

The Cajun *Traiteurs*

A Dissertation Project Submitted to the History Department at Liberty University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Doctor of Philosophy in History

By

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Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Spring 2023

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Dedication

To the people who cheered me on and pushed me forward:

My dad William Robert
My mom Sommer Robert
My sister Hayden Robert
My sister Victoria Robert
My sister Landry Robert
My brother Matthew Robert
My friend Meagan Wahl
My friend Maddy Boyle
My friend Maggie Stone

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Abstract

Traiteurs are traditional folk medicine healers who are a part of the culture of the Cajuns of Louisiana. These people are believed to possess special healing powers given to them by God. They are a significant part of the lifestyle and traditional culture of the Cajuns. The Cajuns are the descendants of the Acadians, a group of French colonists who were forcibly removed from Nova Scotia and dispersed all over North America by the British in 1755. Though the Acadians were able to partially reassemble themselves in Louisiana, they still faced great adversity within the state. This project examines the manner in which Cajuns came to be in Louisiana, the folk healing traditions that they brought with them, and the assimilation that they faced once they arrived. The existing historiography regarding Cajuns has only briefly discussed the traditions, rituals, and practices of the faith healing *traiteurs*. This project incorporates primary sources from the Louisiana Center for Cajun and Creole studies into the larger historical narrative. This is one of the only exhaustive descriptions and analyses of the *traiteur's* tradition within Cajun culture in Louisiana. By creating an analysis of the *traiteur*, this project is better able to examine the practical implications of assimilation within a small cultural group.

Introduction

Louisiana is a state full of diverse cultures, haunted history, delicious multi-cultural cuisine, and one of the most famous and unique ethnic groups in the United States--the Cajuns.¹ Cajun people are the descendants of French settlers who were forcibly expelled from Nova Scotia by British Lieutenant-Governor Charles Lawrence in the late 18th and early 19th centuries: "The Acadians were French settlers to Nova Scotia in the seventeenth century. In 1755, they were expelled by the British to various sites in the Americas, including Louisiana, where they are referred to as Cajuns."² While they were haphazardly dispersed throughout the American colonies and some parts of Europe, many of these French settlers made their way to Louisiana, where they blended their culture and traditions with the Native American tribes, Spanish settlers, white Americans, and African slaves that already called Louisiana their home. This unique blend of cultures created what has become affectionately known as the "gumbo" of culture that is representative of Louisiana. Cajuns are a very particular ethnic group of people that have a unique cuisine, religion, language, culture, and traditions. They primarily reside in Southeastern Louisiana and live in the rural communities where their French ancestors first settled. Maida Owens describes the ethnic makeup of this group of people:

¹Throughout this work, I will use "Cajuns" and "Acadians" interchangeably. Both words refer to the same group of people. "Acadians" is the more proper term and specifically refers to the descendants of the French settlers who were expelled from Nova Scotia. "Cajuns" is the colloquial term used to describe the people who form the cultural group now, which could include people who are not directly descended from the original French settlers. Though the Acadians value their lineage highly and have taken great care to identify their genealogical line, no real distinction exists between the two groups culturally and the terms are used interchangeably. This assertion is supported by Carl Brasseaux, *From Acadian to Cajun: Transformation of a People, 1803-1877*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992.

²Philip Ornell, John Crocker, Andrew Wade, Jason Dixon, and Philip Acott, "An Acadian Variant of Fanconi Syndrome," *Pediatric Nephrology* (Berlin, West) 22, no. 10 (2007): 1711.

Living in relative isolation on the Louisiana bayous and the southwest Louisiana prairie and being the dominant cultural group, the French-speaking Acadians, French nationals, French royalists, and French army officers absorbed Germans, Spanish, British Americans, and Native Americans who settled among them or married into their families. During the late 19th century, large numbers of Midwesterners settled the Cajun prairie to take part in the newly developing rice industry and the railroad. Within a relatively short time period, many were absorbed into Cajun culture. Today, many French-speaking people who identify themselves as Cajuns may have surnames such as Frey (German), Smith (English), McGee (Irish), and Manuel or Rodrigue (Spanish) in addition to Acadian surnames like Bergeron, Broussard, LeBlanc, or Mire, and the French colonial army surnames of Fontenot or Fusilier.³

Within these close-knit communities, the Catholic religion and folk traditions that were customary for their ancestors have prevailed.⁴ This culture, however, came under attack during the 20th century as part of the overarching push to Americanize everyone living in the United States of America. Cajuns were assimilated into “mainstream” Louisiana society, and, as a result, younger generations of Cajuns are no longer privy to the knowledge and culture of their ancestors.⁵ In this case, “mainstream,” society was the traditional patriotic Anglo-Saxon Protestant society that was the mark of America as a whole. By attempting to integrate into “mainstream” society, Cajuns participated in the assimilation of their culture, “In the United States and beyond, cultural assimilation is often used as a way to talk about how immigrants and refugees adjust to the culture of their new country. Another way to think about cultural assimilation is that it’s a way that some people judge how well immigrants fit in with the

³Maida Owens, “Louisiana's Traditional Cultures: An Overview,” *Folklife in Louisiana*, Accessed November 20, 2021, https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Maidas_Essay/main_introduction_onepage.html#tab3.

⁴Owens, “Louisiana's Traditional Cultures: An Overview,” https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Maidas_Essay/main_introduction_onepage.html#tab3.

⁵Shane K. Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), xix.

majority of the population and culture.”⁶ The majority of the population was American, English speaking, and Protestant.⁷ Cajuns were French, French speaking, and Catholic, which put them at odds with most of the population of Louisiana.

This project will examine a specific facet of this assimilation as it pertains to religion and medicine, which intersect in the work of *traiteurs*, or faith healers. *Traiteurs* are Cajun, “wise people” who utilize a combination of herbalism, practical wellness tips, and prayer in order to heal people that seek out their help.⁸ Julia Sweet defines this group of people,

Traiteurs, or ‘treaters’ in English, are the traditional folk medicine healers of south Louisiana. Cajuns, Creoles, and Native Americans all participate in this Catholic healing ritual, and there are many types of *traiteurs*; some use herbal remedies (*remèdes*), gestures such as the sign of the Cross or the laying on of hands, or material objects such as a *cordon*—a knotted string which is tied around the affected area—in their treatments, but all of them use prayer. Faith in God’s power to heal is the heart of this practice.⁹

Their folk remedies have helped to cure people of a number of non-critical illnesses without seeking the help of doctors practicing Western medicine.¹⁰ *Traiteurs* are particularly respected in rural Louisiana communities, where the populations may have an increased number

⁶Emilly Prado, *Examining Assimilation*, (New York, NY: Enslow Publishing, 2019), 9.

⁷Carl A. Brasseaux, “The Moral Climate of French Colonial Louisiana, 1699-1763,” *Louisiana History* 27, no. 1 (1986): 27-41.

⁸Glen Pitre, Nicole Falgoust, and Michael Doucet, *Good for what ails you: healing secrets of the Cajuns, Creoles and Bayou Indians*, Lockport, LA: Côte Blanche Productions, 1998, <https://www.worldcat.org/title/good-for-what-ails-you-healing-secrets-of-the-cajuns-creoles-and-bayou-indians/oclc/811731512>.

⁹Julia Swett, “French Louisiana *Traiteur*,” *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*, Volume 18. 2009, https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/LFMtraiteurs.html.

¹⁰Anna M. Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps: Remedies And Cures Of The Kaplan Area In Southwestern Louisiana,” *Southern Folklore Quarterly Vol. XXXV*, No. 2. June 1971, 3.

of citizens who are wary of seeking the help of doctors.¹¹ Cajun *traiteurs*, or faith healers, are an example of traditional Cajun culture, “The ‘traiteur’ (treater) is a man or woman who claims to heal (and many believe does heal) various types of ailments by power of prayer as well as by some basic medication.”¹² Modern *traiteurs* combine traditional Catholic prayer with folk herbalism to produce a unique medical practice that is sought out by many Cajuns as an alternative to Western medicine.¹³ This practice has not changed much over the course of Cajun history. The practices and history of these *traiteurs* are representative of the larger history of Cajuns as a whole.¹⁴

Just like the history of Cajuns, the history of *traiteurs* has not received very much scholarly consideration. While there are some notable scholars that have written excellent books and articles about the history and culture of Cajuns, very few of them have engaged significantly with the idea and history of Cajun *traiteurs*. This project will use a religious and cultural lens to trace the history and practices of *traiteurs* to their French roots. *Traiteurs* are, first and foremost, religious Catholics.¹⁵ Though they do combine their prayer with herbalism and traditional

¹¹Swett, “French Louisiana *Traiteur*,”
https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/LFMtraiteurs.html.

¹²Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps: Remedies And Cures Of The Kaplan Area In Southwestern Louisiana,” 3.

¹³Swett, “French Louisiana *Traiteur*,”
https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/LFMtraiteurs.html.

¹⁴ Dana David Gravot, “‘all I Depend on is the Lord’: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 128, no. 508 (2015): 179.

¹⁵Gravot, “‘all I Depend on is the Lord’: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement,” 179.

medicine, most *traiteurs* would attribute their success to the healing power of God.¹⁶ So, a religious lens will provide insight into the religious roots of this healing process. The Catholic Church and Catholic religious practices are entwined into the history of the Cajuns, so using a religious lens to examine these topics is necessary to fully comprehend its significance..¹⁷ A cultural lens will allow the reader to understand how Cajun culture and the traditional practices of Cajuns was and is a hospitable environment for *traiteurs* was to grow in popularity. It will also provide an overview of the way that the history of the Cajuns has provided context for the history of the *traiteurs*.

This dissertation will endeavor to answer these research questions: Where did the *traiteur* tradition come from? Were there antecedents of *traiteurs* in France or Canada, the ancestral homes of the Acadians and Cajuns of Louisiana? Is there a particular history of faith healing within Catholicism? Did faith healing have any relation to the Voodoo that was and is commonly practiced amongst the black population of Louisiana? How has the history of assimilation within the Cajun community impacted *traiteurs* and their traditional practices? These questions have remained largely unanswered within the historiography of Cajuns as a whole.

This dissertation will rely primarily on primary resources, including a number of oral history interviews, to support the findings. These oral history interviews, conducted with *traiteurs* themselves, their family members and their patients, will provide some incredible insight into the history and the practices of the Cajun *traiteurs*. As the historical community begins the process of recognizing the importance of diversity and including the stories of all

¹⁶Gravot, ""all I Depend on is the Lord": Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitements," 179.

¹⁷Brasseaux, "The Moral Climate of French Colonial Louisiana, 1699-1763," 27.

people, historians are endeavoring to discuss different ethnic and social groups that have been left out of the historical narrative. This project examines a group that is overlooked. The study of Cajuns should be given the same consideration as the study of other minority groups, because Cajuns, during the 1940s-1980s, experienced the same kinds of assimilation attempts that other minority groups faced at the hands of the elected government of Louisiana. In *Cajuns*:

Americanization of a People, Shane Bernard discusses the roots of this assimilation,

The Americanization of the Cajuns took place after decades of intense, scornful Anglo-Saxonism, the belief that Anglo-Saxon culture is superior and therefore should be imposed on other ethnic groups. Both the Cajuns and the Acadian exiles from whom they descended had been slandered as backward, ignorant, and un-American. In 1856, for instance, a journalist described the Acadians as, 'lazy vagabonds doing but little work.'¹⁸

The distaste that Anglo-Saxon Americans had for non-Anglo-Saxons resulted in widespread loss of culture amongst the Cajuns.¹⁹

Cajuns are typically considered to be the descendants of French Acadians who settled in Nova Scotia.²⁰ As such, they are predominantly Caucasian. Black French citizens in Louisiana typically trace their roots through Haiti and the Atlantic slave trade.²¹ Cajuns have not been treated as poorly as non-white minorities, but they have been discriminated against because of

¹⁸Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, 13.

¹⁹Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, 13.

²⁰Carl Brasseaux, *From Acadian to Cajun: Transformation of a People, 1803-1877*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992), 1.

²¹These are broad statements that are my opinion. Because the study of Creole versus Cajun culture is contentious, I have chosen to focus only on the Caucasian descendants of the Acadians of Nova Scotia. Black descendants of French heritage should be studied exhaustively and independently. Thus, I have chosen to focus on this particular ethnic group in order to give Creole and black French people their due attention in later works. This assertion is supported by this source: Molly Cleaver, "What's the difference between Cajun and Creole—or is there one?" *The Historic New Orleans Collection*, October 16, 2020.

their language, religion, and culture.²² This discrimination will be discussed within this project. Historians of Louisiana have already discussed the discrimination faced by the Cajuns of Louisiana, but further investigation into the dramatic impacts that discrimination has had on the lasting culture of the Cajuns is needed. This is the gap in historiography that this project will attempt to fill. As such, I will also be focusing on French-Catholic *traiteurs*, as their work is unique because of their heritage and religion. Therefore, a study of these people and their forced assimilation into mainstream society is in order. This project will be the first of its kind and will combine the works of previous authors and a slew of primary resources that have not yet been analyzed. This project will make a major contribution to the study of Louisiana history, minority history, the history of Catholicism, and the history of medicine, which is a newer sub-field itself.

This project will utilize a religious and cultural lens to examine the Cajun *traiteurs*. I will trace the history of Cajun *traiteurs* from France to Louisiana. As such, an extensive timeline will emerge, while also focusing on a very niche topic. This project will also examine the relationship between the Cajuns and the Catholic religion. Specifically, it will investigate the union of traditional folk healing practices among the Cajun *traiteurs* and Catholicism, which is the main religion practiced by Cajuns. As of this writing, an investigation into the history of *traiteurs* does not exist, so this dissertation will be adding a new level of analysis to the historiography of the Cajuns of Louisiana. Additionally, knowledge of Cajun culture has been dramatically reduced as a result of the assimilation of Cajuns. Beginning in the 1700s and increasing dramatically in the mid 1900s, assimilation attempts by the citizens and government of Louisiana alike have seriously impacted the culture of the Cajuns.²³ Within three generations, some Cajun

²²Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xi.

²³Brasseaux, *From Acadian to Cajun: Transformation of a People, 1803-1877*, 1.

language, culture, and traditional practices have been lost.²⁴ As such, *traiteurs* are becoming much less common-place and their traditional folk knowledge is being lost. There are some organizations in Louisiana, such as [CODOFIL](#) (Council for the Development of French in Louisiana), that are attempting to stem the loss of Cajun and French culture. The Louisiana Office of Cultural Development states,

Through this web site, CODOFIL and the Fondation Louisiane invite you to learn more about what we do and about why the defense and growth of the French language in Louisiana are important to us. We also invite you to join us in this fight, helping us defend Louisiana's francophone heritage and future. The history of French in Louisiana has not allowed the vast majority of francophones the opportunity to learn to read and write French.²⁵ Additionally, as everywhere in the francophone world, we speak several varieties of French each having its own particular flavor. For these reasons, we have tried to include as often as possible on this web site French 'as it is found in Louisiana.'²⁶

Though Cajun culture has been systematically attacked, these organizations and the State of Louisiana are actively working to stem the loss and re-engage younger generations in the spread of Cajun culture.²⁷ By tracing the history of Cajun *traiteurs*, I will disseminate scholarly material regarding Cajuns, and, specifically, Cajun *traiteurs*.

²⁴Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xi.

²⁵The Office of Cultural Development, CODOFIL, states, "The word francophone refers to people who speak French or areas or countries where French is the principal language or one of the principal languages spoken." See: "Office Of Cultural Development, CODOFIL - Agence Des Affaires Francophones: About / À Propos," Baton Rouge, LA, Louisiana Office of Cultural Development, Accessed November 20, 2021, <https://www.crt.state.la.us/cultural-development/codofil/about/index>.

²⁶"Office Of Cultural Development, CODOFIL - Agence Des Affaires Francophones: About / À Propos," Baton Rouge, LA, Louisiana Office of Cultural Development, Accessed November 20, 2021, <https://www.crt.state.la.us/cultural-development/codofil/about/index>.

²⁷"Office Of Cultural Development, CODOFIL - Agence Des Affaires Francophones: About / À Propos," <https://www.crt.state.la.us/cultural-development/codofil/about/index>.

A study of the topic of Cajun *traiteurs* will contribute to the mission of organizations like CODOFIL by continuing to preserve and disseminate the stories of the Cajuns and their culture. By completing research on the history of the Cajun *traiteur* tradition, new information will become available. This information will contribute to the preservation of the history of the Cajuns of Louisiana.

This project will be completed using the current best practices of the historical community. The utilization of primary resources provided by the Louisiana State Library Archives and the archival repository at the Center for Louisiana Studies at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, will contribute to the collegiality of this study. Some of these primary resources, like the newly digitized sources at the Louisiana States Library, have not yet been analyzed and included in scholarly research about the Cajuns. The arguments wherein will combine the secondary research of previous historians with unanalyzed primary resources.

Historians have studied Cajuns and Acadians briefly and from a large perspective. This small group of people from a small geographical area does not draw the same interest or study as other topics. For this reason, the historiography surrounding Cajun *traiteurs* is brief and non-exhaustive. This dissertation will fill a gap in the historiography of Cajun *traiteurs* by combining previous research about their work with recently digitized archival material from the Louisiana State Library. This new archival material contains recordings and interviews with actual *traiteurs*. It also includes news articles from the late 20th century that discuss the Cajun *traiteurs* and their work. As the Louisiana State Library has only recently published these digital resources, this dissertation will fill a gap in historiography by examining these sources and adding them to the larger discussion of the history of the Cajun people. This dissertation will also interact with new questions that have not been previously posed by historians working with the

stories of *traiteurs* in Louisiana. This dissertation will also engage with the history of herbalism in Louisiana, as herbalism is an integral part of the work that *traiteurs* do with their patients.²⁸ Primary resources describing the specific herbs used by *traiteurs* and their uses will supplement the discussion of the history of these faith healers. By including information that has been gathered from *traiteurs* and other herbalists, the widespread use of herbalism in Louisiana becomes clear. This new avenue of research into the particular method and approach to herbalism used by the *traiteurs* has not been previously researched, so this dissertation will add to the existing historiography with new research.²⁹

No discussion of Acadians or Cajuns would be complete without addressing the work of Dr. Elizabeth Brandon. Brandon was a professor and historian of Acadian folklore, active from the 1960s to 1980s. Her book, *Folk Medicine in French Louisiana*, is one of the only readily available scholarly works that directly discusses the Cajun *traiteurs* in an in-depth manner.³⁰ The book documents stories of *traiteurs* and some of their traditional practices. Though it was published in 1976, the research that Brandon completed will lay the groundwork for the research that will comprise this dissertation. Brandon's work is also integral to the work done by later historians of Cajuns in Louisiana. Brandon, ahead of her time, used a multidisciplinary approach

²⁸Swett, "French Louisiana *Traiteur*," https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/LFMtraiteurs.html.

²⁹In performing initial research about *traiteurs* and their place in Cajun culture, it became increasingly clear that there were no exhaustive works that combined the research of many Louisiana historians into one complete work specifically about the *traiteurs*. While some of the posed research questions have been addressed, these works are far flung. This work combines the existing secondary literature regarding *traiteurs* into one exhaustive description and history. It also incorporates previously unused primary resources into the larger historical narrative surrounding *traiteurs*.

³⁰Elizabeth Brandon, "Folk Medicine in French Louisiana," in *American Folk Medicine*, ed. Wayland D. Hand, 213-234, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976, 1.

to her research and writing. She focused on the history of the Cajuns, the religion of the Cajuns, and the history of medicinal practices within Cajun culture.³¹ In her day, it was not common for historians to separate people into smaller ethnic groups in order to examine the particular complexities of their groups.³² So, Brandon utilized a new approach to her research and writing that allowed her to create a multidisciplinary work that analyzed the history of Cajun medicinal practices and how they combined science, medicine, herbalism, and religion.³³ By focusing on such a niche group of people, she was able to write about and record their specific practices and beliefs.³⁴ Her work was indicative of a larger shift to focus on more specialized historical topics rather than broad overviews of history. Additionally, because most of the primary sources that she utilized were written in Cajun French, Brandon was tasked with translating the unique dialect into English in order to write for her predominantly English-speaking audience.³⁵ While translation of historical works was not a new concept, Brandon faced translating a dialect of French that had not yet been documented or recorded.³⁶ There is no “proper” Cajun French dialect. It is unique to south Louisiana and varies by geographical locations (though there are overarching similarities).³⁷ Brandon’s work shows evidence that she understood the importance

³¹Brandon, *Folk Medicine in French Louisiana*, 213.

³²Timothy Baumann, “Defining Ethnicity,” *The SAA Archaeological Record*, September 2004, 13.

³³Brandon, *Folk Medicine in French Louisiana*, 213.

³⁴Brandon, *Folk Medicine in French Louisiana*, 213.

³⁵Brandon, *Folk Medicine in French Louisiana*, 213.

³⁶Brandon, *Folk Medicine in French Louisiana*, 213.

³⁷Albert Valdman and Kevin J. Rottet, *Dictionary of Louisiana French: As Spoken in Cajun, Creole, and American Indian Communities*, edited by Albert Valdman, Kevin J. Rottet, Barry Jean Ancelet, Richard Guidry, Thomas A. Klingler, Amanda LaFleur, Tamara Lindner,

of preserving this aspect of Cajun culture to the best of her abilities. She knew the importance of language to a culture and knew the importance of preserving Cajun culture specifically.

Additionally, much of the existing historiography about Acadians is a result of the work of Dr. Barry Jean Ancelet. Ancelet is a Professor Emeritus of Francophone Studies and a Cajun folklorist at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.³⁸ He is, perhaps, one of the foremost scholars of Cajuns and Cajun history currently working. He is a born Cajun and speaks Cajun-French, which is a dialect specific to the Acadians of Louisiana.³⁹ Ancelet has written extensively about the history of the Cajuns/Acadians, but he has not written specifically about the *traiteurs*. His work with the folklore of the Cajuns, including his book *Cajun and Creole Folktales* published in 1994, has briefly interacted with the history of the *traiteurs*, but has not gone into great depth about it.⁴⁰ Additionally, Ancelet has done quite a lot of work with contemporary Cajuns, which has produced some new and exciting oral history interviews with Cajun *traiteurs*, their descendants, and their patients. Though he is responsible for the production of these oral history interviews, like one he completed with Madame Gerard on March 29, 1977, in Abbeville, Louisiana, he has not done much analysis of these interviews. This dissertation will contribute to the historiography of the Cajun *traiteurs* by connecting these interviews to the larger study of Cajuns and Cajun history. Ancelet's work with Jay D. Edwards, and Glen Pitre, in

Michael D. Picone and Dominique Ryon, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010; 2009), 1.

³⁸“Barry Jean Ancelet,” *University of Louisiana at Lafayette*, Accessed February 20, 2023, <https://languages.louisiana.edu/about-us/faculty-staff/barry-jean-ancelet>.

³⁹“Barry Jean Ancelet,” *University of Louisiana at Lafayette*, Accessed February 20, 2023, <https://languages.louisiana.edu/about-us/faculty-staff/barry-jean-ancelet>.

⁴⁰Barry Jean Ancelet, *Cajun and Creole Folktales*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994).

Cajun Country published in 1991, again, describes the history of the Cajuns of Louisiana without focusing heavily on Cajun *traiteurs*.⁴¹

Dr. Carl Brasseaux is a retired Emeriti Faculty at University of Louisiana at Lafayette. He is also a foremost scholar of Cajun and Louisiana history and is responsible for a plethora of books and articles pertaining to the history of the Cajuns of Louisiana. His work has continuously interacted with the history of Cajun *traiteurs*, but he has never dedicated an extensive or exhaustive amount of research to the study of the history of the Cajun *traiteurs*. Brasseaux's work was a pioneering endeavor to discuss and document the Acadian and Cajun experience in Louisiana.⁴² As a Cajun himself, Brasseaux felt deeply connected to the story of the Cajuns and his work with archival materials about Cajuns is the base of information that this project is based on. This is likely because *traiteurs* are a niche portion of the history of the Cajuns. Recent trends in historical research and historiography have focused on the intersection between the study of history and of related topics.⁴³ In this case, this project will take an interdisciplinary approach to studying the religious and general history of the Cajuns while also using a sociological approach to analyze how Cajuns have been treated in Louisiana. Brasseaux's works have created a baseline general and comprehensive history of the Cajuns.⁴⁴ New work can

⁴¹Barry Jean Ancelet, Jay D. Edwards, and Glen Pitre, *Cajun Country*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 1.

⁴² "Carl A. Brasseaux," *Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library*, Accessed February 20, 2023, <https://beinecke.library.yale.edu/programs/fellowships/fellow-profiles/carl-brasseaux>.

⁴³Vickie M. Mays and Negin Ghavami, "History, Aspirations, and Transformations of Intersectionality: Focusing on Gender," *American Psychological Association*, 2018, 545.

⁴⁴"Carl A. Brasseaux." Accessed February 20, 2023, <https://beinecke.library.yale.edu/programs/fellowships/fellow-profiles/carl-brasseaux>.

now be done on more niche aspects of Cajun culture, including the *traiteurs* and their practices. This dissertation will seek to combine his work that mentions the *traiteurs* briefly with other secondary research that mentions *traiteurs*. Brasseaux's work also offers extensive overviews of the history of Cajuns and Louisiana, which will set the context of this dissertation. *Traiteurs* are the product of a specific set of cultural and historical circumstances, which are integral to understanding the history of the *traiteurs* themselves. Brasseaux, in his book *From Acadian to Cajun: Transformation of a People, 1803-1877* published in 1992, also describes modern Cajuns and how they came to be.⁴⁵ This work sets the context for the oral history interviews, which are integral to the argument of this dissertation.

⁴⁵Carl Brasseaux, *From Acadian to Cajun: Transformation of a People, 1803-1877*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992), 1.



Figure 1: This image depicts Carl Brasseaux, a premier scholar on the history of Louisiana and Cajuns. He is depicted at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where he did most of his groundbreaking work. “Carl Brasseaux.” *Center for Louisiana Studies*. Object File Name: sa000168. 1995.

More recent articles about Cajun *traiteurs* have begun focusing on the personal stories of self-proclaimed *traiteurs* and those that know of them. “Traiteurs and Their Power of Healing: The Story of Doris Bergeron,” by Ellen Daigle in *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*, in 1994, is an example of these kinds of sources.⁴⁶ Daigle’s work marks the beginning of a more concentrated effort to discuss aspects of Cajun history. Rather than write overviews, like Brasseaux or Ancelet, Daigle chose to write about a niche topic of Cajun history, the *traiteurs*. Works of this nature are the inspiration for this dissertation. The recounting of the history of *traiteurs* has not

⁴⁶Ellen Daigle, “Traiteurs and Their Power of Healing: The Story of Doris Bergeron,” *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*, 1994, https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/lfbmbergeron.html.

been consistent due to the forced assimilation of Cajuns into mainstream society. Therefore, these stories are rapidly disappearing, along with the knowledge and skills of the *traiteurs* themselves. So, this dissertation will attempt to stem the rapid decline and loss of Cajun culture by collecting these stories together and recording and analyzing them in a scholarly manner. By combining the existing secondary research with these personal accounts and oral interviews, this dissertation will contribute to the historiography of the Cajun *traiteurs*. This new method of reporting history through the use of personal interviews and biographical essays is a unique method of disseminating information to the larger historical community.

Dr. Dana Gravot has created a more recent scholarship about Cajun *traiteurs* and their work in Louisiana. Her article, "all I Depend on is the Lord": Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement," in *The Journal of American Folklore*, was published in 2015. Her work illustrates that there is still an interest in *traiteurs* and their work, perhaps because of a growing interest in alternative medicine and healing. Dr. Gravot examines the religious impact that the work of the Cajun *traiteurs* has on the patients that seek out treatment. In speaking about her own work, she said, "*Traiteurs* use treatments to connect with the area's past history or small farming communities, or *voisinages*, through a sophisticated display of reciprocity, and to articulate their relationship to a local notion of community. This pattern is an indication of a cultural level of addressing illnesses previously overlooked in Louisiana."⁴⁷ This focus on religion is a common theme amongst scholars of Cajuns, as Cajuns practice Catholicism in a predominantly Protestant country.⁴⁸ Their practice of Catholicism was one of the contributing

⁴⁷Gravot, "'all I Depend on is the Lord": Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement," 179.

⁴⁸Andrew S. Moore, *The South's Tolerable Alien Roman Catholics in Alabama and Georgia, 1945-1970*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 7.

factors to their forced assimilation into mainstream Louisiana society.⁴⁹ So, the religion of Cajun *traiteurs* is an important point to address within any discussion of their work.

Other historians, like Sharon K. Hull, Timothy P. Daaleman, Samruddhi Thaker, and Donald E. Pathman, have completed research about faith-based healing in the larger Southeast region of the United States. For example, their work, "A Prevalence Study of Faith-Based Healing in the Rural Southeastern United States," which was published in the *Southern Medical Journal* in 2006, analyzes the existence and prevalence of the combination of faith and medicine in rural areas of Southeast United States. The rural location of many Cajun homes creates a perfect environment for belief in and use of *traiteurs* over medical doctors. Because the nearest doctor's office may be hours away, many Cajuns prefer to seek the help of *traiteurs*, who are members of their own community.⁵⁰ The broad nature of these studies is indicative of the fact that the authors briefly interact with the stories of *traiteurs* and their work, but do not engage in any kind of extensive research pertaining to the tradition of faith healing amongst the Cajuns of Louisiana.

Essentially, the goal of this dissertation is to combine the infrequent and far-flung references of the Cajun *traiteurs* with the unanalyzed primary sources made available in the Louisiana State Library Digital Archives in order to create an exhaustive history of the field. This dissertation will work with previously unused primary sources and will add the personal stories of Cajun *traiteurs* to the existing historiography. Cajuns and the *traiteurs* that are a part of their communities have suffered from deliberate assimilation attempts that have resulted in a loss of culture and tradition.

⁴⁹Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, 13.

⁵⁰Brandon, *Folk Medicine in French Louisiana*, 213.

The chapters of this paper will set the context around Cajun *traiteurs*, explain what Cajun culture is, how Cajun culture has been attacked, what *traiteurs* actually are, the antecedents of *traiteurs*, and the current state of Cajun culture in Louisiana. In each chapter, this paper will discuss the stories of some of the *traiteurs* who have shared their practice and their lives with interviewers. Regardless of personal convictions, the people discussed in this paper believe wholeheartedly in their practice and in their faith. As such, their stories and legacies deserve to be respected. This paper will not follow a linear chronological order. The chapters will endeavor to answer the questions of who, what, when, where, and why. Chapter one will investigate who Cajuns are. It will also make the distinction between Cajuns and other ethnic groups in Louisiana. Chapter two will discuss what *traiteurs* are, what they actually practice and how that practice is influenced by their religion. Chapter three will contain an analysis of the actual remedies and cures used by the *traiteurs* in Louisiana. Chapter four will create a general timeline of Cajun (and therefore *traiteur*) history in order to set the context surrounding *traiteurs*. It will also discuss Catholicism in Louisiana and how it impacts the *traiteurs*. It will also discuss the forced assimilation of Cajuns and how that has impacted Cajun and *traiteur* culture. Chapter five will discuss Louisiana and the cultures that have existed there. It will also describe the other cultures that have influenced *traiteurs*. For example, *traiteurs* have historically pulled practices and beliefs from the indigenous people from Louisiana, the slaves and freed black people, the French, Spanish, and American people, and Haitian immigrants. Louisiana is home to a historically diverse group of people, and these people have all influenced Cajuns and their work. Chapter six will analyze the assimilation practices used against the Cajuns and *traiteurs* and how those practices have impacted the culture. The seventh chapter will discuss the current state of the practices of *traiteurs* and the purpose of this paper. It will also discuss the importance of the

historical analysis of this topic. By not following a linear timeline, this paper will be able to dive into the different topics with more depth and nuance. This arrangement allows for an in-depth study of various aspects of Cajun culture, which includes *traiteurs* and their work.

Cajuns are a distinct social and ethnic group in Louisiana. As such, a study of the aspects of Cajun culture that make it unique is valid. Among many other interesting differences, Cajun culture is most easily distinguished from mainstream Louisiana culture by its bilingualism.⁵¹

Nicole Müller, comments on the shifting of this bilingualism:

French-English (and Creole-English) bilingualism in South Louisiana is framed by the continuing process of language shift among French speakers in the region. Two dimensions of “aging” are encountered in the French context in South Louisiana: There are numerous older-generation bilinguals who, during their lifetime, have experienced shifting patterns of language use. The transmission of French as a community language has all but ceased (not only as observed with the participants in this study, but also widely reported in the literature). Therefore, French-English bilingualism with French as a first language is itself an “aging” phenomenon in the region.⁵²

This extreme decrease in the transmission of the French language from generation to generation is a direct result of the assimilation attempts of the State of Louisiana against the Cajun population.⁵³

A discussion of Cajun *traiteurs* would not be complete without addressing the similarities between these traditions and the traditions of other groups. Faith healing, in some shape, form, or fashion, exists within many communities, “Many of these characteristics are also typical of other Christian folk healing traditions that were likewise influenced by Native American healing

⁵¹Valdman and Rottet, *Dictionary of Louisiana French: As Spoken in Cajun, Creole, and American Indian Communities*, 1.

⁵²Nicole Müller, "Aging with French: Observations from South Louisiana," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 24, no. 2 (06, 2009): 143.

⁵³Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, 14.

practices, such as powwowing among the Pennsylvania Dutch, or Latin American curanderismo (Brandon 1976, Daigle 1991, Hufford 1983, Padilla 1997, Weskott 1969, Yoder 1972).”⁵⁴ Since the invasion of North America by European settlers, colonialists have been influenced by the traditional practices of the Native Americans who lived on the continent for centuries before.⁵⁵ The Cajun *traiteurs* are no exception. Their traditional healing has been largely influenced by the Native American tribes that resided in the Southern Louisiana regions that the Cajuns chose to settle in. The National Park Service acknowledges the presence and impact of Native American cultures on South Louisiana,

When European colonization began in the 1700s, historians estimate that 13,000 to 15,000 native people lived in Louisiana, speaking 22 distinct languages. New diseases brought by outsiders, wars, government-forced displacement, and competition for land and food led to a major decline of Indian populations in Louisiana. Native peoples' understanding of the environment contributed to the success of many European, Asian, and African settlements. Indians shared their knowledge of medicinal plants, seasonal patterns for floods and seafood harvests, and agricultural and building skills suited to the local landscape and handed down for generations. Today, there are four federally recognized tribes in Louisiana: the Jena Band of Choctaw Indians, the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana, the Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana, and the Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana. The United Houma Nation is recognized as a tribe by the state of Louisiana.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Swett, “French Louisiana *Traiteur*,” *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*, https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/LFMtraiteurs.html, The works used by Julia Swett are as follows: Elizabeth Brandon, “Folk Medicine in French Louisiana,” In *American Folk Medicine*, ed. Wayland D. Hand, 213-234, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976; Ellen Daigle, “Traiteurs and Their Power of Healing: The Story of Doris Bergeron,” *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*, 1994; David J. Hufford, *Folk Healers. Handbook of American Folklore*, ed. Richard Dorson, Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1983; Carmella Padilla, “Las Curanderas,” *Latina Magazine*, 1997, 48- 51; Marcia Weskott, “Powwowing in Berks County,” *Pennsylvania Folklife* 19(2): 1969, 2-9; and Yoder, Don Yoder, “Folk Medicine,” *Folklore and Folklife*, ed. Richard Dorson, 191-215, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1972.

⁵⁵“American Indians in Louisiana,” *The National Park Service*, December 3, 2021, Accessed October 8, 2022. <https://www.nps.gov/jela/learn/historyculture/native-americans-in-louisiana.htm#:~:text=Today%2C%20there%20are%20four%20federally,by%20the%20state%20of%20Louisiana.>

⁵⁶“American Indians in Louisiana.” <https://www.nps.gov/jela/learn/historyculture/native-americans-in->

The impact of Native American tribes on the Cajun *traiteurs* cannot be overstated and will not be neglected. The influence of Native Americans began before the Cajuns even considered themselves Cajuns. Their ancestors, the Acadians of Nova Scotia maintained a peaceful and cooperative relationship with the Native American tribe that resided near Acadie, “The Acadians and the Mi’kmaq had lived side by side for more than one hundred years before the British took nominal sovereignty over the province. A web of friendships, family ties, and commercial connections linked the Mi’kmaq and the Acadians, and the pattern of interaction they had established proved resistant to change.”⁵⁷ In fact, the hesitance of the Acadians to disconnect themselves from the Mi’kmaq was a contributing factor to their eventual expulsion from their ancestral home of Acadie.⁵⁸ The cooperative relationships that Acadians were able to establish and maintain with Native American tribes would continue to prove beneficial, even as the Acadians were expelled from their home and reconvened as the Cajuns in South Louisiana.⁵⁹

Once in South Louisiana, Cajuns were able to establish relationships with the Native American tribe that lived there. One major way that this can be seen is through the sharing of information and wisdom about the fauna native to South Louisiana.⁶⁰ One of the peculiarities of

[louisiana.htm#:~:text=Today%2C%20there%20are%20four%20federally,by%20the%20state%20of%20Louisiana.](#)

⁵⁷Geoffrey Plank, *An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign Against the Peoples of Acadia*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 2.

⁵⁸Plank, *An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign Against the Peoples of Acadia*, 2.

⁵⁹Plank, *An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign Against the Peoples of Acadia*, 2.

⁶⁰Carl A. Brasseaux, H. Dickson Hoese, and Thomas C. Michot, “Pioneer Amateur Naturalist Louis Judice: Observations on the Fauna, Flora, Geography, and Agriculture of the Bayou Lafourche Region, Louisiana, 1772-1786,” *Louisiana History* 45, no. 1 (2004): 71-103.

the practice of Cajun *traiteurs* is their use of medicinal plants native to South Louisiana.⁶¹ These plants had been used by Native Americans for centuries before *traiteurs* began using them.⁶² It was the Native Americans living in this region that educated the arriving Cajuns about the medical qualities of these plants.⁶³ In fact, many Cajuns and *traiteurs* refer to these plants and herbs by their Native American names.⁶⁴ For example, this specimen was collected by Alida Landry.⁶⁵ The *traiteur* that assisted with this collection referred to the plant by a traditional Native American name. The *traiteur* referred to the plant as “nōglēā,” which is the Native American name for the herb.⁶⁶

⁶¹Brandon, *Folk Medicine in French Louisiana*, 214.

⁶²Glen Pitre, Nicole Falgoust, and Michael Doucet, *Good for what ails you: healing secrets of the Cajuns, Creoles and Bayou Indians*, Lockport, LA: Côte Blanche Productions, 1998, <https://www.worldcat.org/title/good-for-what-ails-you-healing-secrets-of-the-cajuns-creoles-and-bayou-indians/oclc/811731512>.

⁶³Pitre, Falgoust, and Doucet, *Good for what ails you: healing secrets of the Cajuns, Creoles and Bayou Indians*, <https://www.worldcat.org/title/good-for-what-ails-you-healing-secrets-of-the-cajuns-creoles-and-bayou-indians/oclc/811731512>.

⁶⁴Alida Landry, “Samples of Plants Used for Medicinal Purposes by Traiteurs,” R11.197. D-R12-197, Center for Louisiana Studies.

⁶⁵Landry, “Samples of Plants Used for Medicinal Purposes by Traiteurs.”

⁶⁶Landry, “Samples of Plants Used for Medicinal Purposes by Traiteurs.”

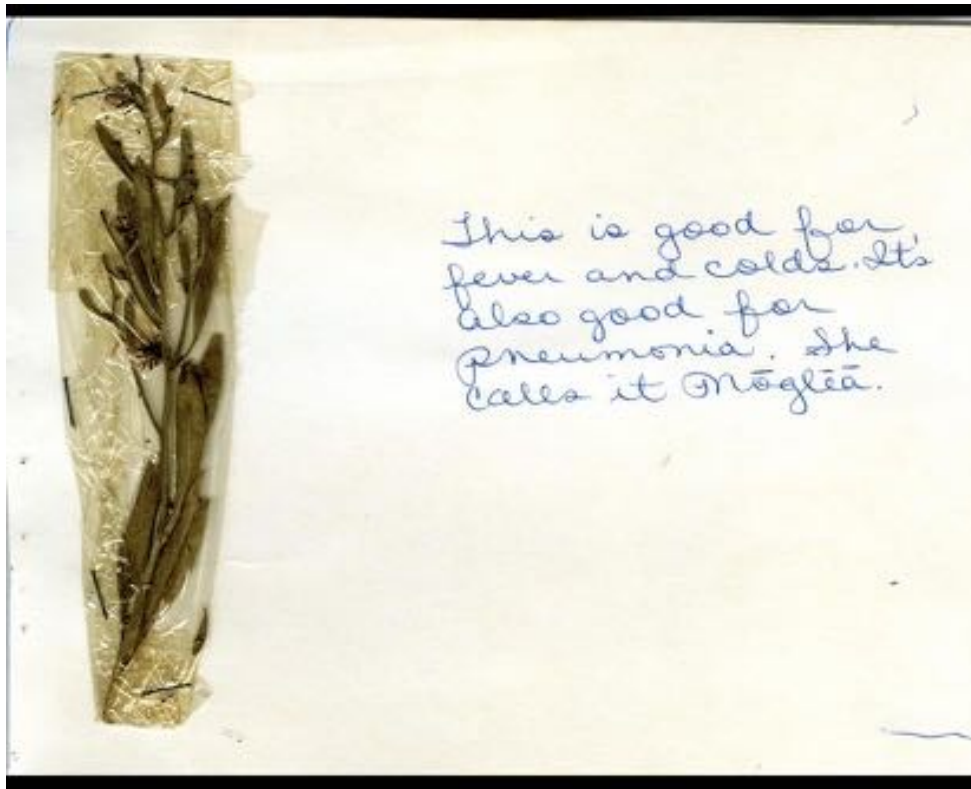


Figure 2: This is an example of an herb called “moglea,” which can be used in *traitemants*. Landry, Alida. “Samples of Plants Used for Medicinal Purposes by *Traiteurs*.” RI1.197. D-R12-197. Center for Louisiana Studies.

This is one example of the kind of information and knowledge that the Cajun *traiteurs* gained from their interactions with the Native American tribes that had inhabited Louisiana long before the arrival of said Cajuns. Because one of the central practices of the *traiteurs* is the use of herbs and remedies to help heal the various ailments and illnesses they treat, it is reasonable to conclude that the *traiteurs* owe quite a lot to the Native Americans that trained them in the use of herbs and plants native to South Louisiana.

Cajuns have a long and storied history in Louisiana, one that has captured the imagination of the general population, in negative and positive ways. The study of this history reveals important lessons about smaller ethnic groups in the United States and the things that they may face as a result of being considered different from the general population. Specifically,

the story of the Cajuns is one that shows the harm and long-term effects of the process of cultural assimilation. This project will briefly recount the history of the Cajuns, discuss the *traiteurs* and their importance to Cajun communities, and describe the assimilation attempts that have succeeded in dramatically impacting Cajun culture in Louisiana.

This project will focus predominantly on the years 1940-1980, or the post-World War II period. The evidence to support these conclusions will come from the disappearance of the French language, the marginalization of Catholicism, and the Cajuns' preference for traditional medicinal treatments.

Chapter One: The Cajuns

In order to understand who the *traiteurs* are, one must first understand who the Cajuns are. Cajuns are the descendants of French settlers from Nova Scotia.¹ The people that we consider to be “Cajuns” began as Acadians. The term “Cajun” has a enigmatic beginning,

For historians, identity evolution can be difficult to trace: the material record cannot replicate 200-year-old lived experiences and perspectives, but it does support the idea of an overarching créolité, or network of Creoleness, to which Acadian descendants belonged and self-identified throughout the 19th century. Much harder to substantiate is when those Acadian Creoles began calling themselves Cajun. It’s a matter of scholarly debate, but the current consensus holds that the term existed by the end of the 19th century. However, its usage does not appear to have been widespread, and it ranged from neutral to pejorative.²

Historian Shane Bernard claims, “It wasn’t said with the kind of pride we see today.”³ Acadians are largely descended from French pilgrims fleeing religious civil war in France, “As peasant immigrants, the Acadians sought to escape the violence that had disrupted their lives in France and destroyed what generations of their families had sought to build... Much of the

¹Carl A. Brasseaux, "Four Hundred Years of Acadian Life in North America," *Journal of Popular Culture* 23, no. 1 (1989): 3-22.

²Molly Cleaver, “What's the difference between Cajun and Creole—or is there one?” *The Historic New Orleans Collection*, October 16, 2020, <https://www.hnoc.org/publications/first-draft/whats-difference-between-cajun-and-creole-or-there-one>.

³Cleaver, “What's the difference between Cajun and Creole—or is there one?” <https://www.hnoc.org/publications/first-draft/whats-difference-between-cajun-and-creole-or-there-one>.

fighting in the 1560s centered in Haut-Poitou, from which most of the Acadian settlers were drawn.”⁴

Acadians were French immigrants who moved from their homeland to Nova Scotia, which was then a French territory. The original colony on Nova Scotia was Port-Royal, settled in 1605.⁵ The Acadians resided relatively peacefully in an area known as Acadie for over a century.⁶ Acadie was a territory rich in natural resources, albeit difficult to navigate.⁷ So, it is no surprise that it drew the attention of the colonial powers that were systematically seizing control over much of the world, and North America in particular. Geoffrey Plank states, “Though Acadia was small, it seemed strategically important, at least from the appearance of seventeenth-century maps, because it lay close to New England, the south of the St. Lawrence River, and the North Atlantic fishing banks.”⁸ These strategic positions and the abundance of resources assured that this area would be consistently fought over. Plank followed, “Nonetheless, Acadia drew the

⁴Barry Jean Ancelet, Jay D. Edwards, and Glen Pitre, *Cajun Country*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 4.

⁵“Acadian Timeline,” Government of Nova Scotia, Accessed September 6, 2022, <https://acadien.novascotia.ca/en/timeline>.

⁶John Mack Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from Their American Homeland*, first edition, (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2005), 1.

⁷Carl A. Brasseaux, "Four Hundred Years of Acadian Life in North America," *Journal of Popular Culture* 23, no. 1 (1989): 3-22.

⁸Geoffrey Plank, *An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign Against the Peoples of Acadia*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 19.

attention of imperial projectors from several empires in the seventeenth century.”⁹ This territory was passed back and forth from imperial powers throughout the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries.¹⁰

The land again came under contest in the early 1700’s, specifically, with the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, which transferred control over Nova Scotia from France to England.¹¹ This treaty and the cession of Nova Scotia and Acadie came as the resolution of the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714).¹² The treaty of Utrecht stated,

Article XII: The most Christian King shall take care to have delivered to the Queen of Great Britain, on the same day that the ratifications of this treaty shall be exchanged, solemn and authentic letters, or instruments, by virtue whereof it shall appear, that the island of St. Christopher's is to be possessed alone hereafter by British subjects, likewise all Nova Scotia or Acadie, with its ancient boundaries, as also the city of Port Royal, now called Annapolis Royal, and all other things in those parts, which depend on the said lands and islands ...and that in such ample manner and form, that the subjects of the most Christian King shall hereafter be excluded from all kind of fishing in the said seas, bays, and other places, on the coasts of Nova Scotia, that is to say, on those which lie towards the east, within 30 leagues, beginning from the island commonly called Sable, inclusively, and thence stretching along towards the south-west.¹³

The Acadians residing within the territory of Acadie practiced Catholicism and had close and cooperative ties with the Mi’kmaq tribe that resided near the area. Carl Brasseux attests, “By

⁹Plank, *An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign Against the Peoples of Acadia*, 19.

¹⁰E. Bunner, *History of Louisiana from Its First Discovery and Settlement to the Present Time*, (Carlisle, Massachusetts: Applewood Books, n.d), 1.

¹¹Wilton P. Ledet, “Acadians Find Peace in Louisiana,” *The Regional Review*, Vol II No. 3, The National Park Service, March 1939, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/regional_review/vol2-3c.htm.

¹²“The War of the Spanish Succession,” *The Royal Hampshire Regiment*, Accessed October 20, 2022, [https://www.royalhampshireregiment.org/about-the-museum/timeline/war-spanish-succession/#:~:text=The%20War%20of%20the%20Spanish%20Succession%20\(1701%E2%80%931714\)%20has,King%20Charles%20II%20of%20Spain.](https://www.royalhampshireregiment.org/about-the-museum/timeline/war-spanish-succession/#:~:text=The%20War%20of%20the%20Spanish%20Succession%20(1701%E2%80%931714)%20has,King%20Charles%20II%20of%20Spain.)

¹³“Treaties of Utrecht,” *Brooklyn College*, Accessed October 20, 2022, <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/history/johnson/utrecht.htm>.

1713, when Great Britain secured permanent control of Nova Scotia through the Treaty of Utrecht, the Acadians, who had colonized the Bay of Fundy's eastern shores for more than a century, and the Mi'kmaq had established a symbiotic relationship, undergirded by extensive trade links and blood ties."¹⁴ Accompanied by the difference in religion, the Acadians were a bothersome problem to the British leadership that had been tasked to integrate the newly acquired territory into the empire. Brasseaux declares, "In the 1740's, the Nova Scotian government embarked upon an effort to 'separate the Mi'kmaq from the Acadians and transform the Acadians into 'English Protestants.'"¹⁵ This was because the culturally distinct group was seen as "subversive" to the British living in the area.¹⁶ At this time, the English required that all citizens take an oath of loyalty to the crown and convert to the state religion, which was Protestantism, "Another complicating factor in the history of Nova Scotia was that both the Acadians and the Mi'kmaq formally adhered to the Catholic faith."¹⁷ The British wanted to integrate the Acadians into normal British society, which meant conversion and obedience, "These projects to 'root' out the Mi'kmaq and to transform the Acadians into Protestant 'faithful subjects,' reflected a simple logic flowing directly from contemporary ideas about the nature of colonial identity within the British Empire."¹⁸ The disparity between the religions and the

¹⁴Carl A. Brasseaux, "An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign Against the Peoples of Acadia (Review)," *Journal of Colonialism & Colonial History* 2, no. 3. 2001, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/7400>.

¹⁵Brasseaux, "An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign Against the People of Acadia (Review)," <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/7400>.

¹⁶Brasseaux, "An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign Against the Peoples of Acadia (Review)," <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/7400>.

¹⁷Plank, *An Unsettled Conquest*. 6.

¹⁸Plank, *An Unsettled Conquest*. 4.

beliefs of the Acadians and their new governmental officials, the British, proved to be tumultuous at best. In other British territories, these differences had been dealt with relatively peacefully. However, the British did not trust the Catholics in Acadie and their ties with Native Americans, “Many British colonial officials assumed that the Catholic Church exerted an insidious influence over the Mi’kmaq and the Acadians. Catholic priests served as emissaries between the two groups and helped establish and maintain communications between the people of Nova Scotia and the French colonial authorities on Ile Royal and in Canada.”¹⁹ Though the English did not push the issue initially, they began to tire of the Acadians who lived in Nova Scotia and seemed to be occupying very rich and resource filled lands in the newly English territory. The remaining tensions from the War of the Spanish Successions proved to be too raw to facilitate a peaceful agreement between the two groups, “The unique geopolitical circumstances of Nova Scotia provided the British with the apparent incentive—and in the 1750s the opportunity— to implement proposals in Nova Scotia that had been debated and rejected in other parts of the empire.”²⁰ Geoffrey Plank, a foremost scholar on the colonial era in Nova Scotia, claims that the study of this time period and the treatment of the Acadians in Acadie is an important aspect of colonial history. He claimed,

Nova Scotia deserves special attention from historians of the eighteenth-century British Empire in part because its history reflects cultural and political developments occurring throughout the realm...In 1755, when the authorities in Nova Scotia sent thousands of Acadians to the English-speaking colonies, they initiated a series of migrations that scattered French-speaking, Catholic exiles across thousands of miles and altered the cultural landscape of much of British North America. With this and other actions, the government of Nova Scotia also exported a set of ideas, policy goals, and tactics that

¹⁹Plank, *An Unsettled Conquest*. 6.

²⁰Plank, *An Unsettled Conquest*. 6.

would exert a discernible but immeasurable influence on the behavior of British and Anglo-American officials in the years to come.²¹

Cajuns came to Louisiana in quite the traumatic manner. Beginning in 1755, the British governor of Nova Scotia decided that all French settlers should swear an oath of loyalty to the British or be cast from their settlements in an effort to solidify his power over the notoriously independent Acadians.²² Though Acadians were not necessarily French patriots, they did not want to pledge themselves to the British crown. In a letter sent by Lieutenant Governor Charles Lawrence to his governors, he claims, “The success that has attended his Majesty's arms in driving the French from the Encroachments they had made in this province, furnished me with a favorable opportunity of reducing the French inhabitants of this Colony to a proper obedience to his Majesty's Government, or forcing them to quit the country.”²³ So, Lieutenant Governor Lawrence had the Acadians forcibly removed from their land and dispersed.²⁴ In what became known as the *Grand Derangement*, the Acadians were sent off to unfamiliar lands. In a letter from Lieutenant Governor Lawrence to Colonel John Winslow, who was the man in charge of the disbursement, Lawrence commanded:

Having in my letter of the 31st of July last acquainted Captain Murray with the reasons which induced his Majesty's Council to come to the resolution of sending away the French inhabitants; and clearing the whole country of such bad subjects (which letter he will communicate to you together with the Instructions I have since that sent him): it only

²¹Plank, *An Unsettled Conquest*. 7.

²²Carl A. Brasseaux, "A New Acadia: The Acadian Migrations to South Louisiana, 1764-1803," *Acadiensis (Fredericton)* 15, no. 1 (1985): 123-132.

²³"Records of the Deportation and Le Grand Dérangement, 1714-1768," Nova Scotia Archives, August 11, 1755, Accessed May 13, 2022, 277.

²⁴"Records of the Deportation and Le Grand Dérangement, 1714-1768," 271.

remains for me to give you the necessary orders and instructions for putting in practice what has been so solemnly determined.²⁵

Journalist Dave Peyton describes Lawrence's harsh treatment of the Acadians as:

He did more than order them. He literally threw them on ships without regard to family ties and dropped them off a few at a time along the entire eastern coast of North America. They were split up intentionally—he didn't want them back together again. He knew if they got together, they'd probably try to come back and take over Nova Scotia again.

²⁵"Records of the Deportation and Le Grand Dérangement, 1714-1768," 271.

There were about 8,000 Acadians—about half of whom died on the ships or shortly after being dropped off.²⁶



Figure 3: This figure shows the artist's representation of the expulsion of the Acadians from their homeland in Nova Scotia. Wm. Notman & Son. "Expulsion of the Acadians, painting by Henri Beau, copied for Robert Glasgow 1914-15." McCord Stewart Museum. McCord Collection. 1914-1915. <https://collections.musee-mccord-stewart.ca/en/objects/131405/expulsion-of-the-acadians-painting-by-henri-beau-copied-fo>.

This treatment is paramount to the ethnic cleansing of the Acadians. In *A Great and Noble Scheme*, John Mack Faragher discussed the foundation of this declaration by quoting a piece of correspondence from 1755:

We are now upon a great and noble Scheme of sending the neutral French out of this Province, who have always been secret Enemies, and have encouraged the Savages to cut

²⁶Leonard Deutsch and Dave Peyton, "Cajun Culture: An Interview," *MELUS* 6, no. 1, 1979, 81.

our Throats. If we effect their Expulsion, it will be one of the greatest Things that ever the English did in America; for by all the Accounts, that Part of the Country they possess, is as good Land as any in the World: In case therefore we could get some good English Farmers in their Room, this Province would abound with all Kinds Of Provisions.²⁷

Faragher believed, “This statement amounts to as frank an acknowledgement as one might fear to find that *le grand derangement* was a classic episode of ethnic cleansing.”²⁸

All was not lost though. Dave Peyton describes the reunion of the Acadians in Louisiana, “By word of mouth the Acadians heard about Louisiana and were attracted there in large numbers.”²⁹ From the end of the 1700s to the 1800s, displaced Acadians began to find themselves in Louisiana, where they were once again reunited with their countrymen.

The Acadian people who found their way to Louisiana began to regroup and have remained in Louisiana for the decades following the *Grand Derangement*. Slowly, the Acadians developed a culture unique to their lives in Louisiana, “The Acadians intermarried with other

²⁷Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from Their American Homeland*, 333.

²⁸Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme*. 333.

²⁹Deutsch and Peyton, “Cajun Culture: An Interview,” 81.

ethnic groups after the Civil War and evolved into Cajuns.”³⁰ These groups included African Americans, Native Americans, and French, Spanish, and German immigrants.³¹

Though they were able to find each other, they were not able to find a place free from discrimination. The state of Louisiana did offer a place for them to reside, but also housed those who felt that Cajuns were inferior and needed to be assimilated into mainstream society.

Cajuns remained largely isolated from the rest of Louisiana from the time period of *Le Grand Derangement* and the subsequent reunification until World War II.³² Bernard claims,

Although the developing Cajun people and their ancestors remained largely untouched by Americanization prior to World War II, they were not totally removed from the currents of national history. Major events like the American Revolution, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and World War I influenced the ethnic group. Of these, the Civil War had the greatest impact, for by destroying south Louisiana’s economy it lowered rival ethnic groups, such as the French, Spanish, and Germans, to the same impoverished social stratum inhabited by most Acadians. As a result, these ethnic groups began to intermarry with the Acadians in sizable numbers. More than any other factor it was this postbellum blending process that created the people called Cajuns. However, the Civil War had only a minor Americanizing influence on the forming ethnic group, which tended to regard the conflict as someone else’s fight. *La guerre des Confédérés*, many south Louisianians called it, the Confederates’ War. A magazine illustration from the period showed a typical Acadian conscript on picket duty, chained to a tree to prevent him from deserting.³³

Peyton states, “For a long time a stigma was attached to being a Cajun. In the 1950s the Cajuns were probably at their ebb; it was the low point in the history of the Cajun people...a lot

³⁰Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xvii.

³¹Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xx.

³²Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xix.

³³Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xix-xx.

of people were trying to deny their heritage at that time—up through the mid-sixties.”³⁴ Dave Peyton claims,

The state of Louisiana was under the control of politicians from northern Louisiana and had been for the first half of the century. He was the English—the British—the Celtic—the Scotch-Irish; and just like the British in Nova Scotia, he had mandated that all things must be British...The Scotch-Irish were trying to mandate the English language throughout Louisiana to the point that in the early 1900s a law was written banning the speaking of Cajun French in the school systems. The way they rationalized this is that Cajun was considered an illiterate language. In fact, it was there was no written Cajun language. There was no Cajun grammar. Cajun was so different from standard French that you couldn't write it in standard French.³⁵

The stigmatization of Cajun culture and the punishment for attempting to preserve it served its purpose. Cajun culture was irreparably damaged by the assimilation attempts of Louisiana politicians during the early 20th century. Journalist Adam Nossiter reported, “French remains the language of the rapidly diminishing elderly; the recorded number of French speakers in Louisiana has dropped to 260,000 in 1980 from 570,000 in 1970...Cajun French is a patois that crawled out of the Louisiana swamps and prairies after two centuries of French residence. Stigmatized as the language of backward Cajuns, it was banned from Louisiana schools by the state Constitution of 1921.”³⁶ The State Constitution prevented teachers from speaking Cajun French in the classroom and from teaching students to speak Cajun French.³⁷ In the actual Constitution from 1921, Article XII Section 12 states, “The general exercises in the public

³⁴Deutsch and Peyton, “Cajun Culture: An Interview,” 82.

³⁵Deutsch and Peyton, “Cajun Culture: An Interview,” 82.

³⁶Adam Nossiter, “LOUISIANA’S CAJUN FRENCH: A PAST TENSE?” Chicago, IL, *Chicago Tribune*, December 20, 1990, Accessed January 10, 2020, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1990-12-20-9004150161-story.html>.

³⁷“Constitution of the State of Louisiana: adopted in convention at the city of Baton Rouge, June 18, 1921,” *Cornell University Library*, Baton Rouge, LA, June 18, 1921. 93.

schools shall be conducted in the English language.”³⁸ This small detail in the Constitution had a massive impact on the culture of the Cajuns in Louisiana. Namely, this section was aimed specifically at Cajun children and the schools that they attended, as they were the only group of students attending schools in Louisiana where they were largely being taught in and to speak another language.³⁹ By specifically addressing the Cajun French being spoken in schools within Cajun communities, the state legislature was essentially making the statement that learning and speaking this language was not acceptable and was not good for the children. As the spoken French dialect was integrally important to the Cajuns, this was an incredibly impactful piece of legislation,

Their language, entirely spoken — few can read or write in French — has been held in contempt by many people as a crude patois, though some authorities insist it is pure seventeenth-century French. Until the first World War relatively few spoke English at all. And those who speak it today have a humorous, if expressive, jargon of their own. In many ways this is not really a dialect, but a literal translation from French, such as, ‘He live in that house which is white, him.’ The last pronoun being repeated to impress you with who it is living in ‘that house which is white.’ Sentences frequently terminate with an interrogative ‘Yes?’ or ‘No?’ or ‘Hein?’ as if desiring your assurance that the speaker is correct in his opinion and that you agree.⁴⁰

By enforcing that all education be done in the English language and the English language only, the State Constitution of 1921 stunted the passing of the Cajun French language down to the youngest generation of Cajuns.⁴¹ The stipulation made clear which language was preferable, and

³⁸ “Constitution of the State of Louisiana: adopted in convention at the city of Baton Rouge, June 18, 1921,” <https://archive.org/details/cu31924030492163/page/n119/mode/2up>.

³⁹Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xiv.

⁴⁰Lyle Saxon, Edward Dreyer, and Robert Tallant, *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1945), 270-271.

⁴¹“Constitution of the State of Louisiana: adopted in convention at the city of Baton Rouge, June 18, 1921,” <https://archive.org/details/cu31924030492163/page/n119/mode/2up>.

the parents of these children understood. If a child was to be accepted into Louisiana society and have the best life possible, they would need to speak English and speak it well.⁴² The importance of passing on the traditional language of the Cajuns and Acadians was lost. The long-term implications of this single law are still being felt in Louisiana today, specifically within the Cajun community.⁴³

The Cajuns are a distinct cultural group that emerged in the Acadian region of Canada in the 17th and 18th centuries.⁴⁴ After their expulsion from Canada by the British in 1755, many Cajuns migrated to Louisiana, where they established a unique cultural and linguistic community that has endured to the present day.⁴⁵ The struggles that they faced during that upheaval cannot be underappreciated,

There are contemporary counterparts of the expulsion of these people from Nova Scotia by the British. Refugees still flee from intolerance, are still banished from their homelands because it is expedient to their rulers that they be so treated. But there is no recent case more tragic than the brutal uprooting of these Acadians, none more filled with misery than the long wanderings of these homeless fifty thousand. Today travel is swift.

⁴²Nossiter, “(sic) LOUISIANA’S CAJUN FRENCH: A PAST TENSE?”
<https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1990-12-20-9004150161-story.html>.

⁴³Nossiter, “(sic) LOUISIANA’S CAJUN FRENCH: A PAST TENSE?”
<https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1990-12-20-9004150161-story.html>.

⁴⁴John Mack Faragher, “When French Settlers Were the Victims of Ethnic Cleansing in North America,” *History News Network*, Washington D.C., April 17, 2005,
<http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/11204>.

⁴⁵Faragher, “When French Settlers Were the Victims of Ethnic Cleansing in North America,” <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/11204>.

Liners can carry the expatriated to new continents in a few days. The Acadians struggled southward, on foot, in small boats, for three decades.⁴⁶

The history of the Cajuns in Louisiana is a complex and fascinating story, one that reflects the resilience, creativity, and adaptability of this vibrant cultural group, “These bayou Cajuns are usually poor, though some are making money today. As fisherman they are eminently successful; the heritage of their Norman and Breton ancestry is not wasted. The great shrimping, crabbing and oyster-fishing industries of Louisiana are entirely in their hands. They are the world’s finest trappers.”⁴⁷

The Cajuns' arrival in Louisiana was not without its challenges. They faced discrimination and persecution from other groups, who viewed them as inferior or unwelcome.⁴⁸ Despite these challenges, the Cajuns were determined to establish themselves in Louisiana, and they did so through hard work, ingenuity, and a strong sense of cultural identity.⁴⁹

One of the key factors in the survival of Cajun culture in Louisiana was the development of a distinct dialect of French, known as Cajun French, that became the primary language of the community. This dialect was influenced by the Acadian French spoken in Canada, as well as by the languages and cultures of other groups in Louisiana, such as African Americans, Native Americans, and Spanish speakers.

Cajun culture also developed a unique culinary tradition, which has become famous throughout the world. Cajun cuisine is known for its bold flavors and use of local ingredients,

⁴⁶Saxon, Dreyer, and Tallant, *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, 268-269.

⁴⁷Saxon, Dreyer, and Tallant, *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, 270.

⁴⁸Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, 14.

⁴⁹Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, 14.

such as seafood, rice, and spices. Some of the most iconic Cajun dishes include gumbo, jambalaya, and crawfish étouffée. The development of Cajun cuisine was a reflection of the resourcefulness and creativity of Cajun cooks, who made the most of the ingredients available to them and developed new recipes and techniques.

Music is another important aspect of Cajun culture. Cajun music is a lively and upbeat genre that features accordion, fiddle, and other traditional instruments. The lyrics are often in Cajun French and tell stories of love, loss, and everyday life in Louisiana. Cajun music is a celebration of the Cajun way of life, and it has helped to preserve and promote Cajun culture both in Louisiana and around the world.

Religion has also played an important role in Cajun culture. The majority of Cajuns are Catholic, and the Catholic Church has been a central institution in Cajun communities for centuries. Many Cajuns attend Mass regularly, and Catholicism is deeply ingrained in Cajun culture, influencing everything from music to food to social customs.

The Cajuns' experience in Louisiana has not been without its challenges. The community has faced discrimination and prejudice from other groups, and the Cajun language and culture have been threatened by assimilation into mainstream American society. However, the Cajuns have also shown remarkable resilience and adaptability, and they have been able to maintain their distinct cultural identity despite these challenges.

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in Cajun culture, both in Louisiana and around the world. The popularity of Cajun music, cuisine, and other cultural expressions has helped to raise awareness of the unique history and traditions of the Cajun people. There has also

been a growing recognition of the value of cultural diversity, and a renewed appreciation for the contributions that different cultural groups have made to American society.

Today, the Cajun community in Louisiana continues to be a vibrant and dynamic part of the state's cultural landscape. While the community has faced many challenges over the years, it has also shown remarkable resilience and creativity, adapting to changing circumstances while remaining true to its cultural heritage. The history of the Cajuns in Louisiana is a testament to the power of cultural identity and the importance of preserving and celebrating cultural diversity in all its forms.

Acadians are still trying to come to terms with the loss of their culture. Tyler Leblanc, a journalist from Toronto, recounted his reaction when learning about his Acadian heritage and the forced removal of his ancestors, “Dancing on someone’s grave is a sign of disrespect. It’s a ‘ha-ha, screw you, I relish in your demise, and outlast you.’ It seems silly, but it’s not. Not here. Charles Lawrence was the racist megalomaniac behind the Expulsion of the Acadians, of *Le Grand Dérangement*—the forced deportation of almost the entire population of Acadie, about 14,000 people.”⁵⁰

Because every family of Acadians did not make it to Louisiana, there are many families who are unaware of their Acadian heritage, like Tyler Leblanc’s,

Acadian culture was erased, at least in my family. But I’ve traced my ancestors back to some of the first settlers that arrived in Port Royal in the middle of the 17th century. No one in my family knew of the connection until a few months ago. I’ve been told French was spoken in the house four generations back, but memories are getting foggy. We’ve nearly forgotten. Many of the unlucky souls who landed in the hostile ports of America

⁵⁰Tyler Leblanc, “Forgetting Charles Lawrence,” *This Magazine*, Toronto, Canada, December 1, 2017, Accessed May 13, 2022, <https://this.org/2017/12/01/forgetting-charles-lawrence/>.

had their culture physically stolen. For my family, among those who escaped the deportations, the erasure happened much more slowly, but it happened nonetheless.⁵¹

This detachment, whether an intentional decision by the Acadians who were dispelled or by their descendants, means that there are many people who will never know about the hardships that their ancestors faced. Admittedly, it was likely advantageous for Acadian families to forgo their French heritage in favor of adopting the lifestyle of the Americans that they found themselves amongst. Emily Prado claimed, “Families, like society, are big influences for people and both often encourage assimilation. For many people, assimilation has been a key for survival, and it has opened up certain opportunities that wouldn’t have been available otherwise.”⁵² They had already seen the potentially devastating reaction to their refusal to give up their French heritage and practices.

The exile of the Acadians was a traumatic ordeal that has had long-term impacts on generations of people. This aggressive act of colonization is but one instance of large countries making decisions that negatively impact small populations. If left to their own devices, the Acadians would have likely caused no trouble to the English crown in Nova Scotia. They had not previously been aggressive and had simply wanted to keep to themselves and continue their lives as they had lived them for decades.⁵³ Only recently, with the works of historians like Carl Brasseaux and Barry Ancelet has the larger population of the United States even become aware

⁵¹Leblanc, “Forgetting Charles Lawrence,” *This Magazine*, Toronto, Canada, <https://this.org/2017/12/01/forgetting-charles-lawrence/>.

⁵²Prado, *Examining Assimilation*, 42.

⁵³Ledet, “Acadians Find Peace in Louisiana,” https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/regional_review/vol2-3c.htm.

of the Acadians and the plight that they faced in the 1700s.⁵⁴ With this new knowledge, some people, like Tyler Leblanc, have been able to reconnect with the family history that seemed to be lost to the marching of time. In fact, this new awareness of the Acadians and the *Grand Derangement* resulted in an official apology being issued by the government that now owned what was once Acadie, “In December of 2003 the Canadian government announced that Governor-General Adrienne Clarkson, the Queen's representative in Canada, had signed a Royal Proclamation acknowledging responsibility for ‘the decision to deport the Acadian people’ from the British province of Nova Scotia in 1755, and regretting the ‘tragic consequences.’”⁵⁵

⁵⁴Faragher, “When French Settlers Were the Victims of Ethnic Cleansing in North America,” <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/11204>.

⁵⁵Faragher, “When French Settlers Were the Victims of Ethnic Cleansing in North America,” <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/11204>.

Chapter Two: The *Traiteurs*

Cajuns can trace their folk medicine practices back to their French ancestors, “Perhaps the most common source for Acadian folk medicine is post-medieval French homeopathic medicine...Many French-derived cures are still found in French Canada as well as Louisiana.”¹ The practice of homeopathic medicine was carried to the New World by the French settlers who came to Nova Scotia.² From there, the practice has gone where the Acadians went, including to Louisiana. The practice of homeopathic medicine manifested itself through the practice of Cajun *traiteurs*. The work of Cajun *traiteurs* is a result of centuries of acculturation. The resultant work is a mix of primarily French, Native American, and African healing traditions.³ Tracing the exact lineage of the practices of the *traiteurs* is, however, next to impossible, “The specific origin of treating is difficult to ascertain. Magico-religious folk healing of this type exists in many societies...At the macro-level, three of the largest groups in past and present Louisiana are European, Amerindian, and African. The use of prayers or chants, herbal medicine, and laying on of hands is present in all three groups.”⁴ Native Americans had lived in the area since before European colonization and Africans were brought to Louisiana through the Atlantic slave trade.⁵

¹Barry Jean Ancelet, Jay D. Edwards, and Glen Pitre, *Cajun Country*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 35.

²Rocky Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treaters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," *Western Folklore* 51, no. 3/4, 1992, 238.

³Brandon, *Folk Medicine in French Louisiana*, 213.

⁴Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treaters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," 238.

⁵Maida Owens, “Louisiana's Traditional Cultures: An Overview,” *Folklife in Louisiana*, Accessed November 20, 2021.
https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Maidas_Essay/main_introduction_onepage.html#tab3.

These rich cultures mixed with the culture of the French Acadians, who settled in the area after being expelled from Nova Scotia, to create the diverse tapestry the comprises Cajun, and therefore *traiteur*, culture.⁶

Cajun *traiteurs*, historically, have been of varied backgrounds, ages, and races. When Raymond Varisco interviewed several Cajun healers in 1968, he found,

Age, however, does not seem to be a determining factor for the belief in or use of home cures. Nor, if the present collection is at all valid, does education or economic statuses seem to contribute significantly' to the degree of belief in home remedies. If nothing else, the list of informants' is a varied one. Some are old, some are quite young. Some have no formal education whatsoever; others hold M.A. degrees. Despite this diversity, there are characteristics which the informants share.⁷

Cajun *traiteurs* are the French Catholic descendants of immigrants expelled from Nova Scotia.⁸ As such, this paper will focus only on those that are “Cajun.” This group is, predominantly, Caucasian. This is because people of African descent are not Cajun, but Creole, “A common contemporary understanding is that creole refers to a mixed-race identity that has at least some African ancestry, but some laymen and scholars take pains to distinguish between ‘Creoles’ and ‘Creoles of Color’ to suggest important differences within the shared identity.”⁹ In fact, the term Creole came to mean Louisiana-born, regardless of racial states, which excludes French-descended Cajuns, “Creole began to be used widely as a noun to indicate native birth in

⁶Owens, “Louisiana's Traditional Cultures: An Overview,” https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Maidas_Essay/main_introduction_onepage.html#tab3.

⁷Raymond Varisco, “Acadian Home Remedies”, *American Folklore*, January 12, 1968, 2.

⁸Carl A. Brasseaux, "Four Hundred Years of Acadian Life in North America," *Journal of Popular Culture* 23, no. 1 (1989): 3.

⁹Michael R. Cope and Mark J. Schafer, "Creole: A Contested, Polysemous Term," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 15 (2017): 2654.

Louisiana, regardless of racial heritage.”¹⁰ There is some scholarly debate about the differences between Cajuns and Creoles, and there has not been an undefeated consensus, however,

For two centuries, ‘Creole’ had been the dominant term used to describe the region’s people and culture; Cajuns existed, but prior to the 1960s they did not self-identify as such in large numbers. For Cajuns were—and are—a subset of Louisiana Creoles. Today, common understanding holds that Cajuns are white and Creoles are Black or mixed race; Creoles are from New Orleans, while Cajuns populate the rural parts of South Louisiana. In fact, the two cultures are far more related—historically, geographically, and genealogically—than most people realize.¹¹

So, Cajuns are Creoles, but Creoles are not necessarily Cajuns. In order to limit the scope of this project, Cajuns will remain the specific subjects of the work. Creole people and Creole healers deserve in-depth and focused research. So, this paper will not address their work, because it should not be only mentioned in passing.

It should be mentioned, however, that some people of African descent would consider themselves Cajun or practice the same kind of faith healing that Cajuns do, “In the Atchafalaya Basin, the ethnic mix of African-American, Creole, Cajun, and Native American culture led to many shared linguistic and cultural characteristics that persist even today.”¹² Michael Cope and Mark Schafer even found evidence that these groups in Louisiana share very similar, “Brasseaux, Fontenot, and Oubre make specific note of the Creole cultural priorities of ‘Catholicism as well as folk Catholicism and the use of *traiteurs*, faith healers, family of nuclear and extended, family values, and hard work mirror the values of neighboring Cajuns’.”¹³ For example, when

¹⁰Cope and Schafer, "Creole: A Contested, Polysemous Term," 2658.

¹¹Cleaver, “What's the difference between Cajun and Creole—or is there one?”
<https://www.hnoc.org/publications/first-draft/whats-difference-between-cajun-and-creole-or-there-one>.

¹²Cope and Schafer, "Creole: A Contested, Polysemous Term," 2663.

¹³ Cope and Schafer, "Creole: A Contested, Polysemous Term," 2663. The author is referencing these works: Brasseaux, Carl A., Keith P. Fontenot, and Claude F. Oubre. *Creoles of*

previously mentioned interviewer Raymond Varisco interviewed multiple Cajun *traiteurs*, he also included information about a Mrs. JoAnn Robicheaux, who was a black woman.¹⁴ In Glen Pitre's documentary, *Good For What Ails You*, the producers interviewed a black Creole woman named Miss Ella, who said that she was *traiteur* and a person, "of two minds."¹⁵

Cajuns in Louisiana are aware that the way they practice their folk medicine is unique to themselves. In a newspaper article from the *Advertiser*, in Lafayette, Louisiana, Alton Broussard reports, "The Indians had their medicine men, the Africans have their witch doctors, and other societies have their treaters, but only in Cajun country does one find unique practitioners called 'traiteurs.' Once considered a dying tribe, the practitioners of the art of healing in the Lafayette area, at least, continue the gris-gris which is passed on to relatives or friends whom they consider worthy and who 'believe.'"¹⁶ Gris-gris are, "the wearable spell-binding bundles associated with New Orleans."¹⁷ Though each gris-gris bag is different, there are some commonalities between

Color in the Bayou Country. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. 1994); and Nordmann, Christopher A. "Free Negroes in Mobile County, Alabama." PhD diss. University of Alabama. 1990.

¹⁴Varisco, *Acadian Home Remedies*, 1.

¹⁵Glen Pitre, Nicole Falgoust, and Michael Doucet, *Good for what ails you: healing secrets of the Cajuns, Creoles and Bayou Indians*, Lockport, LA: Côte Blanche Productions, 1998, <https://www.worldcat.org/title/good-for-what-ails-you-healing-secrets-of-the-cajuns-creoles-and-bayou-indians/oclc/811731512>.

¹⁶Alton E. Broussard, "Traiteurs Continue Gris-Gris," *Advertiser*, Lafayette, LA, June 17, 1973, 53. Also: "Gris-gris" here is referring to the practice of healing. Gris-gris typically refers to amulets or charms used by practitioners of Voodoo in Louisiana, which is a religion stemming from African religions brought to LA during the Atlantic slave trade. Today, gris-gris is used colloquially to describe practices believed to be "magic."

¹⁷Elizabeth Pérez, "'I Got Voodoo, I Got Hoodoo': Ethnography and its Objects in Disney's the Princess and the Frog," *Material Religion* 17, no. 1, 2021, 63.

them.¹⁸ New Orleans author Cheré Coen describes the history of gris-gris bags and some of the potential contents,

Standing behind a table loaded down with herbs, oils and spices, Coen said the biggest misconceptions about “gris gris” bags are that it’s evil or a purely Voodoo practice. Coen said similar bags were made in places like Ireland and Egypt and that the bags are similar to Native American medicine bags. Coen said in many of those cultures, the bags were created out of superstitions around travel. Travelers would place items into the bags that comforted them, she said. The bags were created for a variety of purposes, with each requiring a different set of ingredients. Some of these ingredients, she said, come with little more than folklore, but some have biological backing. For instance, roses are associated with love and are known to release dopamine, giving the same feeling as love, she said. Greeks and Romans believed rosemary helped people to remember things better. Since then, scientists have found that rosemary oil can improve memory, she said. Although some herbs might bring a sense of well-being, Coen said she can’t say whether they do what lore says.¹⁹

Gris-gris bags can be filled with herbs, talismans, animal bones, or any other small item that the creator places high value on.²⁰ Therefore, each bag is different and each bag holds a special blend of contents that are intended to provide the person creating it or that it is being created for a desired outcome.²¹

¹⁸Hope Rurik, “Making gris gris bags...learning the lore,” *The Daily Iberian*, April 20, 2012, Accessed April 20, 2023, https://www.thedailyiberian.com/news/making-gris-gris-bags-learning-the-lore/article_6bb6ec04-8b06-11e1-afda-001a4bcf887a.html.

¹⁹Rurik, “Making gris gris bags...learning the lore,” https://www.thedailyiberian.com/news/making-gris-gris-bags-learning-the-lore/article_6bb6ec04-8b06-11e1-afda-001a4bcf887a.html.

²⁰Rurik, “Making gris gris bags...learning the lore,” https://www.thedailyiberian.com/news/making-gris-gris-bags-learning-the-lore/article_6bb6ec04-8b06-11e1-afda-001a4bcf887a.html.

²¹Rurik, “Making gris gris bags...learning the lore,” https://www.thedailyiberian.com/news/making-gris-gris-bags-learning-the-lore/article_6bb6ec04-8b06-11e1-afda-001a4bcf887a.html.

Gris-gris can also refer to the superstitions and subsequent actions of the Cajuns.²² Gris-gris is a verb and a noun.

There are many superstitions besides the medical ones. Marie Polite can tell you about them. ‘When you find out you forgot something and got to go back to the house, before you go back there, you be sure to make a cross mark right on the spot where you turned around, yes. And when you come back you rub that cross mark out, or bad luck she gon’ sure follow you, her. If you go out on picnic and she is rain hard, go out in yard and make cross with two sticks and put some salt on top that cross. That sure stop rain! That what us Cajuns call gris-gris.’²³

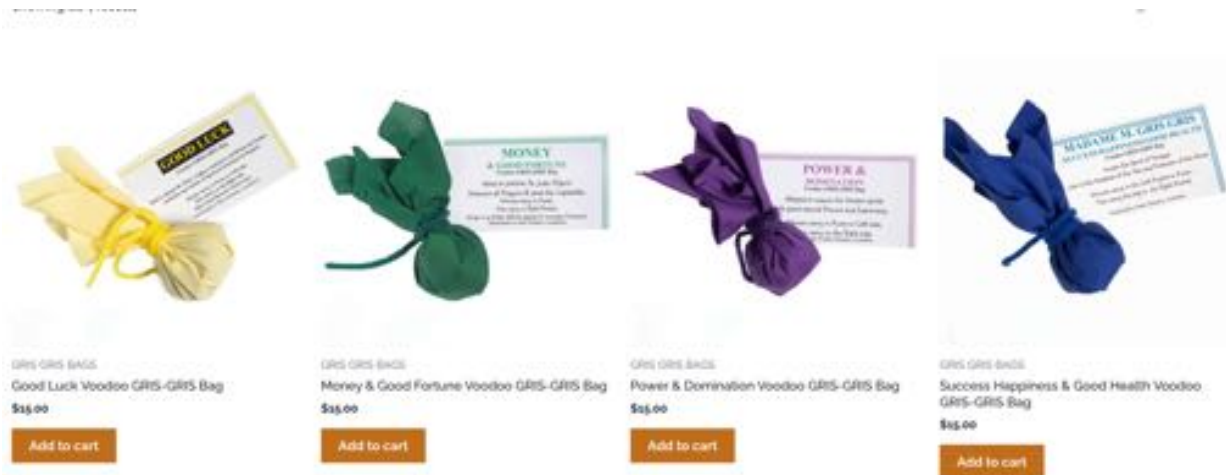


Figure 4: This is a screenshot of the online storefront for the New Orleans Historic Voodoo Museum. It shows what gris-gris bags are, some of their potential uses, and the going rate to purchase one. “Gris-Gris Bags.” *New Orleans Historic Voodoo Museum*. Accessed February 19, 2023. <https://voodooomuseum.com/product-category/gris-gris-bags/>.

Who is NOT a *traiteur*?

²² Lyle Saxon, Edward Dreyer, and Robert Tallant, *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1945), 293.

²³Saxon, Dreyer, and Tallant, *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, 93.

Traiteurs *can* be either white or black, because the ancestors of that person dictate whether they are a *traiteur*.²⁴ *Traiteurs* are faith-healing French-Catholics.²⁵ This group is majority white with some people of black ancestry.²⁶ Historian Shane Bernard comments about their ancestry, “The Cajuns’ early ancestors were known as the Acadians, most of whom were from the Centre-Ouest region of France, on the Atlantic coast.”²⁷ Barry Jean Ancelet, a foremost scholar on Louisiana and Cajun history said, “the French colonists who settled Acadia were in fact a remarkably homogeneous group.”²⁸ The French colonists were largely white, Catholic, and lived in their nuclear families.²⁹

Voodoo practitioners and Haitian healers have similar strategies as *traiteurs*, but their practices descend from Haiti and Africa. Voodoo originates from the *Yoruba* tribe in Africa as far as historians can tell.³⁰ Ancelet claims, “*Traiteurs* were always considered particularly good persons in their communities. The title *doctor* was given to them. They were never associated

²⁴Jacques M. Henry and Carl L. Bankston, "Ethnic Self-Identification and Symbolic Stereotyping: The Portrayal of Louisiana Cajuns," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24, no. 6 (2001): 1020-1045.

²⁵Azelia Stevens, Interview by Alida Landry, December 3, 1973 in New Iberia, Louisiana.

²⁶Henry and Bankston, "Ethnic Self-Identification and Symbolic Stereotyping: The Portrayal of Louisiana Cajuns," 1020.

²⁷Shane K. Bernard, “Acadians in Colonial Louisiana,” *64 Parishes*, July 26, 2011, Accessed November 16, 2022.

²⁸Barry Jean Ancelet, Jay D. Edwards, and Glen Pitre, *Cajun Country*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 3.

²⁹Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 3.

³⁰Ina J. Fandrich, “Yorùbá Influences on Haitian Vodou and New Orleans Voodoo,” *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 5 (2007), 780.

with voodoo doctors, however.”³¹ Voodoo was brought to the Western Hemisphere by the Africans who were forcibly enslaved and moved to the “New World” to work on the various plantations that had been created there. Because of false claims and racist reports, many people in south Louisiana consider Voodoo to be “black magic” and would not confuse the work of the *traiteurs* to be the same as Voodoo.³² This is, of course, a false narrative perpetuated by racist stereotypes of the usually black practitioners of Voodoo.³³ Nevertheless, the idea persists, “As it relates to black magic, treating is considered a distinct entity apart from the practices labeled as ‘voodoo,’ ‘hoodoo,’ or ‘gris-gris,’ that are said to cause harm.”³⁴ Especially following the occupation of the Louisiana territory by the Spanish in the 1700s, these people would likely be referred to and refer to themselves as Creoles, who are distinct from Cajuns. Michael Cope and Mark Schafer assert, “Scholars note that during this time, neither Cajuns, nor those who assimilated into Cajun communities, chose to identify themselves as Creole.”³⁵ In an effort to prevent the diminishment of the work of these people, this paper will distinctly discuss only the

³¹Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 97.

³²Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treaters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," 243.

³³ For more information about the misremembered religion of Voodoo and the systematic manner in which it was demonized, see these sources: Ina Johanna Fandrich, "The Politics of Myth-Making: An Analysis of the Struggle for the “Correct” Appropriation of New Orleans' Voodoo Queen Marie Laveaux," *Social Compass* 43, no. 4, 1996, 613-628; Michelle Y. Gordon, ““Midnight Scenes and Orgies”: Public Narratives of Voodoo in New Orleans and Nineteenth-Century Discourses of White Supremacy," *American Quarterly* 64, no. 4, 2017, 767-786; and Emily Suzanne Clark, “Nineteenth-Century New Orleans Voudou: An American Religion,” *American Religion* (Bloomington, Ind. : 2019) 2, no. 1, 2020, 131-155.

³⁴Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treaters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," 243.

³⁵Cope and Schafer, "Creole: A Contested, Polysemous Term," 2657.

French-Catholic *traiteurs*. The practices of the Voodooos and the Haitian descended healers deserve their own discussion and in-depth research.

The *traiteur* tradition in Louisiana is a unique aspect of Cajun culture that has been practiced for centuries. *Traiteurs* are traditional healers who use a combination of Catholic prayers, herbal remedies, and other forms of spiritual and folk medicine to treat a wide range of ailments and afflictions. While the practice has declined in recent years, it remains an important part of the cultural heritage of Louisiana.

The origins of the *traiteur* tradition are unclear, but it likely has roots in both Native American and African traditions as well as the Catholicism brought by French and Spanish settlers to the region. The *traiteur* tradition emerged in rural Cajun communities in the 18th and 19th centuries, where medical resources were limited, and traditional healers played an important role in the health and well-being of the community.

Traiteurs typically use a combination of prayer, laying on of hands, and herbal remedies to treat their patients. Many *traiteurs* believe that their healing powers come from God, and that their ability to heal is a gift from Him. Patients seek out *traiteurs* for a wide range of ailments, including physical, emotional, and spiritual problems.

The practice of *traiteurs* has long been controversial in the medical community. Some doctors and health professionals view it as a form of quackery, while others see it as a valuable cultural tradition that should be respected and preserved. Despite the controversy, *traiteurs* continue to be an important part of many Cajun communities, where they are often viewed as a last resort for those who have exhausted other medical options.

One of the most important aspects of the *traiteur* tradition is its connection to Catholicism. Many *traiteurs* incorporate Catholic prayers and rituals into their healing practices,

and some *traiteurs* are also active members of the Catholic Church. The use of Catholic prayers and symbols reflects the deep religious roots of the *traiteur* tradition and underscores the importance of faith and spirituality in Cajun culture.

In recent years, the *traiteur* tradition has faced challenges as younger generations have become more assimilated into mainstream American culture. Many young Cajuns are less interested in traditional healing practices, and the *traiteur* tradition has struggled to attract new practitioners.³⁶ At the same time, some have argued that the tradition is in danger of being lost as older *traiteurs* pass away without passing their knowledge and skills on to younger generations.

Despite these challenges, there are signs of hope for the *traiteur* tradition. In recent years, there has been renewed interest in traditional healing practices and a growing awareness of the importance of cultural heritage. In response, efforts have been made to document and preserve the *traiteur* tradition, through initiatives such as oral history projects, community events, and academic research.

Ultimately, the *traiteur* tradition in Louisiana is a testament to the resilience and vitality of Cajun culture. It is a tradition that has evolved over centuries, reflecting the complex and diverse cultural roots of the Cajun people. While the future of the *traiteur* tradition is uncertain, it remains an important part of the cultural heritage of Louisiana, and a symbol of the enduring strength of Cajun culture.

What do *traiteurs* do?

³⁶Gravot, “‘all I Depend on is the Lord’: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement,” 180.

Louisiana *traiteurs* practice folk magic and home remedies. They mix these practices with Catholic prayer and beliefs to form their own unique brand of healing, “*Traitement*, faith healing or ‘treating’ as it is called in English, has often been written about as ‘mysterious’ medicine. Rooted in Acadian French history and drawing on other cultures, *traiteurs*, or treaters, practice a form of healing that is based on verbal interaction, including knowledge of prayers.”³⁷

A relatively recent interview with a modern *traiteur* for *US News* claimed, “Traditional *traiteurs* (male healers) and *traiteuses* (female healers) treat people with specific prayers that are passed down from one healer to the next. Prayers are often combined with other folk treatments, such as the use of healing touch and medicinal plants.”³⁸ *Traiteurs* use traditional herbal remedies accompanied by Catholic prayers and religious rituals in order to facilitate healing in their “patients.” These healing methods have been passed down from one generation to the next and constitute an important aspect of family life in Cajun culture.³⁹ In a news article for *The Advertiser*, Alton Broussard reports, “Sincerity, it seems, is a prime factor and is a rigid requirement for the healer and his patient. As one *traiteur*, Minus Romero, put it, ‘If you believe in it, it works.’”⁴⁰ Frank Borello insists, “Many of these people believe in their medicine very strongly. Others, such as a few I interviewed, don’t believe in the treatment or the cure, but do it just because their ancestors did.”⁴¹ One interesting fact about the practice of *traiteurs*, however,

³⁷Gravot, “‘all I Depend on is the Lord’: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun *Traitement*,” 180.

³⁸Megan Wyatt, “Exploring the Practice of Cajun *Traiteurs*—Faith Healers,” *The Associated Press*, Lafayette, LA. August 7, 2022.

³⁹Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 1.

⁴⁰Alton E. Broussard, “*Traiteurs* Continue Gris-Gris,” *Advertise*, Lafayette, LA, June 17, 1973, 53.

⁴¹Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 1.

is that the practice is not necessarily passed down from generation to generation within the same family.⁴² A *traiteur* may actually pass down their knowledge and practice to a young person in the community that they have identified as having the “gift.”⁴³ Gravot interviewed numerous *traiteurs* in South Louisiana in an effort to document their practices. She discovered how *traiteurs* choose who to pass their knowledge on to:

The *traiteur* or *traiteuse* receives prayers from elder family or community members for various ailments, and thus gains a reputation for having *traitement* for certain illnesses. While *traiteurs* and participants both state that prayers are transmitted to an individual of opposite gender, frequently prayers are passed down along gender lines. *Traiteurs* sometimes choose an individual to receive their prayers, seeing an aptitude for the practice in a younger community member. Other times, a younger individual or family member asks for the prayers. Typically, the individual sits with the *traiteur*, who repeats the prayers until the individual has memorized them.⁴⁴

In this way, *traiteurs* are unique to most other traditional healers, who pass down their practices to their family members. *Traiteurs* pass their knowledge and gifts down to any community member that they believe will be a good healer and that will carry on the tradition.⁴⁵ In 1968, Raymond Varisco interviewed several Acadians from Louisiana in an effort to record some of the home remedies that they used regularly. The interviewees reported that they had

⁴²Wyatt, “Exploring the Practice of Cajun Traiteurs–Faith Healers,” <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/louisiana/articles/2022-08-07/exploring-the-practice-of-cajun-traiteurs-faith-healers>.

⁴³Wyatt, “Exploring the Practice of Cajun Traiteurs–Faith Healers,” <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/louisiana/articles/2022-08-07/exploring-the-practice-of-cajun-traiteurs-faith-healers>.

⁴⁴Gravot, “[sic] all I Depend on is the Lord”: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitements,” 180.

⁴⁵Wyatt, “Exploring the Practice of Cajun Traiteurs–Faith Healers,” <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/louisiana/articles/2022-08-07/exploring-the-practice-of-cajun-traiteurs-faith-healers>.

learned these cures from the “old people.”⁴⁶ This means that the practices of the *traiteurs* are passed down from the older generation to the younger generation. Varisco recorded, “Mozart Baker, a resident of Milton, Louisiana, for seventy-five years, claims to have learned many home remedies from ‘the- old’ people.’ According to Mr. Baker, ‘in olden days if you wanted a: doctor you had to ride to Lafayette for one. That’s far on a horse. Old people have to treat themselves.’ Scott resident Mozar Guidry, seventy-nine, says that he, too, learned home cures out of necessity.”⁴⁷ These “old people” are the elders within the Cajun community.⁴⁸ The Acadians of Louisiana have, traditionally, been poor and lived in rural areas. These areas were isolated and remained distinct from the larger cities in Louisiana for quite a while. While these smaller isolated communities were good for maintaining the integrity of the Cajun cultural identity, they did not have all of the services needed to care for an entire community, especially one that included aging individuals, “Until the mid-twentieth century a majority of Cajuns and Creoles were rural, small-scale agriculturalists. A shortage of cash and a certain degree of both physical and cultural isolation made access to medical care difficult.”⁴⁹ For these reasons, *traiteurs* became an important part of the community, “*Traiteurs* play a significant, albeit shy, role in a culture that relies on interdependence.”⁵⁰ Anna Boudreaux, a writer for *Southern Folklore Quarterly* quotes an older Cajun woman,

⁴⁶Varisco, *Acadian Home Remedies*, 1.

⁴⁷Varisco, *Acadian Home Remedies*, 1.

⁴⁸Varisco, *Acadian Home Remedies*, 1.

⁴⁹Sexton, “Cajun and Creole Treaters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana,” 238.

⁵⁰Gravot, “‘all I Depend on is the Lord’: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement,” 182.

In olden days, she explained, people who lived in the country had difficulty getting medical attention every time they felt ill. They either lived too far away, the doctor could not get around to everyone, or they could not afford the cost of medication. From the Indians and on their own, they learned to take reasonable care of illnesses by using certain plants to make medicines. Even at present, some members of the older generation are hesitant about consulting a doctor, not through any religious belief, but because they think that they can remedy their aches and pains in their own simple way, and generally at a lower cost. Acadians of yester- year lived frugal lives and a lingering strain of this is still evident. They quite possibly would choose to consult a “traiteur” before a doctor.⁵¹

Because of the lack of infrastructure and community services, like doctors and hospitals, the isolation of Cajun communities necessitated the work of the *traiteurs*. Admittedly though, *traiteurs* are sometimes unable to treat serious injuries and illnesses, though they have been known to provide great comfort in times of despair.⁵² *Traiteurs*, largely, do not denounce Western medicine and admit the limits of their own practices. An interview with a *traiteur* from Opelousas, Mr. Sostain Lemelle, revealed, “Mr. Lemelle treats himself and others, and he also receives biomedical care, because there are ‘some things that the doctor got to do to you.’”⁵³ Interestingly, Gravot asserted that, “There are two parallel health systems operating in French Louisiana, one culture-specific and one biomedical, reflecting the values and expectations of the larger American macro-culture. That healers and healing traditions still coexist with modern medicine testifies to a cultural level at which healing continues to occur in the region.”⁵⁴ To their

⁵¹Anna M. Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps: Remedies And Cures Of The Kaplan Area In Southwestern Louisiana,” *Southern Folklore Quarterly* Vol. XXXV. No. 2. June 1971, 121.

⁵²Gravot, “‘all I Depend on is the Lord’: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement,” 179.

⁵³Swett, “French Louisiana *Traiteur*,”
https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/LFMtraiteurs.html.

⁵⁴Gravot, “‘all I Depend on is the Lord’: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement,” 182.

credit, some folk practices, like the ones used by *traiteurs*, have also helped to improve modern and Western medicine.⁵⁵ The *Attakapas Gazette* is quoted as claiming, “Folk medicine has to its credit many important contributions to scientific medicine. Even in surgery there is indication of a debt to folk medicine. Ancient skulls show indications of trephining—opening the skull to release pressure on the brain. This was probably done to release evil spirits, but it may have had the effect of relieving the symptoms of brain tumors or depressed skull fractures.”⁵⁶

Each *traiteur* has their own story of learning the practice and holds different beliefs about who can and cannot become a *traiteur*. Interestingly, the practice does not necessarily have to be handed down from family member to family member.⁵⁷ Many *traiteurs* learn their practice from older people in their community who do not have to be family members. Karen Yochim, a reporter for the *Southern Cultures* magazine quotes a *traiteur* from Bayou Portage, Louisiana named Wade Theriot, “‘My grandmother was an Indian,’ he said. ‘She is the one who taught me. Traiteurs receive their gift from another older treater, and of the opposite sex.’⁵⁸ Rocky Sexton claims, “Passing of the gift to the opposite sex is a rule that holds true in most instances of transmitting the power to treat. If a treater desires a member of the same sex to receive the gift, it must be passed by means of an intermediary... I was bad one day when I was seven and took a

⁵⁵“Remedies and Cures,” *Attakapas Gazette*, Vol. IV No. 2, Center for Louisiana Studies Archives, 16.

⁵⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 16.

⁵⁷Gravot, “‘all (sic) I Depend on is the Lord’: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement,” 179.

⁵⁸Karen Yochim, “A Cajun Traiteur: Faith Healing on the Bayou,” *Southern Cultures* 10, no. 4 2004, 79. Based on this source, some *traiteurs* believe that the power should be passed only to a younger person of the opposite sex. This is not a universal belief and it is unknown why some *traiteurs* hold this belief.

hammer to a pot, breaking it. She took me in a dark room and said she was turning me over to God. It was that day that she started my training.”⁵⁹ Not all *traiteurs* pass their practice down to a person of the opposite sex, so the reason that some *traiteurs* choose to do this is unclear.⁶⁰ Traiteurs can also be born with the power to treat.⁶¹ Sexton reveals, “In Louisiana an example of the gift originating rather than being passed down occurs among Creoles such as Pop Cliff who believe that the presence of a caul or veil at birth represents a future ability to treat.”⁶² This sentiment is echoed by Miss Ella, a traiteur who participated in Glen Pitre’s documentary, *Good for what ails you: healing secrets of the Cajuns, Creoles and Bayou Indians*. Miss Ella claims that she was born with a veil and an older healer in her community knew that she was supposed to be a healer as well.⁶³

The particularities of Cajun folk remedies are what makes them special. Cajun *traiteurs* utilize a unique blend of herbs and plants that are native to Louisiana. For example, a researcher

⁵⁹Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treaters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," 240-241.

⁶⁰Some sources analyzed by the author mention that the practice of the *traiteurs* is passed down from one person to another person of the opposite sex. Other sources say that the receiver must be a person of the same sex. Likely, it is an individual belief held by each traiteur decided based on their own personal experiences and beliefs. See: Rocky Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treaters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," *Western Folklore* 51, no. 3/4, 1992, 237-248.

⁶¹Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treaters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," 241.

⁶²Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treaters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," 241.

⁶³Glen Pitre, Nicole Falgoust, and Michael Doucet, *Good for what ails you: healing secrets of the Cajuns, Creoles and Bayou Indians*, Lockport, LA: Côte Blanche Productions, 1998, <https://www.worldcat.org/title/good-for-what-ails-you-healing-secrets-of-the-cajuns-creoles-and-bayou-indians/oclc/811731512>.

collecting samples of herbs used by *traiteurs*, Alida Landry, collected herbs that only grow wild in Louisiana.

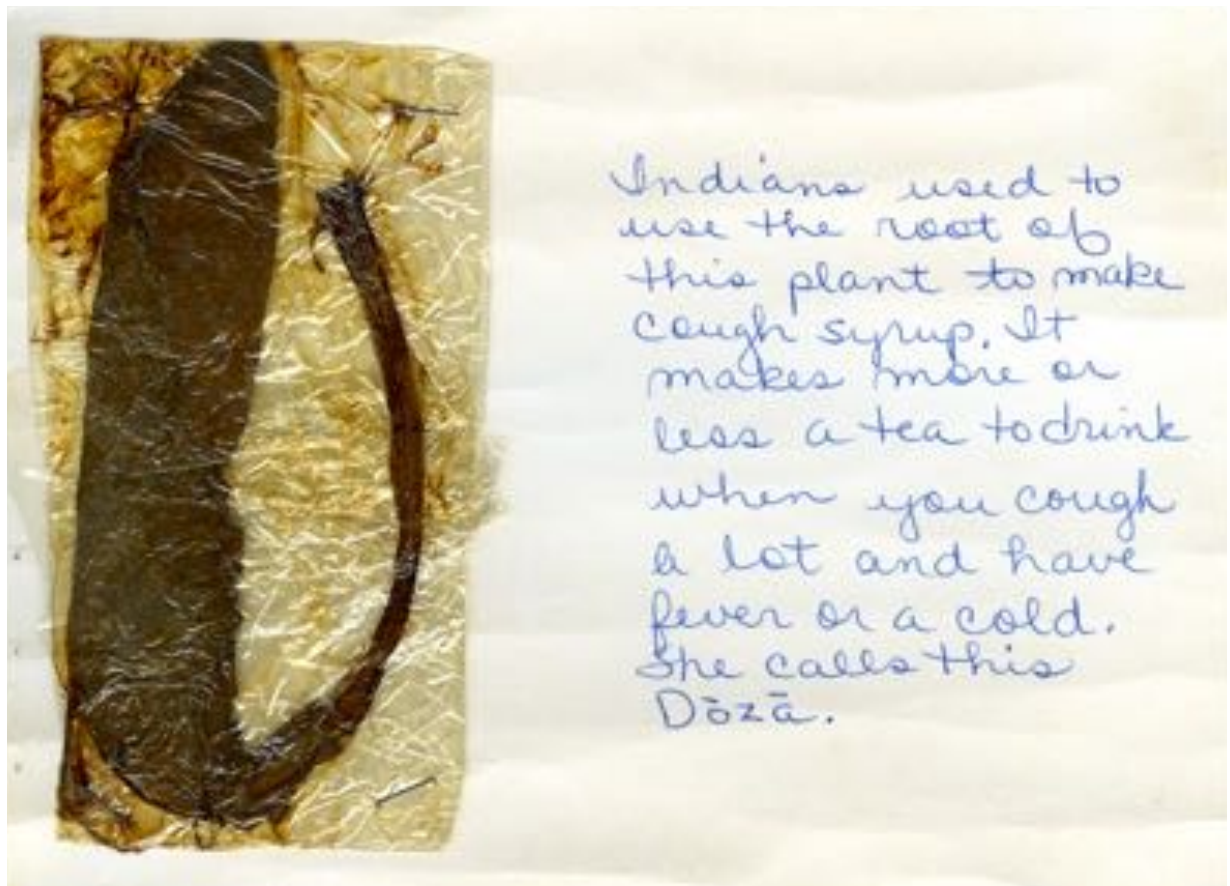


Figure 5: In this example, Landry includes a Native American plant, called “doza” that is used by *traiteurs* to treat a cough. Landry, Alida. “Samples of Plants Used for Medicinal Purposes by *Traiteurs*.” RI1.197. D-R12-197. Center for Louisiana Studies.

The methods used by Cajun *traiteurs* are based on experience.⁶⁴ As such, many Cajuns believe that there is medical support for the remedies.⁶⁵ Varisco quotes one of his interviewees,

⁶⁴Alma Daniels, “Interviews of a Folk Healer,” Elton, Louisiana, *The Center for Louisiana Studies*, December 10, 1973, 1.

⁶⁵Varisco, *Acadian Home Remedies*, 1.

“‘These cures have been proven medically sound,’ believes one college trained informant. For others under thirty, that the remedies worked for their parents is reason enough to rely upon them still.”⁶⁶ Some *traiteurs*, like Wade Theriot, are even allowed to use their practices in hospitals and treat doctors themselves. In an interview for *Southern Cultures* magazine, Wade is quoted as saying, “Wade told me that his patients report pain relief or full cures with Lou Gehrig's disease, blindness, diabetes, cancer, fevers, arthritis, stroke, hemorrhaging, and Hepatitis C. ‘There was a time when I was sometimes told to leave a hospital, but no longer,’ he said. ‘Now I take a few letters of testimonials with me, and I always get in. I even treat a few doctors, because they've seen the results, I've had with some of their patients that they couldn't help.’”⁶⁷ Admittedly, there have been no studies done on the actual influence and effectiveness of *traiteur* practices. A scientifically sound medical study does not exist. Regardless, many medical professionals understand the benefit of a patient's *belief* that something will work. In South Louisiana, this often means that medical professionals will work with *traiteurs* or may recommend that a patient see a *traiteur*.⁶⁸ Julia Swett says this, “Folk healing is often ridiculed as being unscientific by biomedical doctors, who nevertheless rely on pharmaceutical drugs that are often derived from indigenous herbal remedies”.⁶⁹ Yet in rural south Louisiana, there is frequent tolerance and even

⁶⁶Varisco, *Acadian Home Remedies*, 1.

⁶⁷Yochim, “A Cajun Traiteur: Faith Healing on the Bayou,” 83.

⁶⁸Julia Swett, “French Louisiana *Traiteurs*,” *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*, Volume 18, 2009, https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/LFMtraiteurs.html.

⁶⁹The author is discussing these works: Hans A. Baer, Merrill Singer, and Ida Susser, *Medical Anthropology and the World System*, 2nd ed. (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2003); David J. Hufford, “Folk Healers,” *Handbook of American Folklore*, ed. Richard Dorson, 306-313, 9Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1983); and Yoder, Don Yoder, “Folk Medicine,” *Folklore and Folklife*, ed. Richard Dorson, 191-215, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

support for this faith healing practice by authorities in both the Church and biomedical field.”⁷⁰

The pervasive culture of the Cajuns has ensured that even trained medical professionals and scientists can see the value of combining traditional folk healing with staunch religious beliefs.

One of the most unique aspects of the *traiteur* practice is the use of medicinal herbs alongside prayer. Many *traiteurs* use a combination of herbs that are native and unique to Louisiana as well as commonly used ones.⁷¹ Some *traiteurs* choose not to regularly use herbs in their practice but are still aware of their power.⁷² One such person was interviewed by Karen Yochim for *Southern Cultures* magazine. After interviewing Wade Theriot, a practicing *traiteur* who lives near Bayou Portage in Louisiana, the author reports,

Some *traiteurs* treat with herbs. Wade does not, although he knows how to use the local healing herbs and has a sprawling mamou plant in his front yard, the roots of which are used to treat colds. Cajun healing utilizes a variety of common vegetables and fruits, as well as lesser-known ones, such as *l'hèrbe à malot* (swamp lily root), *lamauve* (a curly grass), and the mamou. The Acadians brought their own healing traditions from France and Nova Scotia and learned additional herbal cures from the local Atakapa and Chitimacha Indians.⁷³

⁷⁰Julia Swett, “French Louisiana *Traiteurs*,” *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*, Volume 18, 2009, https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/LFMtraiteurs.html. The author is discussing these works: Brandon, Elizabeth. “Folk Medicine in French Louisiana.” In *American Folk Medicine*, ed. Wayland D. Hand, 213-234. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 1976; and Pitre, Glen. *Good for What Ails You*. 57-minute video. Côte Blanche Productions, Inc. 1998.

⁷¹Yochim, “A Cajun Traiteur: Faith Healing on the Bayou,” 82-83.

⁷²Yochim, “A Cajun Traiteur: Faith Healing on the Bayou,” 82-83.

⁷³Yochim, “A Cajun Traiteur: Faith Healing on the Bayou,” 82-83.



Figure 6: This is an example of an herb, called “tallon,” found in South Louisiana that traiteurs use to treat infections. Landry, Alida. “Samples of Plants Used for Medicinal Purposes by Traiteurs.” RI1.197. D-R12-197. Center for Louisiana Studies.

Traiteurs are an important aspect of Cajun culture, and, like Cajun culture, suffered due to the assimilation attempts faced by the Cajuns. The community service that traiteurs provide cannot be overstated.

Chapter Three: The *Traitements*

Through interviews with *traiteurs*, this project has endeavored to compile a list of common medicinal herbs used by *traiteurs* and the symptoms that they are used to treat. This list has been compiled from multiple primary source interviews of *traiteurs* and accounts of their practices.¹ The healing traditions of the *traiteurs* are an amalgamation of information gleaned from a number of sources, including the Native American tribes that inhabited Louisiana before the Cajuns.² In fact, the Cajuns are still peaceably interacting with the Native American tribes that still remain in Louisiana, like the Houma tribe, “The UHN further requested to visit the French consulate to focus on the Houma’s continuation and blending Houma and French culture that continues to thrive and resist colonization.”³

The healing traditions of the *traiteurs* included various traditional folk healing remedies brought by the Cajuns from their ancestral homeland of France.⁴ Elizabeth Brandon claims,

The French settler brought with him from France and Nova Scotia quantities of domestic remedies transmitted to him from generation to generation. When he settled in Louisiana and became known as the Cajun, he became acquainted with the local flora already used with great success in medical practices by the Indians, from who he doubtlessly learned many a recipe. Literature reports that the Canadian French *voyageurs* and *courers de bois* who visited and often settled in Louisiana valued greatly the Indian’s skills in the healing

¹For an easily readable and alphabetized list of all the *traitements* listed here, please see Appendix B. In Appendix B, the author has created a chart that contains all of the *traitements* that were included in the primary sources examined for this project.

²“American Indians in Louisiana,” *The National Park Service*, December 3, 2021, Accessed October 8, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/jela/learn/historyculture/native-americans-in-louisiana.htm#:~:text=Today%2C%20there%20are%20four%20federally,by%20the%20state%20of%20Louisiana>.

³Michelle Johnson-Jennings, Shanondora Billiot, and Karina Walters, "Returning to our Roots: Tribal Health and Wellness through Land-Based Healing," *Genealogy* 4, no. 3 (2020): 91, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/returning-our-roots-tribal-health-wellness/docview/2440700325/se-2>.

⁴Elizabeth Brandon, “Folk Medicine in French Louisiana,” *In American Folk Medicine*, ed, Wayland D. Hand, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976, 218.

of wounds and chronic sores with poultices and herbs and considered their methods superior to those of the whites.⁵

The *traiteurs* were also heavily influenced by the Native Americans that had inhabited Louisiana long before the Cajuns arrived.⁶ Though this is not documented anywhere, as Native Americans and Cajuns alike did not care to keep very many written historical records, it can be supposed because of the overlap in the healing practices of the Native Americans and Cajuns.⁷ In fact, Brandon claims, “It would be logical to suppose that a number of the medicines made of herbs and trees native to Louisiana were transmitted to the newcomers by the Indians. Parallels are easy to establish between the two groups, although no documented claims of Indian influences on the Frenchmen can be made at this time.”⁸

After settling in Louisiana, and becoming “Cajuns,” these people learned additional cures from the local Native Americans.⁹ The Native Americans did not, of course, write down a detailed historical record of their interactions with the Cajuns, and neither did the Cajuns themselves. However, shortly before, during and after the diaspora of the Acadians, some French travelers commented on the success of the Native American cures.¹⁰

⁵Brandon, *Folk Medicine in French Louisiana*, 218.

⁶Brandon, *Folk Medicine in French Louisiana*, 218-219.

⁷Brandon, *Folk Medicine in French Louisiana*, 218-219.

⁸Brandon, *Folk Medicine in French Louisiana*, 218-219.

⁹Johnson-Jennings, Billiot, and Walters, "Returning to our Roots: Tribal Health and Wellness through Land-Based Healing," 91.

¹⁰Brandon, *Folk Medicine in French Louisiana*, 218-219.

INFORMANTS			
Initials	Name	Age	Years of formal education
AA	Alpheus Abshire	55	0
EBB	Elite Boudreaux Braus	36	8
NB	Mr. and Mrs. Nelson Broussard	70's	2/3
PLB	Paul Lois Broussard	45	11
ETB	Elvidge Trahan Boudreaux	59	0
LB	Loston Bourque	36	12
GB	Gladu Boudreaux	60	0/1
CG	Mrs. Casonne Gaspard	80	0
CH	Mrs. Calisse Hargrave	67	0
STH	Stella Trahan Hebert	55	5
PVH	Pearl Vicknair Hebert	69	8
ATL	Annie Lou Trahan Lege	39	11
EMM	Elda Mire Meaux	69	0
RBM	Ruby Boudreaux Mathiews	39	12
AP	Mrs. Advey Primeaux	49	8

The majority of these informants are life long residents of Kaplan. They are all White, Roman Catholic, and of the French-Acadian culture.

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Nacogdoches, Texas

Figure 7: This is a piece of the primary resource: Boudreaux, Anna M. "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps: Remedies And Cures Of The Kaplan Area In Southwestern Louisiana." *Southern Folklore Quarterly* Vol. XXXV. No. 2. June 1971. It describes some of the traiteurs that were interviewed in order to collect a record of their traitements.

This list has been compiled by the author and includes various remedies described to interviewers by traiteurs and their patients. Each traitement is cited, so the reader can see which primary source that the traitement is being pulled from. The reasonings behind each traitement are not always clear, and it would be reductive to attempt to discern the history of each traitement. This list covers many different ailments from asthma to worms.

Herbs Used for Remedies		
<i>Local name</i>	<i>English name</i>	<i>Botanical name</i>
baume	mint	Mentha sp.
chassepareille	American Beautyberry	Callicarpa americana
choudrons	Thistle	Cirsium horridulum
feuilles de plantain	Swamp aster	Aster puniceus
fleurs de ciré		Myrica cerifera
guimauves	Mallow	Modiola caroliniana
herbes à chien	St. Andrew's cross	Ascyrum hypericoides
herbes à vers	Wormseed	Erigeron philadelphicus
mamou	Coral tree	Erythrina herbacea
manglier	Marsh Elder	Baccharis halimifolia

Figure 8: This is a picture of Anna Boudreaux's article about traiteurs. This table describes some of the medicinal herbs that are included in the following chart. Boudreaux, Anna M. "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps: Remedies And Cures Of The Kaplan Area In Southwestern Louisiana." *Southern Folklore Quarterly* Vol. XXXV. No. 2. June 1971.

The cures used by the traiteurs cover a wide range of ailments that require a wide range of potential remedies. Asthma, for example, can be cured by inhaling the smoke of Jimson Weed leaves, drinking goat's milk, or drinking mare's milk.¹¹ It can also be cured by measuring a child against a tree and drilling a hole at the top of their head, then cutting a piece of hair from the child's head and placing it in the hole and, finally, as the child grows past that spot, they will grow out of their asthma.¹² In addition, traiteurs may have their patients drink goose grease or run it on their chest.¹³ Someone suffering from asthma might also rub sheep's tallow on their chest and then cover it with warm flannel.¹⁴ They may also drill a hole in a pecan and hang it

¹¹ "Remedies and Cures," *Attakapas Gazette*, Vol. IV No. 2. Center for Louisiana Studies Archives, 16-17.

¹² "Remedies and Cures," 17.

¹³ "Remedies and Cures," 17.

¹⁴ Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 133.

around the neck and wait for it to dry up.¹⁵ One could also put turpentine and lard on the chest and cover it with a warm cloth.¹⁶ For ringworms, you can put vinegar on the ringworm.¹⁷ A more prayer-based cure would involve using a finger to circle the affected area while saying a prayer. Then, making a cross on the affected area.¹⁸ You can also drink milk from green figs.¹⁹ You could also be told to rub the blood of a black hen on the ringworm.²⁰ A *traiteur* might also suggest soaking the ringworm in warm water, scrubbing it with a cloth until it is raw, then pouring pure antiseptic on it.²¹ Finally, you could circle the ringworm nine times with a copper penny during the last quarter of the moon.²²

For an inflamed breast, a *traiteur* might suggest making a poultice of elderberry blossoms and applying it on the affected area.²³ This remedy in particular demonstrates the connection between Native American healing and *traiteur* healing, as Native American healers also use elderberry, “*Sambucus canadensis* Native North American tribes used it to treat a wide range of complaints like cold, consumption, headache, indigestion etc. All parts of the elderberry plant are

¹⁵Azelia Stevens, Interview by Alida Landry, December 3, 1973 in New Iberia, Louisiana, 5.

¹⁶Stevens, 5.

¹⁷Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

¹⁸Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 6.

¹⁹“Remedies and Cures,” 29.

²⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 127.

²¹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 127.

²²Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 127.

²³Daniels, “Interviews of a Folk Healer,” 7.

considered to be a valuable healing plant in many folk medicine traditions.”²⁴

For a baby rash, a traiteur might suggest that the ill person make a tea with cornhusks and have the baby drink that tea.²⁵ Another potential remedy for baby rash would be to rub sheep droppings on the child’s face.²⁶

If someone was suffering from measles, a traiteur may prescribe that you boil shucks of red corn and drink the resultant tea.²⁷ One traiteur claimed, “I do two things for measles. I chunk pop corn under the child bed and I give him shuck tea.”²⁸ You could also make a tea from cornhusks and drink, or drink tea made from anisette, or drink tea made from elderberries.²⁹

Cajuns and traiteurs also know how to use the plants around them to purify the water that they drink.³⁰ One example claims, “Marie had taken some peach seeds out of a paper bag and was pounding them to bits on a rock, using another rock as a hammer. They were to ‘settle the water.’ If bayou water must be used for drinking, Cajuns put crushed peach seeds on the bottom of a pail of it and all dirt in drawn to the bottom, leaving the top clean and purified.”³¹ This use of peach seeds to purify water is actually an ingenious use of the locally found plant. In fact, a recent study conducted by researchers at the Universidad del Zulia in Maracaibo, Venezuela,

²⁴ “Native American Medicine,” *Louisiana Agricultural Preservation Society*, Accessed April 12, 2023, <https://louisianaagriculturalpreservationsociety.org/native-american-medicine>.

²⁵Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 135.

²⁶Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 135.

²⁷Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 6.

²⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 26.

²⁹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 136.

³⁰Saxon, Dreyer, and Tallant, *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, 268.

³¹Saxon, Dreyer, and Tallant, *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, 268.

corroborated the use of peach seeds to purify water.³² The conclusion of that study states,

The use of defatted peach kernels (SDG) as a coagulant decreases initial turbidity values to values equal to or less than those established by the Water Quality Standards of Venezuela (5 UNT), with an optimal dose of 250 mg/L, representing removal percentages greater than 90%, and color of 75%. The pH values experience variations (6.5-8.5) within the range established by Venezuelan sanitary regulations. Consequently, peach seeds *P. persica* defatted could be used successfully in the water purification process.³³

So, the Cajuns and *traiteurs* are actually using the native fauna of Louisiana in ways that have scientific foundations. While it is unlikely that they could have articulated the information that is contained in a report done by scientists at a university, they were able to observe the process of purification that came from placing peach seeds into water and then use that process over again.

For a backache, some *traiteurs* suggest taking a piece of twine and saying prayers over the twine and tying a knot for each prayer.³⁴ Tie knots all around the twine, then tie the twine to your waist and wear it until it falls off.³⁵ One could also try preparing a tea of celandine, white oak bark, beach leaf, or horsetail grass and drinking three cups a day.³⁶

For bedsores, *traiteurs* claim that you should prepare and drink a tea with white oak bark,

³²Sedolfo Carrasquero, & Lozano, Yajaira & García, María & Camacho, Maria & Rubí, Marielba, "Efficiency of the peach seeds (*Prunus persica*) as natural coagulant in water purification," *Boletín del Centro de Investigaciones Biológicas*, 49, 2015, 254.

³³Carrasquero, & Lozano, Yajaira & García, María & Camacho, Maria & Rubí, Marielba, "Efficiency of the peach seeds (*Prunus persica*) as natural coagulant in water purification," 254; the conclusion of this study was originally written and published in Spanish. This is a translation done by the author from Spanish to English in order to match the language used in the rest of this project.

³⁴ Borello, "Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area," 3.

³⁵Borello, "Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area," 3.

³⁶Alma Daniels, "Interviews of a Folk Healer," Elton, Louisiana, *The Center for Louisiana Studies*, December 10, 1973, 5.

golden seal, myrrh, bayberry bark, or witch hazel.³⁷

For bee stings, apply a poultice of chewing tobacco.³⁸ You can also rub three different kinds of grass on the bee sting.³⁹

For a bladder infection, “Make a tea from *Ascyrum hypericoides* and drink it every night until your bladder ailment is cured.”⁴⁰ *Ascyrum hypericoides* is also known in the South as St. Andrew’s Cross.⁴¹ The use of St. Andrew’s Cross is not isolated to the *traiteurs* and Cajuns, as the plant has been recorded by the Plants For A Future Foundation as having medicinal properties.⁴² In fact, the plant is known to have quite a few different medicinal properties, “The root was chewed as an antidote to rattlesnake bites. A tea made from the roots is used in the treatment of colic, fevers, pain, diarrhea etc. It is applied externally to ulcerated breasts. A tea made from the leaves is used in the treatment of kidney and bladder ailments, skin problems and

³⁷Daniels, “Interviews of a Folk Healer,” 6.

³⁸Barry Jean Ancelet, Jay D. Edwards, and Glen Pitre, *Cajun Country*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 99.

³⁹Stevens, 4.

⁴⁰Anna M. Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps: Remedies And Cures Of The Kaplan Area In Southwestern Louisiana,” *Southern Folklore Quarterly Vol. XXXV*. No. 2, June 1971, 123.

⁴¹“*Hypericum hypericoides* ssp. *Multicaule*” North Carolina States University Cooperative Extension, Accessed April 11, 2023, <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/hypericum-hypericoides-ssp-multicaule/>.

⁴²“*Hypericum hypericoides* - (L.)Crantz.” *Plants for A Future*, Accessed April 11, 2023, <https://pfaf.org/user/Plant.aspx?LatinName=Hypericum+hypericoides#:~:text=A%20tea%20made%20from%20the,diarrhoea%5B61%2C%20222%5D>.

children's diarrhea. A milky substance obtained from the plant has been rubbed on sores.”⁴³ One could also soak *Modiola caroliniana* in water until it becomes slimy and then drink the concoction.⁴⁴

For blood poisoning, dip a cockroach in whiskey and place it on the wound for several days.⁴⁵ This is one of the more distasteful remedies suggested by the *traiteurs* who were interviewed. Or one could make dough with flour and honey and apply this to the sore.⁴⁶

There are quite a few remedies suggested to those who are suffering from boils. These include, applying a poultice of castor oil, roasted onions, and filé, applying onion juice, or applying the skin from inside an egg.⁴⁷ The sufferer might also dip bread in milk and apply.⁴⁸ Another potential remedy includes crushing octagon soap⁴⁹, mixing with ashes, and applying to the affected area.⁵⁰ One can also put a circle of soot around the boil.⁵¹ Or, one can use octagon

⁴³“*Hypericum hypericoides* - (L.)Crantz.” *Plants for A Future*, <https://pfaf.org/user/Plant.aspx?LatinName=Hypericum+hypericoides#:~:text=A%20tea%20made%20from%20the,diarrhoea%5B61%2C%20222%5D>.

⁴⁴Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 123.

⁴⁵Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

⁴⁶Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 134.

⁴⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 17.

⁴⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 17.

⁴⁹Octagon soap is an older brand of lye soap used in the early 1900s. It was sold by Colgate & Company. Many *traiteurs*, especially older ones, use this brand of lye soap in their households and as a cure-all. See: “Right Way to Wash Clothes: Octagon Soap Premium List 1901,” Colgate & Company, 1901, Published Collections Department, Hagley Museum and Library, Islandora:2380113.

⁵⁰“Remedies and Cures,” 17.

⁵¹“Remedies and Cures,” 18.

soap on the boil.⁵² Another cure would be to apply a poultice of tobacco to the boil.⁵³ Also, one could make a paste with water, gumbo filé, and octagon soap and apply that to the boil.⁵⁴ Another suggested cure would be to make a poultice with fig leaves or juices and applying that to the boil.⁵⁵ One could also apply a pack of leaves of *Asparagus* sp. and oil.⁵⁶ Though very dangerous by modern medicine standards, some *traiteurs* suggested drinking heated lead and milk.⁵⁷ One *traiteur* suggested a more elaborate remedy for a boil, “Make a mixture of six teaspoonful of honey and three of sulphur. Apply the mixture to the boil for nine days. Stop for nine days and then apply again for nine days. Your boil will go away.”⁵⁸ One could also make a mixture of 1 tsp of ashes, 1 tsp of sheep’s tallow, ½ tsp sugar, then mix with castor oil and roll the mixture in your hands to form a ball, and finally apply the ball to the boil.⁵⁹

For bronchitis, *traiteurs* suggest making a poultice made of pounded mustard seeds and sheep’s tallow and applying that to the chest and back and then covering it with a warm piece of flannel.⁶⁰ One *traiteur* suggested a longer process, “Heat whiskey in a pot and when the whiskey is warm, set fire to it. When all of the alcohol is burnt, the fire will go out. When this burnt

⁵²“Remedies and Cures,” 18.

⁵³Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

⁵⁴Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 3.

⁵⁵Daniels, “Interviews of a Folk Healer,” 6.

⁵⁶Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 125.

⁵⁷Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 125.

⁵⁸Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 125.

⁵⁹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 125.

⁶⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 123.

whiskey is warm, drink it and take two aspirin.”⁶¹ Another cure is to take a mixture of pounded seeds of *Erythrina herbacea* and honey at night.⁶² And finally, one could take a mixture of goose fat, sheep tallow, Vicks salve, honey, and baking soda three to four times a day.⁶³

If someone had a fever, they might be instructed to place camphor on the head.⁶⁴ They could also strip peach leaves in a downward motion and boil them to make a tea, add sugar, and drink.⁶⁵ Another possible remedy would be to drink tea made from Marsh Elder leaves.⁶⁶ Finally, one traiteur proposed, (sic) “Boil nine root a Moglea till got a gallun. Strain tea. Bade in it and drink cup in da morning, cup ad dinna time, an cup ad nit.”⁶⁷ This particular remedy reveals the close ties that traiteurs had with the Native Americans that lived in the area, as “moglea,” is the Native American name given to a local plant.⁶⁸

For burns, traiteurs have gathered an extensive list of cures and remedies, such as applying a mixture of hog grease, lard, and sulfur.⁶⁹ One could also apply goose grease to the

⁶¹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 124.

⁶²Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 124.

⁶³Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 124.

⁶⁴Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

⁶⁵Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 5.

⁶⁶Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 129.

⁶⁷Stevens, 6.

⁶⁸Alida Landry, “Samples of Plants Used for Medicinal Purposes by Traiteurs,” RI1.197. D-R12-197, Center for Louisiana Studies.

⁶⁹“Remedies and Cures,” 18.

burn.⁷⁰ The burn victim might also apply grease made out of hog lard and quinine.⁷¹ Another remedy includes applying a mixture made out of hot water, vinegar, Dial soap and grease.⁷² Additionally, one could apply butter and soda to the burn.⁷³ One could also scrape elder bark, fry it in Vaseline and apply to the burn.⁷⁴ Another option it to apply flour to the burn.⁷⁵ One could also try apply to syrup and soda to the burn.⁷⁶ Other options include applying grease and soda, or applying butter to the burned area.⁷⁷ Finally, some *traiteurs* suggest trying to heal the burn by applying butter and syrup, or putting the skimmed cream off the top of milk on the area or applying egg white.⁷⁸

If you suffer from chaffing, some *traiteurs* suggest powdering the area with dirt dauber or applying dirt dauber and soda.⁷⁹

⁷⁰“Remedies and Cures,” 18.

⁷¹Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 3. Quinine is an extract derived from the bark of a *Cinchona pubescens*. More information about this herb can be found here: Kayla Neitzel, “*Cinchona pubescens*, Fever Tree (Quinine),” University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, April 16, 2011, http://bioweb.uwlax.edu/bio203/2011/neitzel_kayl/index.htm.

⁷²Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 4. Dial is a brand of soap commonly sold at most stores in the United States. Information about Dial soap can be found at <https://www.dialsoap.com>.

⁷³“Remedies and Cures,” 18.

⁷⁴“Remedies and Cures,” 18.

⁷⁵“Remedies and Cures,” 18.

⁷⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 18.

⁷⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 19.

⁷⁸Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 124.

⁷⁹“Remedies and Cures,” 19.

For inflammation of the chest, *traiteurs* have some unusual cures that they suggest. First, some *traiteurs* proposed this cure, “Grate cactus leaves and heat that in a pot. Make a pack and put this as warm as possible on the chest of the person.”⁸⁰ One could also soak cactus leaves in water for some time and then drink the water or mix alum powder with water and drink.⁸¹

The primary resources from the Louisiana center for Cajun and Creole studies revealed that *traiteurs* have quite a few remedies for the common cold. Some of the cures are relatively simple, but they range from simple to complex to completely unsavory. To cure a cold, *traiteurs* might have their patients drink hot pepper, whiskey, and sugar as a tea.⁸² They might also have them take turpentine.⁸³ Another remedy if for the ill to take one dose of castor oil, which supposedly gets the “stuff” out of the lungs.⁸⁴ One could also drink boiled tea with lemon and sour wine.⁸⁵ Or, one could drink Mongrea or Mamou tea.⁸⁶ *Traiteurs* could also wrap the ill person in elder leaves.⁸⁷ One interviewed *traiteurs* claimed, “Life-everlasting tea is a crack-shot for colds. This is a bush that grows in the woods. It is very scarce.”⁸⁸ Other suggested cures include drinking tea made from bitterweed, eating a mixture of honey, soda, and the yolk of an

⁸⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 130.

⁸¹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 130.

⁸²Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

⁸³Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

⁸⁴Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 4.

⁸⁵Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 4.

⁸⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 20.

⁸⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 20.

⁸⁸ “Remedies and Cures,” 20.

egg, eating wild goose grease, or rubbing tallow on the chest.⁸⁹ One traiteur even recommended a preventative remedy, “Eat a lot of honey and tallow all the summer and you won’t have colds in the winter.”⁹⁰ Other remedies include rubbing wild goose grease on the chest, rubbing suet grease on the chest, rubbing a mixture of hog lard and quinine on the chest, or rubbing mutton suet on the chest and then covering yourself up with flannel.⁹¹ Some of the crazier cures suggested by traiteurs include eating cockroaches fried in grease, gargling your own urine, drinking your own urine first thing in the morning, boiling and then drinking your own urine, or putting a couple drops of coal oil on a teaspoon of sugar and eating it.⁹² Some traiteurs also suggest, “Quinine is good for a cold, but if you use too much, it will make your hearing bad.”⁹³ Lastly, one could rub their chest with camphor or Vicks Salve and cover with warm flannel cloth, rub their chest with sheep’s tallow and cover with warm flannel cloth, or make tea from lemon, aspirin, and the seeds of the Coral tree and drink it just before going to bed.⁹⁴ For cold sores, one could apply alum.⁹⁵

If a baby that is suffering from colic is brought to a traiteur, they may suggest any number of remedies including, feeding the baby paregoric.⁹⁶ A parent might also strip peach

⁸⁹ “Remedies and Cures,” 20.

⁹⁰ “Remedies and Cures,” 20.

⁹¹ “Remedies and Cures,” 20.

⁹² “Remedies and Cures,” 21.

⁹³ “Remedies and Cures,” 21.

⁹⁴ Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 135.

⁹⁵ Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

⁹⁶ Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

leaves in a downward motion, boil them to make tea, add sugar and have the baby drink the mix.⁹⁷ One could also have their child consume tea made from peppermint leaves.⁹⁸ One *traiteur* suggested a more complicated process, (sic)“Make nine knots in a string and tie it around the baby’s waist. Let it stay on the baby ‘til it fall off.”⁹⁹ Finally, one could try boiling nine pecan shells and having the baby drink the resultant tea.¹⁰⁰

If someone approaches a *traiteur* because they are suffering from constipation, the *traiteur* may recommend consuming Epsom salt as a laxative.¹⁰¹ Another option would be to consume *la mauve*.¹⁰² Additionally, one *traiteur* proposed, “Boil Wormseed until the water is green and strain the juice. Add enough sugar to make a candied substance. Take that at night. In the morning, take three drops of turpentine with a big dose of castor oil.”¹⁰³ In fact, castor oil has also been proven to have laxative qualities by scientific researchers.¹⁰⁴ In an article written for the National Library of Medicine, researchers claim, “The approved FDA condition for which castor oil may be useful as a stimulant laxative, which can be beneficial in constipation and medical procedures. With chronic idiopathic constipation being one of the most common GI complaints, castor oil

⁹⁷Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 4.

⁹⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 21.

⁹⁹“Remedies and Cures,” 21.

¹⁰⁰Stevens, 5.

¹⁰¹Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

¹⁰²Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

¹⁰³Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 133.

¹⁰⁴Jeffrey Alookaran and Jayson Tripp, “Castor Oil,” In: StatPearls [Internet], Treasure Island (FL): *StatPearls Publishing*, 2023 Jan, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK551626/>.

can be of great benefit.”¹⁰⁵ The researchers also noted that castor oil has, historically, been used for a wide range of ailments, though some of these have not yet been studied for their medical efficacy, “Other uses of castor oil exist; however, these indications are not FDA approved. These uses include wound healing, arthritis, headache, menstrual cramps, and labor induction. Although these uses were common in alternative medicine for hundreds of years, there is not enough scientific evidence to support these claims in modern medicine.”¹⁰⁶ Regardless, the use of castor oil by other traditional societies set the precedent for traiteur use of this substance, and shows that traiteurs were willing to learn from and utilize the knowledge of other groups.¹⁰⁷

Traiteurs sometimes see patients who have sought out their help for dealing with corns. Traiteurs might suggest applying fingernail polish to the corn.¹⁰⁸ One traiteur also suggested, “If you rub some soap on your corns, you (sic) kin soon pull em out.”¹⁰⁹

For high blood pressure, “Take mistletoe and angelica root, ground fine, two teaspoonfuls of each, place in a pint of water and bring to a boiling point, allow to cool. Drink two or three cupful a day.”¹¹⁰ A traiteur would also suggest that you eat lots of garlic or soak garlic in water and drink the water.¹¹¹ You could also take a small spoonful of vinegar every morning or take

¹⁰⁵ Alookaran and Tripp, “Castor Oil,” <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK551626/>.

¹⁰⁶ Alookaran and Tripp, “Castor Oil,” <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK551626/>.

¹⁰⁷ Alookaran and Tripp, “Castor Oil,” <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK551626/>.

¹⁰⁸ “Remedies and Cures,” 21.

¹⁰⁹ “Remedies and Cures,” 21.

¹¹⁰ Daniels, “Interviews of a Folk Healer,” 6.

¹¹¹ “Remedies and Cures,” 24.

Epsom salt, or drink lemon juice, or drink unsweetened lemonade every morning.¹¹² Another possible remedy is to boil parsley in water and drink three times a day.¹¹³ A more complicated concoction that could help with high blood pressure can be made by, “Pound garlic and put this in water. Put this liquid in the refrigerator and drink of this liquid often during the day.”¹¹⁴ Lastly, you could mix Epsom salt in water and drink throughout the day, or drink lemon juice mixed into water first thing in the morning.¹¹⁵ The use of garlic for high blood pressure, which is suggested in many of these remedies is also supported by a scientific study.¹¹⁶ A study conducted by a scientific researcher at the Adelaide University in South Australia found, “Garlic supplements have shown effectiveness in reducing blood pressure in hypertensive patients, similarly to first-line standard anti-hypertensive medications. Kyolic garlic has also shown promise in improving cardiovascular health by reducing arterial stiffness, elevated cholesterol levels and blood ‘stickiness’. In addition, the prebiotic properties in garlic increase gut microbial richness and diversity.”¹¹⁷

A persistent cough is a common ailment seen by *traiteurs*, who might suggest consuming lemon and honey.¹¹⁸ Some *traiteurs* also suggest taking a few drops of turpentine with sugar a

¹¹²“Remedies and Cures,” 24.

¹¹³Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 136.

¹¹⁴Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 136.

¹¹⁵Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 136.

¹¹⁶K. Reid, “Garlic lowers blood pressure in hypertensive subjects, improves arterial stiffness and gut microbiota: A review and meta-analysis,” *Exp Ther Med*, 2020 Feb 19, (2):1472-1478.

¹¹⁷Reid, “Garlic lowers blood pressure in hypertensive subjects, improves arterial stiffness and gut microbiota: A review and meta-analysis,” 1472.

¹¹⁸Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

few times a day.¹¹⁹ Lastly, one could complete this complex process, “Boil Rattan vine, Thistle, Mallow, and mamou seeds together and drain the juice. Add enough sugar to the liquid to make a syrup out of it and drink this.”¹²⁰

Some remedies used by *traiteurs* err on the more mystical side. For example, if someone was seeking to get rid of a wart, a *traiteur* might suggest, “At dusk, after sundown, go walking in the yard until you find a bone. Hold the bone behind your back and say to the moon three times, ‘All that I see grows and all that I touch grows smaller.’ Throw the bone where you will not see it again. Do this when there is a new moon. Your wart will go away.”¹²¹ This cure does not include the use of any herbs or traditional prayers, but does include the use of a non-traditional manifestation/prayer.

Herbalism, the practice of using plants for medicinal purposes, has a long and rich history in the South.¹²² For generations, Southerners have relied on the natural healing properties of plants to treat a wide range of illnesses and ailments, and many of these traditional remedies have been passed down through families and communities over time.¹²³ The use of plants for medicinal purposes dates back to the earliest days of human history, and the South has a particularly rich tradition in this area.¹²⁴ Native American tribes in the region were known for

¹¹⁹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 137.

¹²⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 137.

¹²¹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 138.

¹²²Carl A. Brasseaux, H. Dickson Hoese, and Thomas C. Michot, “Pioneer Amateur Naturalist Louis Judice: Observations on the Fauna, Flora, Geography, and Agriculture of the Bayou Lafourche Region, Louisiana, 1772-1786,” *Louisiana History* 45, no. 1 (2004): 71-103.

¹²³Elizabeth Brandon, “Folk Medicine in French Louisiana,” *In American Folk Medicine*, ed. Wayland D. Hand, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976, 213.

¹²⁴Brandon, *Folk Medicine in French Louisiana*, 213.

their extensive knowledge of plant medicine, and many of their remedies were adopted and adapted by early European settlers, and again when the Acadians arrived in Louisiana.¹²⁵ In the colonial era, herbalism was the primary form of medicine in the South, as access to doctors and other medical professionals was limited.¹²⁶ Plant-based remedies were used to treat everything from headaches and colds to more serious illnesses like malaria and tuberculosis.¹²⁷

In the early 20th century, the practice of herbalism began to decline in the South, as modern medicine became more widely available, and people began to rely on pharmaceuticals to treat their illnesses.¹²⁸ However, in recent years, there has been a renewed interest in herbalism, as people have become more interested in natural and alternative forms of medicine.¹²⁹ Julianne Cordero-Lamb reiterates that this renewed interest is not new knowledge, but rather, a mainstream rediscovery of what Native American tribes have known for quite some time, “Contrary to popular belief, native medical traditions have not ‘resurfaced’; rather, they have always been in place, changing and adapting with the ecosystems, as well as contributing to and borrowing from the medical traditions of other nations. Valuable European medicinal plants,

¹²⁵“American Indians in Louisiana,” *The National Park Service*, December 3, 2021, Accessed October 8, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/jela/learn/historyculture/native-americans-in-louisiana.htm#:~:text=Today%2C%20there%20are%20four%20federally,by%20the%20state%20of%20Louisiana>.

¹²⁶Julianne Cordero-Lamb, "Herbalism," In *The American Mosaic: The American Indian Experience*, ABC-CLIO, 2023, Accessed April 10, 2023, <https://americanindian2-abc--clio-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/Search/Display/1483919>.

¹²⁷Cordero-Lamb, "Herbalism," <https://americanindian2-abc--clio-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/Search/Display/1483919>.

¹²⁸Brandon, *Folk Medicine in French Louisiana*, 213.

¹²⁹Cordero-Lamb, “Herbalism,” <https://americanindian2-abc--clio-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/Search/Display/1483919>.

such as milk thistle, basil, and rosemary have been ably incorporated into the sophisticated medical practice of traditional Native doctors.”¹³⁰

Today, there is a growing community of herbalists in the South, who are dedicated to preserving and promoting the traditional practices of plant-based medicine.¹³¹ These herbalists are often trained in traditional techniques, such as using plants to create tinctures, teas, and other remedies. Many Southern herbs are known for their medicinal properties.¹³² For example, black cohosh, a plant native to the Southeast, has been used for centuries to treat menstrual cramps, hot flashes, and other symptoms of menopause.¹³³ Echinacea, a popular herbal remedy used to boost the immune system, is also native to the region.¹³⁴ Other common Southern herbs used in herbalism include ginger, which is known for its anti-inflammatory properties and is often used to treat nausea and digestive issues, and ginseng, which is believed to have a variety of health benefits, including reducing stress and improving mental clarity.¹³⁵

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the scientific study of herbal remedies, as researchers seek to better understand the mechanisms behind the healing properties of

¹³⁰Cordero-Lamb, "Herbalism," <https://americanindian2-abc--clio-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/Search/Display/1483919>.

¹³¹Brasseaux, Hoese, and Michot, "Pioneer Amateur Naturalist Louis Judice: Observations on the Fauna, Flora, Geography, and Agriculture of the Bayou Lafourche Region, Louisiana, 1772-1786."

¹³²Cordero-Lamb, "Herbalism," <https://americanindian2-abc--clio-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/Search/Display/1483919>.

¹³³Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 121.

¹³⁴Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 121.

¹³⁵Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 121.

plants.¹³⁶ This research has led to the development of new pharmaceuticals based on natural compounds found in plants, as well as a better understanding of how plant-based remedies can be used to treat a wide range of illnesses and ailments.¹³⁷

Overall, herbalism remains an important part of Southern culture and history.¹³⁸ Whether used for medicinal purposes or in cooking and other culinary applications, Southern herbs are a testament to the history of the relationship between multiple cultures in the American south.

In addition to the use of herbalism in traditional *traiteur* healing, *traiteurs* very often use the power of prayer. In the case of a cut, for example, “They would say the Hail Mary and make the sign of the cross. Then they would say ‘person’s name, I take your blood, I put your blood in a gourd, I throw it on the other side of the largest river there is.’ Then they would say a prayer and make the sign of the cross. You treat them this way three times before you leave.”¹³⁹ This use of prayer and of Catholic religious actions, like the Hail Mary, show that the job of the *traiteur* is equal parts herbalism and prayer.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶Cordero-Lamb, "Herbalism," <https://americanindian2-abc--clio-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/Search/Display/1483919>.

¹³⁷Cordero-Lamb, "Herbalism," <https://americanindian2-abc--clio-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/Search/Display/1483919>.

¹³⁸Cordero-Lamb, "Herbalism," <https://americanindian2-abc--clio-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/Search/Display/1483919>.

¹³⁹Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures in And Around The Youngsville Area,” 3.

¹⁴⁰Gravot, “[sic] all I Depend on is the Lord”: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun *Traitement*,” 179.

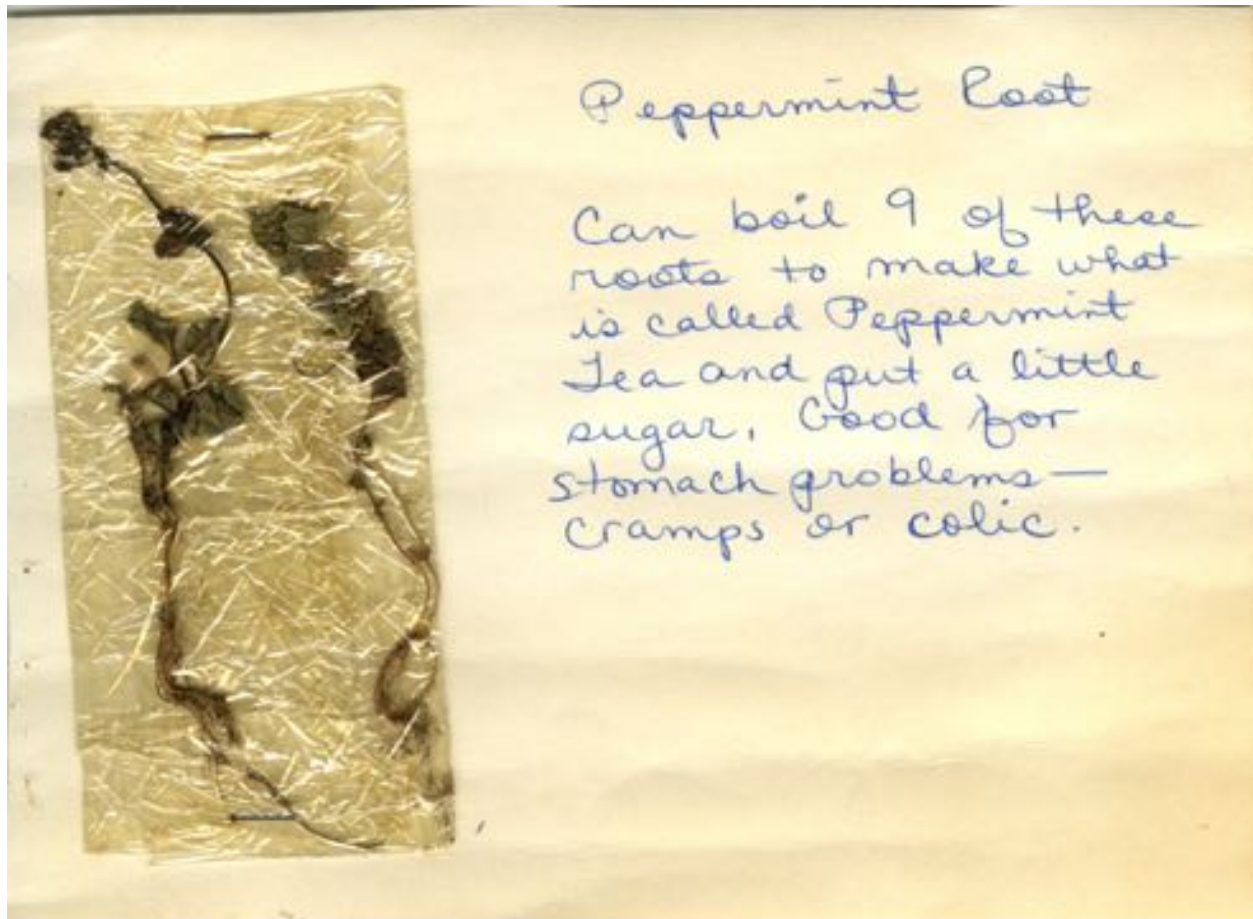


Figure 9: This is an example of Peppermint Root, which can be used in traditional traitements. Landry, Alida. “Samples of Plants Used for Medicinal Purposes by Traiteurs.” RI1.197. D-R12-197. Center for Louisiana Studies.

In addition to these medicinal herbs, traditional procedures, and beliefs, traiteurs may also use solely religious actions, such as prayers.¹⁴¹ Frank Borello claimed, “Different aspects of religion play a significant part in the treatment. For example, for most of the cures I collected, there is a prayer said sometime during the treatment. Many times, the sign of the cross is used in

¹⁴¹Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 1.

curing the illness or injury. In a couple of the cures I collected, the one treating will say ‘Hail Mary’ any number of times.”¹⁴²



Figure 10: This is an informational diagram demonstrating the motion used by traiteurs when the “make a cross.” Pedro, Deacon. “Deacon-structing the Cross part 2: Making the Sign.” *Salt and Light Catholic Media Foundation*. Accessed February 19, 2023. <https://slmedia.org/blog/deacon-structing-cross-making-sign-cross>.

The prayers used by the traiteurs are improvised based on the situation that they are presented.¹⁴³ Because these prayers are not traditional Catholic liturgies, they are specific to each

¹⁴²Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 1.

¹⁴³Gravot, “[sic] all I Depend on is the Lord”: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement,” 123.

traiteur and situation and are unique every time.¹⁴⁴ In all, Catholicism plays a very important role in the practice of the traiteurs and in the daily lives of the Cajuns as a community.¹⁴⁵

As is made clear by some of the remedies contained within this chart, many of the remedies of the traiteurs depends heavily on faith and on the prayers that accompany the herbal cures.¹⁴⁶ Catholicism and the faith that the religion demands is an important aspect tot healing rituals of the traiteurs.¹⁴⁷ These remedies also show that traiteurs may employ many different methods of healing, including herbalism, mystical practices, and Catholic prayers.

Sore Throat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Gargle salt water¹⁴⁸ ❖ Gargle your own urine¹⁴⁹ ❖ Eat snow¹⁵⁰ ❖ Gargle with soda and salt¹⁵¹ ❖ (sic) “Take ashes an make a cross on side of nek wid to matches. Make prayers.”¹⁵²
Spasms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Put salt in the affected person’s

¹⁴⁴Gravot, “[sic] all I Depend on is the Lord”: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement,” 123.

¹⁴⁵Gravot, “[sic] all I Depend on is the Lord”: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement,” 123.

¹⁴⁶Gravot, “[sic] all I Depend on is the Lord”: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement,” 123.

¹⁴⁷Gravot, “[sic] all I Depend on is the Lord”: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement,” 123.

¹⁴⁸Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

¹⁴⁹“Remedies and Cures,” 30.

¹⁵⁰“Remedies and Cures,” 31.

¹⁵¹“Remedies and Cures,” 31.

¹⁵²Stevens, 8.

	hand ¹⁵³
Sprain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Cordon (a string with knots tied on it) is created by traiteur using prayer and tied around the affected limb.¹⁵⁴ ❖ Soak in table salt and warm water¹⁵⁵ ❖ Make a cross with the thumb over affected area and say a prayer¹⁵⁶ ❖ Soak brown paper in vinegar and wrap it around the sprain¹⁵⁷ ❖ Apply a poultice made of clay to the sprain¹⁵⁸ ❖ Pour antiseptic on the sprain¹⁵⁹ ❖ “Have a traiteur treat a string and apply it to the sprained area.”¹⁶⁰ ❖ Rub chalk dust on the sprain¹⁶¹ ❖ Rub sprain with clay¹⁶²
Stomachache	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Consume castor oil¹⁶³ ❖ Place a warm plate on the stomach¹⁶⁴

¹⁵³“Remedies and Cures,” 31.

¹⁵⁴Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treaters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," 240.

¹⁵⁵Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 7.

¹⁵⁶Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 7.

¹⁵⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 31.

¹⁵⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 31.

¹⁵⁹“Remedies and Cures,” 31.

¹⁶⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 134.

¹⁶¹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 134.

¹⁶²Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 134.

¹⁶³Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

¹⁶⁴Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Tie nine knots on a string and tie the string around the waist¹⁶⁵ ❖ Drink mint tea¹⁶⁶ ❖ Drink salt water¹⁶⁷ ❖ “Soak ashes in water and then drink the water.”¹⁶⁸
Sunburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Apply vinegar first and then soda before the vinegar dries¹⁶⁹
Sunstroke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Wash head in water and vinegar and take aspirin¹⁷⁰ ❖ Hold head with hands and say a prayer. Repeat three times in the day of the sunstroke¹⁷¹ ❖ “For sun stroke place a rag or towel on the top of a glass of water. Hold the glass up side down on the person head until the water boils. This will cure the pain.”¹⁷²
Teething	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Tie grass to make a necklace. The child wears the necklace and the teeth will eventually come out¹⁷³ ❖ Put a necklace of alligator teeth on the baby for it to cut teeth on¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁵“Remedies and Cures,” 32.

¹⁶⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 32.

¹⁶⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 32.

¹⁶⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 32.

¹⁶⁹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 124.

¹⁷⁰Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 7.

¹⁷¹Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 7.

¹⁷²“Remedies and Cures,” 33.

¹⁷³Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 9.

¹⁷⁴Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 128.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Put a necklace with a dime on it on the baby to cut its teeth on¹⁷⁵ ❖ Put a necklace made from Lizard's tail root on the baby¹⁷⁶
Tetanus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Eat roaches¹⁷⁷
Thrush	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ "If a man who never saw his father blows in a baby's mouth, this will cure the thrush."¹⁷⁸ ❖ Wipe the baby's tongue with its own urine¹⁷⁹
Toothache	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Bags of salt¹⁸⁰ ❖ A small nail is used to make the sign of the cross three times over the affected tooth. Nail is then buried in backyard. The next day, the nail will be rusted, and the tooth will fall out.¹⁸¹ ❖ Put perfume or aspirin on tooth¹⁸² ❖ Treat a piece of cotton and place it on the tooth. The tooth will fall out¹⁸³ ❖ Put a bunch of roly pollies in a bag around your neck. When they dry up, the pain will go away¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁵Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 128.

¹⁷⁶Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 128.

¹⁷⁷Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 136.

¹⁷⁸"Remedies and Cures," 33.

¹⁷⁹"Remedies and Cures," 33.

¹⁸⁰Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

¹⁸¹Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treaters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," 240.

¹⁸²Borello, "Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area," 7.

¹⁸³Borello, "Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area," 8.

¹⁸⁴Borello, "Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area," 8.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Apply cow manure to the affected tooth¹⁸⁵ ❖ Apply tobacco juice to the affected tooth¹⁸⁶ ❖ Put a piece of tobacco in a tooth that is hollow¹⁸⁷ ❖ “Smoke a pipe and hold the smoke in your mouth for toothache.”¹⁸⁸
Vomiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Break peach leaves in a downward motion and boil them. Drink the resultant tea¹⁸⁹ ❖ Wrap a dry lady’s stocking or dish towel around your neck¹⁹⁰ ❖ “Beat the white of an egg and put that in water. Let that settle then drink it.”¹⁹¹ ❖ Milk of magnesia¹⁹² ❖ Put flower of okra in water and drink¹⁹³
Warts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “Once a month for three months in a row say some kind of prayer at the decline of the moon, then the wart would fall off.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁵“Remedies and Cures,” 33.

¹⁸⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 33.

¹⁸⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 33.

¹⁸⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 33.

¹⁸⁹Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 8.

¹⁹⁰Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 8.

¹⁹¹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 139.

¹⁹²Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 139.

¹⁹³Stevens, 9.

¹⁹⁴Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 8.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “Split a potato in four quarters and rub it on the wart. Then bury the potato where the raindrops from the roof will fall on it. When the potato rots, your wart will go away.”¹⁹⁵ ❖ “Take a stick and cut a V on the stick, then pass the stick on the wart and make a cross, then say a prayer.”¹⁹⁶ ❖ Castor oil¹⁹⁷ ❖ “Steal a dishrag; rub it over the wart and throw the dishrag away.”¹⁹⁸ ❖ Tie a piece of thread around the wart and leave it on until the wart falls off¹⁹⁹ ❖ “Make a cross cut on the wart and make a cross cut on a fast growing plant. When the cross on the plant heals, your wart will go away.”²⁰⁰ ❖ “If you play with toads, you will get warts. To get rid of the warts, make a cross on each wart with a knife and then bury the knife. When the knife rusts, the warts will fall off.”²⁰¹ ❖ “Prick a wart with a pin and fasten the pin to your clothes. When you lose the pin, the wart will go away.”²⁰² ❖ “At dusk, after sundown, go walking in the yard until you find a bone. Hold the bone behind your back and say to
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¹⁹⁵Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 8.

¹⁹⁶Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 8.

¹⁹⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 33.

¹⁹⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 33.

¹⁹⁹“Remedies and Cures,” 34.

²⁰⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 137.

²⁰¹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 137.

²⁰²Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 138.

	<p>the moon three times, ‘All that I see grows and all that I touch grows smaller.’ Throw the bone where you will not see it again. Do this when there is a new moon. Your wart will go away.”²⁰³</p> <p>❖ “Put in a paper bag as many grains of corn as you have warts. Throw the paper bag behind you where you will not find it. Your wart will go away.”²⁰⁴</p>
Wellness (General)	<p>❖ Palm leaves obtained at Easter and kept on the wall over the bed all year²⁰⁵</p> <p>❖ Drink sassafras tea²⁰⁶</p> <p>❖ Drink tea made from peach tree leaves²⁰⁷</p> <p>❖ Lemonade purifies the blood²⁰⁸</p> <p>❖ For a beautiful complexion, apply sheep’s tallow to the face every night²⁰⁹</p> <p>❖ If bayou water must be drunk, crush peach seeds and place them in the bottom of a bucket of water. The peach seeds will draw any impurities to the bottom of the bucket and the water on top will be clean and purified.²¹⁰</p>

²⁰³Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 138.

²⁰⁴Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 138.

²⁰⁵“Remedies and Cures,” 16.

²⁰⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 16.

²⁰⁷Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

²⁰⁸Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

²⁰⁹ Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 123.

²¹⁰Saxon, Dreyer, and Tallant, *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, 268.

Whooping Cough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Let a stallion blow in the child's face²¹¹ ❖ Mare's milk²¹² ❖ Tie garlic around the child's neck²¹³ ❖ "Make a tea out of Rattan vines, Thistle roots and Coral tree seeds or roots and drink it."²¹⁴ ❖ Boil beets until they are tender. Add sugar and peppermint to the juice to make a syrup and drink²¹⁵
Worms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Wear garlic around the neck to cure worms²¹⁶ ❖ Turpentine²¹⁷ ❖ Strip peach leaves in a downward motion. Boil to make a tea, add sugar, and drink²¹⁸ ❖ Drink pumpkin seed tea²¹⁹ ❖ "Put nine drops of kerosene on a tablespoon of sugar. Take this for nine days."²²⁰ ❖ Take castor oil and five drops of turpentine in the morning on an empty stomach²²¹

²¹¹"Remedies and Cures," 34.

²¹²"Remedies and Cures," 34.

²¹³"Remedies and Cures," 34.

²¹⁴Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 126.

²¹⁵Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 126.

²¹⁶Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

²¹⁷Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

²¹⁸Borello, "Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area," 9.

²¹⁹"Remedies and Cures," 35.

²²⁰Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 139.

²²¹Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 139.

Chapter Four: Cajun Catholicism

Catholicism has played an integral role in the history and culture of Louisiana since its earliest days.¹ Early colonial Louisiana was comprised of mostly French and Spanish settlers along with Native Americans and slaves brought over by the colonists.² The Archdiocese of New Orleans describes early Catholicism in Louisiana,

The early history of the Louisiana Catholic Church cannot be separated from the early colonial period of Louisiana. As part of the colonial empires of France and Spain, the settlers of Louisiana were to be Catholic if they were to be faithful subjects. Even the Code Noir, the French law which governed the treatment of slaves, mandated that slaves be instructed and baptized in the Catholic faith, freed from work on Sunday and treated humanely. As Dr. Charles Nolan wrote, "the early residents of this area would have found our distinction between political and religious matters strange and unintelligible. War, a business or marriage contract, and a baptismal ceremony were both sacred and secular."³

From the arrival of the first Catholic missionaries in the 17th century to the present day, the Catholic Church has been a central institution in the life of the state, shaping its religious, social, and cultural landscape.⁴

The most integral aspect of *traiteur* practice is a belief in the Christian God. Traiteurs believe that they are granted the power to heal through God.⁵ Though *traiteurs* do utilize a

¹"The History of Catholicism in New Orleans," *Archdiocese of New Orleans*. Accessed February 20, 2023. <https://noladceffhttps://americanindian2-abc--clio-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/Search/Display/1483919..org/our-rich-history>.

²"The History of Catholicism in New Orleans," <https://noladceffhttps://americanindian2-abc--clio-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/Search/Display/1483919..org/our-rich-history>.

³"The History of Catholicism in New Orleans," <https://noladceffhttps://americanindian2-abc--clio-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/Search/Display/1483919..org/our-rich-history>.

⁴"The History of Catholicism in New Orleans," <https://noladceffhttps://americanindian2-abc--clio-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/Search/Display/1483919..org/our-rich-history>.

⁵Gravot, "'all I Depend on is the Lord': Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement,'" 180.

variety of healing herbs and folk remedies, the main source of healing comes from a belief in the power of prayer.⁶ Frank Borello asserted, “There must be complete faith in the person being treated in order for the cure to work at all. Without complete faith, there is no need to bother going to a treater for a cure.”⁷ Julia Swett’s research into the practice showed, “Treating is a religious lay ritual that renews the social body, much as the Sacrament of the Eucharist renews the body of Christ.”⁸ Megan Wyatt, a reporter for the Associated Press, states, “The transmission of the prayers, said to be a sacred gift, traditionally happens orally in French. Healers are typically not paid or even thanked for their work since the belief is that God is the one who actually heals — *traiteurs* are just facilitating the treatment.”⁹ So, many *traiteurs* and the people that they treat believe that the healing that they are experiencing comes from God, and that prayer combined with the use of herbs and healing rituals can cure many ailments. The Catholic religion is the main tenant that *traiteurs* adhere to and have in common. In an interview with Alida Landry in 1973, *traiteur* Mrs. Azelia Stevens indicated that this was the case, “These *traiteurs* were believed to possess healing powers bestowed upon them by God...She says that God tells her what to do to help people by answering her prayers.”¹⁰

⁶Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures in And Around the Youngsville Area,” 1.

⁷Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 1.

⁸Swett, “French Louisiana *Traiteurs*,”
https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/LFMtraiteurs.html.

⁹Megan Wyatt, “Exploring the Practice of Cajun *Traiteurs*—Faith Healers,” *The Associated Press*, Lafayette, LA. August 7, 2022, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/louisiana/articles/2022-08-07/exploring-the-practice-of-cajun-traiteurs-faith-healers>.

¹⁰Azelia Stevens, Interview by Alida Landry, December 3, 1973, in New Iberia, Louisiana.



Figure 11: This is a collection of images of Azelia Stevens, who was one of the *traiteurs* interviewed by Alida Landry and who's *traitements* contributed to the list compiled by the author. Stevens, Azelia. Interview by Alida Landry. December 3. 1973 in New Iberia, Louisiana.

The process of a *traitement* is relatively similar between *traiteurs*, "*Traitement* occurs in the home of a *traiteur*, during a *veillée* (a house visit), or may occur over the phone at the

discretion of the *traiteur*.”¹¹ Many of the treatments delivered by *traiteurs* include a prayer, typically in a Catholic format, which is a basic prayer said to God or the Saint who is most closely tied to that person or ailment.¹² Karen Yochim described her treatment with *traiteur* Wade Theriot, which involved prayer exclusively,

Without asking what my problem was, Wade placed his right hand on the crown of my head and gazed at the floor, his left-hand jiggling change in his pocket. I felt comforting heat circulating from his hand throughout my head. He softly muttered prayers in French as the television show and daily business of the gas station continued around us. After a few minutes of this contact, Wade raised his head and passed his hand back and forth and up and down about six inches from me, making crosses the length of my body. He had to bend low in order to include my feet in the process. He then circled me, saying prayers in the same manner, until he had made multiple crosses all down my back.¹³

Different *traiteurs* all have different processes that they use during their treatments. These are particular to each person and the intricacies of each *traiteur's* treatments are passed down to them from the person who trained them. However, there are some details of treatments that are nearly universally the same, such as who gets treated and the compensation for that treatment. Many *traiteurs* will not accept money for the treatments that they administer, “*Traiteurs* can treat a wide variety of ailments, including but by no means limited to warts, sunstroke, bleeding, arthritis, and asthma, but their services are not for sale. It is usual for patients to reciprocate by offering a gift of appreciation, but not even the empty-handed will ever be refused treatment.”¹⁴ The practice of not paying or thanking your *traiteur* seems to be fairly

¹¹Gravot, “‘all I Depend on is the Lord’: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement,” 180.

¹²Michael Walsh, *Roman Catholicism: The Basics*, (Taylor and Francis, 2016), 1.

¹³Yochim, “A Cajun Traiteur: Faith Healing on the Bayou,” 79.

¹⁴Swett, “French Louisiana *Traiteurs*,”
https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/LFMtraiteurs.html.

universal amongst those that have been interviewed or who have discussed the practice. The practice of not compensating a *traiteur* seems to stem from the belief that they are merely conduits for the work of God and that they do not want to be paid for doing God's work.

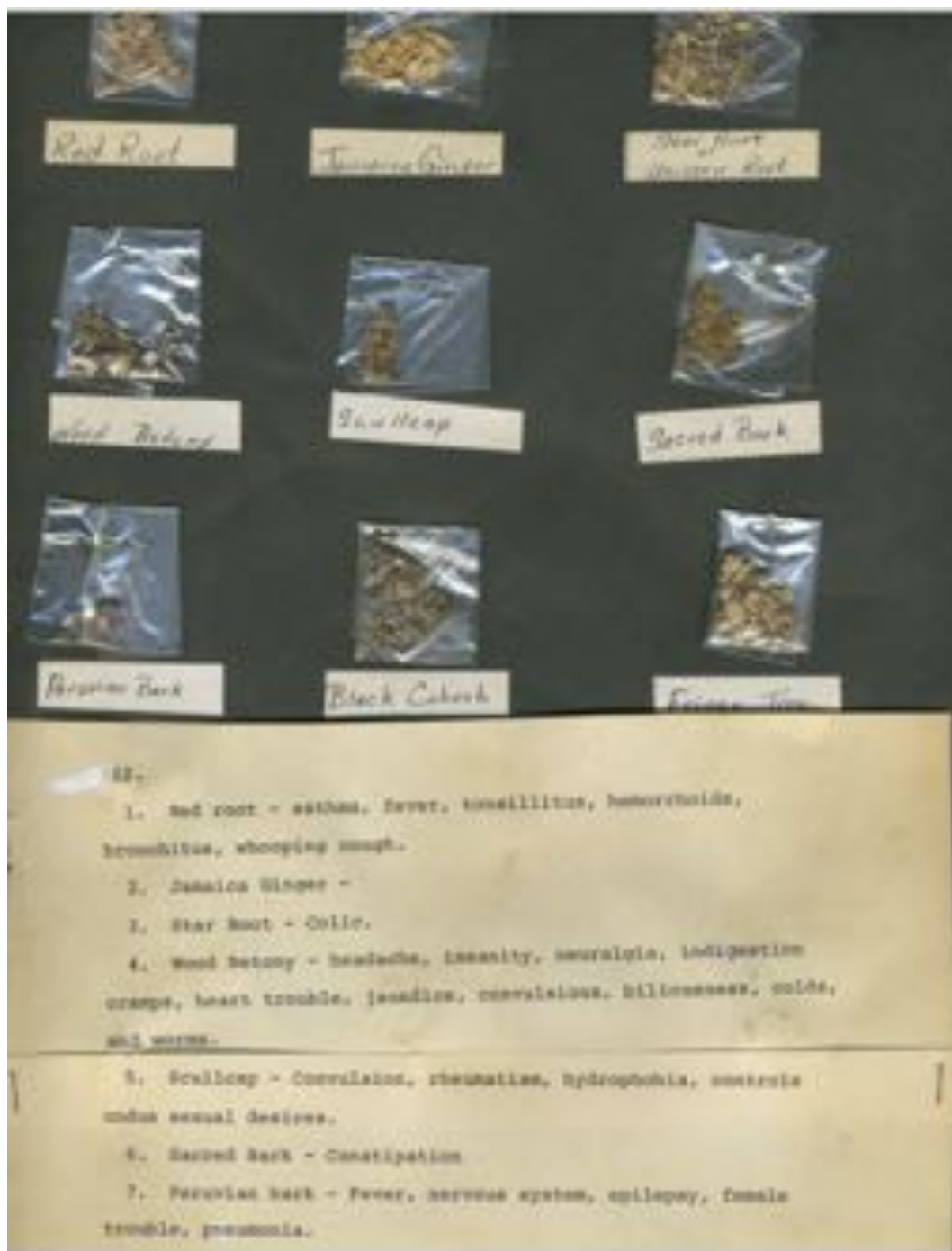


Figure 12: This is an example of various herbs used by *traiteurs* in Louisiana. These include red root, Jamaica ginger, star root (or unicorn root), wood betony, scullcap, sacred bark, Peruvian bark, black cohosh, and fringe tree. Daniels, Alma. "Interviews of a Folk Healer." Elton, Louisiana. *The Center for Louisiana Studies*. December 10, 1973.

Regardless of the treatment, *traiteurs* nearly always use prayer in their practice.¹⁵ Those collecting the stories of *traiteurs*, like Frank Borello, have stated, “Different aspects of religion play a significant part in the treatment. For example, for most of the cures I collected, there is a prayer said sometime during the treatment. Many times, the sign of the cross is used in curing the illness or injury. In a couple of the cures I collected, the one treating me will say ‘Hail Mary’ any number of times.”¹⁶ The prayers of each *traiteur* are unique to him or herself.¹⁷ In fact, some *traiteurs*, such as Helen Boudreaux, are initially intimidated by the prospect of creating and praying their own prayers, “‘I was scared of the prayers,’ she admits. ‘I was not sure about the prayers or what they meant. I was not sure I was good enough or worthy enough that God would recognize me as somebody who could serve people that way. I had no confidence in myself. Yet she believed in me. It took me a couple of years to really work on it.’ Despite her fear, Boudreaux did go to work praying with people for their healing. She prayed for burns, rashes and sore throats. She started out praying for and laying hands on her family. As her confidence grew, word began to spread.”¹⁸

¹⁵Frank Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures in And Around The Youngsville Area,” University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1972, 1.

¹⁶Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures in And Around The Youngsville Area,” 1.

¹⁷“Description and history of Mother Catherine, healer and religious leader, of the Church of the Manger in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1927,” New Orleans, Louisiana, *Item Tribune*, December 25, 1927, <https://louisianadigitalibrary.org/islandora/object/state-lwp%3A8444>.

¹⁸Scott Anderson, “A Practice of Faith: Modern *Traiteurs* Adapt Their Healing Art,” *The Daily Iberian*, October 18, 2022, https://www.thedailyiberian.com/acadiana-lifestyle/health_wellness/a-practice-of-faith-modern-traiteurs-adapt-their-healing-art/article_39a5493c-4350-11ed-8d00-17fe65ef8105.html.

The actual treatment sessions that occur when one visits a *traiteur* is, reportedly, very similar,

While the beliefs of individual treaters may differ somewhat in detail, their *traitements* follow a distinct pattern. Treatment always begins with a request for help. The healer must know for whom he is praying; he will always make sure that he knows the patient's full name. The patient explains his subjective experience of suffering to the treater, who may ask for clarifications, such as the exact location of a pain. Again, the *traiteur* is interested in the nature of the suffering, not the nature of the disease. The treatment is performed three times; each round consists of silent prayer in French, and the laying on of hands. They each have a unique style of passing their hands over the suppliant's body and their prayers are no doubt different.¹⁹

The consistent pattern that is followed in treatments delivered by *traiteurs* is evidence of the passing down of treatments from one generation to the next.²⁰ There are relatively few Cajun bloodlines that can be traced back to Nova Scotia before the *Grand Derangement*, therefore, many Cajuns have common or intersecting ancestors.²¹ This commonality surfaces in the similar traditions of different families, and it manifests in the similar treatments delivered by different *traiteurs*.

The Catholic practices of *traiteurs* are all informed by Catholic dogma.²² As practicing Catholics, *traiteurs* maintained their Catholic manner of prayer while incorporating herbalism and folk healing picked up from the Native Americans that inhabited the same lands as they did.²³ Catholic practices are distinct from Protestant practices, though there is some overlap in

¹⁹Swett, "French Louisiana *Traiteurs*," https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/LFMtraiteurs.html.

²⁰Brandon, *Folk Medicine in French Louisiana*, 213.

²¹"Acadian Memorial," Acadian Memorial, Accessed September 6, 2022. <https://www.acadianmemorial.org/>.

²²Walsh, *Roman Catholicism: The Basics*, 1.

²³Rebecca Begnaud, "The Life of a Healer," *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*, 2012, https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/lfmhealer.html.

the basic principles of each religion.²⁴ *Traiteurs* are Catholic, so they pray Catholic prayers, of which there are many, and they practice Catholic rituals, of which there are also many.²⁵

The study of *traiteurs* and their practices reveals much about the intersection between religion, science, medicine, and culture. Julia Swett describes this intersection,

While orthodox teaching is the product of the philosophy of the educated elite, the actual application by the common practitioner of the distilled teachings often exhibits a distinctly local flavor that necessarily emerges from the practitioner's cultural perspective. Religious belief must be integrated with cultural understanding if it is to be sustained as an existentially satisfying way of living. Thus, folk religion should not be viewed as ignorant, heretical, sectarian, or even merely syncretic. Cultural assumptions function at all levels of praxis, including that reasoning which is touted as being purely theoretical or objective. A class in medical anthropology made me realize that this is true of medicine as well as religion; there is no purely objective ground.²⁶

Thus, the study of *traiteurs* reveals the reality of religious practices within an isolated social group in Louisiana. The practice of *traiteurs* shows that unorthodox ways of applying Catholicism were and are accepted within the communities that these practices serve. Ancelet

²⁴Gregory A. Smith, Jessica Hamar Martínez, and Becka A. Alper, "U.S. Protestants Are Not Defined by Reformation-Era Controversies 500 Years Later," *Pew Research Center*, August 31, 2017, [https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/08/31/u-s-protestants-are-not-defined-by-reformation-era-controversies-500-years-later/#:~:text=Generally%20speaking%2C%20Martin%20Luther%20and,good%20works%20\(e.g.%2C%20living%20a.](https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/08/31/u-s-protestants-are-not-defined-by-reformation-era-controversies-500-years-later/#:~:text=Generally%20speaking%2C%20Martin%20Luther%20and,good%20works%20(e.g.%2C%20living%20a.)

²⁵Walsh, *Roman Catholicism: The Basics*, 1.

²⁶Julia Swett, "French Louisiana *Traiteurs*," *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*, Volume 18, 2009, https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/LFMtraiteurs.html. The author references these other works: Don, Yoder, "Folk Medicine," *Folklore and Folklife*, ed. Richard Dorson, 191-215, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1972; Hans A. Baer, Merrill Singer, and Ida Susser, *Medical Anthropology and the World System*, 2nd ed. (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2003); Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Sorcerer and His Magic," In *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Shoef, 167-185, New York, NY: Basic Books, 1963; and Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret M. Lock, "The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly New Series*, 1(1): 6-41, 1987.

said, “Although much of this early medicine has been replaced and long forgotten by modern medical science, it persists in varying degrees among the isolated rural folk of North America such as in Acadiana.”²⁷

Rosary prayers are also a valuable tool used by *traiteurs* in their practice, “Rosary beads are used to help Catholics count their prayers. Catholics often pray the rosary to make a request to God, some to thank God for blessings received or for requesting a special favour, for example if someone is sick to help them recover.”²⁸ Praying the rosary can be used as a “catch-all” prayer that any Catholic is able to perform.²⁹

²⁷Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

²⁸“How to Pray the Rosary,” *Corpus Christi College*, Accessed March 13, 2023, <https://www.corpus.wa.edu.au/news-blog/2020/5/1/how-to-pray-the-rosary>.

²⁹“The Holy Rosary,” *Maryknoll Sisters*, Accessed March 14, 2023, https://www.maryknollsisters.org/pray-with-us/pray-rosary-us/?s_subsrc=20ZGCZZZ&gclid=Cj0KCQjwtsCgBhDEARIsAE7RYh3oQjjycosoDUMR5NwH7xzsGwVtMGR3XY6xME962apPZLmfs4S1PZoaAIOIEALw_wcB.

How to Pray the Rosary

1. While holding the crucifix, make the Sign of the Cross and pray the *Apostles' Creed*.
2. On the first bead, pray the *Our Father*.
3. On the next three beads, pray three *Hail Mary's* then pray the *Glory Be*.
4. For each of the five decades, announce the Mystery (perhaps followed by a brief reading from Scripture) then say the *Our Father*.
5. While holding each of the ten beads of the decade, next pray ten *Hail Mary's* while meditating on the Mystery, then Pray *The Glory Be*.
6. After finishing each decade, pray *The Fatima Prayer*.
7. After saying all five decades. Pray the *Hail, Holy Queen*, followed by the *closing prayer*.
8. Conclude the Rosary with the Sign of the Cross.

Figure 13: This is an explanation of the process of Praying the Rosary, which is an organized Catholic prayer used by the *traiteurs*. “The Holy Rosary,” *Maryknoll Sisters*, Accessed March 14, 2023. https://www.maryknollsisters.org/pray-with-us/pray-rosary-us/?s_subsrc=20ZGCZZZ&gclid=Cj0KCQjwtsCgBhDEARIsAE7RYh3oQjjycosoDUMR5NwH7xzsGwVtMGR3XY6xME962apPZLmfs4S1PZoaAIOIEALw_wcB#.

When praying the rosary, the person praying should say quite a few Hail Mary's.³⁰ A Hail Mary is a prayer directed to Mother Mary, who is the mother of the Judeo-Christian

³⁰“The Holy Rosary,” *Maryknoll Sisters*, Accessed March 14, 2023, https://www.maryknollsisters.org/pray-with-us/pray-rosary-us/?s_subsrc=20ZGCZZZ&gclid=Cj0KCQjwtsCgBhDEARIsAE7RYh3oQjjycosoDUMR5NwH7xzsGwVtMGR3XY6xME962apPZLmfs4S1PZoaAIOIEALw_wcB#.

messiah, Jesus Christ, and is a significant figure in the Catholic religion.³¹ The Hail Mary is said as follows, “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.”³²

³¹“The Holy Rosary,” *Maryknoll Sisters*, Accessed March 14, 2023, https://www.maryknollsisters.org/pray-with-us/pray-rosary-us/?s_subsrc=20ZGCZZZ&gclid=Cj0KCQjwtsCgBhDEARIsAE7RYh3oQjjycosoDUmR5NwH7xzsGwVtMGR3XY6xME962apPZLmfs4S1PZoaAIOIEALw_wcB.

³²“The Holy Rosary,” *Maryknoll Sisters*, Accessed March 14, 2023, https://www.maryknollsisters.org/pray-with-us/pray-rosary-us/?s_subsrc=20ZGCZZZ&gclid=Cj0KCQjwtsCgBhDEARIsAE7RYh3oQjjycosoDUmR5NwH7xzsGwVtMGR3XY6xME962apPZLmfs4S1PZoaAIOIEALw_wcB.



Figure 14: This is a diagram that explains how to “pray the rosary,” which is an organized Catholic prayer. “How to Pray the Rosary.” *Corpus Christi College*. Accessed March 13, 2023, <https://www.corpus.wa.edu.au/news-blog/2020/5/1/how-to-pray-the-rosary>.

Who can receive treatment?

The work of the *traiteurs* is not reserved only for the Cajuns within the community. In fact, *traiteurs* are allowed and willing to treat anyone who seeks out their help.³³ Sexton describes the egalitarian policy of most *traiteurs*, “Although it appears that most, if not all treaters are Roman Catholic, Protestants are not denied treatment. Neither is treating adversely affected by racial or cultural considerations. Black treaters see white patients and vice versa, and non-Cajuns and non-Creoles are permitted to seek treatment.”³⁴ Anyone who seeks to be treated by a *traiteur* can be treated.³⁵ Because the nature of the work of the *traiteur* is religious, they do not normally receive requests for help from those who do not believe in the Judeo-Christian religion.³⁶

Despite the challenges faced by Catholics in Louisiana, the culture of the state has been undeniably impacted by their presence.³⁷ In fact,

But what truly makes our traditions and celebrations unique are the ties to our Catholic identity. Mardi Gras or Carnival season begins on January 6, the Epiphany or Kings’ Day. We start with King Cakes and inside the cake is a baby which represents the baby Jesus. Our Mardi Gras season ends at midnight with Ash Wednesday, the start of the Lenten season. We are so tied to our traditions that even our National Football team was formed on November 1, 1966, All Saints Day, and named the Saints. So while you’re

³³Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treaters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," 244.

³⁴Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treaters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," 244.

³⁵Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treaters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," 244.

³⁶Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treaters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," 244.

³⁷“The History of Catholicism in New Orleans,” *Archdiocese of New Orleans*, Accessed February 20, 2023, <https://noladceff.org/our-rich-history>.

here visiting, absorb the culture, enjoy the music, enjoy the food and above all observe the riches of our faith that are interwoven in the fabric of New Orleans.³⁸

During the 20th century, the Catholic Church in Louisiana continued to be a major force in the state's social and cultural life, even as it faced new challenges and opportunities.³⁹ Today, the Catholic Church in Louisiana remains an important institution, with a vibrant and diverse community of believers who continue to play an active role in the life of the state.⁴⁰ The church has faced many challenges in recent years, including declining membership and financial pressures, but it remains a vital force in the social and cultural life of Louisiana. One of the most important issues facing the Catholic Church in Louisiana today is the ongoing clergy abuse scandal, which has rocked the church worldwide and has had a particularly significant impact in Louisiana.⁴¹ Many victims of clergy abuse in Louisiana have come forward in recent years, and the church has been forced to confront the legacy of abuse and cover-up that has plagued it for decades.⁴²

Despite these challenges, the Catholic Church in Louisiana remains a vibrant and active institution, with a rich history and a vital role to play in the life of the state.⁴³ The acceptance of

³⁸"The History of Catholicism in New Orleans," <https://noladceff.org/our-rich-history>.

³⁹"The History of Catholicism in New Orleans," <https://noladceff.org/our-rich-history>.

⁴⁰"The History of Catholicism in New Orleans," <https://noladceff.org/our-rich-history>.

⁴¹Justin Mustian, "FBI opens investigation into sex abuse in the Roman Catholic Church in New Orleans," *PBS*, June 29, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/fbi-opens-investigation-into-sex-abuse-in-the-roman-catholic-church-in-new-orleans>.

⁴²Mustian, "FBI opens investigation into sex abuse in the Roman Catholic Church in New Orleans," <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/fbi-opens-investigation-into-sex-abuse-in-the-roman-catholic-church-in-new-orleans>.

⁴³"The History of Catholicism in New Orleans," <https://noladceff.org/our-rich-history>.

Catholics in Louisiana has resulted in a greater acceptance of the Cajuns and their practices.⁴⁴

Additionally, Catholic practices and traditions have become integral to the distinctive culture of Louisiana.⁴⁵ As Catholicism plays a significant role in the lives of *traiteurs* and in the lives of Cajuns, understanding the history of the religion and its prevalence in Louisiana is key to understanding the *traiteurs*.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treaters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," 244.

⁴⁵"The History of Catholicism in New Orleans," <https://noladceff.org/our-rich-history>.

⁴⁶"The History of Catholicism in New Orleans," <https://noladceff.org/our-rich-history>.

Chapter Five: Louisiana's History and the Traiteurs

Who resides in Louisiana? How has the history of Louisiana impacted the Cajuns that came there? What cultural groups exist in Louisiana? How have those cultural groups impacted the Cajun tradition?

Louisiana is a state located in the southern region of the United States.¹ It is a remarkable state with a rich and diverse history.² The area that is now Louisiana has been inhabited by indigenous peoples for thousands of years and has served as the site of numerous historical events and cultural interactions.³ From its early days as a French colony, its period as a Spanish territory, and its eventual entry into statehood as part of the United States, Louisiana has played a significant role in the shaping of North America and the world.⁴

Louisiana's fertile ground and ample wildlife made an ideal place for Native American tribes to settle before European colonization.⁵ Louisiana's geographical location, including its proximity to the vast Mississippi River, guaranteed that colonizing countries paid special attention to the state as they entered the New World, "Beginning with Jacques Cartier's

¹Charles Gayarré, *History of Louisiana*, 3rd ed. Vol. 4. New Orleans: A. Hawkins, 1885, 1.

²Gayarré, *History of Louisiana*, 1.

³"American Indians in Louisiana," *The National Park Service*, December 3, 2021, Accessed October 8, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/jela/learn/historyculture/native-americans-in-louisiana.htm#:~:text=Today%2C%20there%20are%20four%20federally,by%20the%20state%20of%20Louisiana>.

⁴"H.R. 88, An act for the admission of the State of Louisiana into the Union, March 20, 1812," The National Archives, Washington D.C, March 20, 1812, <https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/louisiana-statehood/louisiana-bill.html>.

⁵William Alexander Read, *Louisiana Place Names of Indian Origin: A Collection of Words*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 1.

exploration of the Saint Lawrence River in 1534, France gained sovereignty over a vast territory in North America. Eventually, the French established five colonies: Canada, Acadia, Hudson Bay, Newfoundland, and Louisiana.”⁶ The first European settlement in the Louisiana territory was established by the French in 1699, when they established Fort Maurepas, near what is now Ocean Springs, Mississippi.⁷ Over the next few decades, the French expanded their control over the area and established settlements along the Mississippi River, including what is now New Orleans. The first settlement in present-day Louisiana came fifteen years later, “Natchitoches, the oldest European settlement in present-day Louisiana, was founded by the French explorer Louis Juchereau de St. Denis in 1714. Named after a local Native American group, Natchitoches remained an important colonial outpost during the French, Spanish, and American periods in Louisiana history.”⁸ The French saw Louisiana as a key strategic location, as it provided access to the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico, which were critical trade routes for the French empire.⁹ In 1762, the French ceded Louisiana to the Spanish with the Treaty of Fontainebleau,

⁶Cope and Schafer, "Creole: A Contested, Polysemous Term," 2655.

⁷Mike Bunn, “Fort Maurepas,” *Mississippi Encyclopedia*, April 14, 2018. For more information about Fort Maurepas and its history, see: Jay Higginbotham, *Fort Maurepas*, Colonial Books. January 1, 1968, <https://mississippiencyclopedia.org/entries/fort-maurepas/#:~:text=Fort%20Maurepas%20was%20the%20first,the%20French%20colony%20of%20Louisiana.>

⁸Laura D. Kelley, “Natchitoches Settlement,” *64 Parishes*, April 23, 2019, <https://64parishes.org/entry/natchitoches-settlement/#:~:text=Natchitoches%2C%20the%20oldest%20European,American%20periods%20in%20Louisiana%20history.>

⁹Gayarré, *History of Louisiana*, 4.

and the territory became part of New Spain.¹⁰ This transition was indicative of the constantly changing proprietorship of Louisiana,

The impetus to cede the French colony of Louisiana to the Spanish was the long, expensive conflict of the French and Indian War, also known as the Seven Year's War, between France and Great Britain. Initially, France offered Louisiana to Spain in order to bring Spain into the conflict on the French side. Spain declined. Spanish officials were uncertain about what exactly constituted the vague and immense colony of Louisiana. When the "Family Compact," a supposedly secret alliance between France and Spain, became known to the British, they attacked Spain. In November 1762 in the secret Treaty of Fontainebleau, France handed over Louisiana and the Isle of Orleans to Spain in order to "sweeten the bitter medicine of Spanish defeat and to persuade them not to fight on" against the British. The cession of Louisiana was kept secret for over a year. France feared that Louisiana would become British. As a result, France sought to preempt any actions that Britain would undertake if it became known that Louisiana no longer enjoyed French protection before the Spanish were able to occupy and defend it. Great Britain officially conceded Spanish ownership of Louisiana in February 1763 in one of the series of treaties ending the French and Indian War. This gesture was a mere formality, for the territory had been in Spanish hands for almost three months.¹¹

Though the treaty was signed in 1762, the Spanish did not officially and publicly take control of the Louisiana Territory until 1763.¹² The Spanish period was marked by a mix of growth and conflict, with the Spanish facing challenges from indigenous peoples, European rivals, and slave revolts.¹³ The people of Louisiana were not quick to accept new leadership in

¹⁰"Preliminary Articles of Peace Between His Britannick Majesty, the Most Christian King And the Catholick King: Signed At Fontainebleau, the 3d Day of November, 1762," London: Printed by E. Owen and T. Harrison, 1762, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/aeu.ark:/13960/t8qc0m51g>.

¹¹"Louisiana as a Spanish Colony." *Library of Congress*. Accessed February 6, 2022. <https://www.loc.gov/collections/louisiana-european-explorations-and-the-louisiana-purchase/articles-and-essays/louisiana-as-a-spanish-colony/>.

¹²"Louisiana as a Spanish Colony," <https://www.loc.gov/collections/louisiana-european-explorations-and-the-louisiana-purchase/articles-and-essays/louisiana-as-a-spanish-colony/>.

¹³"Louisiana as a Spanish Colony," <https://www.loc.gov/collections/louisiana-european-explorations-and-the-louisiana-purchase/articles-and-essays/louisiana-as-a-spanish-colony/>.

the colony, especially that of a country so different from the one that they had become accustomed to.¹⁴ In fact, in 1768, French colonists became so discontented with Spanish rule, that they held a convention and drafted a petition to France asking for reentry under French rule.¹⁵ This was, of course, poorly received by their Spanish rulers,

Louisiana citizens loyal to the French Crown held a convention in New Orleans on October 29, 1768, to air their grievances against Spanish authority. They formally petitioned the Superior Council to reinstate the colony's former status and force Ulloa's departure. The Superior Council issued a decree ordering the expulsion of the Spanish governor and drafted a memorandum to present to the French minister of foreign affairs petitioning for the restoration of French rule, all to no avail. Spain, unwilling to countenance such a revolt, responded with force. The crown discharged a fleet of 24 ships and 2,000 troops under the command of General Alexandre O'Reilly, who took possession of Louisiana on August 18, 1769. O'Reilly quickly arrested, tried, and convicted the leaders of the rebellion of treason, executing 12 men, sentencing others to lengthy prison terms, and confiscating the properties of all.¹⁶

In 1800, on October 1, France reacquired the tumultuous territory from Spain with the secret Treaty of San Ildefonso.¹⁷ An article for the Library of Congress describes this transaction,

On October 1, 1800, within 24 hours of signing a peace settlement with the United States, First Consul of the Republic of France Napoleon Bonaparte, acquired Louisiana from Spain by the secret Treaty of San Ildefonso. To the distress of the United States, Napoleon held title to the Mississippi River and the port of New Orleans. With the signing of the Treaty of San Ildefonso, Napoleon sought to reestablish an extended French maritime and colonial empire in the West Indies and the Mississippi Valley.¹⁸

¹⁴“Louisiana as a Spanish Colony,” <https://www.loc.gov/collections/louisiana-european-explorations-and-the-louisiana-purchase/articles-and-essays/louisiana-as-a-spanish-colony/>.

¹⁵“Louisiana as a Spanish Colony,” <https://www.loc.gov/collections/louisiana-european-explorations-and-the-louisiana-purchase/articles-and-essays/louisiana-as-a-spanish-colony/>.

¹⁶“Louisiana as a Spanish Colony,” <https://www.loc.gov/collections/louisiana-european-explorations-and-the-louisiana-purchase/articles-and-essays/louisiana-as-a-spanish-colony/>.

¹⁷“The Louisiana Purchase,” *Library of Congress*, Accessed February 6, 2023, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/louisiana-european-explorations-and-the-louisiana-purchase/articles-and-essays/the-louisiana-purchase/>.

¹⁸“The Louisiana Purchase,” <https://www.loc.gov/collections/louisiana-european-explorations-and-the-louisiana-purchase/articles-and-essays/the-louisiana-purchase/>.

The peace treaty that prompted this transaction was a result of a Quasi-War with France over trade routes in the Caribbean, “After winning independence, the United States’ first international conflict was with its revolutionary ally, France. Like many conflicts in the early years of the United States, this conflict centered around American neutral trading rights, and was a by-product of the ongoing wars between Great Britain and France, and the French Revolution. Commonly referred to as the Quasi-War with France, this conflict was a limited naval war against French privateers who were seizing U.S. shipping in the Caribbean. The Quasi-War is significant as the first seaborne conflict for the newly established U.S. Navy. It was the first action by the United States to protect its shipping abroad and the first effort to exert control over the Caribbean Sea. War was never formally declared, and French naval warships directly clashed with American ships in only a few instances. It was solely intended as a war against privateers and was almost entirely waged in the Caribbean.”¹⁹

Louisiana came under the control of the United States at the beginning of the 1800s, “In May 1802 Madison instructed Livingston to negotiate for the purchase of New Orleans. Livingston was also directed to ascertain whether the cession included East Florida and West Florida, and, if so, to negotiate a price for acquiring them, or at least the right of navigation and deposit on one of the rivers feeding into the Gulf.”²⁰ After the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the colony of Louisiana came under the control of the United States. As a major hub of the Atlantic slave trade, Louisiana also has a large African influence.²¹ As such, the modern day state of

¹⁹“The Quasi-War with France (1798-1801),” *USS Constitution Museum*, Accessed February 6, 2023, <https://ussconstitutionmuseum.org/major-events/the-quasi-war-with-france/>.

²⁰“The Louisiana Purchase,” <https://www.loc.gov/collections/louisiana-european-explorations-and-the-louisiana-purchase/articles-and-essays/the-louisiana-purchase/>.

²¹Ina J. Fandrich, “Yorùbá Influences on Haitian Vodou and New Orleans Voodoo,” *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 5, 2007, 775-791.

Louisiana has been inhabited and controlled by a wide range of people, including Native Americans, French colonists, and Spanish conquistadors, and the United States.²² In *Louisiana: A History*, Light Townsend Cummins describes the Louisiana that was born from such diverse roots, “Colonial Louisiana thus became a true ‘melting pot’ of peoples, languages, customs, and cultures, which made it from the start a diverse place, a quality the state of Louisiana still retains.”²³ Over the next several decades, Louisiana played a significant role in the growth of the United States.²⁴ The state was a major center of the cotton trade and was also home to numerous steamboat lines and railroads, which helped to connect the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico to the rest of the country.²⁵ Louisiana was also a major center of the Confederacy during the American Civil War, and it was the site of several key battles, including the Battle of New Orleans.²⁶

Following the *Grand Derangement*, most of the Acadian people were loaded onto British ships and deposited all along the eastern American seaboard.²⁷ The British crown created a quota

²²Light Townsend Cummins, Bennett H. Wall, John C. Rodrigue, and Simon Levy, *Louisiana: A History*, Sixth ed. (Oxford, England; Chichester, England; Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014, 2013), 10.

²³Cummins, Wall, Rodrigue, and Levy, *Louisiana: A History*, 10.

²⁴Joseph A. Harriss, “How the Louisiana Purchase Changed the World,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, April 2003, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-the-louisiana-purchase-changed-the-world-79715124/>.

²⁵E. Bunner, *History of Louisiana from Its First Discovery and Settlement to the Present Time*, (Carlisle, Massachusetts: Applewood Books, n.d), 1.

²⁶Le Page du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana, Or of the Western Parts of Virginia and Carolina Containing a Description of the Countries That Lie on Both Sides of the River Mississippi*, Project Gutenberg, 2005,1.

²⁷Wilton P. Ledet, “Acadians Find Peace in Louisiana,” *The Regional Review*, Vol II No. 3. The National Park Service, March 1939. See also: Hodson, Christopher Hodson, *The Acadian*

system by which the Acadians were dispersed.²⁸ A certain number of people were to be deposited in major cities along the seaboard until the ship was empty.²⁹ This method of dispersing the Acadians served as the first attempt to assimilate them into “mainstream” culture. Wilton Ledet described the random process of dispersion, “The ships carrying the unfortunate Acadians did not all sail for the same destination. No definite place of settlement had been designated for them. The British vessels sailed along the Atlantic seaboard, spreading most of those French peasants from Maine to Louisiana. Others finally landed in Martinique, in England and in France.”³⁰ The study of the Acadian dispersal is still ongoing. Many Acadians were dispersed into a handful of locations, but some were spread wide and far and were completely detached from the rest of their group.³¹ Thus, people today are still just learning of their Acadian heritage and the history of their ancestors. The British monarchy hoped to prevent the reunification of the Acadians by spreading them as far apart as possible.³²

Diaspora an Eighteenth-Century History, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012,
https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/regional_review/vol2-3c.htm.

²⁸Ledet, “Acadians Find Peace in Louisiana,”
https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/regional_review/vol2-3c.htm.

²⁹Ledet, “Acadians Find Peace in Louisiana,”
https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/regional_review/vol2-3c.htm.

³⁰Ledet, “Acadians Find Peace in Louisiana,”
https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/regional_review/vol2-3c.htm.

³¹Ledet, “Acadians Find Peace in Louisiana,”
https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/regional_review/vol2-3c.htm.

³²Ledet, “Acadians Find Peace in Louisiana,”
https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/regional_review/vol2-3c.htm.

Some Acadians, however, took it upon themselves to find a new home. These Acadians ended up in St. Martinville, Louisiana by 1765.³³ Louisiana was a largely “unsettled” plantation colony that had plenty of land and resources for the Acadians.³⁴ Additionally, Louisiana was a French colony, and the French leadership were sympathetic to the French Acadians. Though the exact date of arrival is unknown, historians have been able to identify a rough year of Acadian arrival,

According to historian Charles Étienne Arthur Gayarré, between January 1 and May 13, 1765, approximately 650 Acadians landed in New Orleans, ten years after their expulsion from Acadia (Nova Scotia) by the British. We know that on April 24, 1765, Charles-Philippe Aubry, interim governor of Louisiana (Spain did not officially take possession of the territory until March 5, 1766), wrote to the Duke of Choiseul, head of the Louis XV government, to inform him of the arrival in New Orleans aboard the Santo Domingo ship of Joseph (Beausoleil) Broussard, an Acadian hero, accompanied by some 200 migrants seeking refuge in Louisiana. This large group was made up of 58 to 60 Acadian families.³⁵

³³“St. Martinville– On the former hunting ground of the Atákapas,” Acadie. Accessed September 6, 2022. [https://acadie.cheminsdelafrancophonie.org/en/st-martinville-on-the-former-hunting-ground-of-the-atakapas/#:~:text=Beausoleil%2C%20an%20Acadian%20Hero&text=According%20to%20historian%20Charles%20%C3%89tienne,Nova%20Scotia\)%20by%20the%20British.](https://acadie.cheminsdelafrancophonie.org/en/st-martinville-on-the-former-hunting-ground-of-the-atakapas/#:~:text=Beausoleil%2C%20an%20Acadian%20Hero&text=According%20to%20historian%20Charles%20%C3%89tienne,Nova%20Scotia)%20by%20the%20British.)

³⁴The word “unsettled” is used here to mean un-industrialized/non-Europeanized. The author would like to add a note that this territory, as with most of North America, had been previously settled by Native Americans and was the ancestral home of as many as 22 distinct tribes. This assertion is supported by this source: “American Indians in Louisiana.” *The National Park Service*. December 3, 2021. Accessed October 8, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/jela/learn/historyculture/native-americans-in-louisiana.htm#:~:text=Today%2C%20there%20are%20four%20federally,by%20the%20state%20of%20Louisiana.>

³⁵“St. Martinville– On the former hunting ground of the Atákapas,” [https://acadie.cheminsdelafrancophonie.org/en/st-martinville-on-the-former-hunting-ground-of-the-atakapas/#:~:text=Beausoleil%2C%20an%20Acadian%20Hero&text=According%20to%20historian%20Charles%20%C3%89tienne,Nova%20Scotia\)%20by%20the%20British.](https://acadie.cheminsdelafrancophonie.org/en/st-martinville-on-the-former-hunting-ground-of-the-atakapas/#:~:text=Beausoleil%2C%20an%20Acadian%20Hero&text=According%20to%20historian%20Charles%20%C3%89tienne,Nova%20Scotia)%20by%20the%20British.)

These families of Acadians were able to build lives for themselves in South Louisiana. They created new churches, schools, restaurants, stores, and community centers based around their cultural values and beliefs.³⁶ The new environments and the connections that they created with other cultural groups around them, like the Native Americans and African slaves facilitated the birth of an entirely new culture—The Cajuns. This kind of cultural mixing was part of a larger trend in the 1900s, called creolization, “Acadians, enslaved West Africans, Houma, Chitimacha, Choctaw, German immigrants, Canadian trappers, French and Spanish settlers—all contributed to a process now known as creolization. Fueled by European colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, creolization occurred throughout the Latin Caribbean world: different populations, most of them in lands new to them, blended their native cultural practices—culinary, linguistic, musical—to create new cultural forms.”³⁷ These new cultures are more like the cultures that we are familiar with today and are beautiful on their own. However, they are distinctly different from their originating culture. Cajuns are unique *because* their culture is a mixture of other cultures.

As with most stories about the arrival of European people to areas in North America, the land settled by the Acadians was not previously unsettled. The land had been previously settled and utilized by various Native American tribes, “The Attakapas District — what is present-day St. Martin, St. Mary, Vermilion, Iberia, and Lafayette Parishes — named for its first inhabitants, is where many Acadians eventually ended up after being expelled from their native lands in

³⁶Carl A. Brasseaux, *Founding of New Acadia: The Beginnings of Acadian Life in Louisiana, 1765–1803*, (Baton Rouge, LA, Louisiana State University Press, 1987), xi.

³⁷Cleaver, “What's the difference between Cajun and Creole—or is there one?”
<https://www.hnoc.org/publications/first-draft/whats-difference-between-cajun-and-creole-or-there-one>.

1755. The Native American, Creole and Acadian cultures, while distinctly different, have been intertwined ever since.”³⁸ The Acadian arrival to Louisiana marked a transition away from the previous habit of people to remain in the larger cities in Louisiana, apart from large scale plantation owners. The Acadians purposefully sought isolation away from the cities and the people who lived within them.³⁹ Their desire to be isolated and keep to themselves facilitated a more peaceful and cooperative working relationship between the Acadians and the Native American tribes that inhabited South Louisiana. The ties between the groups of people who now lived in South Louisiana seemed, for the most part, to be mutually beneficial to all. An article for *Daily Advertiser* claims,

According to Vermilionville Living History Museum and Folklife Park artisan Chief John “Sitting Bear” Mayeux, the Acadians fit in well with Louisiana’s Native American people — a large percent were of mixed heritage with Mi’kmaq blood, and many of Louisiana’s Native American tribes already spoken French, having learned it from the Creoles. Today, it is said that approximately 40 percent of Cajun people have some Native American heritage. Many Native American words are incorporated into Louisiana French, including “bayou,” “chaoui” (raccoon), “maringouin” (mosquito), etc.⁴⁰

Along with language, Native Americans shared their knowledge of the native fauna of South Louisiana. This knowledge of herbs and plants that had nutritional and medicinal value was very helpful to the Acadians, who had come from an environment in Nova Scotia that was very different than the hot, humid, and wet environment of Louisiana. The knowledge passed from

³⁸Erin Segura, “Heritage Day celebrates life before Cajuns,” *Daily Advertiser*, Bayou Vermillion District, Accessed October 9, 2022, <https://eu.theadvertiser.com/story/entertainment/events/2016/09/19/heritage-day-celebrates-life-before-cajuns/90691666/>.

³⁹Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xix.

⁴⁰Segura, “Heritage Day celebrates life before Cajuns,” <https://eu.theadvertiser.com/story/entertainment/events/2016/09/19/heritage-day-celebrates-life-before-cajuns/90691666/>.

Native Americans to the Acadians was no doubt invaluable and partly responsible for the success of the new transplants. This knowledge can be seen today in the practices of the *traiteurs*, who include the use of medicinal plants and herbs in their healing practices.⁴¹ They frequently utilize the same kinds of remedies created and used by the native American tribes that they came into contact with.⁴² In fact, many Cajuns and *traiteurs* even refer to these plants by their traditional Native American names.⁴³ The knowledge and cooperation shared between the Native Americans and the Cajuns showed that cohabitation was possible and could even be beneficial to all involved. This is evidenced by the new foods, languages, practices, and ways of life that emerged as a result of this mixing of cultures. For example, “Gumbo drew upon West African and Native American sources (okra and rice from the former; filé, or crushed sassafras leaves, from the latter) and French culinary techniques (roux). Creolized French—Kouri-Vini, also known as Louisiana Creole—was, by the 1800s, in wide practice, including among Acadian descendants. The accordion, a star feature of both Cajun and zydeco music, was brought to the colony by German settlers, and its use was popularized in part by the enslaved people working those plantations”⁴⁴

⁴¹Brandon, “Folk Medicine in French Louisiana,” In *American Folk Medicine*, ed. Wayland Hand, Berkeley: University of California Press. 1976, 213.

⁴²Brandon, “Folk Medicine in French Louisiana,” *In American Folk Medicine*, 213.

⁴³Valdman, Albert and Kevin J. Rottet, *Dictionary of Louisiana French: As Spoken in Cajun, Creole, and American Indian Communities*, edited by Albert Valdman, Kevin J. Rottet, Barry Jean Ancelet, Richard Guidry, Thomas A. Klingler, Amanda LaFleur, Tamara Lindner, Michael D. Picone and Dominique Ryon, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010; 2009), 20.

⁴⁴Cleaver, “What's the difference between Cajun and Creole—or is there one?”
<https://www.hnoc.org/publications/first-draft/whats-difference-between-cajun-and-creole-or-there-one>.

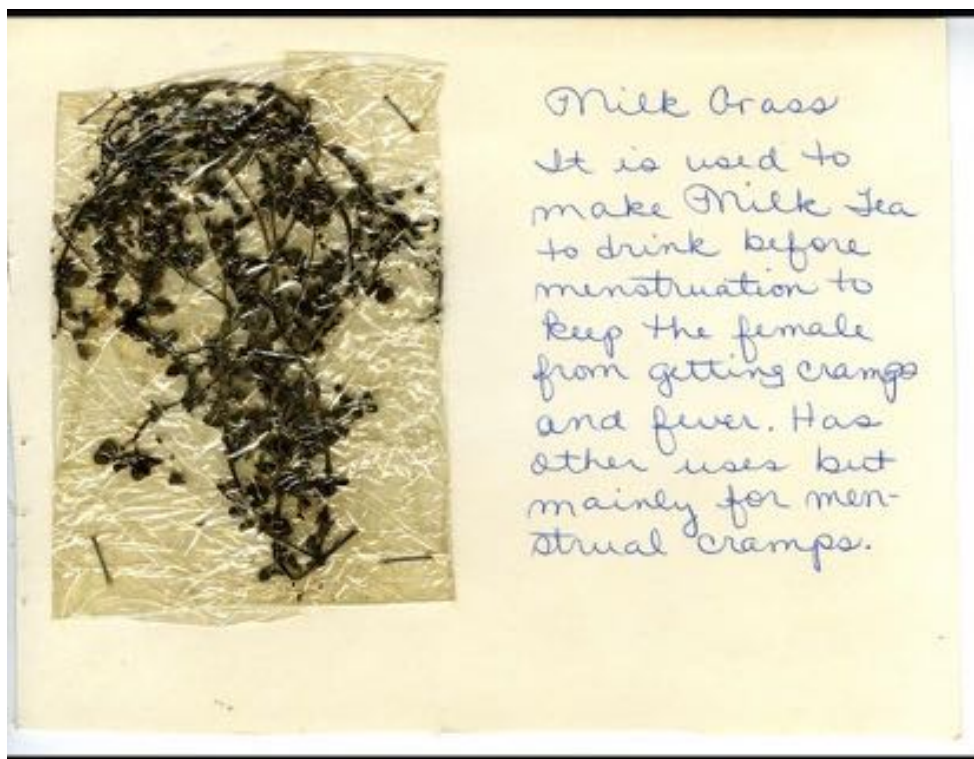


Figure 15: This is an example of a plant called, “milk grass,” used to treat the symptoms of Pre-Menstrual Syndrome. Landry, Alida. “Samples of Plants Used for Medicinal Purposes by Traiteurs.” RI1.197. D-R12-197. Center for Louisiana Studies.

St. Martinville is located in modern South Louisiana. This area was already settled by the Atákapas, indigenous people made up of six tribes.⁴⁵ This area is prone to flooding and hurricanes, but contains excellent grounds for farming, which was an important part of the Acadian way of life.⁴⁶ Today, St. Martinville is spotted with historically significant Acadian

⁴⁵“St. Martinville– On the former hunting ground of the Atákapas,” <https://acadie.cheminsdelafrancophonie.org/en/st-martinville-on-the-former-hunting-ground-of-the-atakapas/#:~:text=Beausoleil%2C%20an%20Acadian%20Hero&text=According%20to%20historian%20Charles%20%C3%89tienne,Nova%20Scotia.>

⁴⁶Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme*, 1.

landmarks and hosts The Acadian Memorial, which is dedicated to the remembrance of the Acadian people and the preservation of Acadian history and traditions.⁴⁷



Figure 16: This is an image highlighting the location of St. Martin Parish in Louisiana. Retrieved from: “Planning and Zoning,” St. Martin Parish Government. Accessed November 16, 2022. <https://www.stmartinparish.net/planning-and-zoning/>.

Because of the close network of communication that they were able to maintain, word spread to other Acadians throughout North America. Acadians began to seek out their relatives and friends in Louisiana.⁴⁸ By this process, many of the Acadians that had been victims of the

⁴⁷“Acadian Memorial,” Acadian Memorial, Accessed September 6, 2022, <https://www.acadianmemorial.org/>.

⁴⁸Carl A. Brasseaux, "A New Acadia: The Acadian Migrations to South Louisiana, 1764-1803," *Acadiensis (Fredericton)* 15, no. 1 (1985): 123.

Grand Derangement found themselves in Louisiana. They joined the Acadians already there and adopted the new way of life that these trailblazers had created.⁴⁹ Thus, the Cajuns of Louisiana were born. Christopher Hodson wrote about an Acadian woman who recalled several large groups of Acadians finding their way to Louisiana,

From her vantage point, Marie-Josèphe's description of the *grand dérangement* rang true. Most of the Acadians from Grand Pré and its hinterland had indeed been shipped to ports between Massachusetts and Virginia in 1755, with Georgia and South Carolina taking the partisan inhabitants of Chignecto. The 'scattering' accelerated thereafter, with thousands of exiles sailing east to Europe and south to the Caribbean in multiple waves...she recalled well that bands of Acadians set foot in the then Spanish colony 'at different periods.'⁵⁰

While Louisiana was a major area of reunification for the Acadians, and the focus of this project, it is important to note that a large group of Acadians also ended up in Quebec, Canada and were able to maintain their traditional culture there as well. Hodson claims, "The same might be said of the several thousand who, by the mid 1770s, had ended up in Canada. At the invitation of James Murray, the postwar governor of the new British province of Québec, hundreds of Acadians migrated from New England to the Saint Lawrence Valley in 1766 and 1767, linking up with former compatriots who had escaped from Nova Scotia and Ile Saint-Jean during the dark days of the 1750s."⁵¹ Just like the Acadians of Louisiana, the Acadians who settled in Canada maintained their traditional roots while adapting to the location that they found themselves in. For this reason, the Acadians of Canada and the Cajuns of Louisiana are similar and share similar traits, but they are also distinctly different from one another. Though they both

⁴⁹Brasseaux, "A New Acadia: The Acadian Migrations to South Louisiana, 1764-1803," 123.

⁵⁰Christopher Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora an Eighteenth-Century History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 197-198.

⁵¹Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora an Eighteenth-Century History*, 198.

share the traumatic roots of the *grand derangement*, their stories of overcoming the disbursement and rebuilding their familial and cultural roots are different.⁵²

Life in Louisiana was good for the Acadians under French rule. They lived, worked, and farmed in relative solitude.⁵³ They were able to live their lives as they pleased. Cajun culture thrived and grew. Cajun culture emerged as a similar, but distinctly different culture to the one of Acadie in Nova Scotia. The practice of the *traiteur* was integral to the culture of the Cajuns.⁵⁴ As they tended to isolate themselves from other people who lived in Louisiana, the need for medical practitioners that would be willing and able to treat them arose. Whereas some Louisianians would have preferred to go into larger towns in order to see doctors to treat their illnesses and injuries, Cajuns preferred to remain in their own communities.⁵⁵ When they did become injured or sick, they sought out the help of the *traiteurs* within their communities, “Historically, community members have called on *traiteurs* to heal various ailments including sunstroke, bleeding, shingles, swelling, arthritis, warts, pneumonia, snakebites and earaches.”⁵⁶ This changed with the Louisiana Purchase on April 30, 1803.⁵⁷ At this time, the colony of Louisiana

⁵²Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora an Eighteenth-Century History*, 198.

⁵³Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xix.

⁵⁴Gravot, “‘all I Depend on is the Lord’: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement,” 182.

⁵⁵Alton E. Broussard, “Traiteurs Continue Gris-Gris,” *Advertiser*, Lafayette, LA. June 17, 1973, 56.

⁵⁶Gravot, “‘all I Depend on is the Lord’: Healing Words and Silence in Cajun Traitement,” 182.

⁵⁷“A convention between the United States of America and the French Republic concerning debts owed by France to citizens of the United States,” The National Archives, Washington D.C., doi: 306464, April 30, 1803, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/306464>.

(which extended from New Orleans all the way to Canada) was sold from the French to the United States of America.⁵⁸ The once French colony became a colony of the United States until March 20, 1812, when Louisiana was granted official statehood.⁵⁹ At this time, Louisiana became an American state and its citizens became American citizens, which did not necessarily sit well for the French Acadians who had been, historically, proud of their French heritage. Though some people chose to continue seeing their *traiteurs*, many Acadians, especially of younger generations, chose to see more modern doctors.⁶⁰

Following the Civil War, America entered into the time period known as Reconstruction. During this period, Americans sought to reunify a country destroyed by turmoil. Part of this reconstruction included a desire for all citizens to become “Americans” again.⁶¹ This included the Cajuns. Cajuns, however, did not desire to Americanize themselves.⁶² They had lived their own lives for decades following their arrival in Louisiana. They had also lived in relative isolation, free from the influence and control of the colonial powers that had held the Louisiana colony. In this wave of Americanization, however, no one was exempt. Julie Hebert says, “Southerners, in general, thought little of the Cajuns and their culture because their values

⁵⁸“A convention between the United States of America and the French Republic concerning debts owed by France to citizens of the United States,” <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/306464>.

⁵⁹“H.R. 88, An act for the admission of the State of Louisiana into the Union, March 20, 1812,” The National Archives, Washington D.C., March 20, 1812, <https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/louisiana-statehood/louisiana-bill.html>.

⁶⁰Shelly Adler, “Integrating Personal Health Belief Systems: Patient-Practitioner Communication,” *In Healing Logics: Culture and Medicine in Modern Health Belief Systems*, ed. Erika Brady, Logan: Utah State University Press, 2001, 115-28.

⁶¹Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xi.

⁶²Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xix.

negated the closely held American values of material wealth, the Protestant work ethic, and progress. Cajuns, themselves, thought little of American standards including those regarding education, and Cajun folk wisdom summed up the Cajun opinion on education: ‘My son is rascal enough without an education.’ Cajuns reveled in their illiteracy, and this attitude concerning education served as another reason why the Americans looked down upon the ‘poor,’ ‘stupid’ Cajuns of south Louisiana.”⁶³ The desire of Cajuns, as a generalized whole, was to remain in isolated farming communities. These communities were largely independent and self-sufficient and tended to rely on the generational “passing down” of jobs. For example, one family may have had a yam or sugarcane farm and would have passed that farm down from generation to generation.⁶⁴

Following the Reconstruction period in America, Cajun culture continued to be assaulted when America saw a resurgence of patriotism. This occurred during World War 1, World War 2, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and the Korean War. Bernard comments on how this Americanization impacted Cajun culture,

A major consequence of this indoctrination was a sharp decline in the number of Cajun children who spoke French as their first language: the figure nose-dived from 63 percent for those born during the five-year period before America’s entry into World War II to 38 percent for those born during the five-year period after the conflict. As one observer noted during wartime, “The children are, these days, more and more inclined to lay aside the French of their forefathers for the English that is taught them in the schools. All their enthusiasm is for modern things and manners.”⁶⁵

⁶³Julie Elizabeth Hebert, “Identifying Cajun Identity: Cajun Assimilation and the Revitalization of Cajun Culture,” *The Student Historical Journal*, Loyola University New Orleans, 1999-2000, 2.

⁶⁴ Hebert, “Identifying Cajun Identity: Cajun Assimilation and the Revitalization of Cajun Culture,” 2.

⁶⁵Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, 18.

These moments of strife prompted Americans to double down on the idea of what it meant to be “American,” which did not include the traditional way of life of Acadians.⁶⁶ In a time of technological revolution and innovation, there was no room for traditional faith and herbalism.⁶⁷ So, Cajun culture and the practices of the *traiteurs* were swept away by the waves of nationalism and modernity.

⁶⁶Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, 18.

⁶⁷Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, 18.

Chapter Six: The Assimilation

How has Cajun culture been attacked in Louisiana? What kinds of attempts at assimilation have been made? What have been the impacts of that assimilation? How has assimilation impacted the *traiteurs* specifically?

Before discussing how Cajuns have been specifically impacted, it is important to define what assimilation is. Assimilation is the process by which individuals or groups adopt the culture and values of a dominant society and whereby one culture is absorbed into another culture and eliminated. It is a complex and often controversial phenomenon that has been a part of human history for thousands of years. The process of assimilation involves a number of different factors, including economic, political, and cultural pressures, as well as individual and group choices.¹

Sociologist Ariela Schachter defines assimilation,

Building on earlier work by Park and Burgess (1921), Gordon (1964), and others, Alba and Nee (2003:10) offer a now-standard definition of assimilation as, ‘the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences.’ Based on this definition, quantitative research generally operationalizes assimilation as the effect of race and generation status on life outcomes, with native-born white citizens treated as the standard-setting reference group.²

We see this process occur anytime a colonizing agent comes into contact with an indigenous population and is intolerant of the culture of that indigenous population. Throughout

¹Maurice Crul, “A New Angle to the Assimilation Debate in the US,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no. 13 (2018): 2258-2264.

²Ariela Schachter, “From ‘Different’ to ‘Similar’: An Experimental Approach to Understanding Assimilation,” *American Sociological Review* 81, no. 5 (2016): 981-1013. The author of this sources is working with information from these sources: Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1921); Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Richard Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

history, assimilation has been a part of the human experience, as individuals and groups have sought to adapt to new cultures and societies in order to survive and thrive.³ In many cases, assimilation has been a conscious choice, as people have sought to improve their economic and social prospects by adopting the norms and values of the dominant culture.⁴ In other cases, however, assimilation has been forced upon individuals and groups, as they have been subjected to political, economic, or cultural pressure to conform to the dominant society.⁵ In America we specifically see this with Native American tribes.⁶ A description of what assimilation actually is does not appear easily. However, there are a few common definitions that are agreeable, “Those who believe in the idea of classic assimilation think there’s a point when all immigrants can become ‘fully’ assimilated and accepted, and they consider complete assimilation a good thing.”⁷ Basically, assimilation is fitting into “mainstream” society, either by force, choice, or

³Crul, “A New Angle to the Assimilation Debate in the US,” 2258.

⁴Crul, “A New Angle to the Assimilation Debate in the US,” 2258.

⁵Crul, “A New Angle to the Assimilation Debate in the US,” 2258.

⁶For further reading about the assimilation of Native American tribes in the United States, see: Keith R. Burich, *The Thomas Indian School and the "Irredeemable" Children of New York*, First ed. (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2016); Arnold Krupat, *Boarding School Voices: Carlisle Indian School Students Speak*, (Lincoln: Nebraska, 2021); Theda Perdue, *"Mixed Blood" Indians: Racial Construction in the Early South*, Vol. no. 45.;no. 45;. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003, 2010); Katherine Ellinghaus, *Blood Will Tell: Native Americans and Assimilation Policy*, (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, and the American Philosophical Society, 2017); Andrae M. Marak and Laura Tuennerman, *At the Border of Empires: The Tohono O'odham, Gender, and Assimilation, 1880--1934*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013, 2016); David H. DeJong, *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs: The United States Indian Service and the Making of Federal Indian Policy, 1824 to 2017*, (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2020); Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); Fritz, Henry Eugene Fritz, *The Movement for Indian Assimilation, 1860-1890*, Reprint 2016, ed. (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017; 1963).

⁷Emilly Prado, *Examining Assimilation*, (New York, NY: Enslow Publishing, 2019), 6.

happenstance. However, assimilation is a complicated sociological continuum that can be difficult to trace and understand, “Segmented assimilation was another popular model in the 1990s that saw assimilation as a process with many factors and a more complicated path than simply ‘fully assimilated’ or not.”⁸ For the purpose of this project, the focus of the definition of assimilation will be Louisiana specifically, “In the United States and beyond, cultural assimilation is often used as a way to talk about how immigrants and refugees adjust to the culture of their new country. Another way to think about cultural assimilation is that it’s a way that some people judge how well immigrants fit in with the majority of the population and culture.”⁹ The process of assimilation typically destroys the indigenous culture in an effort to make the indigenous people more like the colonial people.¹⁰ Though assimilation was initially thought to be the ultimate goal of an immigrant or smaller ethnic group, historians and sociologists have come to understand that it is harmful and should not be the penultimate desire of these groups or the majorities into which they are being assimilated.¹¹ In fact, most modern scholars agree that assimilation is a negative process that has contributed to untold damage to minority groups, “assimilation has been bowdlerized such that we conceive of it as a benign step toward social peace and harmony, when in fact it generates new social problems and strains.”¹²

⁸Prado, *Examining Assimilation*, 7.

⁹Prado, *Examining Assimilation*, 6.

¹⁰Nathan Glazer, "Is Assimilation Dead?" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 530, no. 1 (1993): 123.

¹¹Glazer, "Is Assimilation Dead?" 123.

¹²Peter Skerry, “Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?” *The Brookings Institution*, March 1, 2000, Accessed December 27, 2002, .
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-we-really-want-immigrants-to-assimilate/>.

Speaking of assimilation and its place in academia and policy, famed Harvard sociologist Nathan Glazer asserts, “Indeed, in recent years it has been taken for granted that assimilation, as an expectation of how different ethnic and racial groups would respond to their common presence in one society or as an ideal regarding how the society should evolve or as the expected result of a sober social scientific analysis of the ultimate consequence of the meeting of people and races, is to be rejected.”¹³ Glazer claimed that assimilation was a negative action and that its consequences were immeasurable.¹⁴ Assimilation leaves unnecessary and untold scars on the ethnic groups that are impacted by it. This can happen by demonizing a culture, outlawing religion, restricting the use of a native language, restricting gatherings of that indigenous population, etc., “By better understanding racist laws that have targeted ethnic, religious, racial, and sexual minorities and the stigma marginalized communities face today, we can examine the relationship people have with themselves, their families, and outside of their homes and consider the influences of a centuries-long belief of cultural assimilation.”¹⁵ The purpose of assimilation is to reduce the differences between an indigenous population and colonial population in order to facilitate greater cooperation between the two, “Even today, cultural assimilation affects our everyday lives. Although the influences of cultural assimilation may not always be obvious, the United States continues to push for once ideal ‘American identity.’”¹⁶ However, this process is typically done without the permission or willingness of the indigenous population.¹⁷

¹³Glazer, "Is Assimilation Dead?" 123.

¹⁴Glazer, "Is Assimilation Dead?" 123.

¹⁵Prado, *Examining Assimilation*, 7.

¹⁶Prado, *Examining Assimilation*, 7.

¹⁷For more information on theory and practice of assimilation, see these sources: Richard D. Alba, *The Great Demographic Illusion: Majority, Minority, and the Expanding American*

One of the key factors that has driven the process of assimilation in the United States throughout history is economic pressure.¹⁸ In many cases, individuals and groups have sought to improve their economic prospects by adopting the cultural norms and values of the dominant society.¹⁹ This has often involved learning new skills, adopting new ways of life, and integrating into the dominant culture.²⁰ For example, many immigrants to the United States in the 19th and early 20th centuries sought to assimilate in order to take advantage of the economic opportunities available in the country.²¹

Assimilation, the process by which immigrant groups adopt the culture and customs of the dominant society, has been a complex and often contentious issue in the United States

Mainstream, (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020); Tova Cooper, *The Autobiography of Citizenship: Assimilation and Resistance in U.S. Education*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2015; 2014); Catherine Sue Ramirez, *Assimilation: An Alternative History*, 1st ed. Vol. 58, (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2020); Sin Yi Cheung, "Lessons from an "Old" Second Generation in the US: Fresh Evidence on Assimilation Theories," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 13 (2019): 2285-2290; Maurice Crul, "A New Angle to the Assimilation Debate in the US," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no. 13 (2018): 2258-2264; Ruud Koopmans, Bram Lancee, and Merlin Schaeffer, *Social Cohesion and Immigration in Europe and North America: Mechanisms, Conditions, and Causality*, Vol. 137;137, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015).

¹⁸Ran Abramitzky, "What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants," *Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research*, April 2017, <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

¹⁹Abramitzky, "What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants," <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

²⁰Abramitzky, "What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants," <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

²¹Abramitzky, "What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants," <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

throughout its history.²² From the earliest colonial settlements to the present day, assimilation has been both a source of pride and a cause of tension, as different groups have struggled to find a place within American society.²³ The history of assimilation in the United States can be traced back to the earliest colonial settlements, where European colonizers sought to create new societies in the New World.²⁴ These early settlers brought with them their own customs and traditions, and often sought to impose these on the indigenous populations they encountered.²⁵ Over time, however, many of these settlers also began to adopt aspects of the cultures of the Native Americans and other groups they encountered, leading to a gradual blending of different cultural traditions.²⁶

The idea of assimilation as a deliberate policy began to take shape in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as the United States experienced a wave of immigration from Europe and

²²Abramitzky, “What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants,” <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

²³Abramitzky, “What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants,” <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

²⁴Abramitzky, “What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants,” <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

²⁵ “American Indians in Louisiana,” *The National Park Service*, December 3, 2021, Accessed October 8, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/jela/learn/historyculture/native-americans-in-louisiana.htm#:~:text=Today%2C%20there%20are%20four%20federally,by%20the%20state%20of%20Louisiana>.

²⁶ “American Indians in Louisiana,” <https://www.nps.gov/jela/learn/historyculture/native-americans-in-louisiana.htm#:~:text=Today%2C%20there%20are%20four%20federally,by%20the%20state%20of%20Louisiana>.

other parts of the world.²⁷ These new immigrants often faced hostility and discrimination from the existing American population, and many struggled to find their place in American society.²⁸

One response to this situation was the idea of assimilation, which held that immigrants should adopt American culture and values in order to become fully integrated into American society.²⁹ This idea was championed by many American leaders, including Theodore Roosevelt, who believed that assimilation was the key to preserving American identity and preventing the fragmentation of American society.³⁰ In fact, in a 1903 speech given by President Roosevelt, he said,

The mighty tide of immigration to our shore has brought in its train much of good and much of evil; and whether the good or evil shall predominate depends mainly on whether these newcomers do or do not throw themselves heartily into our national life, cease to be European and become Americans like the rest of us. More than a third of the people of the Northern states are of foreign birth or parentage. An immense number of them have become completely Americanized, and these stand on exactly the same plane as the descendants of any Puritan, Cavalier or Knickerbocker among us, and do their full and honourable share of the nation's work.³¹

Assimilation policies took many forms, including programs to teach English and American history to immigrant children, efforts to promote American-style dress and behavior,

²⁷Abramitzky, "What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants," <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

²⁸Skerry, "Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?" <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-we-really-want-immigrants-to-assimilate/>.

²⁹Prado, *Examining Assimilation*, 6.

³⁰Theodore Roosevelt, "Immigrants and Assimilation," 1903, Accessed April 23, 2023, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/USHistory/Building/docs/TR.htm>.

³¹Roosevelt, "Immigrants and Assimilation," <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/USHistory/Building/docs/TR.htm>.

and restrictions on the use of languages other than English in public life.³² These policies were often controversial, and many immigrants and their descendants resisted efforts to force them to give up their own cultural traditions and adopt American ones.³³ In the same speech delivered by Theodore Roosevelt, however, he denounces the immigrants who attempt to preserve their traditional way of life,

But where immigrants or the sons of immigrants do not heartily and in good faith throw in their lot with us, but cling to the speech, the customs, the ways of life, and the habits of thought of the old world which they have left, they thereby harm both themselves and us. If they remain alien elements, unassimilated, and with interests separate from ours, they are mere obstructions to the current of our national life, and, moreover, can get no good from it themselves. In fact, though we ourselves also suffer from their perversity, it is they who really suffer most. It is an immense benefit to the European immigrant to change him into an American citizen. To bear the name of American is to bear the most honorable of titles; and whoever does not so believe has no business to bear the name at all, and, if he comes from Europe, the sooner he goes back there the better.³⁴

One group that was particularly affected by assimilation policies were Native Americans, who had long been subject to efforts to assimilate them into American society.³⁵ Beginning in the late 19th century, Native American children were often sent to boarding schools where they were forced to abandon their own languages and cultural traditions in favor of American ones.³⁶ The students were also forced to endure extremely abusive conditions,

³²Skerry, "Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?"
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-we-really-want-immigrants-to-assimilate/>.

³³Skerry, "Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?"
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-we-really-want-immigrants-to-assimilate/>.

³⁴Roosevelt, "Immigrants and Assimilation,"
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/USHistory/Building/docs/TR.htm>.

³⁵ Jessica Keating, "The Assimilation, Removal, and Elimination of Native Americans," *University of Notre Dame McGrath Institute for Church Life*, Accessed April 11, 2023, https://mcgrath.nd.edu/assets/390540/expert_guide_on_the_assimilation_removal_and_elimination_of_native_americans.pdf. 4.

³⁶Keating, "The Assimilation, Removal, and Elimination of Native Americans," 7.

Boarding schools were overcrowded and rampant with disease, and students suffered physical or emotional abuse in addition to malnourishment. Dorothy Peche, recalled the utter disregard school officials showed for the unsanitary conditions of the school. For instance, she described officials forcing as many students as possible to wash at the same time in the school's only tub. She also recalled that the school had a jail in the basement where students who disobeyed school policies, such as speaking their Native language, were detained for long periods of time.³⁷

These policies had a devastating impact on Native American communities, and many scholars now view them as a form of cultural genocide, "It is difficult to say how many Native Americans died during the 19th century in the continental United States, but we do know that populations declined precipitously. Some estimates suggest there were anywhere between 5 million and 15 million Native people at the outset of the 19th century. By its close, there were little over 200,000. Most people died from disease, but many deaths were the result of more systematic efforts to solve the 'Indian problem.'"³⁸

The 20th century saw a gradual shift away from the idea of assimilation as a deliberate policy, as Americans began to embrace the idea of cultural diversity and pluralism.³⁹ This shift was in part a response to the growing recognition of the contributions of minority groups to American society, as well as to the influence of the Civil Rights movement and other social and political movements.⁴⁰

Today, the idea of assimilation remains a contentious issue in American society, with some arguing that it is necessary to maintain American identity and unity, while others see it as a

³⁷Keating, "The Assimilation, Removal, and Elimination of Native Americans," 8.

³⁸Keating, "The Assimilation, Removal, and Elimination of Native Americans," 13.

³⁹Darryl Baskin, "American Pluralism: Theory, Practice, and Ideology," *The Journal of Politics* 32, no. 1 (1970): 71–95, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2128865>. 72.

⁴⁰Baskin, "American Pluralism: Theory, Practice, and Ideology," 72.

form of cultural imperialism and oppression.⁴¹ Many scholars argue that a more nuanced approach is needed, one that recognizes the importance of cultural diversity and allows individuals and communities to define their own identities and cultural practices.⁴²

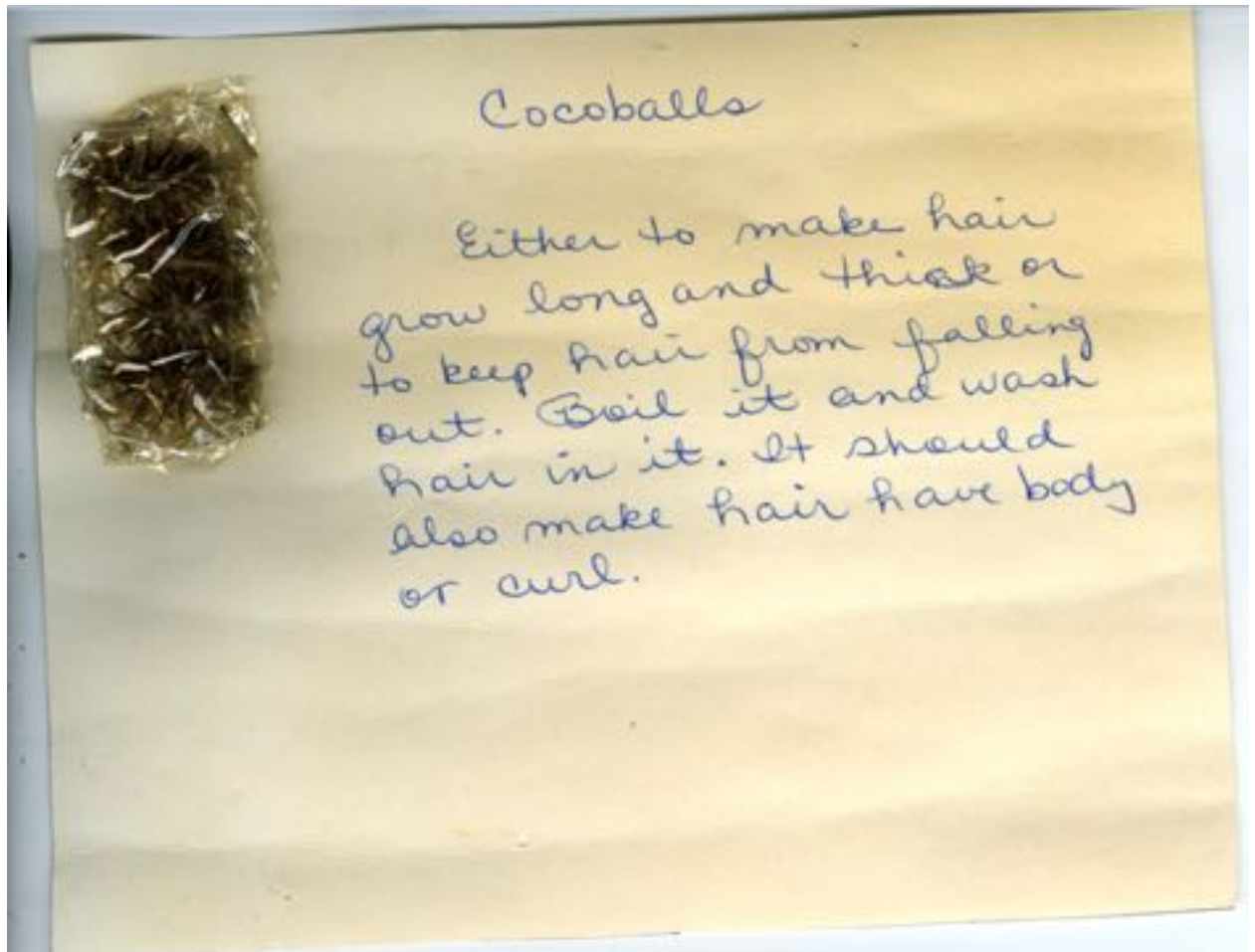


Figure 17: This is an example of Cocoballs, which are used by traiteurs to help hair growth. Landry, Alida. "Samples of Plants Used for Medicinal Purposes by Traiteurs." RI1.197. D-R12-197. Center for Louisiana Studies.

In addition to economic pressure, political and cultural factors have also played a role in the process of assimilation. For example, throughout history, governments have often used

⁴¹Skerry, "Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?" <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-we-really-want-immigrants-to-assimilate/>.

⁴²Baskin, "American Pluralism: Theory, Practice, and Ideology," 72.

policies and laws to encourage or coerce individuals and groups to assimilate into the dominant culture.⁴³ In some cases, this has involved suppressing minority cultures and languages, while in other cases, it has involved promoting the values and norms of the dominant society.⁴⁴ In the case of Native Americans in the United States, the assimilation was unwilling and forced and resulted in an annihilation of large parts of indigenous culture.⁴⁵ Assimilation faced by Cajuns in Louisiana is not in the same realm as the assimilation faced by Native Americans. One of the greatest tragedies in United States history has been the forced assimilation of Native Americans and the destruction of their homeland and culture. The Gullah people that reside in the southwest of the United States have also faced egregious assimilation attempts.⁴⁶ So, while the actual assimilation attempts faced by Cajuns were not quite as harsh, the process of assimilation is the

⁴³Abramitzky, "What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants," <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

⁴⁴Abramitzky, "What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants," <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

⁴⁵"American Indians in Louisiana," *The National Park Service*, December 3, 2021, Accessed October 8, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/jela/learn/historyculture/native-americans-in-louisiana.htm#:~:text=Today%2C%20there%20are%20four%20federally,by%20the%20state%20of%20Louisiana>.

⁴⁶The story of the Gullah people is similar to the Cajuns, which is why it is mentioned here. However, the Gullah people deserve their own in-depth research, which cannot be done in the context of this project. For more information regarding the Gullah people, see these sources: Melissa L. Cooper, *Making Gullah: A History of Sapelo Islanders, Race, and the American Imagination*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Wilbur Cross, *Gullah Culture in America*, (Winston-Salem, N.C: John F. Blair, Publisher, 2012); Sharon Y. Fuller, "Indigenous Ontologies: Gullah Geechee Traditions and Cultural Practices of Abundance," *Human Ecology : An Interdisciplinary Journal* 49, no. 2 (2021): 121-129; Ladan Ghahramani, Katelin McArdle, and Sana Fatorić, "Minority Community Resilience and Cultural Heritage Preservation: A Case Study of Gullah Geechee Community," *Sustainability* (Basel, Switzerland) 12, no. 6 (2020): 2266; Eric Crawford, "The Society for the Preservation of Spirituals Gullah Geechee Collection," *Delos* (College Park, Md.) 37, no. 2 (2022): 135.

same, nonetheless. The legacy and long-term implications of assimilation can be devastating on a culture. Further research into how we should define assimilation and consider its use is absolutely necessary to understand what will be lost as countries around the world continue to globalize.

When the Acadians arrived in Louisiana, they moved into small, isolated towns near one another, “Louisiana’s backwater Acadian settlements were, by certain measures, among the most cosmopolitan places in North America.”⁴⁷ This allowed them to create their own cities and towns where they were able to maintain their traditional cultures. Christopher Hodson said this of the Acadians, “They were also home to people who had, in the words of one historian, resisted the ‘insidious death of assimilation.’ In other words, the Acadians of Louisiana had retained their idiosyncratic culture while tending to the reunification of their families, refusing to adopt the beliefs, practices, or identities of the societies they encountered in the diaspora.”⁴⁸ Hodson made the claim that the isolation of the Acadians was justified, as they had fallen victim to mistreatment and violence at the hand of outsiders.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, their isolation made them the perfect targets of discrimination, character attacks, and assimilation attempts.⁵⁰

One of the most significant changes that was seen after the Louisiana Purchase was a shift in language from French to English. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 spelled doom for the traditionally French-esque Louisianians. Beginning in the early 1800s, Americans began to move into the newly acquired territory, bringing their Americanized and English ways of life with

⁴⁷Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora: An Eighteenth-Century History*, 198.

⁴⁸Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora: An Eighteenth-Century History*, 198.

⁴⁹Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora: An Eighteenth-Century History*, 202.

⁵⁰Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora: An Eighteenth-Century History*, 202.

them, “United States territorial Louisiana began to become Anglicized as books, newspapers, and magazines shifted from French to English. In 1812, the Louisiana State Constitution, written entirely in English, was adopted with no specific delineation of rights for Francophones, even though they represented the majority population in the state.”⁵¹ The growing number of English-speaking people who lived their lives as Americans instead of French colonialists meant that there was less room and tolerance for those who were “stuck” in the French past of the territory. Barry Jean Ancelet describes the opinion of a journalist from *Harper’s Weekly*, “In an article from *Harper’s Weekly* from 1866, A. R. Waud described the Acadians of Louisiana as ignorant and unambitious. He had little more than disdain for the Acadians.”⁵² The animosity and intolerance shown towards the French Cajuns only grew as the United States became more unified as time went along. Bernard states, “The Americanization of the Cajuns took place after decades of intense, scornful Anglo-Saxonism, the belief that Anglo-Saxon culture is superior and therefore should be imposed on other ethnic groups. Both the Cajuns and the Acadian exiles from whom they descended had been slandered as backward, ignorant, and un-American.”⁵³

Following the end of the Civil War, Cajun culture came into direct conflict with the burgeoning “American” culture.⁵⁴ Julie Hebert, a scholar of Acadian history maintains,

During the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction eras, the division between the Cajuns and other Louisianians increased. Several stereotypes which still accompany the idea of “a true Cajun” developed in these eras: lazy, ignorant, illiterate, and simple. Able to remain unassimilated for the most part, Cajuns continued to act in the ways they had before the war. Like all good Southerners, they still loved card games, parties, and

⁵¹Cope and Schafer, “Creole: A Contested, Polysemous Term,” 2658.

⁵²Barry Jean Ancelet, “Tradition and Change in Contemporary Cajun Culture,” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 24, no. 1 (2020): 87.

⁵³Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xvii.

⁵⁴Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xvii.

communal get togethers, but unlike the Americans, Cajuns continued to work at their own pace, a work ethic which stood in complete contrast to the American idea of progress.⁵⁵

Cajuns tended to remain in their own isolated communities. These communities focused primarily on farming and seafood production, often with multi-generational families dedicating themselves to one product. Ancelet describes the communities of the Cajuns, “The Louisiana Cajuns, heirs of this fierce sense of independence, have continued to depend on their own self-sufficient strategies for survival in their Nouvelle Acadie.”⁵⁶

These communities, however, were not exempt from the widely globalizing world around them. Bernard claims,

Although the developing Cajun people and their ancestors remained largely untouched by Americanization prior to World War II, they were not totally removed from the currents of national history. Major events like the American Revolution, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and World War I influenced the ethnic group. Of these, the Civil War had the greatest impact, for by destroying south Louisiana’s economy it lowered rival ethnic groups, such as the French, Spanish, and Germans, to the same impoverished social stratum inhabited by most Acadians. As a result, these ethnic groups began to intermarry with the Acadians in sizable numbers.⁵⁷

It was difficult to separate themselves from the world as an era of instant communication pressed down around them. The process of Americanization changed the lives of the Cajuns, “Americanization is what occurred—rapid, widespread Americanization, sparked by the onset of World War II and fueled by the convergence of several ensuing trends and events during the postwar period: the advent of mass communications, rampant consumerism, interstate highways,

⁵⁵Julie Elizabeth Hebert, “Identifying Cajun Identity: Cajun Assimilation and the Revitalization of Cajun Culture,” *The Student Historical Journal*, Loyola University New Orleans, 1999-2000, 1.

⁵⁶Ancelet, “Tradition and Change in Contemporary Cajun Culture,” 87.

⁵⁷Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xix-xx.

the jet age, educational improvements, even the rise of rock 'n' roll, to name only a few major factors. The twentieth-century notion of progress had come to south Louisiana.”⁵⁸ The introduction of new, more convenient and technologically advanced ways of life impacted the Cajuns greatly. Following the Civil War, the old-school lives of the Cajuns was no longer appreciated or tolerated in Louisiana or the United States as a whole,

These negative stereotypes persisted as the Acadians intermarried with other ethnic groups after the Civil War and evolved into Cajuns. In 1873, for example, a journalist described the Cajuns as “the least intelligent” of south Louisiana natives, while the author of an 1887 Harper’s article quoted a local as calling them a “no good” lot who “don’t know more’n a dead alligator.” One postbellum journalist referred to them as “good representatives of the white trash,” reviled even by local blacks as “Acadian n*ggers.”⁵⁹

Cajun people were aware of the way that they were viewed and younger generations did not wish to stand out in the negative manner that their older family members had.

Even though the Cajuns were viewed as “old school” by outsiders, the reality is that they were actually responsible for impressive technological advances that have greatly impacted the way of life in Louisiana. Ancelet quotes another writer, Albert Rhodes as claiming of the Cajuns, “They detest innovation, and the steam plough and the few-fangled sugar-houses are not in favor. To adopt them involved outlay, risk, much-thinking, and fretting. It is simpler to give them a wide berth, and digest well by day and sleep well at nights. This is Acadian philosophy.”⁶⁰ This claim made by someone outside of the Acadian/Cajun community is representative of the attitude held towards Cajuns in Louisiana. This attitude, however, according to Ancelet, was unfounded. He asserts, “These extraordinary portrayals run directly counter to the way that

⁵⁸Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xii.

⁵⁹Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xvii.

⁶⁰Ancelet, “Tradition and Change in Contemporary Cajun Culture,” 87.

Cajuns have been described by other observers with deeper knowledge of their culture. The Acadians and their descendants the Cajuns have been nothing if not innovative.”⁶¹ Ancelet holds that Cajuns have actually been responsible for a number of technological innovations including housing for the sub-tropical climate of Louisiana, boats, crawfish and animal traps, oil rig parts and processes, cooking utensils and methods, and much more.⁶²

Another important factor that has driven the process of assimilation is the desire of individuals and groups to fit in and be accepted by the dominant society. This desire has often been motivated by a number of factors, including the desire for social and economic mobility, the fear of discrimination and exclusion, and a desire for security and stability.⁶³ In many cases, individuals and groups sought to assimilate in order to escape from poverty, political instability, or cultural oppression.⁶⁴ As the United States grew closer as a single country, small ethnic groups, like the Cajuns, began to become more Americanized. Julie Hebert stated, “Cajun ethnic ties began to unravel as Cajun children and local Louisiana society placed greater emphasis on the English language, whereas before French represented an acceptable alternative to English on the bayous, swamps, and prairies of South Louisiana. The Cajun culture seemed to be losing some of its rural isolationism which it had valued above all things since landing in Louisiana, but the greatest blow to this isolationism came in 1880 when the Louisiana-Western Railroad

⁶¹Ancelet, "Tradition and Change in Contemporary Cajun Culture," 87.

⁶²Ancelet, "Tradition and Change in Contemporary Cajun Culture," 88.

⁶³Abramitzky, “What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants,”
<https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

⁶⁴Abramitzky, “What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants,”
<https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

finished laying its tracks connecting New Orleans to Houston.”⁶⁵ The development of a more interconnected infrastructure made connection easier for the Cajuns. As young people began to interact with the “outside world” more and more, they began to become less accustomed to the isolated lives that their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents had lived. They no longer wanted to live within these isolated communities and, instead, sought to become more Americanized and to join “mainstream” Louisiana culture. Shane Bernard, a Cajun himself, claims, “For beginning in 1941 the Cajuns underwent a transformation so dramatic as to fundamentally alter their ethnic identity. In doing so, they redefined the meaning of the word Cajun. They were still Cajuns, but not the same kind: they were Americanized Cajuns.”⁶⁶ This is because the beginning of WWII created a new push for Americanization, “It was in this Anglo-Saxonist context that the rapid, widespread Americanization of the Cajun people began with U.S. involvement in World War II.”⁶⁷

In addition, previous (and infamous) Louisiana Governor Huey P. Long introduced a new policy of distributing educational materials to rural Cajun schools. Though this served a valuable purpose of increasing the education of young Louisianians, it also had the unintended effect of assimilation:

Although Long made an early and effective pitch to the descendants of Evangeline’s people, noting their needs had long been too ignored by the state’s politicians, what Huey promised (and to a degree at least delivered)—free textbooks, improved schools, roads, hospitals, public services—were needed as much by Cajuns as by other disadvantaged rural inhabitants. But their delivery constituted yet another threat to Cajun ethnic survival. Even if Long failed to realize the effects of his actions, his efforts to give to the Cajun people what they “desperately” needed served as an assimilation technique. Those

⁶⁵Hebert, “Identifying Cajun Identity: Cajun Assimilation and the Revitalization of Cajun Culture,” 2.

⁶⁶Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xii.

⁶⁷Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xvii-xviii.

influenced by these improvements most likely did not realize the extent to which these improvements functioned as infiltrators of their isolationism and their ethnic culture.⁶⁸

Significant damage to Cajun culture also came as a result of the Louisiana Constitution of 1912, in which legislators banned the practice of instructing Louisiana students in both English and French. Julie Hebert claims,

Despite all the necessary changes brought by the Long administration, one piece of legislation issued a substantial blow to the Cajun ethnic identity: the Louisiana Constitution of 1921. Through this document, the legislature denied public schools the right to instruct children in both French and English. Most Cajun rural folk and children were monolingual and able to speak very few words of English. Louisiana legislators through this law in essence denied Cajun children the right to education in their primary language forcing them either to learn English or remain illiterate. In effect this law further emphasized the language barrier between the Cajuns and the 'others,' and most Anglo-Louisianians obtained another reason to believe in the inferiority of the French Speaking population.⁶⁹

This movement was part of a larger push in the United States to create a "common" education for all American students so that they could learn the "proper" American values,

From 1894 to 1915, the goals of Progressive reformers influenced education in the United States, since education was seen as a way to teach children the proper values needed to be a productive American citizen. It was thought that society's ills could in part be alleviated by education for all classes that would fit children for their proper role in society. Public education was also seen as a way to "Americanize" the vast number of immigrant children flooding into cities. Compulsory attendance laws were enacted to ensure that children from all classes received a basic, "common," education in elementary grades.⁷⁰

By denying the ability of Cajun schools to teach young children to speak Cajun French, the Louisiana government created a rift between the younger and older generations of Cajuns.

⁶⁸Hebert, "Identifying Cajun Identity: Cajun Assimilation and the Revitalization of Cajun Culture," 3.

⁶⁹Hebert, "Identifying Cajun Identity: Cajun Assimilation and the Revitalization of Cajun Culture," 3.

⁷⁰"America at School," *Library of Congress*, Accessed March 20, 2023, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/america-at-work-and-leisure-1894-to-1915/articles-and-essays/america-at-school/>.

Many Cajun stories, practices, and traditions had been historically passed down via word of mouth.⁷¹ When the younger generations were no longer taught to speak the language of their elders, it became more and more difficult to pass down these traditions. Additionally, the passage of this law created the idea that the French language was “inferior” and that it was gauche and tacky to speak French, because it outlawed the usage of French in educational settings.⁷² As with all assimilation, the idea that the offending culture is less desirable can have just as significant an impact as the actual legislation. Younger Cajuns did not want to speak or learn Cajun French because they wanted to fit in with their peers. So, they did not seek out knowledge of the language. This meant that the younger people could not or did not want to communicate with the elders in their community.⁷³ This shift in thought and tradition trickled down to later and later generations of Cajuns, until Cajun French became uncommon within families that had been speaking the dialect for decades. The shift, though dramatic, was imperceptible to some within the community. Shane Bernard expresses this sentiment about communication with his own grandparents, “How was it, I wondered, that after more than three hundred years in the New World, our family had suddenly lost the ability to speak French? What had occurred between my generation and that of my grandparents to bring about this significant change?”⁷⁴ Though Bernard did not intentionally contribute to the loss of culture of his people, a simple choice of his parents, to not teach him Cajun French, had a dramatic impact on the connection between his

⁷¹Barry Jean Ancelet, *Cajun and Creole Folktales*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 2.

⁷²Schachter, “From ‘Different’ to ‘Similar’: An Experimental Approach to Understanding Assimilation,” 981.

⁷³Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xii.

⁷⁴Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xii

family and his heritage. Because of that decision, likely fueled by the push to assimilate into Louisiana society, Bernard was unable to communicate with his grandparents in Cajun French and did not teach his own children the language. Only as an adult that became aware of the long-term impacts of a loss of culture, did Bernard recognize the significance of this seemingly inconsequential thing.⁷⁵ This story is, unfortunately, very common amongst the people of Louisiana today that have Cajun heritage. Parents choose not to teach their children Cajun French or do not have access to schools that provide lessons in French, and the children do not learn it.⁷⁶ The pattern has continued until the unique dialect of French that Cajuns speak is in danger of being lost forever. A loss of unique language is one of the hallmarks of assimilation and is a symptom of a larger loss of culture that has occurred in South Louisiana. The way that language has been lost, with the choice to not pass it down, is the same pattern that has happened to the practice of the *traiteurs*. Because they did not want to burden anyone with knowledge of the old traditions or because they did not have anyone to pass that knowledge down to, *traiteurs* have not passed down their knowledge and practices. When they die, this knowledge is lost forever. While assimilation has often been motivated by a variety of positive and negative factors, it has also had a number of significant consequences. On the one hand, assimilation has often led to greater social and economic opportunities for individuals and groups, as well as

⁷⁵Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, 13.

⁷⁶Ancelet, "Tradition and Change in Contemporary Cajun Culture," 86.

increased social and cultural integration.⁷⁷ On the other hand, assimilation has also led to the loss of cultural heritage, language, and identity, as well as increased social and economic inequality.⁷⁸

This pattern is also present in the Mexican American communities in southern Texas.⁷⁹ As Mexican immigrants come into Texas, they attempt or are forced to adopt the English language for educational purposes. This leads to children in these communities being unable to speak Spanish with their families. With the loss of the language also comes a loss of the culture of Mexico. Peter Skerry describes the impact of adopting the English language and losing one's native tongue,

Further evidence that English acquisition does not necessarily lead to the positive outcomes we expect, emerges from recent ethnographic research on the school performance of Latino adolescents. Several such studies report that although newly arrived students experience significant adjustment problems attributable to their rural backgrounds, inadequate schooling, and poor English-language skills, their typically positive attitudes contribute to relative academic success. Yet among Latino students born in the United States, the opposite is often the case. Despite fluency in English and familiarity with American schools, many such students are prone to adopt an adversarial stance toward school and a cynical anti-achievement ethic.⁸⁰

Just as Mexican Americans faced the repercussions of adopting English and forgoing their native tongue, so too did Cajuns. The lack of French education resulted in a significant reduction in the number of Cajun children that were able to speak French and, therefore, communicate with the elders in their communities who spoke French exclusively. Specifically,

⁷⁷Abramitzky, "What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants," <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

⁷⁸Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xi.

⁷⁹Skerry, "Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?" <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-we-really-want-immigrants-to-assimilate/>.

⁸⁰Skerry, "Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?" <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-we-really-want-immigrants-to-assimilate/>.

most young people did not want to sit down and learn the ways of the *traiteurs*. This is because, like Mexican American children, their culture was ridiculed and demonized.⁸¹ In an effort to prevent themselves from being ostracized, these children attempt to make themselves as “American” as possible, oftentimes with the encouragement of their parents and grandparents.⁸² With no one to pass on their knowledge to, many older *traiteurs* likely passed away without imparting their knowledge of the traditional faith healing practices of their ancestors. Thus, the practice of the *traiteurs* dwindled to very sparse numbers.

In addition to the discrimination faced by Cajuns based on the language that they spoke, they also faced discrimination based on the religion that they practiced. Acadians practiced Catholicism, just like their French motherland. Cajuns, therefore, continued that practice in Louisiana. Within the isolated communities of the early 1700s, they were able to freely practice Catholicism without repercussion.⁸³ However, with the birth of the Protestant focused United States of America, Cajuns began to draw ire for continuing their practice of Catholicism.⁸⁴ The ideals of Protestantism, which are ingrained in the very fabric of law and society in America, became the epitome of what an American should be. Skerry describes the manner in which Protestantism relates to assimilation, “Second, they were expected to live by what is commonly

⁸¹Skerry, “Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?”
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-we-really-want-immigrants-to-assimilate/>.

⁸²Skerry, “Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?”
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-we-really-want-immigrants-to-assimilate/>.

⁸³Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xii.

⁸⁴Richard J. Callahan, *New Territories, New Perspectives: The Religious Impact of the Louisiana Purchase*, (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 1.

referred to as the Protestant work ethic (to be self-reliant, hardworking, and morally upright).”⁸⁵ Any deviation from these ideals, either real or perceived, would have resulted in disdain from those Louisianians who already saw Cajuns as less than. In fact, anti-Catholic sentiment was prevalent across much of the American South in the early 1900s. Andrew Moore asserts, “In 1941, journalist-cum-southern critic W.J. Cash argued that despite the South’s fast-rising urbanization and industrialization, white southerners evinced a cultural and ideological continuity between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One element of the network of ideas that white southerners shared was a social fear that bred anti-Catholicism.”⁸⁶ This kind of anti-Catholicism heavily impacted the Cajuns and *traiteurs*, who were practicing Catholics.⁸⁷ Moore says, “From the perspective of an early twentieth-century resurgence of ‘a bitterly narrow spirit of Protestantism,’ according to Cash, Catholics were ‘the intolerable Alien, the bearer of Jesuit plots to rob them of their religion by force.’ Cash described the first few decades of the twentieth century, but even in the years after World War II that type of anti-Catholicism that approached religious paranoia persisted and brought Catholics attention disproportionate to their numbers in the South.”⁸⁸

However, as the country expanded and grew more diverse, Americans and Louisianians became more tolerant of other religions, “Some aspects of culture are physical or material, like

⁸⁵Skerry, “Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?”
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-we-really-want-immigrants-to-assimilate/>.

⁸⁶Andrew S. Moore, *The South’s Tolerable Alien Roman Catholics in Alabama and Georgia, 1945-1970*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 11.

⁸⁷Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, xi.

⁸⁸Moore, *The South’s Tolerable Alien Roman Catholics in Alabama and Georgia, 1945-1970*, 11.

architecture, clothing, art, technology. And cars. But much of what cultural assimilation focuses on are nonmaterial ideas like social habits, beliefs, and values. While the United States Constitution and early American society strongly believe in Protestant Christianity as the only suitable religion, the country has become more religiously diverse over time.”⁸⁹ Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, the American South, including Louisiana, began to accept religions other than Protestantism more readily.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, this acceptance came as a result of commonalities between white southern Protestants and white southern Catholics who all agreed that the maintenance of racial segregation was more important than religious differences.⁹¹ Moore claims, “The civil rights movement changed the South and the Catholic Church. It linked Catholics to southern culture in a way not previously experienced, even as that culture was undergoing changes from which it would not recover. The black freedom struggle separated southern religion from southern culture and freed southern Protestants to seek common ground with Catholics.”⁹²

Traiteurs came into conflict with the Western doctors that were now more readily available to the Cajuns who had previously been isolated from them. Some of the older *traiteurs* remember the shift in ideology that contributed to the decrease in the amount of people practicing the tradition. Ray Brassieur, a retired anthropologist specializing in Cajuns said,

⁸⁹Prado, *Examining Assimilation*, 45.

⁹⁰Moore, *The South's Tolerable Alien Roman Catholics in Alabama and Georgia, 1945-1970*, 161.

⁹¹Moore, *The South's Tolerable Alien Roman Catholics in Alabama and Georgia, 1945-1970*, 161.

⁹²Moore, *The South's Tolerable Alien Roman Catholics in Alabama and Georgia, 1945-1970*, 161.

A century or two ago, people knew their neighbors and who offered what services in a community. With the rise of Western medicine practices and antibiotics, home remedies were seen as suspicious and even dangerous. That, combined with the stigmatization of the Louisiana French language during the early 20th century, resulted in the discouragement of *traitement* practices. Nearly all groups of people in Louisiana have historically practiced some form of folk healing. “There was a great deal of sharing,” Brassieur said. “There’s Native Americans from different tribes, Cajuns, Creoles, Black people, White people, Italians — they all have some elements that are exactly the same. But as it went on, other forces made it more risky to share. If it got out that you’re doing this kind of thing, maybe the local physician would look down on you, maybe talk bad about you. Or maybe people would say, ‘Oh, this is a witch.’”⁹³

In fact, so serious was the stigmatization of the use of *traiteur* practices that some people went to criminal trials because of distrust of their healing “powers.” Research into the digital archives of the Louisiana Digital Library revealed a court transcript from the trial of a “Father Brown.”⁹⁴ The trial transcript states, “After Mrs. Annie Buhler, white, took the witness stand in the first city criminal court Thursday against Rev. Joseph Brown, negro ‘divine healer,’ showing Assistant District Attorney Landfried how the ‘Father’ had passed his hands over her body in ‘blessing’ her.”⁹⁵ The acts of Reverend Brown were very similar to the healing practices described by other *traiteurs*. While it is unclear if Reverend Brown was a Cajun *traiteur* or not, the trial against him does show that the early 20th century was a time period of distaste for the traditional folk practices that had been commonplace in Louisiana for decades. In the end,

⁹³Megan Wyatt, “Exploring the Practice of Cajun Traiteurs—Faith Healers,” *The Associated Press*, Lafayette, LA. August 7, 2022, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/louisiana/articles/2022-08-07/exploring-the-practice-of-cajun-traiteurs-faith-healers>.

⁹⁴“Trial of ‘Father’ Brown, faith healer, 1914,” New Orleans, Louisiana, State Library of Louisiana, July 16, 1914, <https://louisianadigitallibrary.org/islandora/object/state-lwp%3A5459>.

⁹⁵“Trial of ‘Father’ Brown, faith healer, 1914,” <https://louisianadigitallibrary.org/islandora/object/state-lwp%3A5459>.

“‘Father’ Brown was found guilty and fined \$50 and sentenced to 60 days in prison.”⁹⁶ This kind of treatment of those that had been revered only a decade before is symptomatic of a larger shift in belief and in trust of traditional healers.⁹⁷

So, in combination with the systemic assimilation that occurred as a result of legislation passed by the government of the State of Louisiana, Cajuns and *traiteurs* also faced a cultural assimilation. This cultural assimilation was brought on by the globalization and Americanization of Louisiana, and formerly isolated Cajun communities specifically. Cajuns were expected to adopt the mentality of their American neighbors and to see themselves as Americans, first and foremost, “...they were expected to take pride in their American identity and believe in America’s liberal democratic and egalitarian principles.”⁹⁸

As a result of the assimilation of the Cajuns, many Cajun people neglected to pass down their traditions. They chose to “fit in” within their communities rather than continue the practices of their ancestors, now deemed “outdated” and “primitive.” The number of practicing *traiteurs* decreased significantly.⁹⁹

⁹⁶“Trial of ‘Father’ Brown, faith healer, 1914,”
<https://louisianadigitallibrary.org/islandora/object/state-lwp%3A5459>.

⁹⁷This court case is also an example of the harsh treatment of African Americans in Louisiana and the United States of America. The author would like to make clear the point that a white person accused of the same “crime” would have likely faced a much less harsh punishment if they had been found guilty at all. The use of this particular court case is an attempt to show a larger pattern of distrust for folk healing. This assertion is supported by this source: David Cole, *No Equal Justice: Race and Class in the American Criminal Justice System*, (New York: New Press, 1999); and “Shadow Report to the United Nations on Racial Disparities in Sentencing in the United States,” *The Sentencing Project*, July 14, 2022.

⁹⁸Skerry, “Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?”
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-we-really-want-immigrants-to-assimilate/>.

⁹⁹The author makes these claims based on the interviews conducted with practicing *traiteurs* and those familiar with the practice. There is no database or accounting system that can track the number of *traiteurs* practicing in Louisiana. In fact, some Cajuns utilizing *traiteur*

The *traiteur* tradition survived only because of the isolation of some of the rural dwelling Cajuns. Julie Hebert claims, “The majority of the Cajun country population remained alienated from these new surroundings. Many, in fact, chose to leave the city and return to the country and their simple agrarian existence. Rural Cajun folk became the preservers of Cajun culture, while the urban Cajuns adjusted to city life and the American way of living. Once again, a vital area of Acadian land came under siege, and the Cajuns, true to their Acadian roots, proved their ability to adapt and to maintain their ethnic dissimilitude. Urbanization failed to break the Cajun ethnic bond among the rural community in the last decades of the nineteenth century.”¹⁰⁰ As the population in Louisiana grew and people began moving into these communities, the social isolation that had allowed Cajuns to easily maintain their distinct culture, dwindled. As a result, young Cajuns began adopting the language, mores, habits, and other cultural indicators of the encroaching people. Thus, the traditional culture of the Cajuns became less and less distinct.

Modern *traiteurs* are few and far between. An interview with a *traiteur* for the Associated Press claims, “Mary Perrin, a Lafayette *traiteuse*, treats about two people per month. ‘A long time ago, people would have a line waiting outside their door,’ Perrin said. ‘It’s changed quite a bit in the last 75 years.’ Perrin, 75, uses medicinal plants in her work and also maintains a healer’s garden at Lafayette’s living folklife museum, Vermilionville. Perrin personally knows of

remedies and practices may not even consider themselves to be fully *traiteurs*. Thus, quantitative data regarding the number of *traiteurs* that are actively practicing cannot be used to “prove” this claim. Qualitative and subjective data gathered from those within the community are the basis for this claim.

¹⁰⁰Hebert, “Identifying Cajun Identity: Cajun Assimilation and the Revitalization of Cajun Culture,” 3.

10 faith healers in Acadiana but estimates there may be as many as 100. She knows of none who are younger than 60.”¹⁰¹

A note must be made that the same process of assimilation has been used against other ethnic groups within Louisiana, specifically against the Creoles.¹⁰² A side effect of assimilation is the combination of groups categorized as “other.” This combination can create a lack of distinction between various social and ethnic groups that are very distinct. In the case of Louisiana specifically, Cajuns and Creoles have been lumped together, which detracts from their cultural differences and creates animosity between the two groups, who would like to be viewed as distinct from one another. This plays out in various ways in Louisiana,

The seemingly nonchalant use of the “Cajun” label and the increasing “Cajunification” of South Louisiana understandably distressed groups that did not claim Acadian ancestry. Included in these non-Cajun groups were the black population and the Creoles of Color. Dormon (1996, 173) captures the degree of the distress by citing one respondent who stated, “I can’t be Cajun. I’m **black**” (emphasis original). An additional example can be seen in the protests against the use of the name “Ragin’ Cajuns” for the University of Southwestern Louisiana (now, University of Louisiana, Lafayette) whose black-dominated athletic teams were supposed to reflect Cajun pride.¹⁰³

This lack of distinction between Cajuns and Creoles and the ire that it causes is one reason that this project has focused specifically on Cajuns and tirelessly endeavored not to confuse or mix the two groups. Creole people have their own culture that deserves the same kind of niche research and investigation that Cajun culture deserves. To recklessly combine the two groups

¹⁰¹Wyatt, “Exploring the Practice of Cajun Traiteurs–Faith Healers,” <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/louisiana/articles/2022-08-07/exploring-the-practice-of-cajun-traiteurs-faith-healers>.

¹⁰²Nicholas R. Spitzer, *"Monde Créole": The Cultural World of French Louisiana Creoles and the Creolization of World Cultures*, Vol. 116, (Boston, Mass: American Folklore Society, 2003), https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/creole_art_creole_state.html.

¹⁰³Cope and Schafer, "Creole: A Contested, Polysemous Term," 2655.

negates the distinct culture and historical differences between the two, which contributes to the cultural erasure of both. Luckily, just as Cajuns have endeavored to preserve their culture, Creoles have done the same,

In response to the Cajunification of the entire region, from the 1970s on, numerous organizations were established to promote and preserve the Creole heritage. Examples of these include the Louisiana Creole Heritage Center, St. Augustine's Historical Society, and Cammie G. Henry Research Center (all in Natchitoches, Louisiana), C.R.E.O.L.O. Inc. (Lafayette, Louisiana), Creole Heritage Education Research Society (Slidell, Louisiana), The International French Creole Culture Society (San José, CA), The Associates for the Preservation of Creole Cultural Heritage (Los Angeles, CA), and others. The vibrancy of the Creole culture ranges from individual assertions of pride to the wearing of T-shirts and jewelry that express Creole identity. In addition, there are unique Creole flags, pins, prayers, poetry, literature, folktales, and a long-standing musical tradition.¹⁰⁴

Thus, the people of Louisiana, who are as varied and storied as the state in which they live, continue to advocate for themselves, their history, and their heritage.

In recent years, the process of assimilation has become a subject of growing concern and debate.¹⁰⁵ On one hand, assimilation can be seen as a positive force that can bring people together and promote social and cultural integration, while it can also be seen as a threat to minority cultures and identities.¹⁰⁶ This debate is particularly relevant in a globalized world, where the process of assimilation affects individuals and groups around the world, as well as raises important questions about the relationship between culture, identity, and social integration. Assimilation is an important topic and one that has drawn the interest of modern scholars. Researcher Geoffrey Plank said this,

¹⁰⁴Cope and Schafer, "Creole: A Contested, Polysemous Term." 2655.

¹⁰⁵Schachter, "From 'Different' to 'Similar': An Experimental Approach to Understanding Assimilation," 981.

¹⁰⁶Schachter, "From 'Different' to 'Similar': An Experimental Approach to Understanding Assimilation," 981.

In recent years, many scholars analyzing the process of imperial expansion in eighteenth-century North America have examined the intricate web of relations between native peoples and colonizers in places where the interests of rival empires overlapped. Historians studying the Great Lakes region, the Ohio Valley, Louisiana, and the Spanish borderlands have studied the ways representative of different cultural groups in “borderland” regions struggled to coexist in environments where none of them had a monopoly on power.¹⁰⁷

Plank’s comment is exactly the reason for this project. Assimilation is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has been a part of human history for thousands of years.¹⁰⁸ Driven by a variety of economic, political, and cultural factors, as well as individual and group choices, assimilation has had a significant impact on individuals and groups throughout history. While it has often brought people together and led to greater social and economic opportunities, it has also led to the loss of cultural heritage, language, and identity, as well as increased social and economic inequality. As the world becomes more interconnected, the process of assimilation will continue to be a subject of great importance and one deserved of more thorough examination. Though the loss of the *traiteur* tradition is a small topic in comparison to larger cultural annihilation, the study of the loss of this practice is one that sheds light on the negative consequences of cultural assimilation. Peter Skerry also notes that assimilation is fraught with negative results, “Whether we’re talking about Italians yesterday or Hispanics today, such group identities in part signal the efforts of immigrants and their offspring to secure their place in America. Such efforts have in our history almost always been contentious. It is difficult to imagine that they could be otherwise.”¹⁰⁹ It can be difficult to understand how assimilation

¹⁰⁷Plank, *An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign Against the Peoples of Acadia*, 5.

¹⁰⁸Prado, *Examining Assimilation*, 5.

¹⁰⁹Skerry, “Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?”
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-we-really-want-immigrants-to-assimilate/>.

impacts groups of people but attempting to understand the consequences allows scholars to see the potential effects of assimilation today. Plank summarized,

Native people, French, Dutch, Russian, and Spanish colonist, Mexicans and other conquered groups in the lands that became Canada and the United States have generated scholarly interest for generations, but recently world examining the process of Anglo-American conquest have proliferated, grown in sophistication, and heightened our awareness of the complexity of territorial expansion. Much of the best of this work, whether dealing with native peoples or with the conquered people of European descent, has centered on themes of cultural survival and adaptation, reminding us that North America has always been a place of many nations who have related to each other in ever-changing ways. Earlier generations of historians referred casually to “vanishing peoples,” but most current historical work suggests that nations seldom disappear; instead they change and survive.¹¹⁰

Plank makes an excellent point that is representative of the research that has been conducted about the Cajuns of Louisiana. Though their culture has been attacked and wounded, they have found a way to survive. When a culture like the Cajuns’ is attacked but not destroyed, it can always come back, maybe stronger than it was before.

In conclusion, the history of assimilation in the United States is a complex and multifaceted one, reflecting the struggles of different groups to find their place within American society. While assimilation policies have often been controversial and even harmful, they have also played a role in shaping American identity and culture. Today, as the United States continues to grapple with issues of diversity and inclusion, it is important to continue to examine and understand the history of assimilation and its ongoing impact on American society.

The place of the *traiteur* within the larger context of assimilation is also complex. However, the story of the *traiteur* is not over, and is ever changing in modern Louisiana.

¹¹⁰Plank, *An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign Against the Peoples of Acadia*, 5.

Chapter Seven: The Here and Now

Where are the *traiteurs* now? Are they still practicing? What are they practicing? How have they been influenced by the modern era? How are Cajun and *traiteur* culture different because of the assimilation attempts that they faced?

Traiteurs have become less prevalent in Cajun culture since the process of assimilation began. Alton Broussard reported on the state of practicing *traiteurs* in 1976, “These *traiteurs*, if, indeed, they are *traiteurs*, were once prevalent but are now relatively rare, perhaps because of a slow market and the fear of getting into difficulties with medical authorities and tax collectors. Apparently, peddlers of folk medicine are not included to report their transactions.”¹ Because of a focus on Western medicine and the lack of “advertising” of the services of *traiteurs*, the practice has been slowly dying off for decades. Younger generations of Cajuns either have not been made aware of the *traiteurs* or choose not to utilize them. As the practice has traditionally been handed down from one generation to the next, this means that the passing down of the practice has slowed dramatically.²

¹Alton E. Broussard, “*Traiteurs Continue Gris-Gris*,” *Advertiser*, Lafayette, LA, 17 June 1973, 53.

²Broussard, “*Traiteurs Continue Gris-Gris*,” 53.

UNIQUE TO CAJUN COUNTRY

Traiteurs Continue Gris-Gris

E. BROUSSARD does one find unique practitioners called "traiteurs," which is passed on to relatives or friends whom they consider worthy and who "believe." Once considered a dying tribe, the practitioners of the art of healing in the Lafayette area, at least, continue the gris-gris

patient. As one traiteur, Minus Romero, put it, "If you believe in it, it works."

Minus is a healer with limited powers, a type of traiteur who is in the majority. Some few will treat almost any or all ailments, but most believe they have acquired special powers only for certain ailments.

Stroke Treated

Interviewed in his modest rural home on Highway 92 near Youngville, Minus was affable and willing to talk about his "powers."

"Do you think you have special spiritual power? I asked him.

"I guess so," he answered hesitantly. "I think if you believe in it — it comes. I believe in treatments. It helps you. About three out of four times it goes work," he said in a thick, Cajun accent.

Minus learned his techniques from an 89-year-old widow in whose home he occasionally worked. Apparently she was impressed by Romero and when he expressed a desire to learn to treat, she showed him how she treated two ailments. She died before Minus' lessons proceeded beyond that point.

As in most treatments, the methods are not difficult but are only successful if one knows the "special words." For instance, to treat "resapoe" (erysipelas), Minus explained:

"You make the sign of the cross first and you treat it so many times. When you finish it so many times, like 15 times, that's it. It don't change — always 15 times. Then you make the sign of the cross back."

Once Is Enough

Sometimes additional treatments are necessary, the traiteur explained, but usually one treatment is enough to stop

treat people. In his room he prays for relief for one person or several persons. Sometimes the patient is not present.

"Sometimes I pray alone," he related. "A person may be 100 miles away, but my prayers will help him."

Ulcer Is Treated

A typical case was a patient suffering from a bleeding ulcer, who was hospitalized in New Orleans. Friends and relatives of the patient asked Thibodeaux to help him. The traiteur said he recited "The Lord's Prayer" several times and said a number of "Hail Mary's." The ulcer stopped bleeding almost immediately, he said.

Among the ailments and diseases for which he has prayed, Thibodeaux listed sunstroke, shingles and cancer. Pressed for a report on the condition of the cancer patient, he said she lives in Lafayette and although her illness was classified as terminal a long time ago, "She's still there."

As far as he knows, the retired carpenter says all patients for whom he has prayed have been cured or helped.

Unlike some traiteurs, Thibodeaux advises all his patients to get medical help, as he does himself.

Does he seek help for himself? Yes, and he needs help for five serious conditions: diabetes, gout, lumbago, an injured disc, and two ruptures.

"I've prayed for myself for 30 years," he informed, and anticipating a question, he added, "I was supposed to be a vegetable beginning shortly after I got out of (military) service. I'm still here. I asked God to help me. (Today my blood sugar is normal and I don't take any medication for my diabetes.)"



PRACTITIONER — Lloyd "Red" Broussard of Catahoula has so many that he had to limit his practice, about three hours daily to his office. Among the objects used and seen on his desk are candles,

playing cards, a Bible, a crucifix and other religious objects, and a piece of string with nine knots. He keeps case histories of his clients in pigeon holes. (Photo by Allen E. Broussard)

Figure 18: This is a scan of a 1973 article discussing traiteurs and their continued presence in Louisiana. Broussard, Alton E. "Traiteurs Continue Gris-Gris." *Advertiser*. Lafayette, LA. June 17, 1973.

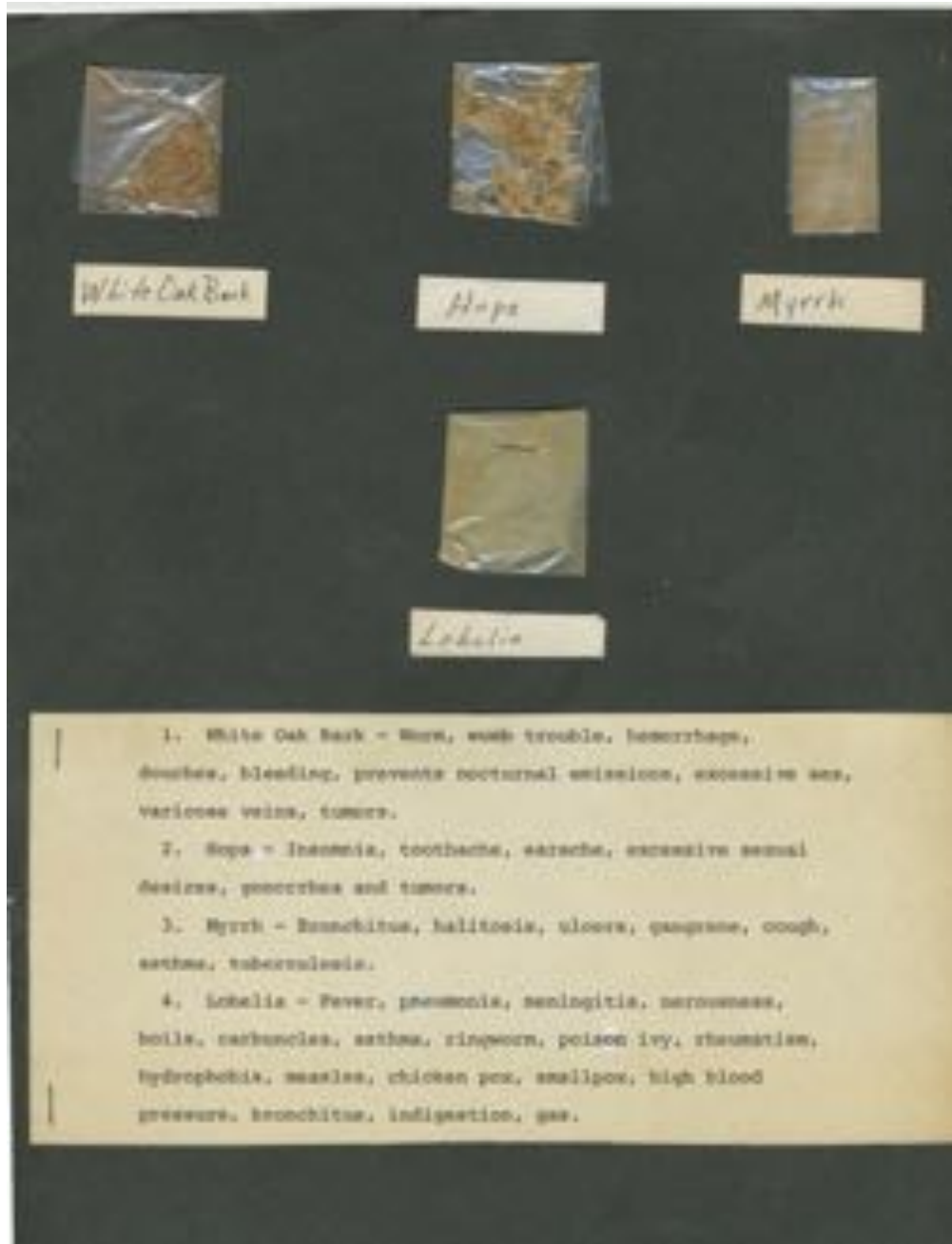


Figure 19: This is an example of various herbs used by traiteurs in Louisiana. These include white oak bark, hops, myrrh, and lobelia. Daniels, Alma. "Interviews of a Folk Healer." Elton, Louisiana. *The Center for Louisiana Studies*. December 10, 1973.

There is still hope for the revival of the practice, however. Frank Borello puts it this way, “Many of these people believe in their medicine very strongly. Others, such as a few I interviewed, don’t believe in the treatment or the cure, but do it just because their ancestors did it that way.”³ The tradition lives on. As Louisiana is a part of the Deep South, tradition holds a very important place in the daily lives of the people. So, some Cajuns continue to see the *traiteurs* for their minor injuries and illnesses. The need for this kind of alternative medicine and treatment seems to have staying power, regardless of popularity, “The tradition of *traiteurs* in South Louisiana is slowly dying out. This is evidenced by the small numbers still practicing and the fact that the younger generation has not taken an interest in learning the healing prayers. One possible factor contributing to this is that modern medicine is becoming more readily available to the poor. But as long as belief in God continues, and doctors are unable to cure all illnesses, there will be a need for alternatives.”⁴

Some *traiteurs* have even found a more “popular” way to keep with the times and remain relevant. These younger *traiteurs* have combined their traditional practices with Eastern wellness practices, like Reiki healing, yoga, meditation, etc.⁵ Reiki is another form of alternative medicine that is traditionally found in Japanese culture, “Reiki is a form of energy healing that works in tandem with other modalities of healing. The word Reiki is made up of two different Japanese

³Frank Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1972, 1.

⁴Ellen Daigle, “*Traiteurs and Their Power of Healing: The Story of Doris Bergeron*,” *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*, 1994, https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/lfbmbergeron.html.

⁵Wyatt, “Exploring the Practice of Cajun *Traiteurs*—Faith Healers,” <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/louisiana/articles/2022-08-07/exploring-the-practice-of-cajun-traiteurs-faith-healers>.

words: ‘rei’ = ‘universal’ and ‘ki’ = ‘energy’ or ‘life force’. Reiki represents the ‘life force energy’. The belief is that there is an unseen energy that flows through all living things. This energy is believed to be around us at all times and is believed to be what creates and sustains life.”⁶ Reiki is believed to work like this,

It’s a very simple and powerful healing technique that aids to balance out the energy systems of the body which often leads to improvements in health, better stress management, and an overall improved sense of wellbeing. The belief is that if someone’s life force energy is low or blocked, they are more likely to become ill or encounter imbalances. If someone’s life force energy is high and flowing smoothly through the body (i.e., through the meridians), then the person is more likely to be resilient to disease and be happier, healthier and more in balance. The goal of balancing the person’s energy is very similar to that of acupuncture or acupressure. The main difference is that, with Reiki, the Practitioner does not necessarily need to touch the body — Reiki can be done “hands-on” or “hands-off”. It can be done in person or via a distance healing session.⁷

As Reiki is can be done in tandem with the treatments traditionally performed by traiteurs, some traiteurs have opted to include these healing techniques in their work.⁸ The Sage Holistic and Wellness Center, a foremost institution in Reiki healing, even claims that receiving a Reiki treatment can, “Increase the effectiveness of traditional medical and psychiatric treatment,” which is exactly the kinds of treatments performed by traiteurs.⁹ “In this way,

⁶“Reiki Healing,” *Sage Holistic Health and Wellness Center*, Accessed March 20, 2023, https://sagewellnessctr.org/spirituality/?gclid=CjwKCAjwiOCgBhAgEiwAjv5whIZroQNp_5rInaDkN3ZQgwZf2GQrSoWb3tXWAOgOVUeb_uksU0xnZxoCspQQAvD_BwE.

⁷“Reiki Healing,” *Sage Holistic Health and Wellness Center*, https://sagewellnessctr.org/spirituality/?gclid=CjwKCAjwiOCgBhAgEiwAjv5whIZroQNp_5rInaDkN3ZQgwZf2GQrSoWb3tXWAOgOVUeb_uksU0xnZxoCspQQAvD_BwE.

⁸Wyatt, “Exploring the Practice of Cajun Traiteurs–Faith Healers,” <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/louisiana/articles/2022-08-07/exploring-the-practice-of-cajun-traiteurs-faith-healers>.

⁹“Reiki Healing,” *Sage Holistic Health and Wellness Center*, https://sagewellnessctr.org/spirituality/?gclid=CjwKCAjwiOCgBhAgEiwAjv5whIZroQNp_5rInaDkN3ZQgwZf2GQrSoWb3tXWAOgOVUeb_uksU0xnZxoCspQQAvD_BwE.

traiteurs are able to stay in business by catering to the new fads in wellness and healing.¹⁰ These other folk/alternative healing methods are used by various other cultures around the world and have become increasingly popular in the United States.¹¹

Some *traiteurs* have decided to pursue the practice themselves, “Becca Begnaud, one of the few Acadiana healers who has an online presence, first came across the concept of faith healing in 1989 while undergoing treatment for breast cancer...Begnaud, who previously trained in reiki and healing touch, said *traiteurs* have been known for curing warts, headaches, sunstrokes, sprained ankles, thrush, shingles and other ailments.”¹² In this way, some *traiteurs*, like Becca Begnaud are able to adapt the practice of *traiteurs* to be more relevant to modern times. By combining her practice of Eastern healing with traditional Cajun practices, and by maintaining an online presence, Begnaud is able to keep the *traiteur* tradition alive in some form.

Many of the older *traiteurs* are aware of their dwindling numbers and are worried about what will happen when they pass away. One interview with a *traiteur* in 2022 revealed this:

Mary Perrin, a Lafayette *traiteuse*, treats about two people per month. “A long time ago, people would have a line waiting outside their door,” Perrin said. “It’s changed quite a bit in the last 75 years.” Perrin, 75, uses medicinal plants in her work and also maintains a healer’s garden at Lafayette’s living folklife museum, Vermilionville. Perrin personally knows of 10 faith healers in Acadiana but estimates there may be as many as 100. She knows of none who are younger than 60. “Everybody wants to know if I think it’s got a future,” she said. “And it’s kind of like the Cajun French language. Is that going to live

¹⁰Scott Anderson, “A Practice of Faith: Modern *Traiteurs* Adapt Their Healing Art,” *The Daily Iberian*, October 18, 2022, https://www.thedailyiberian.com/acadiana-lifestyle/health_wellness/a-practice-of-faith-modern-traiteurs-adapt-their-healing-art/article_39a5493c-4350-11ed-8d00-17fe65ef8105.html.

¹¹Anderson, “A Practice of Faith: Modern *Traiteurs* Adapt Their Healing Art,” https://www.thedailyiberian.com/acadiana-lifestyle/health_wellness/a-practice-of-faith-modern-traiteurs-adapt-their-healing-art/article_39a5493c-4350-11ed-8d00-17fe65ef8105.html.

¹²Wyatt, “Exploring the Practice of Cajun *Traiteurs*—Faith Healers,” <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/louisiana/articles/2022-08-07/exploring-the-practice-of-cajun-traiteurs-faith-healers>.

on? No, it's not. It's only old people who speak it, and when they die, it's going to be gone."¹³

Evidence of the attempts to maintain the *traiteur* traditions and to educate the public about their long and storied history is present in the Vermilionville museum located just outside of Lafayette, Louisiana.¹⁴ The website for this exhibit at the museum describes its purpose, "In the Healer's Garden, visitors can see, smell, and touch a collection of plants used for medicinal purposes for 250 years or more by Cajun, Creole, African-American, and Native American people in this area of South Louisiana known as Acadiana."¹⁵ As an additional tribute to the French-speaking *traiteurs* and Cajuns of the region, the museum includes informational plaques written in both English and French, "French is still spoken in Louisiana's Cajun, Creole and Native American communities today, in addition to others. The Healer's Garden project reflects this influence by including plant signs in French, in addition to English (Common Name), and Latin (Scientific Name)."¹⁶ The garden includes many of the native fauna that is used frequently by the *traiteurs*,

Directly inside the front gate are generally familiar plants, including a variety of fragrant mints, such as, spearmint [*Menthe Verte*] *Mentha spicata* (used for fever, digestion and headaches); peppermint [*pimpermint*] *Diospyros virginiana* (toothache, cold, flu); and horse mint [*Baume*] *Monarda punctata* (cold, fever, colic). Meandering along we spot elderberry, [*Sureau*] *Sambucus canadensis*, (coughs, sore throat, respiratory problems);

¹³Wyatt, "Exploring the Practice of Cajun *Traiteurs*—Faith Healers," <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/louisiana/articles/2022-08-07/exploring-the-practice-of-cajun-traiteurs-faith-healers>.

¹⁴"Healer's Garden," *Vermilionville*, Accessed March 20, 2023, <https://bayouvermiliondistrict.org/gardens/>.

¹⁵"Healer's Garden," *Vermilionville*, Accessed March 20, 2023, <https://bayouvermiliondistrict.org/gardens/>.

¹⁶"Healer's Garden," *Vermilionville*, Accessed March 20, 2023, <https://bayouvermiliondistrict.org/gardens/>.

ground cherry [Poc Poc] *Physalis* sp. (burns, stomachache); and lemon balm [Citronelle] *Melissa officinalis* (fever, headaches, cold). Less common plants are lizard's tail [Herbe à Malo] *Saururus cernuus* (colic, cutting teeth); wormseed [Herbe à Vers] *Chenopodium ambrosioides* (you guessed it – worms); and groundsel bush [Manglier] *Baccharis halimifolia* (a horrible tasting tea reputed to cure almost everything).¹⁷



Figure 20: This is a picture of *Le Gardin du Traiteur* at the Vermilionville Living History Museum located in Lafayette, Louisiana. “Le Jardin de Traiteur.” *Lafayette Travel*. Accessed March 20, 2023. <https://www.lafayettetravel.com/blog/post/le-jardin-du-traiteur-the-healers-garden/>.

The fewer and fewer young people who are interested in taking on the traditional practices of their Cajun ancestors, the less likely that the healing tradition will continue.

¹⁷“Healer’s Garden,” *Vermilionville*, Accessed March 20, 2023, <https://bayouvermiliondistrict.org/gardens/>.

There are quite a few organizations dedicated to the preservation and remembrance of the Acadians and the trials and tribulations that they faced.¹⁸ One of these organizations is The Acadian Memorial. This organization houses a museum and document repository dedicated to the genealogy of the Acadian families who were expelled from Nova Scotia and who landed in Louisiana.¹⁹ They are also dedicated to preserving the culture of those Acadians and passing their stories down to younger generations.²⁰ It is through the work of The Acadian Memorial and organizations like it that Acadian traditions, including the *traiteur* tradition have been passed down from one generation to the next.²¹ By actively working against the assimilation attempts of the Louisiana government, these organizations have been able to preserve some aspects of Acadian culture.²²

The French language has been identified as a major source of pride and tradition amongst Cajuns in Louisiana,

Concerned with preserving the unique Francophone dialects, Louisiana lawyer/politician James Domengeaux and his supporters were able to establish the Council for the Development of French Louisiana (CODOFIL). While CODOFIL focused primarily on preserving/restoring spoken French to the Gulf Coast region, other organizations sought actively to revitalize and preserve the broader Cajun culture. To the extent that these efforts were successful, the popular use of the “Cajun” label in the Gulf Coast region soon assumed a ubiquitous connection to all things associated with French ancestry.²³

¹⁸“Acadian Memorial,” Acadian Memorial, Accessed September 6, 2022, <https://www.acadianmemorial.org/>.

¹⁹“Acadian Memorial,” <https://www.acadianmemorial.org/>.

²⁰“Acadian Memorial,” <https://www.acadianmemorial.org/>.

²¹“Acadian Memorial,” <https://www.acadianmemorial.org/>.

²²“Acadian Memorial,” <https://www.acadianmemorial.org/>.

²³Cope and Schafer, "Creole: A Contested, Polysemous Term," 2664-2655.

CODOFIL, or the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana, is a major proponent of the culture of the Cajuns.²⁴ While its primary focus is on maintaining and reviving the practice of teaching French to young children, it also works to maintain and revive Cajun culture as a whole.²⁵ CODOFIL was created to be a beacon for the French and Cajun culture of Louisiana,

The Council for the Development of French in Louisiana was created in 1968 by the Louisiana state legislature. According to Legislative Act No. 409, the Governor of Louisiana is “...authorized to establish the Council for the Development of Louisiana-French, said agency to consist of no more than fifty (50) members and including a chairman...” CODOFIL is furthermore empowered to “do any and all things necessary to accomplish the development, utilization, and preservation of the French language as found in Louisiana for the cultural, economic and touristic benefit of the state.” The name was subsequently changed to the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana.²⁶

This office of the Louisiana government seeks to undo what has been done previously. By holding special events, creating new initiatives, and funding various scholarships, CODOFIL is doing the work to try and spread awareness and respect for Cajun culture throughout Louisiana and the United States.²⁷

CODOFIL challenges those who speak Cajun French to pass on the tradition, and with it, Cajun culture. The website for CODOFIL includes this call to action,

Through this web site, CODOFIL and the Fondation Louisiane invite you to learn more about what we do and about why the defense and growth of the French language in Louisiana are important to us. We also invite you to join us in this fight, helping us defend Louisiana's francophone heritage and future. The history of French in Louisiana

²⁴“Office Of Cultural Development, CODOFIL - Agence Des Affaires Francophones: About / À Propos,” Baton Rouge, LA. Louisiana Office of Cultural Development, Accessed November 20, 2021.

²⁵“Office Of Cultural Development, CODOFIL - Agence Des Affaires Francophones: About / À Propos,” <https://www.crt.state.la.us/cultural-development/codofil/about/index>.

²⁶“Office Of Cultural Development, CODOFIL - Agence Des Affaires Francophones: About / À Propos,” <https://www.crt.state.la.us/cultural-development/codofil/about/index>.

²⁷ “Office Of Cultural Development, CODOFIL - Agence Des Affaires Francophones: About / À Propos,” <https://www.crt.state.la.us/cultural-development/codofil/about/index>.

has not allowed the vast majority of francophones the opportunity to learn to read and write French. Additionally, as everywhere in the francophone world, we speak several varieties of French each having its own particular flavor. For these reasons, we have tried to include as often as possible on this web site French ‘as it is found in Louisiana.’²⁸

The website relays its information in English, French, and Cajun French, which is an easy but significant way to attempt to normalize Cajun French. Louisiana “francophone heritage” is the same heritage of the *traiteurs*.²⁹ So, any attempt at maintaining and spreading Cajun French will undoubtedly result in the maintaining and spreading of the *traiteur* practice as well.

Places in Louisiana, like the Acadian Cultural Center in Lafayette, Louisiana, are also doing the work to preserve Cajun culture and educate the public about its existence. The Acadian Cultural Center boasts, “The Acadian Cultural Center in Lafayette tells stories of the origins, migration, settlement, and contemporary culture of the Acadians (Cajuns) and other area groups. Ranger programs, films, exhibits, and events share a variety of local traditions including music, story-telling, dance, and food, and explore the mysteries of the Atchafalaya Basin, Louisiana's wildest place.”³⁰ By educating the public, including young Cajuns that have not yet been exposed to the history of their ancestors, the Acadian Cultural Center is helping to increase knowledge about the Cajuns and the plights that they have faced.³¹ Those who are able to make a connection with the stories of the Cajuns are more likely to “spread the word” about them. In this way, the

²⁸“Office Of Cultural Development, CODOFIL - Agence Des Affaires Francophones: About / À Propos,” <https://www.crt.state.la.us/cultural-development/codofil/about/index>.

²⁹“Office Of Cultural Development, CODOFIL - Agence Des Affaires Francophones: About / À Propos,” <https://www.crt.state.la.us/cultural-development/codofil/about/index>.

³⁰“Acadian Cultural Center.” National Park Service. Accessed October 4, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/jela/planyourvisit/new-acadian-cultural-center.htm>.

³¹“Acadian Cultural Center,” <https://www.nps.gov/jela/planyourvisit/new-acadian-cultural-center.htm>.

history of the Cajuns and their traditional cultural practices can be preserved and passed down. These kinds of exhibits and historical sites also offer a warning: assimilation is real and can have devastating impacts on the culture of a particular group.

Museums like the one in Vermilionville tell the story of the Cajuns through real-life displays of their lives, “Perrin, 75, uses medicinal plants in her work and also maintains a healer’s garden at Lafayette’s living folklife museum, Vermilionville.”³²

Some people have hope that the practice of the *traiteurs* will not die out. Ray Brassier, a Cajun anthropologist has hope that the modern increase in interest surrounding alternative and Eastern medicines will also result in a resurgence in interest regarding *traiteurs* and their practices, “Brassieur, 68, said he believes there could be a resurgence in traitement because of growing interest in natural remedies and preserving Louisiana French traditions. ‘Most people will say it’s a dying thing,’ Brassieur said. ‘But I really have no evidence of that. I know it’s changing — the context of it is changing. That it’s going away? I’m really not sure of that.’”³³ In fact, the internet and the globalization of niche information could be having the opposite effect in 2022 that it did in the mid to late 1900s. As part of the research for this project, a recently posted article written for *The Associated Press* on August 7, 2022, offered new information about *traiteurs*. The author, Megan Wyatt reported about someone who had recently become interested in the practice of the *traiteurs* as a result of attempting to research alternative medicine, “New Orleans resident Chuck Blamphin recently learned about Acadiana faith healers, or *traiteurs*,

³²Wyatt, “Exploring the Practice of Cajun Traiteurs–Faith Healers,” <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/louisiana/articles/2022-08-07/exploring-the-practice-of-cajun-traiteurs-faith-healers>.

³³Wyatt, “Exploring the Practice of Cajun Traiteurs–Faith Healers,” <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/louisiana/articles/2022-08-07/exploring-the-practice-of-cajun-traiteurs-faith-healers>.

while searching for treatments for a friend with migraine headaches. As tends to happen online, one thing led to another, and he soon found himself reading about *traiteurs*. ‘I’m not surprised that we have something like this in Louisiana culture,’ said Blamphin, 75. “I’m not surprised at all.”³⁴ Because of the work of some *traiteurs* to remain relevant, specifically in the online realm, the old folk practices of the Cajuns, who have faced such strife and turmoil, have a fighting chance to stay alive. Even in an increasingly globalizing and unifying world, small differences and cultures still stand out. Leaders within the Cajun communities are striving and fighting to maintain their traditional cultural practices in whatever way that they are able to. With the help from some of the younger generation, they just may be able to preserve their traditional ways of life within Louisiana. If not in practice, then maybe in memory.

³⁴Wyatt, “Exploring the Practice of Cajun Traiteurs–Faith Healers,” <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/louisiana/articles/2022-08-07/exploring-the-practice-of-cajun-traiteurs-faith-healers>.

Conclusion

Cajuns, also known as Acadians, are a group of people with a rich and unique cultural heritage who have lived in Louisiana for over three centuries.¹ The history of Cajuns in Louisiana is a story of perseverance, adaptation, and cultural preservation in the face of adversity. The Cajun people originally hail from the Canadian Maritime provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island.² In the early 1700s, the British government, who then controlled the region, forced the Acadians to leave their ancestral homes due to their refusal to pledge allegiance to the British crown.³ This event, known as the Great Expulsion, saw the Acadian people dispersed across the eastern seaboard of North America and the Caribbean.⁴ In the 1760s and 1770s, a number of Acadians made their way to Louisiana, then a French colony, seeking refuge.⁵ The Louisiana territory was a safe haven for the Acadians, and they quickly established themselves as successful farmers and fishermen.⁶ However, with the transfer of Louisiana from French to Spanish control in 1763, the Acadians found themselves once again facing religious and cultural persecution.⁷

¹Carl A. Brasseaux, "Four Hundred Years of Acadian Life in North America," *Journal of Popular Culture* 23, no. 1, 1989, 3-22.

²John Mack Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from Their American Homeland*, First edition, (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2005), 4.

³Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme*, 4.

⁴Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme*, 4.

⁵Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme*, 4.

⁶Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme*, 4.

⁷"Louisiana as a Spanish Colony," <https://www.loc.gov/collections/louisiana-european-explorations-and-the-louisiana-purchase/articles-and-essays/louisiana-as-a-spanish-colony/>.

What can we learn about assimilation and the long-term implications that it has on cultures? What parts of culture can be lost as a result of assimilation? These questions are the purpose of this project. By learning of the history of the Acadians and the trials and tribulations that they suffered as a result of the discriminatory policy of assimilation, the long-term ramifications of assimilation become clear. Even decades after the end of policies attempting to assimilate Cajuns, the culture has not rebounded. It is still a struggle to find people who speak the Cajun language and know the Cajun traditions. Though the practice of the *traiteurs* is a relatively small aspect of larger Cajun culture, it is indicative of the effects of assimilation.

The story of the Acadians is one marked by tragedy and strife, but it is also a story of perseverance and new beginnings. By studying the story of the Cajuns, the reality of a rapidly globalizing and Americanizing nation becomes clear. The minority cultures that are inevitably bulldozed over the course of Americanization deserve to be studied and documented, because they suffer greatly in the wake of a country “moving forward.” Despite these challenges, the Acadians persevered and continued to preserve their cultural traditions and the Cajun French language. Over time, they developed a unique cultural identity that blended elements of their Acadian heritage with influences from the Native American and African American communities with whom they lived, worked, and peacefully interacted. This blend of cultural influences gave birth to the Cajun culture that exists today.⁸

Assimilation is a tricky topic to discuss because the long-term implications of becoming a part of a larger culture are hard to identify.⁹ Assimilation is particular to each group that faces it,

⁸Barry Jean Ancelet, "Tradition and Change in Contemporary Cajun Culture," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 24, no. 1 (2020): 86-103.

⁹Glazer, "Is Assimilation Dead?" 123.

so creating a “one-size-fits-all” narrative and plan is very difficult. In the case of the Acadians, progress in rural areas led to a decrease in cultural diversity.¹⁰ In the moment, it is difficult to identify the long-term effects of changes that could be considered improvements. Therefore, it is important to examine instances of cultural assimilation and annihilation in order to learn about how cultural identities may be affected by change. Dr. Nathan Glazer points out that the goal of a majority group should be to celebrate the differences that minority groups have.¹¹ He posits that academia and policy should reject the outdated ideas about the benefits of assimilation in favor of celebrating the diversity of many different groups, “Our ethnic and racial reality, as we are told, does not exhibit the effects of assimilation; our social science should not expect it; and as an ideal, it is somewhat disreputable, opposed to the reality of both individuals and group difference and to the claims that such differences should be recognized and celebrated.”¹² Glazer does posit, however, that assimilation is not readily occurring at an administrative level in modern times.

While some historians and sociologists, like Nathan Glazer, posit that assimilation is no longer occurring in the modern world, on account of the growing acceptance of cultural and racial diversity, others disagree.¹³ Peter Skerry counters Nathan Glazer by claiming, “While I certainly agree with Glazer that assimilation persists as a social reality, I strongly disagree that it is dead as a national ideal or policy objective. To be sure, assimilation is moribund among many of our elites, especially ethnic, racial, and minority group leaders. But as an animating force in

¹⁰Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, 5.

¹¹Glazer, “Is Assimilation Dead?” 123.

¹²Glazer, “Is Assimilation Dead?” 123.

¹³Skerry, “Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?”
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-we-really-want-immigrants-to-assimilate/>.

our communities and in our national life, assimilation is alive and well.”¹⁴ The differences between the ideas of Skerry and Glazer highlight the issue of conflicting ideas about what assimilation is and the nature of assimilation in general. Skerry ponders,

This confusion is highlighted by the contradictory assertions we hear about the assimilation of newcomers. Immigrant leaders and advocates claim that America is a racist society that will not allow “people of color” to become part of the mainstream of American life. Alternatively, it is argued that the assimilation of such individuals into that mainstream is an insidious process that robs them of their history and self-esteem. No one ever bothers to explain how both claims can be true. Echoing immigrant leaders, nativists and restrictionists also argue that today’s newcomers are not assimilating. Yet as I will argue here, there is abundant evidence that they are. How can so many Americans be mistaken about such a relatively easily verified and fundamental aspect of our national life?¹⁵

Assimilation is a nefarious act that can effectively annihilate a culture. If left unchecked, any ethnic group that falls victim to assimilation can face untold damage and loss of culture that cannot be regained. When a group faces assimilation, the food, stories, language, religion, culture, and general way of life can be erased. This project has endeavored to show just one facet of the effects of purposeful and non-purposeful assimilation.

In the decades following the Civil War, Louisiana experienced significant growth and change. The state was a major center of the oil industry and was also home to numerous other industries, including shipping, agriculture, and manufacturing.¹⁶ In the 20th century, Louisiana experienced significant social and cultural changes, including the civil rights movement, the

¹⁴Skerry, “Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?”
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-we-really-want-immigrants-to-assimilate/>.

¹⁵Skerry, “Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?”
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-we-really-want-immigrants-to-assimilate/>.

¹⁶Le Page du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana, Or of the Western Parts of Virginia and Carolina Containing a Description of the Countries That Lie on Both Sides of the River Mississippi*, Project Gutenberg, 2005, 3.

growth of the state's African American population, and the emergence of a vibrant Cajun culture.¹⁷

Assimilation was not reserved only for the Cajuns in the United States, as other ethnic groups, including Native Americans, the Gullah people, the people of Appalachia, Mexican immigrants, Muslims, etc.¹⁸ Especially amongst immigrant groups, assimilation has been at the forefront of any policy dealing with these groups.¹⁹ Ran Abramitzky details the history that the United States has regarding immigrants and the sentiment and policy regarding them, “Both today and in earlier times, many in this country have viewed immigrants as a threat to the integrity of the nation’s culture, fearing that foreigners among us somehow make America less American. Consider the following statement: Immigration ‘is bringing to the country people whom it is very difficult to assimilate and who do not promise well for the standard of civilization in the United States.’ The speaker was not Donald Trump on the campaign trail but Massachusetts Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge in 1891.”²⁰ The issue of non-Americans and what to do with them has long been an issue in the United States, and the Cajuns of Louisiana were caught in a much larger web of intolerance and Americanization.

¹⁷Le Page du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana, Or of the Western Parts of Virginia and Carolina Containing a Description of the Countries That Lie on Both Sides of the River Mississippi.*, 5.

¹⁸Skerry, “Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?”
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-we-really-want-immigrants-to-assimilate/>.

¹⁹Ran Abramitzky, “What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants,” *Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research*, April 2017,
<https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

²⁰Abramitzky, “What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants,”
<https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

Assimilation involves a minority group becoming integrated into the majority/mainstream culture of an area/state/country, etc. Emily Prado states, “As whites are the largest racial group in the United States, at two-thirds, they are often referred to as the ‘dominant’ or ‘majority’ population. People who identify as Asian, Black or African American, Native American or Alaska Native, Latinx or Hispanic, or multiracial, are considered ‘non-dominant’ or ‘minority’ populations.”²¹ The United States in particular is a hot spot for assimilation because of the diversity of the people who reside there. Additionally, shifts in the larger societal ideals can be just as impactful as purposeful assimilation. In the case of the Cajuns, Americanization caused an increase in disdain held towards groups of people who did not necessarily identify themselves as Americans. Assimilation can be difficult to quantify, “Measuring cultural assimilation is a challenge because data on cultural practices—things like food, dress, and accent—are not systematically collected.”²² However, long-term observation produces an easily noticeable shift in culture amongst those groups that are faced with the policy of assimilation. Abramitzky says, “The evidence is clear that assimilation is real and measurable, that over time immigrant populations come to resemble natives, and that new generations form distinct identities as Americans.”²³ Throughout its history, Louisiana has been shaped by a variety of cultural and political forces, including the influence of indigenous peoples, the legacy

²¹Prado, *Examining Assimilation*, 10.

²²Abramitzky, “What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants,” <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

²³Abramitzky, “What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants,” <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

of colonialism, the impact of slavery, and the growth of the United States.²⁴ Today, Louisiana is a vibrant and diverse state with a rich cultural heritage and a unique blend of influences from Africa, Europe, and Native America.²⁵

The Cajuns of Louisiana were not immune from this policy and its results. Assimilation is a hard wave to fight against, and many minority communities have been unable to do so. Over time, the Cajuns of Louisiana have become much more like Americans than their French ancestors,

...as time went by, they may have started to navigate the dominant culture with greater ease. Their children may have attended schools with children from other cultures and have spoken with American accents. What does this tell us about the assimilation process? We can imagine that after many years in the U.S., immigrants, like natives, become baseball fans, eat hamburgers, and watch fireworks on the Fourth of July. To be sure, their connections with their countries of origin are not obliterated. Instead, they may come to see themselves as hyphenated Americans, but Americans nonetheless.²⁶

Cajuns faced discrimination and assimilation due to various aspects of their culture. These included religion, language, traditional practices, etc.²⁷ As practicing Catholics, they faced a nation of Protestants who were initially unwilling to accept Catholicism, “First, for much of the twentieth century, religion rivaled race as a boundary separating groups in the South. Most of the South’s Catholics enjoyed the legal, social, and political advantages of white skin color. But

²⁴Le Page du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana, Or of the Western Parts of Virginia and Carolina Containing a Description of the Countries That Lie on Both Sides of the River Mississippi*, 5.

²⁵Le Page du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana, Or of the Western Parts of Virginia and Carolina Containing a Description of the Countries That Lie on Both Sides of the River Mississippi*, 5.

²⁶Abramitzky, “What History Tells Us about Assimilation of Immigrants,” <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/what-history-tells-us-about-assimilation-immigrants>.

²⁷Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People*, 5.

examples of anti-Catholicism—including violence and intimidation—from the early twentieth century until after World War II suggest that Catholics still flirted with the margins of the South’s racialized public sphere.”²⁸

In the 20th century, Cajun culture experienced a resurgence as people became more interested in preserving their cultural heritage.²⁹ This revival was sparked in part by the efforts of Cajun musicians who popularized the distinctive music of their culture and by the growth of Cajun cuisine, which has become renowned for its flavorful blend of French, Native American, and African American culinary traditions.³⁰ The Cajuns of Louisiana have attempted to maintain their connection to their past. Many organizations focused on the revitalization and preservation of Cajun culture have been formed in Louisiana and are working to fulfill their missions. The Cajun French Music Organization, the Acadian Cultural Society, the Association Nouvelle-Angleterre/Acadie, The Center for Acadian and Creole Folklore (which has contributed greatly to this project), the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana, the International Relations Association of Acadiana, the Madawaska Historical Society, and the Acadian Archives are only some of the organizations that are dedicated to the study of spread of Cajun culture.³¹

²⁸Andrew S. Moore, *The South’s Tolerable Alien Roman Catholics in Alabama and Georgia, 1945-1970*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 1-2.

²⁹Julie Elizabeth Hebert, “Identifying Cajun Identity: Cajun Assimilation and the Revitalization of Cajun Culture,” *The Student Historical Journal*, Loyola University New Orleans, 1999-2000.

³⁰Hebert, “Identifying Cajun Identity: Cajun Assimilation and the Revitalization of Cajun Culture,” http://people.loyno.edu/~history/journal/1999-2000/documents/IdentifyingCajunIdentity_CajunAssimilationandtheRevitalizationofCajunCulture.pdf.

³¹“Organizations and Associations,” Acadian.org. Accessed January 24, 2023, <https://www.acadian.org/about/organizations-and-associations/>.

These organizations are part of a larger shift in ideology in the United States that is more accepting of minority cultures.³²

The history of Louisiana is a complex and fascinating story that spans thousands of years and encompasses a wide range of cultural and political forces. From its early days as a French colony to its role as a key center of the American South, Louisiana has played a significant role in shaping the history of North America and the world. Today, Louisiana continues to be a vibrant and dynamic state that is defined by its rich cultural heritage and its unique blend of historical influences. The history of Cajuns in Louisiana is a story of resilience and perseverance in the face of adversity. Despite facing religious and cultural persecution, the Cajun people have managed to maintain their unique cultural heritage, language, and traditions for over three centuries. Today, Cajun culture is celebrated and appreciated for its rich history and vibrant contributions to the cultural landscape of Louisiana, “ Yet here in what (Henry) Longfellow calls ‘the Eden of Louisiana,’ along the picturesque, winding bayous, they found a new home.”³³ Regardless of any personal feelings about religion and folk medicine, one cannot deny the significant and important role of the *traiteur* in Cajun culture. Even through devastating assimilation, the practice of the *traiteurs* in Louisiana has not died, “In the twentieth century urbanization, improved transportation, and mandatory education transformed Cajun and Creole culture to the extent that many traditional practices have declined. However, despite the transformations, vestiges of a traditional medical system continue to function within the culture

³²N. Gharaei, K. Phalet, and F. Fleischmann, “Contingent National Belonging: The Perceived Fit and Acceptance of Culturally Different Peers Predicts Minority Adolescents' Own Belonging,” *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol 9, 2018, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6215841/>.

³³Saxon, Dreyer, and Tallant, *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, 269.

of French Louisiana.”³⁴ The impact that personal belief can have on the physical body of someone is undeniable. The place of the *traiteur* in the Cajun culture of Louisiana is one of great importance. The study of the *traiteur* and the struggles that an entire culture has faced to maintain the presence of the *traiteur* is important, because it shows that “progress” is not always what we may imagine. Though Cajun culture has faced much adversity, through legislation and societal pressure due to Americanization, Cajun culture and the practice of the *traiteurs* has persisted. Sometimes the way forward does not account for the importance of the past. Even through devastating assimilation, the practice of the *traiteurs* in Louisiana has not died, Indeed, Wade Theriot, says, “‘I’ve had people in wheelchairs get up and walk,’ he said softly. ‘But even if someone’s going to die, the treatments will ease the pain. Avec le Bon Dieu, nen n’est impossible. (With God, nothing is impossible.)’”³⁵

³⁴Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treater: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," 239.

³⁵Yochim, “A Cajun Traiteur: Faith Healing on the Bayou,” 85.



Figure 21: This is a rendering of a Cajun traiteur done by George Rodrigue. Anderson, Scott. "A Practice of Faith: Modern Traiteurs Adapt Their Healing Art." *The Daily Iberian*. October 18, 2022. https://www.thedailyiberian.com/acadiana-lifestyle/health_wellness/a-practice-of-faith-modern-traiteurs-adapt-their-healing-art/article_39a5493c-4350-11ed-8d00-17fe65ef8105.html

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<https://archives.novascotia.ca/deportation/archives/?Number=ONEII&Page=277>.

Appendix A: Further Readings

This appendix contains further readings about the herbs typically used within Louisiana and where to find them. Many of these herbs are briefly discussed in the table located in Chapter Three: The Traitements. It also contains further readings regarding topics related to assimilation and Southern society.

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Appendix B: Alphabetized List of Traitements

Symptom	Medicinal Herb/Treatment
Asthma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Inhale the smoke of Jimson Weed leaves³⁶ ❖ Drinking goat milk³⁷ ❖ Drinking mare milk³⁸ ❖ Measure a child against a tree and drill a hole at the top of their head. Cut a piece of hair from the child's head and place it in the hole. As the child grows past that spot, they will also grow out of their asthma³⁹ ❖ Drink goose grease or rub it on your chest⁴⁰ ❖ Rub the chest with sheep's tallow a cover that with warm flannel⁴¹ ❖ Drill a hole in a pecan and hang it around the neck. When it dries up, the asthma will be gone.⁴² ❖ Put turpentine and lard on the chest and cover with warm cloth.⁴³
Baby Rash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Make tea with cornhusks and have the

³⁶ "Remedies and Cures," *Attakapas Gazette*, Vol. IV No. 2. Center for Louisiana Studies Archives, 16.

³⁷"Remedies and Cures," 17.

³⁸"Remedies and Cures," 17.

³⁹"Remedies and Cures," 17.

⁴⁰ "Remedies and Cures," 17.

⁴¹Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 133.

⁴²Azelia Stevens, Interview by Alida Landry, December 3, 1973 in New Iberia, Louisiana, 5.

⁴³Stevens, 5.

	<p>baby drink it to make his rash come out⁴⁴</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Rub sheep droppings on the child's face to make the rash finish coming out⁴⁵
Backache	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Take a piece of twine and say prayers over the twine and tie a knot for each prayer. Tie knots all around the twine. Tie the twine to your waist and wear it until it falls off.⁴⁶ ❖ Prepare tea of celandine, white oak bark, beach leaf, or horsetail grass. Drink three cups a day⁴⁷
Bedsores	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Prepare a tea with white oak bark, golden seal, myrrh, bayberry bark, or witch hazel⁴⁸
Bee Stings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Apply a poultice of chewing tobacco⁴⁹ ❖ Rub three different kinds of grass on the bee sting⁵⁰
Bladder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ "Make a tea from Ascyrum hypericoides and drink it every night until your bladder ailment is cured."⁵¹

⁴⁴Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 135.

⁴⁵Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 135.

⁴⁶Borello, "Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area," 3.

⁴⁷Alma Daniels, "Interviews of a Folk Healer," Elton, Louisiana, *The Center for Louisiana Studies*, December 10, 1973, 5.

⁴⁸Daniels, "Interviews of a Folk Healer," 6.

⁴⁹Barry Jean Ancelet, Jay D. Edwards, and Glen Pitre, *Cajun Country*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991, 99.

⁵⁰Stevens, 4.

⁵¹Anna M. Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps: Remedies And Cures Of The Kaplan Area In Southwestern Louisiana," *Southern Folklore Quarterly Vol. XXXV*. No. 2, June 1971, 123.

	❖ Soak <i>Modiola caroliniana</i> in water until it becomes slimy and then drink ⁵²
Blood Poisoning	❖ Dip a cockroach in whiskey and place it on the wound for several days ⁵³ ❖ Make dough with flour and honey and apply this to the sore ⁵⁴
Boils	❖ Apply a poultice of castor oil, roasted onions, and filé ⁵⁵ ❖ Apply onion juice ⁵⁶ ❖ Apply the skin from the inside of an egg ⁵⁷ ❖ Dip bread in milk and apply ⁵⁸ ❖ Crush octagon soap ⁵⁹ and mix with ashes and apply ⁶⁰ ❖ Put a circle of soot around the boil ⁶¹ ❖ Use octagon soap on the boil ⁶²

⁵²Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 123.

⁵³Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

⁵⁴Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 134.

⁵⁵“Remedies and Cures,” 17.

⁵⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 17.

⁵⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 17.

⁵⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 17.

⁵⁹Octagon soap is an older brand of lye soap used in the early 1900s. It was sold by Colgate & Company. Many *traiteurs*, especially older ones, use this brand of lye soap in their households and as a cure-all. See: “Right Way to Wash Clothes: Octagon Soap Premium List 1901,” Colgate & Company, 1901, Published Collections Department, Hagley Museum and Library, Islandora:2380113.

⁶⁰“Remedies and Cures,” 17.

⁶¹“Remedies and Cures,” 18.

⁶²“Remedies and Cures,” 18.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Apply a poultice of tobacco⁶³ ❖ Make a paste with water, gumbo filé, and octagon soap⁶⁴ ❖ Make a poultice with fig leaves or juices and apply to boil⁶⁵ ❖ Apply a pack of leaves of Asparagus sp. and oil⁶⁶ ❖ Drink heated lead and milk⁶⁷ ❖ “Make a mixture of six teaspoonful of honey and three of sulphur. Apply the mixture to the boil for nine days. Stop for nine days and then apply again for nine days. Your boil will go away.”⁶⁸ ❖ Make a mixture of 1tsp of ashes, 1 tsp of sheep’s tallow, ½ tsp sugar. Mix with castor oil and roll the mixture in your hands to form a ball. Apply the ball to the boil⁶⁹
Bronchitis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Apply a poultice made of pounded mustard seeds and sheep’s tallow. Apply to chest and back and then cover with a warm piece of flannel⁷⁰ ❖ “Heat whiskey in a pot and when the whiskey is warm, set fire to it. When all of the alcohol is burnt, the fire will go out. When this burnt whiskey is warm, drink it and take two aspirin.”⁷¹

⁶³Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

⁶⁴Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 3.

⁶⁵Daniels, “Interviews of a Folk Healer,” 6.

⁶⁶Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 125.

⁶⁷Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 125.

⁶⁸Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 125.

⁶⁹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 125.

⁷⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 123.

⁷¹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 124.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Take a mixture of pounded seeds of <i>Erythrina herbacea</i> and honey at night⁷² ❖ Take a mixture of goose fat, sheep tallow, Vicks salve, honey, and baking soda three to four times a day⁷³
Burns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Apply a mixture of hog grease, lard, and sulfur⁷⁴ ❖ Apply goose grease⁷⁵ ❖ Grease out of hog lard and quinine⁷⁶ ❖ Hot water, vinegar, Dial soap and grease⁷⁷ ❖ Apply butter and soda⁷⁸ ❖ Scrape elder bark, fry it in Vaseline and apply to the burn⁷⁹ ❖ Apply flour to a burn⁸⁰ ❖ Apply syrup and soda⁸¹

⁷²Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 124.

⁷³Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 124.

⁷⁴“Remedies and Cures,” 18.

⁷⁵“Remedies and Cures,” 18.

⁷⁶Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 3. Quinine is an extract derived from the bark of a *Cinchona pubescens*. More information about this herb can be found here: Kayla Neitzel, “*Cinchona pubescens*, Fever Tree (Quinine),” University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. April 16, 2011.

⁷⁷Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 4. Dial is a brand of soap commonly sold at most stores in the United States. Information about Dial soap can be found at <https://www.dialsoap.com>.

⁷⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 18.

⁷⁹“Remedies and Cures,” 18.

⁸⁰“Remedies and Cures,” 18.

⁸¹“Remedies and Cures,” 18.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Apply grease and soda⁸² ❖ Apply butter⁸³ ❖ Apply butter and syrup⁸⁴ ❖ Put the skimmed cream off the top of milk on a burn⁸⁵ ❖ Apply egg white⁸⁶
Chaffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Powder the area with dirt dauber⁸⁷ ❖ Apply dirt dauber and soda⁸⁸
Chest Inflammation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “Grate cactus leaves and heat that in a pot. Make a pack and put this as warm as possible on the chest of the person.”⁸⁹ ❖ Soak cactus leave in water for some time and then drink the water⁹⁰ ❖ Mix alum powder with water and drink⁹¹
Colds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Drink hot pepper, whiskey, and sugar as a tea⁹² ❖ Turpentine⁹³

⁸²“Remedies and Cures,” 19.

⁸³“Remedies and Cures,” 19.

⁸⁴Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 124.

⁸⁵Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 124.

⁸⁶Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 124.

⁸⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 19.

⁸⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 19.

⁸⁹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 130.

⁹⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 130.

⁹¹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 130.

⁹²Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

⁹³Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ One dose of castor oil, which gets the “stuff” out of the lungs⁹⁴ ❖ Drink boiled tea with lemon and sour wine⁹⁵ ❖ Drink Mongrea tea⁹⁶ ❖ Drink Mamou tea⁹⁷ ❖ Wrap the ill person in elder leaves⁹⁸ ❖ “Life-everlasting tea is a crack-shot for colds. This is a bush that grows in the woods. It is very scarce.”⁹⁹ ❖ Drink tea made from bitterweed¹⁰⁰ ❖ Eat a mixture of honey, soda, and the yolk of an egg¹⁰¹ ❖ “Eat a lot of honey and tallow all the summer and you won’t have colds in the winter.”¹⁰² ❖ Rub wild goose grease on the chest¹⁰³ ❖ Eat wild goose grease¹⁰⁴ ❖ Rub tallow on the chest¹⁰⁵ ❖ Rub suet grease on the chest¹⁰⁶
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⁹⁴Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 4.

⁹⁵Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 4.

⁹⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 20.

⁹⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 20.

⁹⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 20.

⁹⁹“Remedies and Cures,” 20.

¹⁰⁰“Remedies and Cures,” 20.

¹⁰¹“Remedies and Cures,” 20.

¹⁰²“Remedies and Cures,” 20.

¹⁰³“Remedies and Cures,” 20.

¹⁰⁴“Remedies and Cures,” 20.

¹⁰⁵“Remedies and Cures,” 20.

¹⁰⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 20.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Rub a mixture of hog lard and quinine on the chest¹⁰⁷ ❖ Rub mutton suet on the chest and then cover yourself up with flannel¹⁰⁸ ❖ Eat cockroaches fried in grease¹⁰⁹ ❖ Gargle your own urine¹¹⁰ ❖ Drink your own urine first thing in the morning¹¹¹ ❖ Boil and then drink your own urine¹¹² ❖ Put a couple drops of coal oil on a teaspoon of sugar and eat it¹¹³ ❖ “Quinine is good for a cold, but if you use too much, it will make your hearing bad.”¹¹⁴ ❖ Rub chest with camphor or Vicks Salve and cover with warm flannel cloth¹¹⁵ ❖ Rub chest with sheep’s tallow and cover with warm flannel cloth¹¹⁶ ❖ Make tea from lemon, aspirin, and the seeds of the Coral tree and drink just before going to bed¹¹⁷
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¹⁰⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 20.

¹⁰⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 20.

¹⁰⁹“Remedies and Cures,” 20.

¹¹⁰“Remedies and Cures,” 20.

¹¹¹“Remedies and Cures,” 21.

¹¹²“Remedies and Cures,” 21.

¹¹³“Remedies and Cures,” 21.

¹¹⁴“Remedies and Cures,” 21.

¹¹⁵Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 135.

¹¹⁶Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 135.

¹¹⁷Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 135.

Cold Sores	❖ Alum ¹¹⁸
Colic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Consume paregoric¹¹⁹ ❖ Strip peach leaves in a downward motion. Boil to make tea. Add sugar and drink¹²⁰ ❖ Consume tea made from peppermint leaves¹²¹ ❖ “Make nine knots in a string and tie it around the baby’s waist. Let it stay on the baby ‘til it fall off.”¹²² ❖ Boil nine pecan shells and drink the resultant tea¹²³
Constipation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Consume Epsom salt as a laxative¹²⁴ ❖ Consume <i>la mauve</i>¹²⁵ ❖ “Boil Wormseed until the water is green and strain the juice. Add enough sugar to make a candied substance. Take that at night. In the morning, take three drops of turpentine with a big dose of castor oil.”¹²⁶
Corns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Apply fingernail polish to the corn¹²⁷ ❖ “If you rub some soap on your corns,

¹¹⁸Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

¹¹⁹Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

¹²⁰Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 4.

¹²¹“Remedies and Cures,” 21.

¹²²“Remedies and Cures,” 21.

¹²³Stevens, 5.

¹²⁴Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

¹²⁵Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

¹²⁶Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 133.

¹²⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 21.

	you (sic) kin soon pull em out.” ¹²⁸
Cough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Consume lemon and honey¹²⁹ ❖ Take a few drops of turpentine with sugar a few times a day¹³⁰ ❖ “Boil Rattan vine, Thistle, Mallow, and mamou seeds together and drain the juice. Add enough sugar to the liquid to make a syrup out of it and drink this.”¹³¹
Cramps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Place a warm plate on the stomach¹³² ❖ Mix baking soda and warm water and drink¹³³ ❖ Boil Tennessee grass and drink the resultant tea¹³⁴ ❖ Drink tea made of mint¹³⁵ ❖ Soak milk grass in water and drink the resultant tea¹³⁶
Croup	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Sweetened hot coffee flavored with melted butter¹³⁷ ❖ Drink syrup made from heating onions and sugar¹³⁸

¹²⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 21.

¹²⁹Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

¹³⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 137.

¹³¹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 137.

¹³²Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

¹³³Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 5.

¹³⁴Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 5.

¹³⁵Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 127.

¹³⁶Stevens, 5.

¹³⁷Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

¹³⁸Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 127.

Cuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Use turpentine on the bandage¹³⁹ ❖ Use kerosene on the bandage¹⁴⁰ ❖ Apply a poultice of mashed <i>la mauve</i>¹⁴¹ ❖ Wrap a cobweb in white cloth and put it on the cut to stop the bleeding¹⁴² ❖ If the bleeding person wasn't around, place a cotton ball with his blood on it on the floor and stick a knife through the cotton ball. Then, say a prayer¹⁴³ ❖ "They would say the Hail Mary and make the sign of the cross. Then they would say 'person's name, I take your blood, I put your blood in a gourd, I throw is on the other side of the largest river there is.' Then they would say a prayer and make the sign of the cross. You treat them this way three times before you leave."¹⁴⁴ ❖ Apply a cobweb to the cut¹⁴⁵ ❖ "After the blood has been stopper, put the cut soaking in kerosene."¹⁴⁶ ❖ "To stop the bleeding, make the sign of the cross three times and say, 'Oh, (name of the person), the blood which flows is as pure as the blood which Jesus Christ lost on the Cross.' Make the sign of the cross three times."¹⁴⁷
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¹³⁹Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

¹⁴⁰Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

¹⁴¹Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

¹⁴²Borello, "Folk Remedies and Cures in And Around The Youngsville Area," 3.

¹⁴³Borello, "Folk Remedies and Cures in And Around The Youngsville Area," 3.

¹⁴⁴Borello, "Folk Remedies and Cures in And Around The Youngsville Area," 3.

¹⁴⁵"Remedies and Cures," 21.

¹⁴⁶Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 126.

¹⁴⁷Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 126-127.

Diarrhea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Drink a mixture of baking soda and vinegar¹⁴⁸ ❖ Drink a mixture of water, antiseptic, and sugar¹⁴⁹ ❖ “For children, boil rice water and make the child drink or take this in his bottle.”¹⁵⁰ ❖ Boil pecan shells to make a tea and drink¹⁵¹ ❖ Drink a tea made from boiling the leaves of <i>Myrica cerifera</i>¹⁵²
Earache	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ A traiteur sticks their finger in the affected ear and says a prayer¹⁵³ ❖ Make a pancake with a lot of pepper in it and place it as hot as possible on the ear¹⁵⁴ ❖ “Steam a cabbage leaf until it is soft. Put that on the ear as hot as the person can stand it. Tie the head with a kerchief.”¹⁵⁵ ❖ Melt catfish grease and drop it into the ear¹⁵⁶ ❖ Blow cigarette smoke into the ear and then put a wad of cotton in the ear¹⁵⁷

¹⁴⁸Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 129.

¹⁴⁹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 129.

¹⁵⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 129.

¹⁵¹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 129.

¹⁵²Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 129.

¹⁵³Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures in And Around The Youngsville Area,” 5.

¹⁵⁴Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 131.

¹⁵⁵Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 131.

¹⁵⁶Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 131.

¹⁵⁷Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 132.

	❖ Drop hot olive oil in the affected ear and then block ear with cotton wad ¹⁵⁸
Eczema	❖ Fry the leaves of the Swamp aster in olive oil and apply the mixture ¹⁵⁹
Eyes	❖ Eggs whites for “eye trouble” ¹⁶⁰ ❖ Wash out the eyes with rose water ¹⁶¹
Fever	❖ Place camphor on the head to cure a fever ¹⁶² ❖ Strip peach leaves in a downward motion. Boil to make tea, add sugar, and drink ¹⁶³ ❖ Drink tea made from Marsh Elder leaves ¹⁶⁴ ❖ (sic) “Boil nine root a Moglea till got a gallun. Strain tea. Bade in it and drink cup in da morning, cup ad dinna time, an cup ad nit.” ¹⁶⁵
Fever Blister	❖ Apply your own ear wax to the fever blister ¹⁶⁶
Freckles	❖ Apply watermelon rind ¹⁶⁷

¹⁵⁸Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 132.

¹⁵⁹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 128.

¹⁶⁰Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

¹⁶¹Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

¹⁶²Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

¹⁶³Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 5.

¹⁶⁴Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 129.

¹⁶⁵Stevens, 6.

¹⁶⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 23.

¹⁶⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 23.

Headache	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Seek out a <i>traiteur</i> and have them pray over you¹⁶⁸ ❖ Put a tobacco poultice on the head¹⁶⁹ ❖ Bore the ear and pierce the ear with earrings¹⁷⁰ ❖ Cross two matches in your hair¹⁷¹ ❖ Camphor¹⁷² ❖ Mustard poultice¹⁷³ ❖ Salt in the hair¹⁷⁴ ❖ “Put two aspirins and a teaspoon of baking soda in a glass of warm water and drink.”¹⁷⁵
Heartburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Drink soda water¹⁷⁶ ❖ Eat soda¹⁷⁷ ❖ Peppermint¹⁷⁸ ❖ Put a piece of Irish potato in water and drink¹⁷⁹
Hiccups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Scare the person with hiccups¹⁸⁰

¹⁶⁸Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

¹⁶⁹Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

¹⁷⁰“Remedies and Cures,” 23.

¹⁷¹“Remedies and Cures,” 23.

¹⁷²“Remedies and Cures,” 23.

¹⁷³“Remedies and Cures,” 23.

¹⁷⁴“Remedies and Cures,” 23.

¹⁷⁵Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 132.

¹⁷⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 24.

¹⁷⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 24.

¹⁷⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 24.

¹⁷⁹Stevens, 7.

¹⁸⁰“Remedies and Cures,” 24.

	❖ Drink nine swallows of water while holding your breath ¹⁸¹
High Blood Pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “Take mistletoe and angelica root, ground fine, two teaspoonfuls of each, place in a pint of water and bring to a boiling point, allow to cool. Drink two or three cupful a day.”¹⁸² ❖ Eat lots of garlic¹⁸³ ❖ Soak garlic in water and drink the water¹⁸⁴ ❖ Take a small spoonful of vinegar every morning¹⁸⁵ ❖ Take Epsom salt¹⁸⁶ ❖ Drink lemon juice¹⁸⁷ ❖ Drink unsweetened lemonade every morning¹⁸⁸ ❖ Boil parsley in water and drink three times a day¹⁸⁹ ❖ “Pound garlic and put this in water. Put this liquid in the refrigerator and drink of this liquid often during the day.”¹⁹⁰ ❖ Mix Epsom salt in water and drink

¹⁸¹“Remedies and Cures,” 24.

¹⁸²Daniels, “Interviews of a Folk Healer,” 6.

¹⁸³“Remedies and Cures,” 24.

¹⁸⁴“Remedies and Cures,” 24.

¹⁸⁵“Remedies and Cures,” 24.

¹⁸⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 24.

¹⁸⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 24.

¹⁸⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 24.

¹⁸⁹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 136.

¹⁹⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 136.

	<p>throughout the day¹⁹¹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Drink lemon juice mixed into water first thing in the morning¹⁹²
Hoarseness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Drink a mixture of a well-beaten egg white, sugar and honey¹⁹³ ❖ Take a few drops of coal oil with a spoonful of sugar¹⁹⁴ ❖ Take honey and soda¹⁹⁵ ❖ Eat Vicks¹⁹⁶
Indigestion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Take soda and salt¹⁹⁷ ❖ Soda water¹⁹⁸ ❖ Eat salt to induce vomiting¹⁹⁹ ❖ Drink hot soda water²⁰⁰
Infection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Burn a cane reed under the infection²⁰¹ ❖ Turpentine²⁰²
Inflamed Breast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Make a poultice of elderberry blossoms and apply on affected

¹⁹¹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 136.

¹⁹²Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 136.

¹⁹³“Remedies and Cures,” 25.

¹⁹⁴“Remedies and Cures,” 25.

¹⁹⁵“Remedies and Cures,” 25.

¹⁹⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 25.

¹⁹⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 25.

¹⁹⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 25.

¹⁹⁹“Remedies and Cures,” 25.

²⁰⁰“Remedies and Cures,” 25.

²⁰¹Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

²⁰²Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

	<p>area.²⁰³</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Make a soft cake with St. Johnsworth and apply to affected area²⁰⁴
Insect Bite/Stings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Smash garlic and salt and put on bite²⁰⁵ ❖ Apply tobacco to the bite or sting²⁰⁶ ❖ Apply coal oil to the sting or bite²⁰⁷ ❖ Place a mud pack on the sting²⁰⁸ ❖ Place a mixture of soda and vinegar on the sting²⁰⁹
Itch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Make salve from sulphur and lard, apply to affected area, do not remove until itch is gone²¹⁰ ❖ Wash affected area with homemade lye soap²¹¹ ❖ Mix sulphur, salt, and kerosene to make a paste and apply to affected area for three days without washing it²¹² ❖ “Bad itch: Make a slave with lard and sulphur until it is thick. Rub yourself with that three times a day for nine days. Do not wash yourself before the

²⁰³Daniels, “Interviews of a Folk Healer,” 7.

²⁰⁴Daniels, “Interviews of a Folk Healer,” 7.

²⁰⁵Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 7.

²⁰⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 31.

²⁰⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 31.

²⁰⁸Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 133.

²⁰⁹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 133.

²¹⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 130.

²¹¹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 130.

²¹²Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 130.

	nine days are over.” ²¹³
Kidney Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Boil an odd number of cockle burr roots. Drink the resultant tea. Repeat for nine days²¹⁴ ❖ Drink plenty of water to wash out the kidneys²¹⁵
Lock Jaw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Apply roach grease²¹⁶ ❖ “Take marrow out of a hog jaw and rub this on the face²¹⁷ ❖ “Beat elderberries; put some vinegar in that and heat it. Rub the jar and this is good.”²¹⁸ ❖ Rub wagon grease on the jaw²¹⁹ ❖ “If you stick a nail in your foot, put a piece of fat meat on it and you wont have lock jaw.”²²⁰ ❖ “If you stick a nail or anything in your foot, put some cow manure on it.”²²¹ ❖ Beat a big roach, put it in whiskey, and drink it²²²
Low Blood Pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Make a tea with golden seal or black willow leaves and drink two or three

²¹³Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 130.

²¹⁴Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 5.

²¹⁵Stevens, 7.

²¹⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 25.

²¹⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 25.

²¹⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 25.

²¹⁹“Remedies and Cures,” 26.

²²⁰“Remedies and Cures,” 26.

²²¹“Remedies and Cures,” 26.

²²²Stevens, 7.

	cupful a day ²²³ ❖ Mix wine, iron rust, and chinchona bark and drink ²²⁴ ❖ Eat lots of calf liver ²²⁵
Measles	❖ Boil shucks of red corn and drink the resultant tea ²²⁶ ❖ “I do two things for measles. I chunk pop corn under the child bed and I give him shuck tea.” ²²⁷ ❖ Make a tea from cornhusks and drink ²²⁸ ❖ Drink tea made from anisette ²²⁹ ❖ Drink tea made from elderberries ²³⁰
Mumps	❖ Make a cross with soot on the throat ²³¹ ❖ Put soot on the throat ²³²
Nosebleed	❖ Tie a skeleton key on a string and put around neck ²³³ ❖ Cross two match sticks and allow the nose to bleed on them ²³⁴

²²³Daniels, “Interviews of a Folk Healer,” 6.

²²⁴Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 136.

²²⁵Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 136.

²²⁶Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 6.

²²⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 26.

²²⁸Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 136.

²²⁹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 136.

²³⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 136.

²³¹“Remedies and Cures,” 26.

²³²“Remedies and Cures,” 26.

²³³Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 6.

²³⁴Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 6.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Tie a key around the person's finger²³⁵ ❖ Put a piece of paper inside the top lip²³⁶
Palate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ To fix a fallen palate, give a quick and hard jerk to the hair on top of the persons head²³⁷
Piles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Apply a slave made from white Vaseline and sulphur to the rectum²³⁸ ❖ Sulphur and grease applied to the rectum²³⁹
Pneumonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ "Drink tea made with hog hoofs."²⁴⁰
Rheumatism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Apply a poultice made with grated salted potatoes²⁴¹ ❖ "Tie a penny around your ankle."²⁴² ❖ Tie a penny around your waist²⁴³ ❖ Tie a dime around your ankle²⁴⁴ ❖ Apply a hot towel to the areas with pain²⁴⁵ ❖ Make salve with earthworms and lard

²³⁵"Remedies and Cures," 27.

²³⁶"Remedies and Cures," 27.

²³⁷"Remedies and Cures," 27.

²³⁸"Remedies and Cures," 27.

²³⁹"Remedies and Cures," 27.

²⁴⁰"Remedies and Cures," 28.

²⁴¹"Remedies and Cures," 29.

²⁴²"Remedies and Cures," 29.

²⁴³"Remedies and Cures," 29.

²⁴⁴"Remedies and Cures," 29.

²⁴⁵"Remedies and Cures," 29.

	<p>to rub on affected area²⁴⁶</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Mix three ounces of orange juice with a tablespoon of lemon juice and drink three times a day²⁴⁷ ❖ “Mix two cups of honey and one cup of whiskey and take a tablespoons of this each morning before eating or drinking.”²⁴⁸ ❖ Drink a teaspoon of spirits mixed with ammonia in warm water and take this three times a day²⁴⁹ ❖ “Wear a string prepared by a traiteur around your body.”²⁵⁰
Ringworm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Put vinegar on the ringworm²⁵¹ ❖ Use a finger to circle the affected area while sating a prayer. Then, make a cross on the affected area²⁵² ❖ Drink milk from green figs²⁵³ ❖ Rub the blood of a black hen on the ringworm²⁵⁴ ❖ Soak the ringworm in warm water, scrub It with a cloth until it is raw, then pour pure antiseptic on it²⁵⁵ ❖ Circle the ringworm nine times with a

²⁴⁶Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 134.

²⁴⁷Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 134.

²⁴⁸Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 134.

²⁴⁹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 135.

²⁵⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 135.

²⁵¹Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

²⁵²Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 6.

²⁵³“Remedies and Cures,” 29.

²⁵⁴Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 127.

²⁵⁵Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 127.

	copper penny during the last quarter of the moon ²⁵⁶
Shingles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “Make the sign of the cross. Make a circle around shingle area with knife. Make nine lines, with knife, inside the circle. Shingles should go away soon.”²⁵⁷ ❖ Rub the blood of a black hen on the affected area²⁵⁸ ❖ Make a cross with a thumb that has been covered with the blood of a black hen²⁵⁹ ❖ Rub yourself with the leave of the French Mulberry and do not wash²⁶⁰
Small Pox	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Rub onion all over the affected person²⁶¹
Snakebite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Tie a bag of garlic around the ankles to prevent a snakebite²⁶² ❖ Apply a poultice made of tobacco²⁶³ ❖ Smash garlic and salt and put on bite²⁶⁴ ❖ “Suck the poison out of the wound of a snake but; then make it bleed.”²⁶⁵

²⁵⁶Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 127.

²⁵⁷Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 7.

²⁵⁸Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 131.

²⁵⁹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 131.

²⁶⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 131.

²⁶¹“Remedies and Cures,” 30.

²⁶²Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

²⁶³Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

²⁶⁴Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 7.

²⁶⁵“Remedies and Cures,” 29.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Suck the poison out of the bite²⁶⁶ ❖ Mix soda and vinegar and apply the thick mixture to the snake bite²⁶⁷ ❖ Kill a chicken, remove its liver, and apply to the snakebite right away²⁶⁸
Sores	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Boil and strain “hot” weed, add Epsom salt and sulphur and make a poultice to rub on sore²⁶⁹
Sore Eyes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Wash in salt water²⁷⁰ ❖ Get your ears pierced and wear earrings²⁷¹ ❖ Grate Irish potatoes and apply to eyes²⁷² ❖ Put warm milk in the eyes²⁷³ ❖ “Put parsley in a dish outside overnight. Next morning, rub your eyes with the dew from the plate.”²⁷⁴ ❖ “Put lettuce out overnight in a plate. The next morning rub the dew from the plate on your eyes.”²⁷⁵
Sore Throat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Gargle salt water²⁷⁶

²⁶⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 29.

²⁶⁷Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 132.

²⁶⁸Stevens, 8.

²⁶⁹Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 7.

²⁷⁰“Remedies and Cures,” 30

²⁷¹“Remedies and Cures,” 30.

²⁷²Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 139.

²⁷³Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 139.

²⁷⁴Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 140.

²⁷⁵Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 140.

²⁷⁶Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Gargle your own urine²⁷⁷ ❖ Eat snow²⁷⁸ ❖ Gargle with soda and salt²⁷⁹ ❖ (sic) “Take ashes an make a cross on side of nek wid to matches. Make prayers.”²⁸⁰
Spasms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Put salt in the affected person’s hand²⁸¹
Sprain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Cordon (a string with knots tied on it) is created by traiteur using prayer and tied around the affected limb.²⁸² ❖ Soak in table salt and warm water²⁸³ ❖ Make a cross with the thumb over affected area and say a prayer²⁸⁴ ❖ Soak brown paper in vinegar and wrap it around the sprain²⁸⁵ ❖ Apply a poultice made of clay to the sprain²⁸⁶ ❖ Pour antiseptic on the sprain²⁸⁷ ❖ “Have a traiteur treat a string and

²⁷⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 30.

²⁷⁸“Remedies and Cures,” 31.

²⁷⁹“Remedies and Cures,” 31.

²⁸⁰Stevens, 8.

²⁸¹“Remedies and Cures,” 31.

²⁸²Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treaters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," 240.

²⁸³Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 7.

²⁸⁴Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 7.

²⁸⁵“Remedies and Cures,” 31.

²⁸⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 31.

²⁸⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 31.

	<p>apply it to the sprained area.”²⁸⁸</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Rub chalk dust on the sprain²⁸⁹ ❖ Rub sprain with clay²⁹⁰
Stomachache	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Consume castor oil²⁹¹ ❖ Place a warm plate on the stomach²⁹² ❖ Tie nine knots on a string and tie the string around the waist²⁹³ ❖ Drink mint tea²⁹⁴ ❖ Drink salt water²⁹⁵ ❖ “Soak ashes in water and then drink the water.”²⁹⁶
Sunburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Apply vinegar first and then soda before the vinegar dries²⁹⁷
Sunstroke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Wash head in water and vinegar and take aspirin²⁹⁸ ❖ Hold head with hands and say a prayer. Repeat three times in the day of the sunstroke²⁹⁹ ❖ “For sun stroke place a rag or towel on

²⁸⁸Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 134.

²⁸⁹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 134.

²⁹⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 134.

²⁹¹Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

²⁹²Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

²⁹³“Remedies and Cures,” 32.

²⁹⁴“Remedies and Cures,” 32.

²⁹⁵“Remedies and Cures,” 32.

²⁹⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 32.

²⁹⁷Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 124.

²⁹⁸Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 7.

²⁹⁹Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 7.

	the top of a glass of water. Hold the glass up side down on the person head until the water boils. This will cure the pain.” ³⁰⁰
Teething	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Tie grass to make a necklace. The child wears the necklace and the teeth will eventually come out³⁰¹ ❖ Put a necklace of alligator teeth on the baby for it to cut teeth on³⁰² ❖ Put a necklace with a dime on it on the baby to cut its teeth on³⁰³ ❖ Put a necklace made from Lizard’s tail root on the baby³⁰⁴
Tetanus	❖ Eat roaches ³⁰⁵
Thrush	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “If a man who never saw his father blows in a baby’s mouth, this will cure the thrush.”³⁰⁶ ❖ Wipe the baby’s tongue with its own urine³⁰⁷
Toothache	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Bags of salt³⁰⁸ ❖ A small nail is used to make the sign of the cross three times over the affected tooth. Nail is then buried in backyard. The next day, the nail will

³⁰⁰“Remedies and Cures,” 33.

³⁰¹Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 9.

³⁰²Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 128.

³⁰³Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 128.

³⁰⁴Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 128.

³⁰⁵Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 136.

³⁰⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 33.

³⁰⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 33.

³⁰⁸Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

	<p>be rusted, and the tooth will fall out.³⁰⁹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Put perfume or aspirin on tooth³¹⁰ ❖ Treat a piece of cotton and place it on the tooth. The tooth will fall out³¹¹ ❖ Put a bunch of roly pollies in a bag around your neck. When they dry up, the pain will go away³¹² ❖ Apply cow manure to the affected tooth³¹³ ❖ Apply tobacco juice to the affected tooth³¹⁴ ❖ Put a piece of tobacco in a tooth that is hollow³¹⁵ ❖ “Smoke a pipe and hold the smoke in your mouth for toothache.”³¹⁶
Vomiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Break peach leaves in a downward motion and boil them. Drink the resultant tea³¹⁷ ❖ Wrap a dry lady’s stocking or dish towel around your neck³¹⁸ ❖ “Beat the white of an egg and put that in water. Let that settle then drink

³⁰⁹Sexton, "Cajun and Creole Treeters: Magico-Religious Folk Healing in French Louisiana," 240.

³¹⁰Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 7.

³¹¹Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 8.

³¹²Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 8.

³¹³“Remedies and Cures,” 33.

³¹⁴“Remedies and Cures,” 33.

³¹⁵“Remedies and Cures,” 33.

³¹⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 33.

³¹⁷Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 8.

³¹⁸Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 8.

	<p>it.”³¹⁹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Milk of magnesia³²⁰ ❖ Put flower of okra in water and drink³²¹
Warts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “Once a month for three months in a row say some kind of prayer at the decline of the moon, then the wart would fall off.”³²² ❖ “Split a potato in four quarters and rub it on the wart. Then bury the potato where the raindrops from the roof will fall on it. When the potato rots, your wart will go away.”³²³ ❖ “Take a stick and cut a V on the stick, then pass the stick on the wart and make a cross, then say a prayer.”³²⁴ ❖ Castor oil³²⁵ ❖ “Steal a dishrag; rub it over the wart and throw the dishrag away.”³²⁶ ❖ Tie a piece of thread around the wart and leave it on until the wart falls off³²⁷ ❖ “Make a cross cut on the wart and make a cross cut on a fast growing plant. When the cross on the plant

³¹⁹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 139.

³²⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 139.

³²¹Stevens, 9.

³²²Borello, “Folk Remedies And Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 8.

³²³Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 8.

³²⁴Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 8.

³²⁵“Remedies and Cures,” 33.

³²⁶“Remedies and Cures,” 33.

³²⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 34.

	<p>heals, your wart will go away.”³²⁸</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ “If you play with toads, you will get warts. To get rid of the warts, make a cross on each wart with a knife and then bury the knife. When the knife rusts, the warts will fall off.”³²⁹ ❖ “Prick a wart with a pin and fasten the pin to your clothes. When you lose the pin, the wart will go away.”³³⁰ ❖ “At dusk, after sundown, go walking in the yard until you find a bone. Hold the bone behind your back and say to the moon three times, ‘All that I see grows and all that I touch grows smaller.’ Throw the bone where you will not see it again. Do this when there is a new moon. Your wart will go away.”³³¹ ❖ “Put in a paper bag as many grains of corn as you have warts. Throw the paper bag behind you where you will not find it. Your wart will go away.”³³²
Wellness (General)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Palm leaves obtained at Easter and kept on the wall over the bed all year³³³ ❖ Drink sassafras tea³³⁴ ❖ Drink tea made from peach tree leaves³³⁵

³²⁸Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 137.

³²⁹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 137.

³³⁰Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 138.

³³¹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 138.

³³²Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 138.

³³³“Remedies and Cures,” 16.

³³⁴“Remedies and Cures,” 16.

³³⁵Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Lemonade purifies the blood³³⁶ ❖ For a beautiful complexion, apply sheep's tallow to the face every night³³⁷ ❖ If bayou water must be drunk, crush peach seeds and place them in the bottom of a bucket of water. The peach seeds will draw any impurities to the bottom of the bucket and the water on top will be clean and purified.³³⁸
Whooping Cough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Let a stallion blow in the child's face³³⁹ ❖ Mare's milk³⁴⁰ ❖ Tie garlic around the child's neck³⁴¹ ❖ "Make a tea out of Rattan vines, Thistle roots and Coral tree seeds or roots and drink it."³⁴² ❖ Boil beets until they are tender. Add sugar and peppermint to the juice to make a syrup and drink³⁴³
Worms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Wear garlic around the neck to cure worms³⁴⁴ ❖ Turpentine³⁴⁵

³³⁶Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 99.

³³⁷Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 123.

³³⁸Saxon, Dreyer, and Tallant, *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, 268.

³³⁹"Remedies and Cures," 34.

³⁴⁰"Remedies and Cures," 34.

³⁴¹"Remedies and Cures," 34.

³⁴²Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 126.

³⁴³Boudreaux, "Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps," 126.

³⁴⁴Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

³⁴⁵Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre, *Cajun Country*, 100.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Strip peach leaves in a downward motion. Boil to make a tea, add sugar, and drink³⁴⁶ ❖ Drink pumpkin seed tea³⁴⁷ ❖ “Put nine drops of kerosene on a tablespoon of sugar. Take this for nine days.”³⁴⁸ ❖ Take castor oil and five drops of turpentine in the morning on an empty stomach³⁴⁹
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³⁴⁶Borello, “Folk Remedies and Cures In And Around The Youngsville Area,” 9.

³⁴⁷“Remedies and Cures,” 35.

³⁴⁸Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 139.

³⁴⁹Boudreaux, “Les Remèdes Du Vieux Temps,” 139.