

Louisiana's Creole French People: Our Language, Food & Culture

500 Years Of Culture

Language & Literature

John LaFleur II

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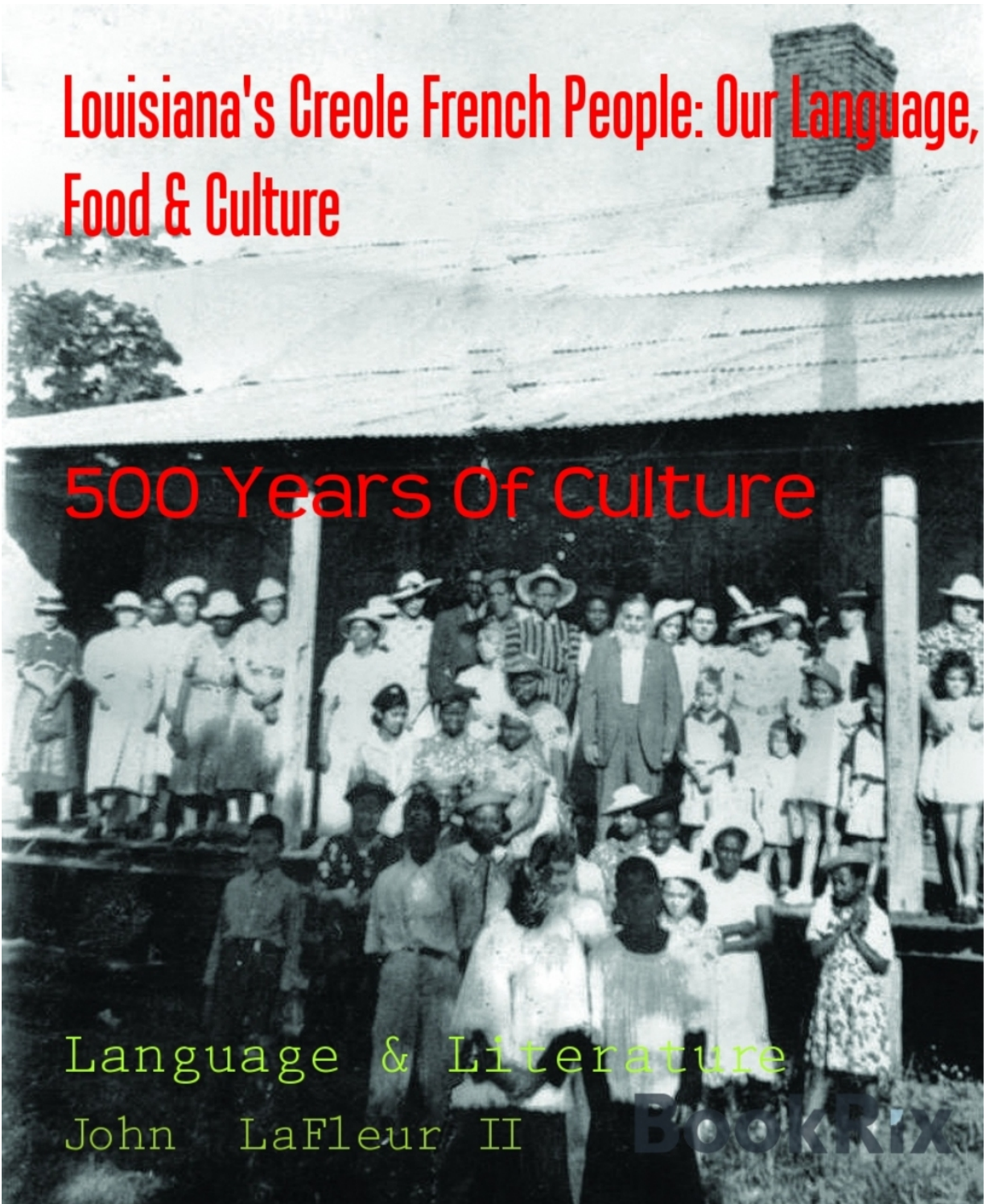
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To all of the forgotten and ignored North American, Caribbean, Antillean, African, Indian Ocean & Louisiana French Creoles of yesterday, today & tomorrow & including Kreol Int.'l, Mary Gehman, author-ally of all Louisiana Creoles, Dr. Ina Fandrich, Mr. Brian Costello, Creole scholar; Mo Creole Magazine, Jambalaya Magazine's Elroy Batiste, Radio KVPI's Creole Director, Mr. Martel Ardoin, Mr. Gene Buller, along with New Orleans' Dionne Butler, WWL TV, and Mr. David Ortego, Steve Hallam and Michael Bordelon of The Ville Platte Gazette; Randy DeCuir & Carlos Mayeux of Avoyelles Parish's Marksville's Weekly News & the Pte. Coupee Banner; Michael 'Milano' Hebert, Christophe Landry, Jeremy Semien, Jason Joplin, & Brandon "Beausoleil" Broussard for their friendship, enthusiasm and support in telling the truth about who we Louisiana creole & metis people really are-culturally! Cover photo: Jarreau Family Collection: St. Catherine's Pray Chapel, Pointe Coupee Parish-Brian Costello.

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Preface

In *Laissez Les Bontemps Rouler! Would Louisiana French Have Survived Without The Acadians?*"I addressed this loaded question which naively suggests the supremacy and cultural primacy of the early Acadians in Louisiana, while ignoring the fact of at least a century of multi-ethnic Creole-French and *métis* culture whose linguistic, social and culinary traditions remain the true cultural mother source of all things relabeled "Cajun" since the veiled "Cajun" cultural revolution began forty-six years ago in 1968.<ins>

In this provocative and poignant revision, I seek to provide my intelligent Iay readers appropriate and useful scholarly resources for further reading and some specific documentation in order to illustrate that a pre-Acadian culture of Canadian and North American French and *métis* roots existed to which was added Franco-European, African and later Spanish elements, as well as to expose the facts supportive of my thesis.

These ethnicities which combined in both "Upper" and "Lower Louisiana" resulted in a multi-ethnic, but distinctly unique Louisiana creole culture reminiscent of <ins>other kindred creole cultures in the world of the former French Empire because creolization did not stop here; not even after 'Americanization.'

This unique historic, but forgotten culture was long present before the arrival of the Acadians and its<ins> <ins> diverse contributions resulted in Louisiana's historic country creole & metis culture.

It is from this multi-ethnic culture's 'raw material' that the substance for sculpting a politically-crafted "Cajun" cultural double was launched after 1968, and heralded by Chef K-Paul Prudhomme, himself of Louisiana French creole-metis background. <ins>

It is my hope to sufficiently demonstrate through this historical narrative which is both passionate and humorous, how greed, ignorance and commerce joined hands in relabeling Louisiana's historic multi-ethnic culture and people as if it had a unique and monolithic Acadian/Canadian French origin, in full contempt of history and scholarship.

Informative with sound sources of research, I submit to you the reading and caring public, this small book which will no doubt prove to be a powerhouse of jaw-dropping facts, as it is an uproariously amusing expose' of one of the most popular cultural forces in America and across the planet today!

This revision <ins><ins>is a much more readable, better edited and supplemented text. For example, this book now includes a long needed discussion on the cultural relationship between Louisiana's Creole culture and Haitian Creole culture<ins> and will surely be helpful in avoiding confusion of these two separate, but kindred cultures.

This book also contains a "Lagniappe" on the two historic forms of gumbo in Louisiana; its very old Choctaw *kombolichi*, or "*file' Kombo*" and its later African-creole *k-ngombo*, or "*gombos fevis*" tradition.

The reader will surely gain a new perspective of Louisiana's very old and diverse creole & metis culture and people!

Introduction

After reviewing and giving my new book, *Louisiana's French Creole Culinary & Linguistic Traditions: Facts vs. Fiction Before And Since Cajunization* a strong vote of credibility for its solidly-based <ins><ins>argument (that Louisiana's true culture and what is now referred to as "Cajun" culture for the past forty years was and remains decidedly Creole), author and *Louisiana Book News* editor, Ms. Chere Coen of *Lafayette's Daily Advertiser* nonetheless, *disagreed* with my thesis, that what is represented as "Cajun" culture in Lafayette, Louisiana is and has always been Louisiana's old multi-ethnic country creole French-metis tradition and culture.

<ins>But, it is not our sweet Chere alone who has expressed this perception or who believes that what is presented and marketed as "Cajun" culture-presuming an Acadian origin for the culture and francophone people of south Louisiana.

This is one of many assertions taken for granted by a generally uninformed and mostly misinformed, public.<ins>

<ins><ins>However, let me say for the record, that there is no doubt that the arrival of the Acadians in Louisiana certainly helped to reinforce its or our historic francophone and cultural longevity, but not because they were its unique creators, nor the creators of its food and social culture; nor were they at all culturally or politically significant. To make such claims would be a grotesque overstatement which cannot be supported from their colonial period history in Louisiana.

But, this presumption that the Acadians and their heirs (the 'Cajuns'), were responsible for the creation and survival of Louisiana French culture and its food ways exaggerates both their history, social, cultural and political importance-claims which cannot demonstrated from

Louisiana's almost 100-year pre-Acadian French Creole and metis cultural history.

Notwithstanding this reality, 'Cajunization' became a true cultural and economic commercially-motivated hurricane of Katrina-like ferocity in more ways than one, especially after 1968 and throughout the 70s, 80s, 90s to date.

This was due in large measure to the efforts of then, young Governor Edwin Edwards and the cultural-historical and economic wizardry of the late, Youngsville, Louisiana Senator "*N'oncle*" Dudley LeBlanc; yes, *the* Dudley of both "Hadacol" fame or infamy, as per your viewpoint.

Mr. LeBlanc was also the author of the myth-history, "*The Acadian Miracle*" which became the basis of Louisiana's mass-marketed 'Cajun' cultural myth-history.

And, we must be careful not to confuse the four decade-long "Cajunization" myth-history with Louisiana's very old pre-Acadian creole cultural history. This "country creole & metis" culture existed before the 19th century, and throughout the 20th century to the present. We are its living witnesses.

However, in New Orleans French commercial re-packaging of "creole" culture and cuisine as a uniquely 'aristocratic' high class cuisine and society was a myth created by French ex-pat chefs and certain romantic and politically-motivated writers who would give the equally misleading impression through the media, of a unique New Orleans-centered "Creole" haute-cuisine, culture and people.

This is misleading because of the fact that there was never an 'aristocratic' creole culture in New Orleans until after this myth was created and marketed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries onward!

Bienville's humble and racially-diverse creole colonial people and even her truly wealthy creoles such as the Baronesse de Pontalba, did not speak "perfect French."

In fact, according to Tulane University scholar, Christina Vella, the Baronesse's numerous correspondance reveals quite the contrary. And, it was only after many years of Parisian acculturation that her writing and speaking improved-according to the Standard French model. Even thereafter, she deliberately continued to speak Louisiana's old creole French at her fabulous parties, as if to spite French pretensions of cultural superiority.

See Christina Vella's *Intimate Enemies: The Two Worlds of The Baronesse de Pontalba*, 2004, LSU Press.

Having noted this fact, however, it is also true that with later economic and educational prosperity some prominent New Orleans "Creole" families did acquire and began to reflect the refinements and manners of 'polite' French society. Such are the results of education and improved finances.

For many their education came vicariously, through their Parisian-schooled sons and, or from their Ursuline-educated daughters. It is well-known in New Orleans that pralines and roux were part of the 'instruction' provided to the young women in their charge as part of their education.

The later extravagant Mardi Gras parades and 'Krewes' of the 19th century are thought by some authorities to be the result of the souvenirs, or impressionable memories of young creoles who had experienced "Carnival" in both Paris or Rome.

The country creole Mardi Gras erroneously dubbed "Cajun" however, remains very similar to that reported in the earliest experiences of the Louisiana's creole French reported in *A Company Man: The Remarkable French-Atlantic Voyage of a Clerk for the Company of the Indies* by Marc-Antoine Caillot living in 1730s Louisiana.

This book was translated by Terry Chalmers and edited by Erin Greenwald, 2013 Historic New Orleans Collection.