

Call for papers

Franco-Louisianais? Diversity of Identifications and Contemporary Adaptations in French Louisiana

Although the popular image of French language in Louisiana has been one in steep decline since the late nineteenth century, recent decades have revealed dynamic cultural production in literature, education, and media, as well as an opening to the French-speaking world.

While scholarship in the 1980s and 90s emphasized a specifically Acadian component of this francophone region, scholarly works from the early 2000s and on have questioned this focus on a single ethnic identity that overshadows the diverse set of origins of Louisiana's francophone heritage (David 2005; Klingler 2009; Sexton, 1999, 2000; Mattern 2006). The designation of "French Louisiana" is not limited to French colonial heritage, but rather encompasses various waves of French-speaking immigration established in the region. Adopted at the turn of the 20th century, the ethnonym "Cajun" applied to several francophone populations of diverse origins (lower-class Acadians, White Creole descended from settlers, "Foreign French", and German, Irish, and Scottish immigrants), all sharing an inferior social status and stigmatization as "white trash" (Brasseaux 1992; Bernard 2003; Henry et Bankston 2002). This dark chapter of history was followed by a francophone renaissance, epitomized by CODOFIL, that generated a new cultural momentum evident in music, literature, and cuisine. During the 1980s, this revival took on a new dimension by becoming the focus of touristic promotion that reinforced a monolithic image of French Louisiana culture (Giancarlo 2019; David 2010; Le Menestrel 1999). Since then, the progressive recognition of Black Creoles by local authorities has led to the publication of African-American tour guides and to the creation of museums that highlight Creole heritage (Seck 2014).

In Southwest Louisiana, the distinction between Cajun and Creole heritage and reliance on Acadian and African ancestry demonstrate a persistent interest in respecting and celebrating cultural diversity. Strategies of differentiation, issues of domination, and social inequalities overlying these categories of identification remain, by contrast, largely unexplored both between Cajuns and Creoles, and also within each respective group. This diasporic dimension also tends to eclipse the diversity of French Louisiana identifications, the multiple senses of belonging and their conflicting nature, both contradictory and competing (Le Menestrel 2015; Parham 2017). Promoting the notion of an Acadian diaspora in the cultural heritage of francophone Louisiana (museums, memorials, expositions, the music scene) may conceal those who do not relate to this diasporic identity and can even disqualify other ethnic labels that might be combined with Cajun identity (such as "coonass"), even if they are criticized in the public arena (Walton 2003). At the same time, identifying as Black Creole does not necessarily imply the acknowledgement of a servile descent, as is the case in certain rural enclaves of southwestern Louisiana. In the Cane River region, the sentiment of belonging to a specific culture, the product of a unique mixture of Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans, is part of a refusal to identify as either Black or White (Jolivet 2007; Kein 2000).

On the other hand, the southeast region of the state has received little attention until present in the field of French Louisiana studies. In addition to its Acadian presence, this region

boasts a Native American heritage carried by the Houma Nation. Long since vulnerable in economic and geographic terms, many communities now witness their existence threatened by coastal erosion and climate change (Dajko 2020; Dardar 2014). A collection of languages, cultural practices, regional activities, and immaterial heritage must be displaced toward the north.

This diversity of identifications and the manner in which they overlap, combine, and remain distinct, is an integral part of the landscape of contemporary French Louisiana. More broadly, this issue seeks to question the way in which the singularity of French Louisiana and regionalist claims are situated in a quest for legitimacy and for national and international recognition. We would like to explore the various strategies at play to position oneself as actors in a region confined to the margins, as the hurricanes of 2005 so tragically highlighted.

In literature, several new publication outlets have appeared (e.g. Éditions Tintamarre, *Feux follets*), which have in turn resulted in more autonomy for francophone poets of Louisiana in terms of distribution (Rabalais 2020). Recent years have also given rise to greater diversity of poetic voices and a questioning of the Cajun identity discourse in contemporary poetry (Michot 2019; Rabalais 2017). Moreover, a renewed interest in the creation of diverse media, especially on social media, has been recently been an important vehicle for the French language in Louisiana and suggests the emergence of innovative uses of Louisiana French in the digital era (Télé-Louisiane, *Bourdon de la Louisiane*).

While several of these developments undoubtedly arose from a new generation having participated in French immersion programs established several decades ago, international exchanges have also had a significant impact on francophone Louisiana. Sustained contact between Louisiana and institutions such as the Centre de la Francophonie des Amériques and Université Sainte-Anne have contributed to a shift in the French language's perception among the francophone youth. No longer viewed solely as a vessel for a linguistic heritage in need of preservation, French in Louisiana is now seen more widely as a world language. One emblematic example of this broader view of the language is Louisiana's recent admission into the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) as an observing member in 2018. In reaching outward to *la Francophonie*, Louisiana's French-speakers appear, in many ways, to be at odds with the nationalist and quasi-isolationist policies of the United States established in 2017.

This special issue aims to bring together articles that explore and examine the plurality of francophone identities in Louisiana, their contemporary reconfigurations, as well as their place in the United States and the world.

We welcome submissions from various fields in the humanities and social sciences, as well as those favoring more interdisciplinary approaches.

Suggested topics:

- Diversity of francophone Louisiana's ethnic and racial identities
- Implications and repercussions of the current movement for racial and social justice (debates surrounding confederate monuments, police violence)
- Economic, social, political, and environmental precarity; tension between regionalism and national identity
- Tourism and cultural economy; the process of patrimonialization of francophone Louisiana's cultural heritage (museums, festivals, monuments)

- Revival of francophone Louisiana's musical traditions: current influences, evolution of the music scene, marketing strategies, careers, official recognition in national arts institutions (NEA, Grammys, etc.)
- Impact of the digital era; communities and social networks
- New French-language media in Louisiana
- Sociolinguistic issues
- Francophone and creolophone literature
- Internationalization of French education and language promotion; international partnerships and agreements; assimilation and Americanization; Louisiana as a member of the OIF
- Developments in the field of Louisiana studies; new research topics, historiographical debates, transnational approaches, international collaborations

Articles between 6000 and 8000 words, in French or English, should be sent to Sara Le Menestrel (lemenest@ehess.fr) and Nathan Rabalais (nathan.rabalais@louisiana.edu) by June 1, 2021. We encourage the use of audio and audiovisual and materials. Submissions must follow the journal's style guideline (<https://languages.louisiana.edu/about-us/etudes-francophones/guide-de-redaction>) and will undergo double-blind peer review. Please contact us to submit your article or to request additional information.

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