole communities in the city.²⁹ Far out—in Avoyelles, Pointe Coupée and Rapides, and St. Landry, on the Francophone frontier as it were—land was plentiful and ethnic rivalry was limited, as the two groups imperceptibly merged. A similar pattern characterized the Gulf Coast, though in both cases the sheer preponderance of "mericains" assured assimilation of the *ancienne majorite*. Only in New Orleans was there palpable resistance to Americanization, but megavents such as the War of 1812, the Mexican War (1848), the Cuban filibusters, and the Civil War never allowed creole nationalism much momentum.

Creole politics was naturally ultraconservative, and thereby tended to undermine the objectives of an autonomous Francophonie. The defensive posture of planterdom contributed to this conservatism. The experience of three changes of sovereignty and three official languages in 36 years (1767–1803) figured prominently in creating the conservative cast of mind and the void in civic responsibility that has long plagued the region; another was the legacy of Haiti,

where the French Revolution fomented a grave reactionism among the refugees and their descendants. By the 1830s many Creoles had already lived in Saint-Domingue, lost fortunes, moved to Cuba, established estates, faced exile again in 1809, and were now on their third try in Louisiana. The loss of slaves in three separate countries, the pains of migration and resettlement—such experience bred a stout variety of political cynicism and distrust of governments and fates. Loss of land and slaves after the Civil War put the coup-de-grace to many a last-ditch creole career.

The War for Southern Liberation was surely the watershed event in the three-century experience of the creole people of the South. The entire Francophone society of the region suffered material, political, social losses—with dire psychological effects. Commercial agriculture and trade were devastated by economic disruption, military occupation, and cultural decay. A permanent wedge was driven between white and nonwhite, who having sustained unfathomed damages from both the war and the regime of Federal Reconstruction, turned ever inward and backward, as they were when portrayed by G. W. Cable.³⁰ As local institutions crumbled, both groups were further marginalized, until creole identity was reduced to a mere caricature. From the 1880s Creoles founded associations and publications in which to defend their sense of nationality (ethnicity), but many sensed they were doomed, as Alfred Roman, secretary of the Creole Association, chartered in 1886, addressed the *Picayune* that year:

It is truly amazing that the Dutch of New York and the Huguenots of South Carolina are considered to-day as the very best (society) in the land and eagerly cling to traditions of the past, while Louisiana creoles live under the revolting prejudice that they are of an inferior race and not the equals, as a class, of their fellow American citizens of another ancestry.³¹

This gloomy lament is emblematic of the condition of the French-oriented upper class after Reconstruction, at a point midway between the regional ethnogenesis of the creole people (best treated elsewhere) and today's politics of cultural preservation.³² For clarity, we must distinguish between "heritage," a metaphor for the packaging of "culture" for middle class consumption—and empirical ethnohistory—between which only slight contact occurs. Tourists are treated to a rhetoric that frames today's Louisianians as "Cajuns," constructed as oddities, curiosities—a historical aberration. Too much effort is required to see their collectivity and communities as real, as historical fragments of a centuries-old process of diffusion; one that cast peoples of Europe, Africa, and native America together in the construction of a series of European maritime empires centered, or partly focused, in the Caribbean Sea.

Consider, then, the Gulf as the north end of a Caribbean continuum, rather than the south end of the modern United States. The Lower Mississippi, until

early in the last century, was the northernmost salient of a Franco-African civilization that endures beneath the veneer of the melting pot.³³ So marginalized has become the French-descent population of the region that the designation "Creole" is not discussed in the new *Dictionary of Afro-American Slavery*³⁴ and receives only cursory coverage in the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*.³⁵ A course in American studies will never draw attention to creole literature, creole music, or creole historiography; yet these were significant products of southern creativity during the last century.³⁶ The immense literature of jazz studies only obliquely refers to the creole origins of the music, allowing a distortion in the popular perception of this most vital component of American culture.³⁷

It may be argued that creole culture is included in conventional studies of the South, though the term "creole" may be forgone—a mere question of emphasis or semantics. Since historical and other writings are produced through the prism of what Jacques Barzun liked to call "thought clichés," it may be revealing to consider which ones govern here. One powerful cliché is that the South is a land of two races, having a historical experience that sets it apart from the rest of America and the world. This binary model reflects and reifies a specific ideology but obscures the social reality. A large percentage of white Southerners have African and American Indian antecedents and most black Americans have white ancestry. Some subregional areas of the South exhibit a material and/or a domestic culture shared nearly identically among several "races" since the eighteenth century.³⁸

The dispersed groupings of creole peoples along the lower Mississippi Valley and Gulf Coast came to be here via colonization, not from the British Isles or the eastern seaboard, but from France and Spain via the Antilles. The early historical record of these populations is in French and Spanish archival sources, as well as in a wide range of local repositories, not to mention a range of nineteenth-century French publications, among which travel literature figures prominently.³⁹ Thus the study of creole history is occluded from the spectrum of likely research subjects because it requires us to rethink some canonical clichés. A great many creoles of note were of mixed African-European origins. Black historiography ignores them because they used French and seem therefore "foreign." Traditional history ignores them because of the nineteenth-century stigma attached to "race" and "color." One example makes the point: Paul Lafargue (1842–1911), who was born in Cuba of French creole parents from the Saint-Domingue diaspora, and subsisted on the proceeds of sugar properties inherited in Louisiana.⁴⁰ Most of his life was spent in France, where he finished medical study, but was drawn to both socialism and Laura, the daughter of Karl Marx, whom he married in 1868.

Lafargue emerged the leader of French radicalism and was elected to the national assembly while serving a prison term. He was a fiery writer of utopian

tracts and a classic critic of industrial political economy. (He also published a tract against circumcision!) Though he is well known in Europe, he is utterly unknown in Louisiana; and Cuban literature about him is scant. A colored, multilingual socialist, Lafargue was easily bested by Horatio Alger at the bookstands, and was not the likely object of hagiography. He is mentioned in no modern biographical dictionary of Afro-Americans. Few American-born personalities, and certainly no racially ambiguous ones, had such a blistering impact on any European society in the last century, yet Paul Lafargue remains invisible.⁴¹

How did the culture that produced Lafargue manage to be effaced from the American environment; to be physically present yet silent and unacknowledged? The official record of the era between the Purchase (1803) and the Battle of New Orleans (1815) is practically mute regarding creoles, despite their vital participation in the defense of the city from British invasion. The majority of experienced personnel on that occasion were refugees from Saint-Domingue, where they had already faced British fire. As a group, their real identity has gone unmentioned all this time, doubtless due to the animus against free-colored creoles that intensified through the antebellum era. Officially, creole identity and the heterogeneity it implied proved embarrassing, especially as Americanization involved the displacement of a nonwhite or mixed majority population in the territory of the Louisiana Purchase. Having been in the lower Mississippi since the late seventeenth century, preferring to use French to communicate, and tolerating interracial concubinage, they bore the marks of a nation within a nation.

Because we have perceived the South as a place where two races have vied for control of discrete spaces, and because Southerners have long held an acute political and economic interest in the image of racial polarity, the racially ambiguous, culturally alien, already-present, property-holding creole population offended both the dominant ideology and the precarious sense of American identity and ownership of the country. With their historic ties to Europe, the Caribbean, and (remotely) Africa, creoles have been "written out" of the population history of the South, and become a truly "forgotten people" despite their nearly autochthonous roots in the country. Even Xavier University in New Orleans, America's only black Catholic college, whose student majority comes traditionally from local creole families, offers no creole studies program and no course in creole civilization or language. There has been little market in southern history and social science for researches into a population that is traditionally Catholic, oftentimes ethnically indecipherable, and linguistically disloyal; shrouded in mythology and misnomer, and ominous in what its real past may say about "pluralism," this historic regional subculture has yet to make its rendezvous with modern America.

Though the past decade has seen many instances of fine scholarship dedicated

to creole themes, as yet there is no general sense of what kind of whole these emerging parts refer to. A brief exploration of the historical contours of creole society in the South, based on both contemporary published data and some primary research, will suggest a legitimate framework for research and a distinct field of interdisciplinary study.

Origins

When the real estate on the west bank of the Mississippi and the small "Isle of Orleans" was transferred to American sovereignty in 1803, people already lived there. A small percentage were "foreigners," usually Anglo-Americans who had entered Spanish territory in the last years of the preceding century, often with the colonial government's encouragement. Though thousands of Spanish people had come into the Gulf coast and various settlements in Louisiana since 1767, most were temporary, and there were never many Hispanics relative to either the size of the native (creole) population or the vastness of the King's domain. This fact in no way mitigates the strong impact of the Spanish regime on the legal, architectural, and musical development of the regional society.⁴² French Louisiana was far more diverse than popularly portrayed. The Spanish came upon an already established society, peopled by native Indian, Canadian, West Indian, French, and Alsatian settlers (*habitants*). The so-called "French" population included immigrants from every part of France, from Saint-Domingue and the Windward Islands, from Quebec and Upper Louisiana; Alsatians (among the John Law Germans), Africans, black West Indians, and recombinations of all the above.⁴³ Serious colonizers, the Spanish summarily crushed local resistance to the change of sovereignty in 1768, reorganized the bureaucracy, installed the latest urban improvements, and imposed their own colonial law.⁴⁴

Though the entire regime until 1803 (1818 and 1821 in the Florida Parishes) was administered from Cuba and, secondarily, from New Orleans, the colonial people were distributed over an enormous area that embraced Arkansas, the Mississippi Valley as far north as Iowa on the west bank, and Memphis southward on the east bank; all of the Gulf Coast through Biloxi, Mobile, and Pensacola, and the waterways that descended from hundreds of miles northward. The coastal towns were securely tied to New Orleans through a dense network of trading and passenger vessels, and virtually constituted one community. When the Americans came to incorporate this vast region, there were creole "establishments" in St. Louis, St. Genevieve, Natchez, Opelousas, Pointe Coupée, Attakapas, and Natchitoches to the west, and Biloxi, Gulfport, Mobile, and Pensacola all along the Gulf coast eastward.⁴⁵ It must be emphasized that creole populations were not confined to, nor exclusively associated with,

Louisiana—not in the early nineteenth century, at least. Post-Reconstruction fiction, and fanciful writing in the guise of historical work, generated the myth and enduring assumption, that creoles were somehow to be found only in the quaint, iron-grilled passageways of New Orleans's Vieux carcé. Robert West's *Atlas of Louisiana Surnames of French and Spanish Origin* indicates that colonial French, Spanish, and other settlers were distributed over a vast area, and moreover, in those locales of densest colonial settlement, they remained the majority until well into the past century and frequently they assimilated "*les américains*" and other "foreigners," though the reverse occurred where demographic pressure was sufficient.⁴⁶ One of Louisiana's premier genealogists calculates that there are nearly 1,000,000 people of creole origin within Louisiana's current boundaries alone, and perhaps again that many in the general area once referred to as the "province."⁴⁷

Despite the continuous migration of French people to Louisiana through the course of the past century and the large modern community of French descendants, the French language as a popular medium has steadily declined, and no impetus for regional creole studies has been found. The local French language and its variants have attenuated to near-extinction (a very gradual process taking about a century), particularly since World War II. Having never surpassed English as the language of the market—and the Creole City was the heart of the market—Louisiana French was reduced largely to small-circulation newspapers and religious magazines, to become a domestic language, associated with family intimacy and religious experiences.⁴⁸ The fact that the state must promote its use is a sign of its increasing irrelevance. On the other hand, increasing globalization of the capitalist economies and Louisiana's geographical and commercial advantages may yet enhance the prospects of French.

Race & Créolité

We have remarked the profound political conservatism of regional creole communities, past and present, which unexpectedly does not promote social conservatism—*au contraire*. There is evidence as well to argue the innate cultural conservatism of the creoles since Reconstruction, especially of those racially mixed. A study of wills indicates that they retained their language and customs far more tenaciously and longer than did their white counterparts.⁴⁹ For this reason the tension that developed after the Civil War as colored creoles moved to lead the first civil rights campaign created bitter divisions and prevented any unified organizing by the native Francophone society. Many colored creoles, including the several hundreds who fought for the Confederacy—and more significantly, those who fought for the Union—ultimately disdained both the

War and the consequent Reconstruction, the subsequent material loss, and the Republican attempt to revolutionize local society.⁵⁰ Still others among the most talented colored creoles applied their skills and exploited the new opportunities to lead a long political struggle against the white power structure, much of which was still in white creole hands.

Very often colored and white creoles shared not only a common space, a common domestic culture, and common speech, religion, and customs, but also a common history, since they often also shared (usually white male) ancestors. Thus during Reconstruction conservative whites saw the “radical” politics of their colored countrymen as treasonous, while certain privileged colored politicians saw themselves leading the black freedmen to full civil rights.⁵¹ Colored creoles bitterly resented the whites’ attempts to disassociate themselves from their fellows, to seek refuge from the racial tyranny that followed Reconstruction, to erect a public and literary discourse that even excluded the former from the appellation “creole.” The bitterness of that betrayal was never repaired, though privately white and colored creoles often remained close, as suggested in the household compositions recorded in the 1880 U.S. Federal census.⁵²

The multivalent struggle over the distribution of power during Reconstruction so fractured the French-speaking population of Louisiana that creole identity itself crumbled, particularly with the assault from outside—from the Reconstruction government. Only then did white publicists begin to insist that race was a criterion for membership in the creole subculture. Only they (whites) could legitimately claim creole identity, the term having taken on a positive, romanticized connotation by the late nineteenth century.⁵³ Colored Franco-phones occasionally retorted that they certainly were creoles, since their language, religion, customs, and antiquity in the colony were shared with the rest of the gallic community (and surely not with the American Negroes). This self-defeating colloquy, which continues as we speak, cannot be imagined outside the overarching pall of scientific racism that gripped the country with the approach of the Civil War and came by the 1890s to conflate race with culture. A leading figure in that trend was a Tulane professor of medicine with a practice in Mobile, Josiah Nott. Through the later years Nott published in Britain and the United States a series of books and essays proclaiming dire consequences to white civilization and eugenic health that would result from continued racial crossing. Contorting Gobineau, Nott and others managed to make respectable, “scientific,” and later popular, a theory nowhere verified in experience. As popular social prejudices met elitist medical theory, the hybrid creoles had to run for cover.⁵⁴ Only foolhardy creole chauvinists like Plessy and the Desdunes held out.

The identity struggle within the creole society diverted Louisianians from the immediate issue of late-nineteenth-century life—*survivance*—and became its

unwitting undoing. Reconstitution, revival, solidarity, even survival as a distinct historic culture would have required a whole new discourse that left the canard of race to the "foreigners." Instead, white elites took the bait offered by the expansionist American state, with its scientist apologists, and hence the first steps toward oblivion in the melting pot. From the easy distance of a century, it is not difficult to see how this developed, though it was not clear to those who experienced those chaotic decades. Colored creoles were under siege as early as the restrictive legislation of the 1840s. They began moving out of the region in large enough numbers to affect the whole society's viability. They made for places as unlikely as Haiti, Mexico, and Europe.⁵⁵ With the Southern Pacific Railroad completed in 1880, a steady stream drained out to Los Angeles and to places along the route, such as San Antonio. White creoles quickly apprehended what the presence of colored confreres among them signified to their new American masters. They were not particularly proud of their society, which had been a dumping ground and military outpost for three different nations. They were easygoing, dissimulating. They sought to avoid confrontation, to appear neutral at least, and not foreign or disloyal. They expected to retain several historical identities: American, Southern, creole. As Homère Plessy discovered, even local ordinance could be contrived to draw a sharp line where there had been none. American racial politics and imperialist aggression took things on another course.

The "Radical" Reconstructionists insisted, while occupying and dismantling the Old South in the name of the freedmen and civil rights, that the colored creoles were Negroes. Americans had little use for the three-caste system that gave the colored people their own "space"—a special status that was not quite white nor quite slave.⁵⁶ This was not an ideal arrangement, but a social fact that accommodated whites and colored people at least, and permitted a certain permeability among the three castes. The American government and the flood of incoming American settlers did not comprehend the ambiguity, the chiaroscuro, of intermediate status—to them the world was literally all black or white. Americans easily asserted a kind of superiority over the creoles; the whites were charged with having "a hint of the tar-brush." Rather than organize to defend their land and their birthright, the natives quarreled. Both racial groups sought to adapt to the new circumstances that followed the withdrawal of Federal troops in 1877. White creoles and Americans ultimately connived to have the colored creoles classed with the freedmen, so that the last two decades of the century were fraught with omens of declining status and actual exclusion from many kinds of skilled or other work. European immigrants began arriving before the Civil War, and a half century later were competing vigorously with black and colored natives for available jobs. In the hard contest for home rule, which meant reasserting white control over the ex-slaves and their issue, the colored creoles

were caught in a sociopolitical no-man's land.⁵⁷ A large and growing part of the regional population in 1835, they steadily declined in numbers and status until they became a mere appendage on the black underclass—to all but themselves.⁵⁸

Prosopography or Caste of Characters?

The study of creoles has, until the recent appearance of the several works cited, remained the patrimony of the local amateur and the oral mythologist. Recent research allows us to see how the very word “creole” was chewed up and distorted by the internecine conflict over who could please America most. Dominguez and Mills explain the various uses of the word in the printed media from the late colonial time to the present, and how these uses served interest groups, with the usual goal of excluding the colored creoles from the public perception of who creole society was. A prosopography, or collective biography, of creoles indicates a large group with distinguished members distributed across a spectrum of skin colors.

The Gulf Coast creoles were not acquired by a war, but they no less frequently resisted assimilation, and they were dense enough to maintain a distinct and separate society through the decades, and a smaller, more besieged presence into this century. Ironically, white creoles nearly evaporated in this century, while the colored ones still persist in many areas of endeavor: music, education, law, politics, media, arts. Neither group tends to acknowledge the other, and neither wants to be acknowledged as creole—unless that means having aristocratic ancestors. Yet another irony is that in both groups are a few descendants of lesser, and occasionally high, French and Spanish nobility.⁵⁹ Since much of the culture, both popular and elite, of the lower Mississippi region evolved under creole influence, that is, when creole people were demographically dominant or (later) in decline but still potent, and since several million creole descendants live in the South and a great number may be found in Chicago and California, and since creole identity has survived the disaster of the last century and the easy mobility of this one, perhaps the real history of creoles now deserves serious attention.

A catalogue of creole achievements in many fields would astound any reader, including creoles themselves. Their culture flourished from the 1830s to the War, under competition from American neighbors. They excelled in several fields: tropical medicine, Afro-Caribbean music, comparative law, architecture, and commercial agriculture (cotton, sugar, rice). They produced (in French) a worthy creative literature—prose and poetry⁶⁰; a vibrant and witty journalism (Lionel Durel, editor of *Le Carrillon*, for example); monumental regional histories (Xavier Martin, C. Gayarre, A. Fortier are prominent); political polemicism second to none (Dr. Charles Delery stands out); a few notable protoanthropolo-

gists (Duralde, Rouquette); artists and engravers (Salazar, Hudson), and lest we slight him, the spiritual monarch of New Orleans—Amedee Peychaud, inventor of the cocktail!

Those who pass on are soon forgotten in the high-tech, high-speed orbit of mass culture, and more so those who departed two centuries back. Yet many creole people have seriously influenced their times. The period saw the preponderance of creole output: the Baratarian privateer community of Jackson's era, for example, was predominantly creole—and a force to reckon with, as witness the Battle of New Orleans in 1815, and the subsequent wars for South American independence, in which many took part in the 1820s. Renato Beluche, among others, comes to mind in that connection. Even in the sciences some creoles excelled: Norbert Rillieux, a colored, French-trained engineer, revolutionized sugar processing equipment (1840s). In literature there were parallel white and colored traditions dating far back. Victor Sejour, colored, dominated Parisian drama circles. Armand Lanusse led the first black literary movement in North America just prior to the Civil War. The noted Southern General P. T. G. Beauregard was the author of several works concerning the South in the Civil War, for which Alfred Roman fronted as author. Adrien and Dominique Rouquette were major publishers of romantic poetry in the tradition of Chateaubriand. Adrien, following the path of LePage du Pratz, Martin Duralde, and Audubon, documented and communed with the Choctaws, who evanesced from the north shore only in this century; born in the Quarter, Alfred Vignaud made himself the salient authority on Columbus and the Discoveries while secretary at the American embassy in Paris for many decades after the Civil War; late in the century, Alfred Mercier, one of a host of brilliant creole physicians, treated yellow fever and wrote a series of excellent novels exploring social problems and the merits of the creole language. R. L. Desdunes published in Canada in 1911 a meticulously compiled and plaintively chronicled account of the colored creole intellectual class at the turn of the century—an explicit expression of *créolité*. From these writers there runs a line to Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Jean Toomer, Arna Bontemps (all three participants in the Harlem Renaissance), Frank Yerby, and Ernest Gaines.

Tremé native, Pierre Crabites (1877–1943), diplomat and author of important works in African and European political history, was appointed a judge on the International Mixed Tribunal in Cairo that decided the fate of the King Tut treasures in 1924, during the time Jelly Roll Morton was “inventing” jazz.⁶¹ Morton's musical ancestor was Louis Moreau Gottschalk, the actual “creator” of ragtime, who formalized Afro-Caribbean music and astounded audiences on three continents (1850s); creoles turned en masse from literature to music at the turn of the century, to better support themselves. The prosopography of early jazz is packed with Louisiana creole musicians, among whom the chief interpo-

lator for Gottschalk was Jelly Roll himself.⁶² And of course the significance of Louis Armstrong requires no elaboration.

The chess genius Paul Morphy was studied by Freud's star student, Ernest Jones; Clement Eaton considered Gayarre the greatest American historian of the nineteenth century. Artist Richard Clague was feted in Europe and America; Milneburg-born Ada Isaacs Mencken, paramour of Alexander Dumas fils, was the toast of Parisian society, bohemian though she was. She prefigured the many creoles who would later contribute to the development of American entertainment: Ben Turpin, Joan Crawford, Dorothy Lamour, Guy Kibbe, and Catherine Dunham. It is doubtful whether any other single part of the United States, with the exception of big eastern cities, or any area of the South, could account for such a thick gumbo of cultural productivity over such a long period, as did Louisiana in the past century and well into the present one. This is no attempt to catalogue the collective output of the regional society, but to suggest the contours of a real phenomenon.

All this production appeared because New Orleans and its hinterlands were prosperous, expanding, linked to distant markets via steamer and—most importantly—attuned to political and cultural trends in France. The combination of American entrepreneurialism and French civilization provided a material foundation for the development of a unique creole cultural boom that reached well across the past century. From it much of the humor, lore, music, aesthetics, architecture, cuisine, and mythology of the Old South emerged and has become standard fare today.⁶³ Still, the real magnitude of today's population of creole descent in the South has never been estimated, since creole people are not supposed to exist.⁶⁴

Creole descendants continue to be a sizeable minority throughout the South Central States and lower Mississippi, and in South Louisiana (and parts of the former colonial "province" and Territory) they are a majority of the native-born. The Cajun craze, though welcome in many ways, obscures a more significant reality: the suspension in time of an entire people—a "fractured nation."⁶⁵ So-called "Cajuns" are part of a larger culture complex whose roots reach far back to earliest European contacts with Africa and North America, to the transmission of a synthetic new "creole" civilization, with a unifying language, aesthetic, cuisine, music, and politics stretching across broad expanses of the Americas.⁶⁶ Do this particular history and the current state of officially promoted "cultural preservationism" bode well for either the future survival of "creole civilization" or a successful linkup to the pan-creole movement? It is difficult to be optimistic on either count.

New Orleans's liberal establishment this spring of 1996 celebrates the centennial of the Plessy vs. Ferguson case, wherein the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a Louisiana statute creating a "separate but equal" principle on public carriers.

The legislature had passed this, its first Jim Crow law, in 1890, followed by an antimiscegenation statute in 1894. In 1896 a political compromise over the election of Governor Murphy Foster doomed black political participation. Literacy and property-owning qualifications were written into election laws passed by the state constitutional convention in 1898, removing the bulk of black voters from the registration rolls. There were 128,150 black voters listed in 1888, but only 5,320 survived in 1900. Separate schools for the races were also written into the constitution.

Foster's grandson, Mike Foster, a Democrat turned Republican, is now governor, and nearly every statistic places Louisiana at the bottom of the 50 states. Still, the Plessy celebrants persist in their dogged illusion of progress. Federal law since 1954 and 1964 has struck down the holding in the Plessy case and "integrated schools" now prevail throughout the state. Federal Affirmative Action policy has for decades opened the way for black citizens to political office and white-collar employment. Beneath the happy facade of cryptofascist social engineering there persist conditions of poverty and educational farce that make those of a century ago enviable. There are more illiterates in the state today than there were people in 1896. The real per capita income of the bottom half of the population is lower than it was a century ago. The homicide rate per thousand is much higher than in Plessy's time, and the "integrated schools" are 99% black. The ruling class's spokesmen may fool themselves but they do not fool the many thousands of denizens of the state's public housing projects, nor the rural inhabitants of the parishes along the "cancer corridor," whose conditions often approximate those of Mali or Chad.

Plessy's case is misread by the celebrants. However it is interpreted in legal history, it reminds us of how the state's past is bound up with the fate of the creole people. The group that brought the suit represented a successful colored creole middle class, whose historic privileges were trounced by Jim Crow. Their concern with the conditions of the black underclass was doubtful. This same group of creoles today occupies symbolic positions in the legislature, mayoralty, judiciary, and police. The misuse of public funds, abuse of office, and indifference to the conditions of the mass of citizens exhibited by these officials would shame the political ring that dominated New Orleans a century ago. creoles are the key group upon whom rests the future of the region. They are products of its history and environment and representative of its composite character.

At some point the progressive celebrants of the civil rights fest may do well to consider another strategy, as the politics of symbolic shell games exhausts itself amidst the sweltering dance of decay. The cultural heritage agenda keeps a distance from the realpolitik of the housing project, the brainchild of Federal and local parasites and white-collar larcenists. Yet the Cajun craze and the Heritage program have mass appeal and hence the seeds of mass organization required to

arrest the hemorrhaging of the crucified body politic. Lest history dictate the future, now is the time to rethink past social reality and to set a new course. This and that fest must give way to critical economic reappraisal; careful management of Louisiana's precious human and natural resources must replace the politics of pseudoethnicity, shell games, and Federal dependency. The ideal of "work" must replace the abstraction of "rights" in public discourse.

The Plessy celebrants have an inverted perception of history. It is not the "separate but equal" fantasy that marks the low point in Louisiana's social debacle, but the regression to the present disaster, concealed not at all by the self-serving pretense of progress. Louisiana has the Mississippi, the City of New Orleans, the second port of the United States, and the second oil production after Texas (not to add a monstrous federal dole), but cannot feed, house, and medicate its few million people. Let's reflect on that ... as we congratulate ourselves.

Notes

¹ Lafcadio Hearn, *Gombo Zhebes: A Little Dictionary of Creole Proverbs* (New York: Harper Bros., 1885): 25; Hearn worked in Louisiana from 1878 to 1887. Some meditations on his sociological prescience appear in Hepzibah Roskelly, "Cultural Translator: Lafcadio Hearn," in Richard Kennedy, ed., *Literary New Orleans: Essays and Meditations* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992): 16–28.

² Hearn, *Martinique Sketches* (New York: Harper Bros., 1890). The most useful published, brief treatment of Hearn's "creolism" is Emily Hahn, *Romantic Rebels: An Informal History of Bohemianism in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967): 73–93. An intimate account is Leona de Queyrouze, *The Idyll—My Personal Reminiscences of Lafcadio* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1932). Most insightful of all is S. Frederick Starr, "Lafcadio Hearn and his Creole Japan" [forthcoming].

³ The published record of the pan-creole movement is already vast. See, for example, Francis Byrne and John Holm, eds., *Atlantic Meets Pacific: A Global View of Pidginization and Creolization* (Amsterdam: Benjamin's, 1993); Petr Zima, "The New Wave in Creole Studies," *Archiv-Orientalni* [Amsterdam] 55, no. 4 (1987): 405–408; Vinesh Hooksoomsing, "So Near, Yet so Far: Bannzil's Pan-Creole Idealism," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* [Berlin], 102 (1993): 27–38; Lambert Prudent, "Political Illusions of an Intervention in the Linguistic Domain in Martinique," *IJSL* 102 (1993): 135–48, Ellen Schnepel, "Creole Movements in the Francophone Orbit," *IJSL* 102 (1993): 117–34; Adlai Murdoch, "Displacing Marginality: Cultural Identity and Creole Resistance in Glissant and Maximin," *Research in African Literatures* 25 (Summer, 1994): 81–101; Juris Silenieks, "Toward Créolité," in James Arnold et al., eds., *History of Literature in the Caribbean*, vol. 1: *Hispanic and Francophone Regions* (Amsterdam: Benjamin's, 1994): 517–25.

⁴ David Cheramie, "La nouvelle littéraire de la Louisiane française," *Francographies* 2, (1993): 301–308; Thomas Klingler, "Norme, tourisme, et étiolement linguistique chez les creolephones en Louisiane," *Cahiers de l'Institut de Linguistique* [Louvain-la-Neuve] 20, nos. 1–2 (1994): 123–29.

⁵ A century ago local luminaries such as Alfred Mercier, Alcée Fortier, and Jules Choppin collected creole folk literature and incorporated black creole speech in their more popular works. They fully acknowledged the role of Louisiana creole in the evolution of the regional culture. See S. D. Dickinson, "Créole Patois in the Novels of Dr. Alfred Mercier," *Louisiana Literature* 8, no. 1 (1991): 69–80. A. Fortier, "Bits of Louisiana Lore," *Transactions of the Modern Language Association of America*. 1, 2 (1887–8): 1–69, and *Louisiana Folk-Tales* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1895). Choppin and Mercier published their "Creole Studies" in the *Comptes rendus de l' Athénée Louisianaise*. Among overtly political responses to the pressure of Americanization, white creoles organized themselves in that period into a series of literary and self-help organizations. See "Charter, by-laws and rules of the Creole Association of Louisiana," Incorporated June 24, 1886 (New Orleans: Crescent Steam Print, 1886): 17 pages. Charles J. Villers, vice-pres.

⁶ Eric Waddell, "La louisiane: un poste outre-frontiere de l' Amerique française ou un autre pays et une autre culture?" in Dean Louder and E. Waddell, eds., *Du continent perdu à l'archipel retrouvé* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1983): 196–211; Jacques Henry, Review of James Dormon, *The People Called Cajuns: An Introduction to an Ethnohistory* (Lafayette, LA: University of Southwest Louisiana Press, 1983), in *Revue francophone de louisiane* 1, no. 1 (Spring, 1986): 89–93.

⁷ For purposes of discussion we have collapsed the terms Cajun and creole. The varying historical origins and distinctions between the two terms cannot be set forth in this space. In most respects the populations they refer to have merged during this century. By creole we refer to Louisiana's Francophone communities and regional culture. The term is more inclusive than Cajun, which creole may be taken to include, but not obliterate. We also demur in the matter of French Canada, which certainly shares in the colonial history, population, and language exchange of today's creole culture areas. Like Louisiana, it is marginalized by a British-origin majority and by its traditional development outside the capitalist "center." The case is too extensive and physically remote to treat here.

⁸ The reticence of CODOFIL (the state's promoter of French-language maintenance), for example, to embrace the creole-speaking dimension of local language usage, found mainly among black and colored rural folk, typifies the elitist approach to "culture." As does the centrality of food (cuisine) to the neo-creole revival. Cooking helps promote ethnicity as "heritage"; it is infinitely marketable in a country where culinary skill (and domesticity generally) has dissolved, and its effects are inherently benign. Consider the wide acceptance of Paul Prudhomme, who is disabled and confined to his TV kitchen stool, for example, and the contrasting images of Zack Richard or the late Dewey Balfa, sincere creole nationalists and beloved Cajun musicians known widely among music consumers in Louisiana, Canada, and France for hard living, but unknown to or feared by mainstream American media. For an example of the elitist construction "ethnicity =heritage=food," see "A True and Delectable History of Creole Cooking," *American Heritage* (Dec., 1986): 66–73. Local writer Bethany Bultman here surveys New Orleans's culinary past in a lucid and beautifully illustrated manner, marked, however, by the usual lapses in chronology and inattention to historical accuracy that distinguish most writing on Louisiana. See Terrence Turner, "The politics of Culture: The Movement for Cultural Conservation as Political Cause and Anthropological Phenomenon" (unpublished paper, 152nd National Meeting of the Amer. Assn. for the

Advancement of Science, May 1986).

⁹ A flurry of regional work appeared in the 1930s, led in part by Vernon Parenton and his students at Louisiana State University, most of which remains unpublished. For example, Parenton and Joe Jones, "The People of Frilot Cove: A Study of Racial Hybrids," *American Journal of Sociology* 57 (1948): 145–49. The frequency of such tri-caste groups throughout the region attests to the unique racial arrangements of past times and the highly heterogeneous background of the modern creole population—suggesting the inappropriate application of racial categories to the contemporary ethnic discourse. Also Jay Kay Ditchy, *Les Acadiens louisianais et leur parler* (Paris, 1932) and Hosea Phillips, *Étude du parler de la paroisse Evangeline* (Paris, 1936).

¹⁰ Joseph Tregle, Jr., "The Period," in *A Guide to the History of Louisiana*, ed. by Light Cummins and Glen Jeansonne (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982): 27–49; at 27–28.

¹¹ So pervasive were Cable's images that turn-of-the-century tourists walked the Quarter with his stories tucked under their arms attempting to locate the scenes he portrayed. A travel magazine in 1925 ran the feature: "George W. Cable's New Orleans: Actual Scenes Identified with the Author's 'Old Creole Days,'" *The Mentor* (March, 1925): 28–50. Gayarre (1805–1895) penned *Histoire de la Louisiane*, 2 vols. (Nouvelle-Orleans: Magne & Weisse, 1846–47) and *A History of Louisiana*, 4 vols. (New Orleans: J. Gresham, 1879 [1883]); George Washington Cable, *The Creoles of Louisiana* (New York: Scribners, 1884); Grace King, *New Orleans: The Place and the People* (New York: Macmillan, 1907).

¹² James Dormon, "Ethnicity and Identity," in Dormon, ed., *Creoles of Color*, 167–79. It is ironic that, like the paranoid white creoles of late Reconstruction, the *Creole Magazine* utterly misses the vital point, as do the expert academicians, that race is irrelevant to the creole discourse. The virtue, or, to be scientifically objective, the phenomenon, of creole civilization in its broad historic and global context, has been its capacity to form, from all races and classes tossed into the tropical export economies, a distinctive social entity, one that has contributed solidly to the making of the North Atlantic World. This is not to collapse all creoledom into one model. Certainly vast statistical variables characterize white and colored household structures, economic status, education levels, and other indices. But a distinctive pattern separates the entirety from middle-class USA—that is, shared characteristics outweigh the local and class variations.

¹³ *The Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977). For the national context see Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: Free Press, 1984).

¹⁴ *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* (Rutgers, NJ: University Press, 1986). Dominguez avoids characterizing creole society by comparisons with mainstream America. A somewhat trite, but no less useful corrective is Robert Gramling, Craig Forsyth, and Linda Mooney, "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Cajunism," *The Journal of Ethnic Studies* 15, no. 1 (Spring, 1987): 33–47.

¹⁵ Marc Etienne Ficatier, "Les louisianais français: creoles et acadiens," *Revue de psychologie des peuples*, 3e trimestre (1957): 3–35. One finds what one seeks. Ficatier sought out a French aristocracy and concluded there was none. Were he looking for Francophones, he need only have searched the creole Seventh Ward, or the Cajun neighborhoods on the West Bank. See Pierre Paul Ebeyer, *Paramours of the Creoles* (New

Orleans: Windmill Pubs., 1945), an unseemly, sensationalist, local treatise bordering on parody, yet a revealing creole product.

¹⁶ Robert West, *Atlas of Louisiana Surnames of French and Spanish Origin* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986); Gilbert E. Martin, *Creoles: A Shattered Nation*, Ch. 3; Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800–1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981).

¹⁷ Stanley Lieberman and Mary Waters, *From Many Strands: Ethnic and Racial Groups in Contemporary America* (New York, 1988): 90–91; “Francophones in the United States,” *Population* 19, no. 2 (1988).

¹⁸ John T. Gillard, *The Colored Catholic and the American Negro* (Philadelphia, 1929).

¹⁹ Greg Jaynes, “Suit Recalls Lines Drawn under Slavery,” *New York Times* (Sept. 30, 1982): B–16; W. DeVillie “The Margrita Case,” *Louisiana Bar Journal* (1984); Calvin Trillin, “American Chronicles: Black or White?” *The New Yorker* April 14, 1986: 62–78.

²⁰ See various essays by David C. Rankin below, esp. “The Impact of the Civil War on the Free Colored Community of New Orleans,” *Perspectives in American History* 3 (1978): 374–416. The best documented, but by no means the only, general studies of Louisiana’s colored creoles are Loren Schweningen, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790–1815* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Donald Everett, “Free Persons of Color in New Orleans, 1803–1860,” (Ph.D. diss., Tulane, 1952); David C. Rankin, “The Forgotten People: Free People of Color in New Orleans, 1850–1870,” (Ph.D. diss., Johns-Hopkins, 1976); H. E. Sterkx, *The Free Negro in Louisiana* (Rutherford: Farleigh Dickenson University Press, 1972). Recent works include Carl Brasseaux et al., *Creoles of Color in the Bayou Country* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994) and James H. Dormon, ed., *Creoles of Color of the Gulf South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996). The conceptual and theoretical innocence of virtually all these works is symptomatic of the social history literature focused on, and produced in, the region.

²¹ Brasseaux et al., *Creoles*, Appendices A & B, 127–54.

²² Winston DeVillie, “Preface,” to Robert West, *Atlas of Louisiana*.

²³ Glenn R. Conrad, “How Acadian is Acadiana?” *Attakapas Gazette* 21, no. 4 (Winter, 1986): 148–57.

²⁴ Dean Louder and Eric Waddell, eds., *Du continent perdu a l’archipel etouvee: Le Quebec et l’Amerique française* (Quebec, 1983): “Introduction.”

²⁵ Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Beckwith, *The Creoles of St. Louis* (St. Louis, 1906). The creole period in St. Louis (1764–1803) is discussed in vol. 3 of Julian Chandler, ed., *The South in the Building of the Nation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1941).

²⁶ Jaime Wilkinson, “Rapport” [1804] in *Louisiana under the Rule of Spain, France, and the United States, 1785–1807*, ed. and trans. by James A. Robertson (Cleveland, 1911): 1: 23, 35.

²⁷ T. Fiehrer, “From la Tortue to la Louisiane,” in Glenn Conrad and Carl Brasseaux, eds., *The Road to Louisiana* (Lafayette: University of Southwest Louisiana Press, 1992): 1–34; Paul Lachance, “The 1809 Immigration of Saint-Domingue Refugees to New Orleans,” *Louisiana History* 29, no. 2 (Spring, 1988): 109–41.

²⁸ Philippe Gezuscik, “French Creoles on the Gulf Coast,” in Allen G. Noble, ed., *To Build a New Land: Ethnic Landscape in North America* (Baltimore: Johns-Hopkins,

1992): 136–156; M Vlatch, “The Shotgun House: An African Architectural Legacy,” Pts. 1 & 2, *Pioneer America* 8 (1976): 47–70; C. E. Peterson, *Colonial St. Louis: Building a Creole Capital* (New York: Brightstone, 1993); R. Sauder, “Architecture in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans,” *Southeastern Geographer* 17 (1977): 93–107.

²⁹ Lilliane Crété, *Daily Life* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); Joseph Tregle, “Creoles and Americans,” in A. Hirsch and J. Logsdon, eds., *Creole New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992): 31–188.

³⁰ In stories like “Sieur George” and his classic novel *The Grandissimes*, Cable mixes concrete fact with imaginary license to produce images of the preceding era that local creoles resented and pilloried. See Cable, “Who are the Creoles?” *Century Magazine* 25 (Jan., 1883): 384–98, and *Creoles and Cajuns: Stories of Old Louisiana* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959), ed. by Arlin Turner. Gayarre and Adrien Rouquette, the poet-priest, took umbrage and wrote bitter responses to Cable’s fanciful publications. See author’s analysis of Cable’s creoles compared with their Caribbean contemporaries: “Literary Marronage: Precursors of Negritude,” *Boletín de estudios Latino-americanos y del Caribe* [Utrecht] (1990). The findings of Forrest G. Wood, *Black Scare: The Racist Response to Emancipation and Reconstruction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968) and Laurence Friedman, *White Savage: Racial Fantasies in the Post-bellum South* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970) can be applied to Louisiana only loosely. “Race relations,” varied greatly by regional economy and period (and still do).

³¹ Henry Rightor, ed., *Standard History of New Orleans, Louisiana* (Chicago, 1900): Ch. 7 “The Creoles,” 184–202; at 193. See “Sybaris on the Delta: Upward Mobility à la Creole: Love, Marriage, Politics, Confederacy,” in William Stadiem, *A Class by Themselves: The Untold Story of Great Southern Families* (New York, 1980): 93–116.

³² Joseph Tregle, “Early New Orleans Society: A Reappraisal,” *Journal of Southern History* 18 (1952): 20–36; also Elizabeth Mills, “The Creole: White, Nonwhite, Aristocratic, or Common?” *Louisiana Genealogical Register* 24 (March, 1979): 54–57; Gilbert E. Martin, *Creoles, A Fractured Nation* (Detroit, 1981): 70–83; Robert Chaudenson and Fernand Nathan, *Les créoles françaises* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1979).

³³ Hans R. Runte & Albert Valdman, eds., *Identité culturelle et francophonie dans les Amériques: Colloque II* (2–5 avril, 1975), Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976). A graphic presentation of current creole personalities appears in Lula Hay Owen and Owen Murphy, *Creoles of New Orleans: Gens de couleur* (New Orleans: First Quarter Press, 1987).

³⁴ Ed. by John David Smith and Randall Miller (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1988).

³⁵ Ed. by William Ferris and Charles Wilson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

³⁶ Clement Eaton, “The Creole Civilization,” *The Waning of the Old South* (New York: Harper, 1968): Ch. 5.

³⁷ T. Fiehrer, “From Quadrille to Stomp: The Creole Origins of Jazz,” *Popular Music* [Cambridge, Eng.] 10 (1990): 21–38; Maximilien Laroche, “Le vers créole—entre la musique et la prose,” *Études Créoles* [Québec] 14, no. 1(1991): 82–96.

³⁸ Robert P. Stuckert, “Race Mixture: The African Ancestry of White Americans,” in Peter Hammond, ed., *Physical Anthropology and Archaeology* (New York: Dutton, 1964): 55–90. Daniel H. Usner, Jr., “Indian-Black Relations in Colonial and Ante-bellum Louisiana,” in Stephan Palmie, ed., *Slave Cultures and the Cultures of Slaves* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995): 145–61; Jack D. Forbes, *Africans and*

Native Americans (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993): 53–4, 90, 185, 237; Elizabeth Mills, "Ethnicity and the Southern Genealogist: Myths, Misconceptions, Resources, Opportunities," in Ralph J. Crandall and Robert M. Taylor, eds., *Generations and Change: Genealogical Perspectives in Social History* (Macon, GA: Heritage, 1986): 89–108; Jan Carew, "The African and the Indian Presence: Some Aspects of Historical Distortion," *Race and Class* 27, no. 1 (1985): 29–44.

³⁹ The literature treating each of these early settlements is too vast to list here.

⁴⁰ Francisco Domenech Vinajeras, *Tres vidas y una época* (La Habana, 1940): 34–50; Jean Cavignac, *Paul Lafargue* (Bordeaux, 1948); J. Varlet, *Lafargue: Théoreticien du marxisme* (Paris: Marlot, 1933).

⁴¹ Leslie Doerfler, *Paul Lafargue* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992): Ch. 1. He deserves to be remembered for his essay "La droit à la paresse" [The Right to Be Lazy] (1880), where he asserts that industrial work is the worst form of slavery; that the Spanish siesta is the wisest institution: "descansar es salud"—rest is health!

⁴² Nicholas Spitzer, "Spanish Populations of South Louisiana," in *Mississippi Delta Ethnographic Overview* (New Orleans, 1979), ed. by Nicholas Spitzer, 170–202; T. Fiehrer, "Hispanic Population, Material Culture, and Linguistic Impact on Louisiana, 1768–1868" [unpubl. ms., 1993].

⁴³ Paul Lachance, "Intermarriage and French Cultural Persistence in Late Spanish and Early American New Orleans," *Histoire Sociale* 4 (29): 47–81.

⁴⁴ John Preston Moore, *Revolt in Louisiana: The Spanish Occupation, 1766–1770* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), discusses early republican tendencies of the 1766 rebels: 172–204.

⁴⁵ Virginia Gould, "The Free Creoles of Color of the Gulf Ports of Mobile and Pensacola," Dormon, ed., *Creoles of Color*: 28–50.

⁴⁶ *Atlas of Louisiana Surnames*; Nicholas Spitzer, "Cajuns and Creoles: The French Gulf Coast," *Southern Exposure* V (1977): 140–55; Elizabeth Mills, "The Creole": 54–57.

⁴⁷ Winston DeVille, Review of *White by Definition* in *Plantation Society* 3, no. 3 (Winter, 1988): 112–14. In his exemplary studies of this region Lawrence Estaville locates a nineteenth-century "core" French population zone centered far west of New Orleans and compares indices of land-tenure, slave holding, and technologies, such as rail access, to determine the material contrasts between the densest French areas and those of neighboring Americans. See "The Louisiana French in 1900," *Journal of Historical Geography* 14 (Oct. 1988): 342–59, and "The Louisiana French Culture Region: Geographic Morphologies in the Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1984).

⁴⁸ Jean Bardot, "French Creole Portraits: The Chopin Family from Natchitoches Parish," in Grady Ballenger et al., eds., *Perspectives on Kate Chopin* (Natchitoches: Northwestern State University Press, 1992): 25–36.

⁴⁹ Paul Lachance, "The Foreign French," in Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, eds., *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992): 101–30.

⁵⁰ David Rankin, "The Origins of Black Leadership in New Orleans during Reconstruction," *Journal of Southern History* 40, no. 3 (August, 1974). Rankin, in "Impact of the Civil War on the Free Coloreds of New Orleans," *Perspectives in American History* 3 (1978): 374–416, elaborates several poignant examples of creole

demoralization and self-destruction. Also Roger Fischer, "Racial Segregation in Antebellum New Orleans," *American Historical Review* 74 (February, 1969): 926–37; Athé Agnes Anthony, "The Negro Creole Community in New Orleans, 1880–1920: An Oral History" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Irvine, 1978).

⁵¹ An essential study of the contest for ethnic domination preceding the Civil War is Carl Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun: The Transformation of a People* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992). For post-Reconstruction see Geraldine McTeague, "Forms of Racial Interaction in Louisiana, 1860–1880," (Ph.D. diss., Yale, 1975).

⁵² U.S. Census Office, *Tenth Census, 1880, Population Schedule for Louisiana, Orleans Parish, City of New Orleans*, Schedule I. Such multiracial households appear in the Fourth through Seventh Wards. The close physical and cultural proximity of colored and white creoles, inevitable in the compact old city located on a virtual "island," went unacknowledged even by so learned a writer as Henri Vignaud, born in the French Quarter, president of the *Société des Americanistes de Paris*, and permanent attaché to the United States Embassy in Paris. See his review of Dawson Warrington, *Le Nègre aux Etats Unis* (Paris, 1910) in *Journal de la société des Americanistes* (nouvelle serie) 9 (1912): 141–44. Vignaud was offended by Warrington's discussion of voodoo practiced in his home town.

⁵³ The pretense of white creole exclusivity is adumbrated variously in the essays and public speeches of Charles Gayarre, Alcée Fortier, and Judge Porché. In the same vein was Church historian Roger Baudier, "The Creoles of Old New Orleans" (typed manuscript), Howard-Tilton Library. Much late-nineteenth-century creole writing was a defense against de facto concubinage, interracial cohabitation, and miscegenation—all customary from the first decades of the eighteenth century and through the era. Between the 1864 State Constitution and the Amendment in 1866, and from the end of Reconstruction (1877) to 1894, interracial marriage was *not* illegal, as indicated by the 1880 census, where such marriages are plainly listed. Dominguez, *White by Definition*, notes this fact. See author's discussion of *White by Definition* in *Newe West-Indianische Gids* [Utrecht] (Fall, 1988): 61–66. See Joel Williamson, *New People* (New York: Free Press, 1980): 60–110, on the collapse of the three-tier colonial class system to the modern, binary one.

⁵⁴ Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995): Chs. 5–6.

⁵⁵ Loring Dewey, ed., *Correspondence Relative to the Emigration to Haiti of the Free People of Colour in the United States* (New York: Athenaeum, 1824), refers to several such cases.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Mills, "(de) Mézières-Trichel-Grappe: A Study of a Tri-caste Lineage in the Old South," *The Genealogist* 6, no. 1 (Spring, 1985): 4–84, is probably the best single examination of a creole lineage, illustrating the prospects of colored creoles. The rural context of this work is especially significant, as creoles lived in virtually every parish. The same opportunities for advancement via landholding were of course not available to New Orleans's large creole population.

⁵⁷ Rankin; Williamson, *New People*, 70–87.

⁵⁸ Edward Larocque Tinker, *Creole City: Its Past and Its People* (New York, 1953): 78–99; Joy Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age, 1880–1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969): Ch. 11.

⁵⁹ Winston DeVille, genealogist, personal communication; Elizabeth Mills,

“(de)Mézières,” identifies one such colored family of noble descent: 6.

⁶⁰ Patrick Griolet, *Cadjins et créoles en louisiane* (Paris: Payot, 1986): esp. “Les noirs francophones,” 69–71; Rudolphe Lucien Desdunes, *Nos hommes et notre histoire* (Montréal, 1911), attests to the tenacity of creole identity and the persistence of a creole community of letters. Also Reginald Hamel, *La louisiane créole: littéraire, politique, et sociale, 1762–1900* (Ottawa: Editions Lemeac, 1984). 2 vols., 2: 43–66; James Wood Davidson, *Living Writers of the South* (New York, 1869), essays on creole littérateurs.

⁶¹ Jean Carpentier, “La Louisiane controversée: subsidence créole, efflorescence zydeco, mouvement français, Cajun power,” *Études Créoles* [Paris], 9, no. 2 (1987): 121–140.

⁶² Frederick Starr, *Bamboula! The Life of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Oxford, 1995).

⁶³ Gilbert E. Martin, *Creole Chronology: 2300 Years of Cultural Continuity* (Arlington: Mandingo Press, 1992): 60–88.

⁶⁴ Gilbert E. Martin, *Creoles: A Shattered Nation*, Ch. 7.

⁶⁵ Sybil Kein, *Gombo People: Poesie créole de la nouvelle-orléans* (New Orleans: Gosser, 1981).

⁶⁶ Frances Jerome Woods, *Value Retention among Young Creoles: Attitude and Commitment of Contemporary Youth* (Lewiston: Mellen Press, 1989); S. Condon and P. Pittman, “Language Attitudes in South Louisiana,” in André Crochétière et al., eds., *Les langues menacées* (Québec: Presses U. Laval, 1993): 3: 3–14.