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French Creoles in Louisiana: An American Tale

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The story of America reflects a rich history of the many peoples who came to this continent to begin a new life. Some came willingly, looking for the challenges and the rewards; others were sent, in shackles, from prisons or as slaves. Their origins notwithstanding, these immigrants' contributions to American culture have created a unique nation. America is not a melting pot, but a marriage of cultures. These cultures mix and meld, share and exchange, adapt, adopt, and reject aspects of the foreign cultures which help the immigrants forge an American identity.

The different ethnic groups and their contributions to the mosaic of American life are fascinating to study. As a French teacher, I enjoy learning about French Americans, their history and culture. The French Americans are descendants of French explorers and settlers who were resilient and creative in adapting to their new environment, and, in adapting their new environment to their way of life. They took advantage of natural resources, in particular, to establish their claim to certain areas of the New World.

This unit focuses on the French Creoles of Louisiana, their history, holidays and customs, music, dress, food, and language. Creole life today will be mentioned as evidence of the Creoles' tenacity and interest in holding on to their heritage.

This five week unit is designed for French classes levels II, III, IV. In addition, it can be used in an American History class, an American Literature class, and a visual arts, drama, or creative writing class.

History of Louisiana Time Line

1519—Alonso de Pineda sailed the Gulf Coast and discovered the mouth of the Mobile River.

1528—Panfilo de Narvaez landed in Florida to establish a colony. Most of his men died fighting Indians. He tried to sail to Mexico along the coast. Near the mouth of the Mississippi River he lost all of his ships. Some men escaped. Alvar Nu-éz Cabeza de Vaca was one of them. He and some of the other men traveled across Louisiana to Mexico. This trip took eight years.

1539—Hernando de Soto landed on the west coast of Florida. He heard about a rich Indian nation and searched for it unsuccessfully for four years.

1608—The French founded Quebec in Canada.

1658 (approx.)—Pierre Esprit Radisson reached the western area of Lake Superior. He and his men learned of a great river which ran south to the Gulf of Mexico.

1682—Robert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle and Henri de Tonti who were living in Canada, decided to explore the Mississippi River accompanied by fifty-four French and Indians. When they reached the mouth of the river, La Salle planted a wooden cross in the ground and took possession of the territory in the name of Louis XIV of France. He called it *Louisiane*, land of Louis.

1684—La Salle left France with four hundred colonists to establish a colony in Louisiana. He couldn't find the mouth of the Mississippi River so he founded the colony in Matagorda Bay in Texas. The settlement failed.

1687—La Salle was killed by his own men. France controlled the St. Lawrence River Valley in Canada, the area of the Great Lakes, the Ohio and Upper Mississippi River Valleys. France wanted to keep the lower Mississippi Valley from the Spanish and English.

1694-98—Various books were written about founding a colony at the mouth of the Mississippi River.

Oct. 24, 1698—The Sieur d'Iberville and three hundred men left Brest, France to establish a settlement at the mouth of the Mississippi River.

Feb., 1699—Iberville landed and set off to find the ideal spot for a settlement.

March, 1699—Iberville and his men found the mouth of the Mississippi. They continued up the river past what is now Baton Rouge, turned around and came back to the Gulf Coast.

May 1, 1699—A small fort was established on the eastern side of Biloxi Bay. It was called Fort Maurepas in honor of the French Prime Minister.

1702—Iberville moved the survivors of Fort Maurepas to Massacre Island now called Dauphin Island. A new, larger fort was built on the western side of Mobile Bay about thirty miles from the Gulf. It was called Fort St. Louis de la Mobile.

April 27, 1702—Iberville left Louisiana for the last time.

1712—The Louisiana colony was firmly established.

Sept., 1712—Antoine de Crozat, a French merchant received a royal charter granting him the Louisiana colony for fifteen years. He received all of Louisiana south of Illinois; all the privileges and rights which used to belong to the King; all the land he could cultivate; mines; importing and exporting goods; exclusive right to import slaves from Africa; the King would pay the soldiers for nine years and about \$2,000 a year to Crozat to pay the officers; Crozat had to rule the colony under French law. He also had to send two ships from France every year with colonists and supplies.

1713—Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac arrived in Louisiana as governor. He tried all kinds of economic ventures to help Louisiana become self-sustaining.

1714—Louis Juchereau de St. Denis established a post in northwest Louisiana on the Red River near Natchitoches.

1716—Forts were built at Natchez, on the Alabama River and the Wabash River north of the Ohio for protection from the English and Spanish. Black slaves from the Caribbean were brought to Louisiana. Cadillac was dismissed as governor. Bienville became acting governor.

March, 1717—Chevalier de Lepinay arrived to become governor and was dismissed in August, 1717.

1717—Louisiana was given to the Company of the West organized by John Law, a Scotsman. Shares of stock in the Company were sold to all Frenchmen. This Company had the same rights and privileges as Crozat had.

1718—Bienville established a new town, New Orleans.

1719—All the French trade and colonizing companies merged into the Company of the Indies. The Company of the West was included in this merger.

1717-1722—Many settlers arrived: Germans, Swiss, French, and others.

1721 Louisiana was divided into nine districts, each governed by a Commandant and a Judge.

1722—Three religious parishes were created by the Jesuits, Carmelites and Capuchins. The capital of Louisiana was moved to New Orleans.

1724—The *Code Noir* (Black Code) was written. It dealt with slaves, restricted the activities Of Free Negroes, ordered the Jews out of the colony, and insisted on only one religion- Catholic.

1726—Jesuit Father Ignatius de Beaubois secured permission for Jesuits to establish a headquarters near New Orleans as a way station for missionaries working in the Mississippi Valley. Also, Ursuline Nuns were to do educational and medical work.

1727—The first group of *filles à la cassette* (casket girls), each with a small trunk of possessions, arrived to find husbands. They were selected by the Company and stayed with the Ursuline Sisters until they married.

1729—Natchez Indians massacred almost three hundred people at Fort Rosalie because the Commandant of the fort wanted their land for his plantation. He told the Indians they had to leave. The French fought the Indians.

1731—The French attacked the Natchez again. They killed most of the Indians; the rest were sent to Santo Domingo as slaves. The Natchez were no longer an Indian nation. Directors of the Company asked the King to take back their charter.

1736—Governor Bienville and Pierre d'Artaguette gathered an army to fight the Chickasaws. The French were defeated. D'Artaguette and his men were burned to death by the Indians.

1740—The Chickasaws and the French signed a treaty. Bienville was discouraged about his failure and asked to be relieved as governor.

1743—Pierre Rigaud, Marquis de Vaudreuil became the new governor of Louisiana.

1747—The Chickasaws raided along the Mississippi south of Baton Rouge.

1748—The Chickasaws raided again.

1752—The Chickasaws were finally defeated.

1753—Louis Billouart, Chevalier de Kerlerec was appointed governor. He was a soldier and a disciplinarian. There were lots of problems: the Indians, trade, etc.

Nov. 3, 1762—France ceded Louisiana to Spain in a secret treaty. England took Spanish Florida and the French territory north of the Isle of Orleans and east of the Mississippi River.

1763—The Jesuits were banished from Louisiana.

March, 1766—Don Antonio de Ulloa, the Spanish Governor arrived in Louisiana. He made many mistakes but he tried to govern well.

Spring, 1768—Spain ordered the colonists to use only Spanish ships for trade in only Spanish ports.

Oct., 1768—Some rebels plotting a revolution against the Spanish called a convention to condemn Ulloa and commanded him to leave Louisiana, which he did fearing for his life.

Oct., 1769—The rebels were executed by Spanish troops led by Lieutenant General Alejandro O'Reilly who had arrived to become the new governor of Louisiana.

Spring, 1770—O'Reilly had reorganized the Louisiana colony politically and economically.

Dec. 1, 1769—Colonel Unzaga became governor of Louisiana. He appointed Creoles to important government positions as had O'Reilly before him. Unzaga initiated the planting of tobacco in Louisiana, granted land to immigrants, made treaties with Indians, and encouraged trade.

Jan., 1777—Don Bernardo de Galvez became governor because Unzaga retired.

1778—Americans and British came to Louisiana to find refuge from the RevolutionaryWar. They were welcome as long as they were willing to obey the laws of the territory.

May, 1779—Spain declared war against England. By the end of August, Galvez and the Spanish troops had captured Baton Rouge from the British. This battle was important because the British were unable to gain control of the territory.

Jan., 1780—Galvez and his troops laid siege to British-held Mobile and forced the British to surrender in March, 1780.

May 10, 1781—Penascola and West Florida surrendered to the Spanish troops.

1785—Galvez was appointed Captain General of Cuba and Governor of West Florida and Louisiana. In addition, he was made Viceroy of New Spain which included all of Spain's territories north of Central America.

1785-1803—Louisiana had five different governors during this time who tried to rule it as a colony of Spain: Colonel Don Estevan Miro who was a progressive governor in the style of Unzaga; Don Francisco Luis Hector, Baron de Carondelet who was a good administrator and would not allow the Creoles to imitate the French Revolution and overthrow the government; Don Manuel Gayoso de Lemos was well respected; Marquis de Casa Calvo was the governor when the French reclaimed the territory of Louisiana with the Treaty of San Ildefonso in 1800; Brigadier General Juan Manuel de Salcedo governed until November 30, 1803 when he turned Louisiana over to the French.

March 26, 1803—Pierre Clement de Lausaat arrived in New Orleans for the transfer of Louisiana back to France.

April 30, 1803—The United States and France concluded the Louisiana Purchase Treaty in which France sold the Louisiana Territory to the United States for about \$11,250,000. There were additional costs and interest payments so that the total amount owed was almost \$27,000,000.

Dec., 1803—Louisiana officially joined the United States.

March 2, 1805—Louisiana became an "organized" territory. This meant that the President of the United States named a Secretary of the Territory, a thirteen member Legislative Council, a federal District Judge, and three judges of the Superior Court. In addition, a Legislature was appointed by the President. The people were allowed to elect a twenty-five member lower house, as well.

1804-1805—Louisiana was divided into twelve counties and the Territory of Orleans into nineteen parishes (following an old Spanish custom).

1808—A civil law code was adopted.

April 18, 1812—Congress approved a state constitution.

April 30, 1812—Louisiana became the eighteenth state of the United States.

1812—The United States declared war on Britain.

1814—Battle of Lake Borgne won by the British.

Jan. 8, 1815 Battle of New Orleans won by the Americans and led to the Treaty of Ghent ending the War of 1812.

Louisiana's beginnings are crucial to the study of the Creoles. Creoles began to have an influence on the territory in the 1760's with the help of O'Reilly and Unzaga who included them in the government and encouraged marriages between the French Creoles and Spanish soldiers. The Creoles kept their languages and customs throughout their early history and well into the present century. Definition of "Creole" A Creole is a 'white person descended from the French or Spanish settlers of Louisiana and the Gulf States and preserving their characteristic speech and culture.' . . .

We find that the meaning of the word may be further explained; that the Spanish verb *criar*, meaning to bring up, was the root from which *criollo* (creole) sprung, and that it was the French who changed this spelling to Creole, which distinguishes the progeny of the Spanish- and French created natives from those of an unknown or doubtful origin." (Herrin, p. 28)

New Orleans

New Orleans is so rich in Creole history, with its ancient landmarks, . . . that it is difficult to delve into the rich and romantic background of the Creole without including . . . the city itself. (Herrin, p. 49)

New Orleans used to be called *Vieux Carré* (Old Square). It was the capital of the area which now includes the states of Louisiana, Missouri, Arkansas, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and Minnesota. New Orleans was a Creole city founded in 1718 by Sieur de Bienville. The Spanish helped build it. The Americans came in 1803.

The city is divided into three sections: *Vieux Carré* (Old Quarter) the "bastion of the established Creole families," (Crété, p. 56); the Faubourg St. Mary, a growing American district; and the Faubourg Marigny built by the Creole Bernard de Marigny on land across from the Esplanade on the banks of the Mississippi. The river was deep here and docks could be built for boat traffic. Marigny wanted to make his area the center of the town but merchants didn't want to move their businesses, so this area became the home of the poorer Creoles and French.

The *Vieux Carré* as the heart of New Orleans was composed of eight streets in a square. As new streets were added, the square became a rectangle surrounded by a wall. After a while the walls were removed and three large avenues bordered the city. Fifteen streets left Rampart Street and ended at the river, and seven streets went from Canal Street to the Esplanade. In the center was the Place d'Armes surrounded by an intricate wrought iron fence. The streets were straight and wide, with brick sidewalks called *banquettes*. The houses sported decorative balconies and iron grillwork. The Cathedral, City Hall, and the Presbytery were all magnificent buildings located here. To the southeast was found a levee which served as a port of export for products for the West.

Between Levee and Bourbon Streets was located the best commercial and residential area. The houses had court-yards with fountains and tropical plants. The main entrance or *porte cochère* was a wide gate behind which was kept the family carriage. Beyond the gate was a wide staircase that led to an upper apartment. Wide windows opened to the patio. There were iron balconies. There was no cellar. The first floor was raised above street level and was used for storage.

From Bourbon to Rampart Street the houses were low and made of mixed brick and wood. There were some simple wooden houses as well. The roofs were made of tile or shingles and extended over the sidewalks. The two front rooms opened into the street with French glass doors. One room was the dining room and the drawing room. The other was bedrooms.

There were excellent street lights in New Orleans dating from 1796. Oil lamps hung on chains at every street corner. They were lit at sundown and extinguished at dawn. The lights were financed by an annual chimney tax of nine reales per chimney per owner.

The Saint Louis Cemetery was originally Catholic. Eventually it allowed Protestants and Blacks to be buried there in their own sections of the cemetery. The cemetery was established during the early days of the Spanish settlement. The tombs were placed above the ground because of the water level.

The marketplace was located near the Place d'Armes. All kinds of food was sold there. A little something extra, *lagniappe*, was given with every purchase: a rose, a bunch of radishes, etc. There were makeshift stands selling refreshments like gumbo, or flowers. There were street vendors too.

Creole Architecture Mansions in and near Natchez are representative of Creole architecture, in particular "Bontura" at Natchez and "Cottage Gardens." They had large spacious rooms with high vaulted ceilings, arched doorways, overhead fanlights, and wrought-iron railings. There were tall white columns, broad galleries, and large entrances on the outside of the houses. In back of the mansion was the kitchen and further back were the slave quarters. The mansion's grounds were gorgeous with magnificent old trees and Spanish moss, tons of flowers, and gracious lawns.

The inside of the mansions reflected the plantation owner's wealth; hand-carved rosewood furniture, mantles, stairs, etc.; winding mahogany staircases, decorated ceilings, etc.

Creole Society There were three general groups that made up Creole society: 1) whites who were Creoles, Americans, and inhabitants of European origin made up the highest class; 2) free Blacks, emancipated slaves and their descendants made up the middle class; and 3) slaves who were household property, were the lowest class. The Creoles were the majority of the white population. They had a complex social organization which included foreign groups such as Germans, Irish, and Spaniards whose names were given a French accent.

The people who could trace their noble ancestors called themselves "Creole." Others were "chacas" or tradesmen, "chacalatas" or countryfolk (peasants), or "chacumas" for anyone with Black blood. All Creoles, no matter what level of society they were in, including slaves, looked down on the Americans.

The Creole Family In the Creole family the father was dominant. His word was law. He was not always a faithful spouse, but he was an indulgent parent. If he was a planter, he ruled his estate like a king. He had a large house, large crops, and a large family. He was a dutiful husband and accompanied his wife to balls, the theatre, and social events. He would go to the cafes to discuss business, play dominoes, and have a drink.

Young men were given their own quarters for entertainment purposes. They had mistresses who were Black or mulatto, but they couldn't marry them. Having a mistress was an accepted custom because marriages were usually business arrangements, not for love, and the men expected their wives to be passive and innocent lovers.

A gentlemen took fencing lessons, went horseback riding, dancing, or played cards. He would fight duels if necessary and preferred to die rather than be dishonored.

Girls needed a dowry and had to marry before they were twenty-five years old. They usually had a "coming out" during an evening at the Theatre d'Orleans which marked the beginning of their search for a husband. The whole family attended the performance and sat in a box. Young men who were interested in the girl

stopped by the box to pay their respects. They had intermediaries talk to the father so that they would be permitted to call on the girl at home. The first formal visit was brief, with the girl's mother and perhaps other relatives in attendance who would find out the young man's intentions. After four home visits the father asked the young man if he was serious about his daughter. If the young man wanted to marry the girl the two fathers negotiated the dowry. A notary came to write a list of the couple's possessions and drew up the marriage contract. Once the contract was signed, the families announced the engagement.

The girl's family gave a big dinner at her house where the young man gave her an engagement ring. As a fiancée the young man could visit the girl whenever he wanted and take her out, but they were always chaperoned.

A few days before the wedding, the young man gave his fiancée a wedding basket with lacework (handkerchiefs, mantilla, fan), a cashmere shawl, gloves, jewelry. She could not wear the jewelry before the wedding, nor could she leave the house for three days before the wedding.

The Creoles liked to have weddings on Mondays or Tuesdays in Saint Louis Cathedral in New Orleans in the late afternoon. The bride wore a silk dress with pearls and lace. The veil was held in place with a crown of orange blossoms. The bride carried the same flowers in her bouquet. Later she left the bouquet in the church, put it on a relative's grave, or sent it to the convent where she studied.

After the ceremony the members of the family signed the register. The guests then went to the bride's home for the banquet. The bride cut the cake and gave pieces of it to single girls to put under their pillows. When the guests began to dance, the bride and her mother went to the bridal chamber where she took off her wedding clothes and changed into her nightgown. The bride and groom spent their honeymoon in her parents' house. They were expected to stay in the bedroom for five days or more.

Creole Clothing For ordinary people, their clothing was made of cotton, wool, or linsey-woolsey (a mix of linen and wool). Women wore simple "dresses of homespun cloth, sunbonnets reinforced with split-cane ribs, and crudely made shoes. The men wore pants of cottonade cloth, sewed with alternating blue and white thread, shirts and jumpers; heavy shoes; and straw, split-cane, or reed hats." (Davis, p. 187)

Wealthy planters and townspeople dressed as if they lived in London or Paris. "The men wore tightfitting pants, waistcoats, high and pointed shoes, and high hats. The women were dressed in full skirts with hoops, tight bodices, fragile shoes, and well-trimmed hats. Their accessories included ribbons, parasols, and much jewelry." (Davis, p. 187)

Pleasures and Pastimes The Creoles loved to dance and they attended many balls. Society balls were usually sponsored by a group of bachelors and young married men. There were different committees for various aspects of the ball: renting the hall, selling tickets, etc. Tickets were sold by subscription. A subscriber would buy a series of tickets for a certain number of balls for himself and his family. Balls were held for holidays or in honor of a famous person's visit to the area.

The King's Ball opened the Carnival season. It was held on January 6, Epiphany. Special pastries were made. A King and Queen were chosen. Admission to this ball was limited to the elite. The people who were left out ran their own balls.

Public dances were very frequent. They were inexpensive and lasted long into the night. From January 1 through Mardi Gras masked balls and costume balls were held often.

Two other kinds of dances were incorporated into the social season. Black and White balls were held with the lowest elements of society. Dance hall girls, call girls, and kept women, usually dark or lighter skinned, would attend to dance with the white men. The Quadroon's Ball or Blue Ribbon Ball was held for Black women and white men.

Other social evenings included the *soirée dansante* or dinner dance which was held quite often. At-homes on Sunday evenings included a big dinner and dancing. On plantations the guests stayed for several days after the balls.

Other entertainments included attending the opera or the theatre, vaudeville shows, concerts and parades. The men liked to gamble, play billiards, backgammon, checkers, dominoes, or attend cockfights, horse races, dogfights, and bullfights.

Creole Music

Most of the songs of the Creole show a definite influence of the Latin regime of the Spanish and French colonists of Louisiana, and are not dissimilar in origin from the spirituals of the Negro race, which form a part of what we know as American folk music. (Herrin, p. 71)

Songs sung in Creole patois came from the plantations and the French Quarter of New Orleans. They included lullabies, love songs, songs about unhappiness or loneliness, and humorous songs about everyday life. The majority of Louisiana music is Cajun and has been discussed in my 1991 unit as well as two important books: *The Makers of Cajun Music* by Barry Jean Ancelet (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press), 1984, and *Cajun Music A Reflection of a People Vol. 1*, edited by Ann Allen Savoy (Eunice, Louisiana: Bluebird Press, Inc.), 1984. Customs Creole customs can be divided into two kinds: religious and non-religious. Religious customs focus on holidays : All Saints Day, Mardi Gras and Easter, for example.

On All Saints Day Creoles bring flowers made of white, black, or purple tissue paper to place on graves in the cemetery. The week before this holiday shops display crowns and crosses with black beads and immortelles, which might be pictures of saints (I couldn't find the definition of immortelles in Magruder's book).

Mardi Gras or Fat Tuesday is celebrated on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday which is the beginning of Lent.

The custom of masking on Mardi Gras was brought from France by the early settlers. During the period when Louisiana was a French, and later a Spanish province, the maskers went from house to house, but there was no regular street parade until after the Americans came into the State. The Americans thought Mardi Gras might become a business enterprise, and be made so attractive as to draw visitors to New Orleans. There is now a fixed programme. Rex, the King of the Carnival, who is some wealthy citizen, comes up the river on Monday, and is royally welcomed. Early Tuesday morning the merry children, noisy with tinkling bells and dressed in masks and gay dominoes, come out of their houses and visit from door to door in their neighborhood. Later in the day there is a street parade, and another one at night. . . . The Mardi Gras gayeties end with the most brilliant ball of the season. (Magruder, pp. 353-554)

At Easter, rabbits come out at night. The children try to stay up as late as possible, but they don't see the rabbits. The rabbits nests are found filled with colored eggs both outside and inside the house. When the children find all the eggs, they have a contest of egg-breaking. The child who breaks the egg takes it. The child with the most eggs at the end of the game, is the winner.

Non-religious customs of the Creoles can be illustrated by two activities: 1) *lagniappe*, which comes from the Spanish word *la napa* meaning a sweetening. Grocery stores in Louisiana give a small addition to one's purchase, such as candy or small cakes as a token of appreciation to a customer; and 2) *chiavari*, which is a kind of celebration of the remarriage of a widow or widower.

. . . A man ran around screaming 'Spire e Fire!' Men, women and children then gathered before the house of the newly married couple, shouting, beating on old kettles, tin pans, drums, clashing shovels and tongs together, blowing on combs, tooting horns, and making every loud noise imaginable. . . . The *chiavari* lasted until the bride and groom made their appearance. They were usually sensible enough to come out on the gallery and invite the people in to have a glass of wine. When this was done, the noise suddenly ceased, and after drinking the health of the newly wedded pair, the crowd went quietly home. (Magruder, pp. 345-346)

Gombo Culture The Blacks in Louisiana created their own culture combining elements of their African and Caribbean heritage with elements of the European culture to which they were exposed. George Washington Cable, Lafcadio Hearn, and Alcée Fortier preserved the Black cultural heritage in the *gombo* songs, folktales, and proverbs the Blacks told and retold to their children.

The language spoken by the Blacks, according to Alcée Fortier was not a broken-down French but their own language.

It is the transformation by ignorant African slaves of the French language into a speech concise and simple, language at the same time soft and musical. The tendency is to abbreviate as much as possible, both in the form and in the construction of the sentence. All parts of speech not absolutely necessary to the meaning, are thrown out of the sentence. There is hardly any distinction of gender and the verb is simplified. . . (Crété, p. 156)

Some examples of this language are: *l[^]-dedans* became "ladan," (over there), *monsieur* became "michié," (sir or mister), *Petit ma[^]tre* became "timaite," (young master).

The literature of the Blacks, such as their proverbs and folktales were African in origin, used animals as heroes, had a humorous tone and contained elements of surprise and the supernatural. They showed a good understanding of human nature.

The music of the Blacks contained the flavor of eighteenth century French because as slaves, they were exposed to minuets, waltzes, polkas, operas, concerts, and ceremonial music. The African and Caribbean rhythms of their recent past also influenced their music.

Creole music lacks the emotional depth of the spirituals and blues, those outshoots of the Afro-American experience. But although Creole music occupies a different emotional plane, it also shares a bond with the music of American blacks: the bond of all blacks transported to American shores. . . Music and religion are intimately linked in black culture. . . Afro-Christian music was virtually unknown among Creole slaves. No attempt was made to 'Africanize' the Catholic liturgical music, and the voodoo chants retained their original African character. . . The disassociation between sacred and profane music that we find among the Creole slaves is unique and surely attributable to their French Catholic heritage. (Crété, p. 139)

In addition, Black Creole music consisted of rounds, love songs, ballads, and laments. Improvisation was extremely important in this music.

Voodoo or *v[^]dum* was a form of religion brought to this hemisphere by slaves from Dahomey and the Guinea

Coast. Immigrants from Santo Domingo settled near New Orleans in the 1820's and brought their worship of voodoo with them. It was a matriarchal institution giving much power to women. Even though the slaves were baptized and considered to be Catholics, they continued to worship their African gods. Catholic saints and the African gods coexisted peacefully.

The slaves worshipped the gods of the sea, thunder, iron, trees, mountains, fire, wind, and rivers. A *loa* was a divinity-which could have a double nature. There were three kinds of gods: good spirits like Moses and the Catholic saints; spirits of death and overlords of cemeteries; and evil gods who used magic. "Because they look' ed on natural phenomena as supernatural forces, they made a place in their pantheon for Saint Sun, Saint Moon, Saint Earth, and the Sainted Stars." (Crété, p. 169)

The followers of voodoo met at night for their ceremonies. They worshipped the snake god or *gran zombi* . Free Blacks were the priests and priestesses. The ceremony usually began "with the snake ritual, presided over by a voodoo 'king' and 'queen.' The bow containing the snake was placed on the ground, and the voodoo queen climbed upon it and began to 'writhe about, possessed by the snake' 8 Spirit 2 and to give tongue to oracular pronouncements.' The voodoo king then 'traced a large circle with some black substance, and beckoned the candidates for initiation to enter the circle. A small bundle containing herbs, horsehairs, fragments of horn and other strange substances was placed in his hands.' The king then tapped the initiate on the head with a wooden paddle, meanwhile intoning an African chant that was taken up by the crowd. Gradually the entire group of spectators fell into a trance." (Crété, pp. 167-168) Some participants fainted, others moved in a frenzied manner.

Creole Cuisine Creole cooking is different from Cajun cooking even though both of them use ingredients found in southern Louisiana. In the book *Cajun-Creole Cooking* by Terry Thompson (see Bibliography); he says that both cuisines have "French roots, livened with Spanish spices, inspired by African vegetables and general magic, 'Caribbeanized' by West Indian hands, laced with black pepper and pork by the Germans, infiltrated with potatoes by the Irish, blasted with garlic and tomatoes by the Italians, and even touched in some ways by the Swiss, Dutch, Malagans and Malaysians." (Thompson, p. 8)

The difference between Cajun and Creole cooking is that Cajun cooking is hearty country fare with a very dark roux or type of broth which is the basis for most dishes, along with an extremely spicy flavor, using a lot of animal fat. Creole cooking on the other hand, is civilized, using a great deal of cream and butter. The seasoning of food is the key to its authenticity.

Creole cooks use everything they have in their dishes. Leftovers combine to make heavenly new taste sensations, especially when combined with green onions, celery, bell peppers, and parsley.

Coffee is extremely important to Creole cuisine. When combined with chicory, Creole coffee leaves an indescribable taste in a person's mouth! *Café Brûlot* is served for special occasions. It is coffee served in demitasse cups after it has been mixed with cinnamon, orange and lemon zest, coriander seeds, bay leaf, cloves, pecan halves, sugar cubes, and two different kinds of brandy. *Café au Lait* is hot black coffee and hot milk served with caramelized sugar.

Rice is an important staple in the Creole kitchen. It forms the base for several typical Creole dishes.

Rice is a main ingredient in Creole *gumbo* a kind of stew made of meat and rice and seasoned after cooking with sassafras leaves or file (ground sassafras leaves). It is used in *jambalaya* , a mixture of meat or fish, vegetables and rice. Beignets are small cakes of rice combined with vegetables and poultry. *Calas* is a rice

patty made with a heavy syrup and eaten for breakfast.

Many dishes have fish as their main ingredient: shellfish, crayfish, oysters, trout, redbfish, swordfish, etc. *Bouillabaisse* is a fish chowder containing at least two fish with one being a shellfish. It is highly seasoned, and similar to French *bouillabaisse* made in Marseille or Paris.

Creole pastries come from French pastry: cream puffs, *éclairs*, *Napoléons*, *Duchesses*, *Vol-au-vent* . The best-known pastry from Creole country is petite fours, small cakes, thickly iced, with candied violets or other delicacies on top.

Creole Language One can find three kinds of French in Louisiana; traditional French, Acadian, and Black Creole. Louisiana natives are definitely considered to be *francophone* , French-speaking.

According to Griolet, there is enough linguistic evidence in the language spoken in Louisiana of Old French, regional or provincial French, and Canadian French to warrant more research than is possible in this unit. There is an excellent explanation of Creole or Acadian French in his book, *Cadjins et Créoles en Louisiane* (see Bibliography).

Griolet speaks about “franglais” (Frenchified English or Americanized French), as it appears today in Louisiana. This “franglais” is “le sympt^{me} de leur dissolution progressive: introduction de mots anglais francisés (électer) accolés et prononcés ^ la franCaise (Ftre smart, revenir back, Ftre gone, faire friend) puis ^ l’américaine, changements de langue continuels ^ l’intérieur du récit, voire de la phrase, traduction mot ^ mot d’une pensée américaine.” (the symptom of their progressive dissolution: introduction of Frenchified English (to elect) coupled with and pronounced in French (to be smart, to come back, to be gone, to make friends) then like in American English changes in the structure of the speech, in truth of the sentence, translation word by word of an American thought. (author’s translation- H.J.B.) (Griolet, p. 310)

For more detailed information about the Creole language, I recommend *Cadjins et Créoles en Louisiane* by Patrick Griolet. See the Bibliography for other sources as well.

Creole Literature It is very difficult to find Creole literature outside of Louisiana. Griolet presents stories in Cajun or Creole French as they have been told generation by generation in the following categories: *contes creux* (hearty stories), *Lee docteurs* (doctors and ailments), *histoires ethniques* (ethnic stories), *chroniques villageoises* (villchronicles), *les niches* (jokes), *la nature et les animaux* (nature and animals), *le djab et le bon djeu* (the devil and God), and *contes créoles* (Creole stories). These stories could be used in class for a study of Creole folklore, literature, and language.

Another book, *New Orleans Stories* , edited by John Miller and Genevieve Anderson, contains a variety of stories by famous authors with the setting and/or theme being New Orleans. Many, if not all of these stories can be used in class for students to experience Creole culture and life.

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES I prefer using a variety of activities in which students can participate, to a format of lectures and notetaking. Students remember what they did, far longer than what they were told. Therefore, the following discussion of objectives and strategies will contain ideas for large group, small group, and individual learning activities.

OBJECTIVE 1: To learn about the French Creoles in Louisiana- how their customs, work, leisure time, food, music, etc. unite them as an American ethnic group.

For an introductory lesson to this unit and the first objective, the whole class would be involved in a discussion of ethnicity, in particular, what ethnicity is and is not. The students might discuss whether or not the U.S. is a melting pot in small groups and present their opinions to the entire class. Some discussion questions might include: What is an ethnic group? How does an ethnic group preserve its culture in the face of overwhelming pressure to become Americans?

A follow-up activity might be to ask the students in small groups to discover several ethnic groups in the United States (German-Americans, Chicanos, Swedish-Americans, Japanese-Americans, Franco-Americans, for example). Each group could do some research to find where these groups settled, when they came, why they came to the United States, how they influenced the growth of their area or state, what evidences of their culture are shared by all North Americans in the U.S. and which are kept within the group. When the research is completed, each group of students would share their information with the rest of the class.

OBJECTIVE 2: To learn the history of French Creoles in the United States, concentrating on Louisiana.

To focus more closely on the French Creoles of Louisiana, the students could read excerpts from various sources about early Louisiana history, and about French explorers such as La Salle, Champlain, and Marquette and Joliet. These excerpts could be in French or English depending on the level of French the student is learning. In addition, excerpts from a journal written by an early settler such as Iberville (see Bibliography), would be interesting to the students. The students could prepare short skits depicting the most important events for presentation to other French classes and U.S. History classes.

Students could make timelines of important historical events or dioramas depicting different events. Some students could trace the various routes for French settlers arriving in Louisiana. Other students could draw pictures illustrating costumes and houses of the Creoles. Still others could study Creole music and food. As a concluding activity, they could prepare a typical Creole meal with Creole music and dancing as the entertainment.

OBJECTIVE 3: To learn about Creole life today.

Students would be responsible for finding out about Creole life today. Some students might write to Louisiana asking for the information. Once the research is done, the students could share their information with each other in small discussion groups. Then they might write a paragraph or two in French or English, describing the custom. They could draw a picture showing the custom. These pictures and paragraphs might be used as a display on a bulletin board or in a display case.

OBJECTIVE 4: To use the Creoles and their culture to motivate students to learn French.

The students might study Creole holidays and celebrations typical of Louisiana. They could prepare skits, displays, booklets, dioramas, etc. highlighting the most unusual or interesting customs. While working toward this objective, they would be encouraged to discover the typical French customs, etc. which have become Creole.

OBJECTIVE 5: To use the Creole language to learn about Creoles and their culture.

The students would learn vocabulary and would read simple texts written in Creole French about life in Louisiana, or legends or fiction (short stories). Students could make a chart listing Creole terms, their equivalents in standard French, and their English translation. They might want to include a list of words or

expressions that reflect life in America for which there are no French equivalents.

Another activity for students might be to find magazine pictures of common objects and label them in Creole French and standard French.

Students might write a children's story using Creole vocabulary, customs, and beliefs.

OBJECTIVE 6: To use Creole literature to learn about Creole culture.

Students could read excerpts of Creole short stories, legends, etc. in French or English. The class could be divided into groups for vocabulary study, as well as discussion of the elements of these excerpts that reflect Creole life or thought.

The students could find pictures from magazines that treat the same topics as in their readings. They could label the pictures in Creole French or standard French. They could write simple stories using the same themes as their readings. They might even write skits and present them to another class.

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A detailed study of language and literature in Louisiana in the first two parts of the book are the most useful for this unit.

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This book is well-written and thorough. Well-documented sections on music, stories, and language make this book an essential reference for studying the Creoles.

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An in-depth study of Creole life in Louisiana. A very useful resource.

Magruder, Harriet. *A History of Louisiana* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., Publishers), 1909.

A comprehensive history of Louisiana up to statehood. Clear and well-written.

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An interesting linguistic study of French-speaking Louisiana. In additions the author discusses CODOFIL and the efforts of the government to revive French in the state.

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Written like a diary, this book tells the story of life in Louisiana from its beginnings. Parts of this book could be read by students as part of their language study.

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Selections from this book will help students understand the beginnings of Louisiana. Reading a first person account makes the history more exciting.

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Davis, Edwin Adams. *Louisiana The Pelican State* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 1959.

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Vignettes and stories from Louisiana’s past. Very lively and interesting.

Gallant, Robert. *Mardi Gras* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc.), 1948.

Everything you always wanted to know about Mardi Gras is in this book. Interesting reading!

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Many delicious and authentic dishes are presented in this cookbook. Good pictures and useful information are included.

Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute. Comments to ynhti-helpyale.edu.

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For Anglo-American storytellers and audiences, the Afro-French folklore of Louisiana and the Caribbean can be a rich but daunting source of material. This review introduces Afro-French Creole folktales (kont) in terms of recurring characters, comparisons with cognate tales around the Black Atlantic, and the political economy of folklore in American race relations. Afro-French Creole Tales: Introduction and Background for Storytellers Translation is an essential step in giving, not voice to Creole people they have a voice, which needs to be heard but ears to readers of English. (Haring 157) The oral traditions of Africa and the diaspora are justly celebrated among the world's greatest. I can speak french, but can only half-understand french creole. [permalink](#). [embed](#). [save](#). [parent](#). [report](#). [give award](#). After mingling and lingering in Maine (Acadia National Park), a considerable population eventually skipped all the way down to Louisiana ("Cajun" derives from "Acadian"). [permalink](#). [embed](#). [save](#). [report](#). [give award](#). [reply](#). The Louisiana Creoles are the descendants of the settlers in French Louisiana and Spanish Louisiana, having significant populations in the US states of Louisiana, Texas, California, Illinois, and Mississippi. The Creoles are a genetic and cultural mix of French, Spanish, Native American, and African descent, with some Germans and Italians marrying into Creole communities. Louisiana Creoles typically speak either Louisiana French or their native Louisiana Creole language, with the latter iPhone app for Creole French. French and Creole in Louisiana (Topics in Language and Linguistics) by Albert Valdman. \$127.20. Publisher: Springer; 1997 edition (September 30, 1997). 388 pages. My contribution to the virtual cookout is a modern spin on an American classic: potato salad. Don't get me wrong: I LOVE potato old-fashioned potato salad. But...this time, I wanted to do something a bit different. The French Americans are descendants of French explorers and settlers who were resilient and creative in adapting to their new environment, and, in adapting their new environment to their way of life. They took advantage of natural resources, in particular, to establish their claim to certain areas of the New World. This unit focuses on the French Creoles of Louisiana, their history, holidays and customs, music, dress, food, and language. Creole life today will be mentioned as evidence of the Creoles' tenacity and interest in holding on to their heritage. This five week unit is designed for F...