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# Just Throw it in the Pot! The Cultural Geography of Hidden Landscapes and Masked Performances in South Louisiana Gumbo Cooking

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JUST THROW IT IN THE POT! THE CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY OF  
HIDDEN LANDSCAPES AND MASKED PERFORMANCES IN SOUTH  
LOUISIANA GUMBO COOKING

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by

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December 2015

Dedicated to  
those who left before me:  
Dr. Thomas Eubanks,  
Lester Landry,  
Dr. Miles Richardson,  
Augie Fragala  
and Jamie Lapeyrouse Cox

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## **ABSTRACT**

One of Louisiana's gifts to the world is gumbo. Yet, gumbo is not just a local dish of renown. It is a metaphor which describes the people, a food that represents a region, and a symbol that stands in for the state. It is also the official dish of Louisiana. The association of gumbo with South Louisiana is recognized worldwide. The word itself evokes images of Louisiana's swampy Cajun landscapes. Yet gumbo is not indigenous to Louisiana nor is it a strictly Cajun dish.

This dissertation is about the cultural and historical geography of gumbo. This study delves into the background, evolution, and how gumbo became a symbol for south Louisiana. In the historical perspective we see that gumbo is not just a Louisiana food but a dish that has ties to the greater history of the Atlantic world. Gumbo is a dish born of colonialism with heavy influences from the African diaspora.

Yet, gumbo goes beyond history. The meaning embodied in gumbo can be found in the cooking of the dish. However, in the cooking of the dish only one geography and one voice is realized. Cooking gumbo illustrates a hidden landscape, which is not often studied in the discipline of geography. By looking at masked performances/hidden landscapes, geographers can get a more nuanced idea of what is actually happening in landscapes and thus realize a true human geography of space. Studying gumbo can help geographers better understand the regional/cultural/historical implications of what a food and its preparation can say about a place.

## CHAPTER 1: PRESENTING GUMBO

### Introduction: Gumbo Season Begins

On the morning of Friday October 28, 2011 a cold front swept through South Louisiana. The temperatures changed from a high of 86 degrees the day before to a low of 49 for this particular Friday. During midday, the temperature ranged around 59 degrees as overcast skies and a very cool breeze permeated the region. That Friday, I was putting on a white jacket to go meet my friend and fellow graduate student Jasmine at a small restaurant located along the oil and gas industry corridor of Highway 90 in Broussard, La.

Entering the restaurant fifteen minutes early for my lunch date, I took a seat at one of the few empty tables in the corner of the restaurant. As I waited for my friend to show up, I noticed the overpowering bitter smell of roux mixed with the salty taste of chicken and sausage. Intrigued, looking up from my phone I saw waitresses coming out of the kitchen with numerous steaming white bowls filled with a thick brown liquid and placing them on tables in front of customers, who were anticipating the initial dive into the dish with their spoon. I overheard comments about how this dish was perfect for the cool day, I caught glimpses of men adding Tabasco sauce and filé powder into the white bowls, and one patron even snapped a picture of the bowl on his phone while showing it to the other patrons at the his table. It was official, at least in this restaurant, Gumbo Season had begun!

Jasmine walked into the restaurant and I waved her over to the table. She maneuvered her way through the servers and other customers to sit down across from me. Our blonde haired and brown eyed waitress came over to ask for our drink orders and to tell us about the specials. She explained, the two lunch specials included a grilled fish topped with crawfish etouffée and chicken and sausage gumbo, to which she made a point to say, "But, the gumbo is what everyone

is getting." The waitress left to go get our drinks and as Jasmine opened her menu to decide what to order she effortlessly said, "Well, I know what you want." Defiantly I replied, "Jasmine, even I need a break from gumbo every now and then"! When the waitress came to take our orders, I asked for the cheeseburger cooked well as I tried to ignore the slurping sounds and the spooning of yellow potato salad into the gumbos, which was happening all around me.

After lunch, during the drive home, I heard on the radio that the temperatures were supposed to dip into the 40s later that night. I thought to myself how this actually was perfect gumbo weather and I started feeling guilty about not getting the gumbo for lunch. The gumbo guilt became so powerful that I stopped at a local grocery store, where I had conducted the first interview for this research, because I remembered that they had homemade gumbo in their freezer aisle. I grabbed a container of frozen chicken and sausage gumbo, all the while kicking myself for not getting gumbo at the restaurant earlier. "I should have been doing research, I should have been a part of the process." are the thoughts that went through my head as I checked out.

A few weeks later I went back to this eatery to actually get some gumbo and to see if the head chef had any interest in being interviewed for my dissertation on the gumbo he cooks and serves at this location. As the Afro-French Creole descended chef from Jeanerette and I discussed the best possible times our schedules would coincide for the interview, I related to him what I experienced on October 28th at his small restaurant. He surprised me in the fact that he had remembered that particular day. In the lunchtime hour alone (12:00 pm - 1:00 pm) the kitchen had served over 120 bowls of gumbo. This was a feat to him because he could not remember ever selling that much in a short period of time. I expressed how, from my standpoint, it seemed people were happy with the gumbo they consumed. He then asked me if I had ordered

the gumbo that day. Feeling embarrassed I told him no but I had ordered it to go before he came out to schedule the interview. When we finally sat down for a discussion about his gumbo dish, I related to him that I thoroughly enjoyed his gumbo, a gumbo he has been cooking for over 30 years (Fred, 2011).

Gumbo in South Louisiana is not just a dish, it is a metaphor, a cause to argue (see Fiebleman, 1971; Shelly, 2012), and a performance. This soup is used to describe the people, the music, the culture, and even the cuisine that resides in this portion of the state. It is deeply rooted in the history and landscape of South Louisiana. For those two reasons it is a topic of scholarly interest. Since gumbo has ties to the region of South Louisiana, this places the examination of the dish in the enduring tradition of foodway studies in cultural geography.

The American public fascination with South Louisiana foods stretches back to the 1970s and 1980s with the emergence of Paul Prudhomme commercializing the regional food as Cajun (Bienvenue et al., 2005; Zelda, 2009). More recently, South Louisiana foodways have taken up the mainstream media's attention again. Popular chefs hosting television shows such as Anthony Bourdain's, "No Reservations" and Andrew Zimmern's, "Bizarre Foods" have dedicated episodes featuring South Louisiana cuisine. In 2012, readers of Southern Living magazine voted Lafayette, Louisiana as the, "Tastiest Town in the South" (Southern Living, 2012). Along with that recognition, Lafayette as well as four other Louisiana cities rank as the happiest in the United States (Holmes, 2014). A distinction that some have attributed to food (Wartelle, 2014). Gumbo is the food ambassador which helps introduce people to the South Louisiana cultural landscape.

In this dissertation, I am writing about gumbo. Gumbo is intrinsically tied to the history of the southern portion of the state, to race/ethnicity, and to other people/regions of the world.

For this reason, a soup that many think of as indigenous to Louisiana becomes a vehicle for geographic inquiry. This project explores the historical, cultural, and anthropological geography of the dish. The dish adds to the human geographic dimensions of South Louisiana.

### **Cultural Landscapes and Gumbo**

Human beings live in the world and use material culture, this material culture communicates place (Richardson, 1982). Geographers study this phenomenon through the idea of the landscape (Schein, 1997). Landscape is employed by a variety of other disciplines but widely used in geography (Dubow, 2009). Geographers have studied both the etymology and development of landscape in the discipline (see Dubow, 2009; Wylie 2007, 2009). Generally two ideas come to mind with the notion landscape. These are the lay of the land or the natural landscape and what people make of their surroundings via culture (Regis, 1999). We experience the landscape through our senses, namely sight (Bunske, 2007; Wiley, 2007).

In human geography a major theme of study has been cultural landscapes. A cultural landscape is one in which a cultural group leaves its mark on the natural geography of a place (Sauer, 1925; Schein, 1997). The person in geography credited for introducing this concept is Carl O. Sauer (Sauer, 1925; Schein, 1997, 2008; Wylie, 2007). Sauer (1925) set the foundation for cultural landscapes in his treatise, "Morphology of Landscape."

Sauer's (1925) work, "Morphology of Landscape" laid out the groundwork for how geographers should study landscape. In this piece he states that humans manipulate the land and the record of that activity is presented in the cultural landscape (Sauer, 1925; Schein, 1997). The landscape remains constantly in flux due to the fact that culture perpetually changes the land (Sauer, 1925; Schein, 1997). Therefore the cultural landscape one sees is actually constructed on

a previous one. It is up to the geographer to understand and interpret that landscape (Sauer, 1925).

Although Sauer's ideas can be considered groundbreaking for the time, geographers later critiqued his ideas (see Duncan, 1980; Mitchell, 2003; Schein, 1997; Wylie, 2007). The issues with Sauer's work revolved mainly around the idea of human agency. Although culture is at work in landscapes, people still have their individual thoughts and activities which also add to the landscape (Duncan, 1980). Also, landscapes develop through those who are in power via people they control (Duncan, 1980; Schein, 1997). Landscape, therefore, is not just the product of a culture but the agglomeration of people who helped produce it, even those not credited (Schein, 1997).

Yet, memory and imagination play important roles in landscapes (DeLyser, 1999; Till, 2001; Wylie, 2007). What helps this perception is the idea of authenticity. If a landscape is considered authentic by people, then the landscape they are experiencing holds up to the ideas they have in their mind (DeLyser, 1999). That way, people feel they visit a real landscape because it matches with the stereotype they know (DeLyser, 1999; Wylie, 2007). The landscape replicates cultural norms as dictated by the dominant cultural force (Wylie, 2007). Even though these landscapes are "imagined," people experience them as real (DeLyser, 1999).

Cooking gumbo is a way for the masses to experience the South Louisiana cultural landscape. Using what is found naturally in South Louisiana as ingredients shows how culture manipulates its surroundings to produce a temporal artifact that seems indigenous to the region. Yet, people can use memory to access this cultural landscape via recipes. Preparation of gumbo harkens back to how others, presumably a native of South Louisiana, has cooked the dish before.



Importantly, the performance of cooking the dish restores a cultural landscape perceived to be authentic by the actor engaged with the dish (see Schechner, 1985).

The idea of performance is important to this study. Because of that, I find it useful to define performance here, specifically drawing on the works of performance theorist Richard Schechner. For Schechner (1985), performance is "restorative" or "twice behaved" which means people draw upon past actions (from others) in order to convey cultural norms of who they believe to be. This can be done in accordance or against those past actions but the importance of the performance is through the transmission from past generations (see Schechner, 1985). People are drawing on past performances of cooking gumbo even though they may change a part of the recipe, thus making it a "restorative" act. I detail other theories of performance and how they pertain to gumbo more fully throughout this work.

### **A Prologue: The GIS of Gumbo**

The current study began with a Geographic Information Systems/Science (GIS) project as part of a graduate seminar in GIS. A GIS is a digital representation of geographic phenomena (see Cope and Elwood, 2009). Practitioners utilize GIS in order to examine and solve real world issues. The basic unit of this digital information in GIS is a shapefile. As part of this seminar, students had to analyze a particular geographic occurrence in GIS. I chose chicken and sausage gumbo for this seminar project for two reasons. Firstly, as a GIS professional who dealt mainly with land/water issues, I wanted to see if a cultural act could be mapped. Secondly, at the time I was experimenting with cooking foods I remembered from my rural South Louisiana childhood. Gumbo always proved to be a challenge for my cooking skills so this project allowed me to bring together my professional life, my burgeoning hobby, and my inevitable academic life.

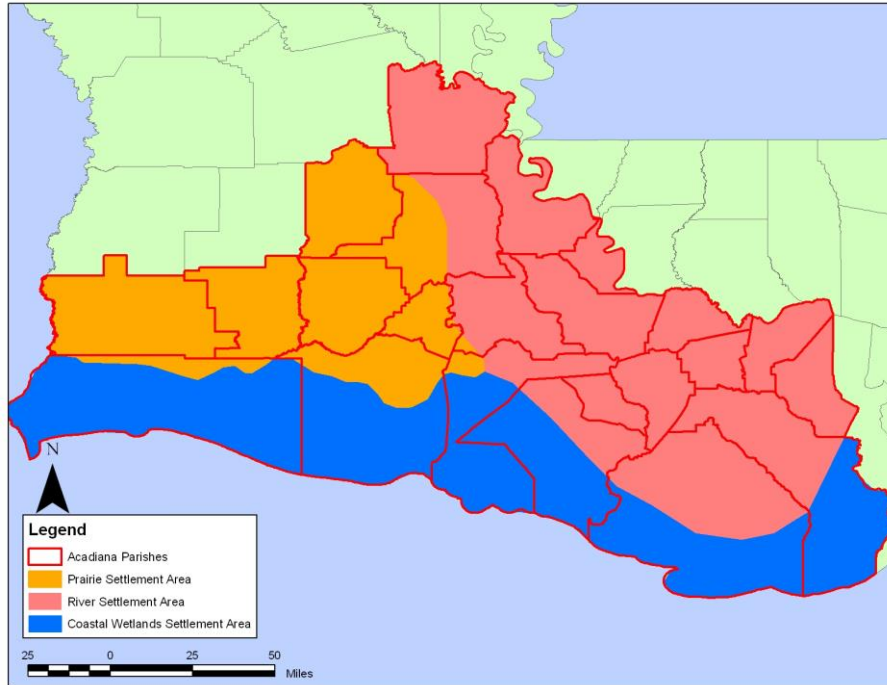


Figure 1: Physical geography regions of Acadiana.

Initially the point of this project was to investigate whether or not there was a correlation between similarities in chicken and sausage gumbo recipes with the physical geographic locales of the Acadiana region. Although, I will go into the Acadiana region further in this dissertation, just briefly here, Acadiana is the 22 parish region of South Louisiana designated as the area where not only French was traditionally spoken, but also the parishes that were the initial settling places for the Acadians who later became known as "Cajuns." The physical geographic regions that dominate Acadiana include the eastern river/bayou parishes, the western prairie parishes, and the southern coastal parishes (see Figure 1).

I gathered chicken and sausage gumbo recipes a few different ways. The first included emailing friends/family members a quick questionnaire asking to briefly describe their gumbo recipe. In the second way I scoured cooking or personal blogs on the internet regarding the dish. Lastly, I also started fielding recipes from regional cookbooks. Importantly, there needed to be a

location (city or town, parish) associated with the recipe otherwise it could not be mapped in GIS (see Figure 2).

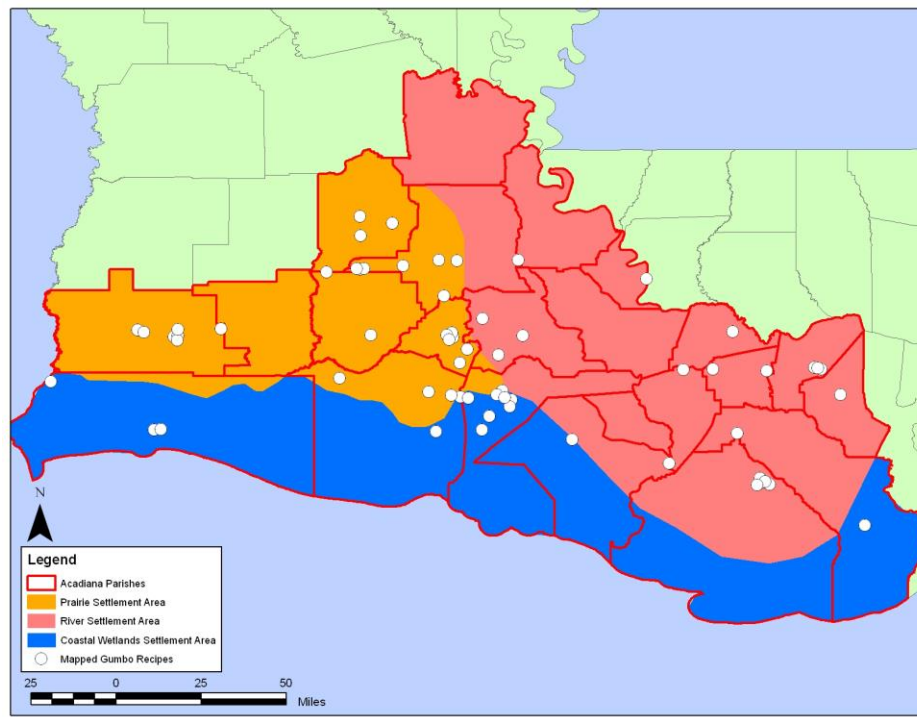


Figure 2: Mapped gumbos of the Acadiana Region

It is important to note here that I both unintentionally/intentionally biased this sample. Recipes which originated from New Orleans or called for tomatoes I did not incorporate in this GIS study as those are indicators of a New Orleans Afro-French Creole style of cooking. I ignorantly only wanted to map "Cajun" recipes since I was only looking at the region of Louisiana known as Acadiana. So although I assembled over 100 recipes for this project, I only mapped 70 in GIS. The main reason I discarded gumbo recipes is because I thought they had an Afro-French Creole inclination, an issue I will go into further in this dissertation.

After running two different analyses in GIS software, specifically ArcMap 9.2, I did not find what I initially wanted to investigate. I did not see a relationship between gumbo recipes and the physical geographic regions of Acadiana. However, three gumbo cooking regions of

Acadiana became distinguishable. These areas seemed to be based on proximity to urban areas and could be designated directionally. The GIS showed the gumbo cooking regions of Acadiana were Eastern Acadiana close to New Orleans, Central Acadiana spanning Opelousas to New Iberia along the I-49/Highway 90 corridor, and Western Acadiana near Lake Charles (see Figure 3).

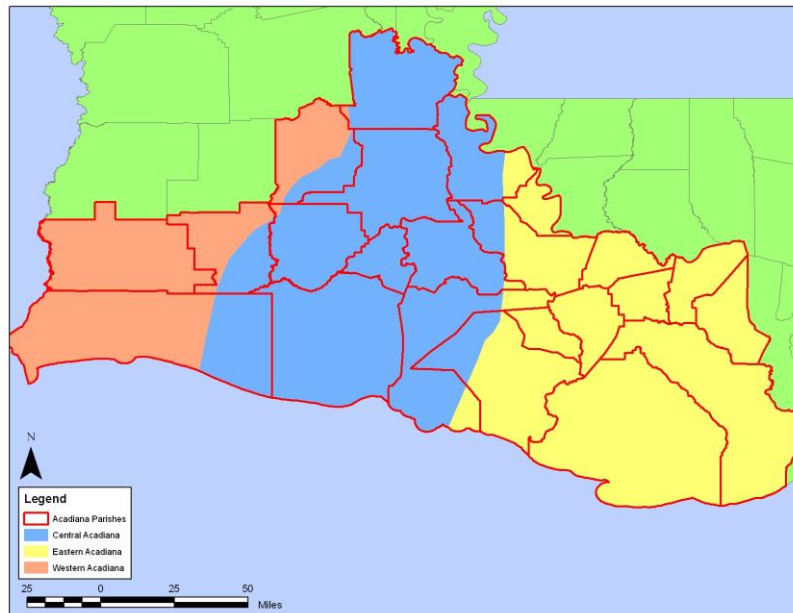


Figure 3: GIS determined gumbo cooking regions in Acadiana.

Each gumbo cooking region identified by the GIS had distinct characteristics. The East Acadiana region showed gumbos tended to have lighter roux, employ smoked sausage as one of the meats, more spices, and the recipes frequently called for filé. The gumbos of Central Acadiana were more likely to have homemade roux, recipes called for more vegetables than other regions, and this area called for the longest cooking times. Lastly, gumbos in Western Acadiana typically had dark rouxs in terms of color, roux recipes called for equal measurements of oil and flour, and took generally two hours to cook.

Although the GIS project allowed for a view of gumbo in a mapped context, hindsight demonstrates there are some major geographic factors of South Louisiana that I did not take into

account. Recipes from New Orleans were not used which ignored a segment of the state that is both historically and geographically important. Also, by just looking at recipes identified as Cajun, I overlooked the major contributions of Afro-French Creole hands to this popular dish. Further, I did not take into account what the term Creole means, the racial/ethnic connotations the word assumes, and how that impacts not only the geography of Louisiana but that of the Atlantic world. Finally, since most of the recipes were gathered electronically, there could have been more information given in a face to face encounter via a personal interview. Incorporating these three crucial elements to the GIS could have changed the outcome and findings of the gumbo maps. Therefore, a more inclusive study of gumbo is in order. I attempt a more in depth study with this dissertation.

### **Previous Studies of Louisiana Foodways**

It is important to note that my study, while distinctive for its focus on gumbo, is not the first in depth investigation into South Louisiana cuisine. Louisiana foodways, specifically the food we cook in South Louisiana has been investigated in a number of different ways. Foodways are defined by C. Paige Gutierrez (1992: xi) as, "...not only to food and cooking but to all food-related activities, concepts, and beliefs shared by a particular group of people." Below I offer a brief synopsis of the various methods in which people including scholars and professionals have studied Louisiana cuisine. Importantly this is not an exhaustive list, these are sources I found useful in my own investigation.

Born in 1899, geography Lauren C. Post comes from Acadia Parish in Louisiana. Although his family originated in Mississippi, he developed an affinity for the culture he was exposed to in Acadia Parish. He used this as a basis for his doctoral research which he completed in 1936 (Post, 1973) under the direction of Carl O. Sauer at Berkeley. Post (1962)

later published the study as a book entitled, *Cajun Sketches from the Prairies of Southwest Louisiana*. This descriptive study illustrated the folkways of Cajun including food. He (1940) also wrote about the rice industry of the area, rice being a staple in South Louisiana dishes. Post (1973) bequeathed to LSU's special Collections in Hill Memorial Library tape recordings of interviews he conducted with people from the Louisiana prairies in which they discussed foods such as couche-couche, okra, dried shrimp, oyster casserole, jambalaya, and gumbo (see Chapter 4). While these tapes contain interviews from both white and African descended people, he consistently uses the term Cajun.

Another scholarly account of South Louisiana cuisine comes from the doctoral work of C. Paige Gutierrez (1984). Gutierrez (1984, 2003) studied the food of South Louisiana in the late 1970s and published several chapters in edited volumes. These were followed by her (1992) book, *Cajun Foodways*. From an ethnographic perspective, she recounts her time in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana. While she does spend time dissecting different dishes from the region, her work focuses primarily on the crawfish and how the crustacean became an adoptive symbol for Cajun identity.

In trying to find sub-regions of Cajun cooking, historian Michael James Foret examined cookbooks from both sides of the Atchafalaya River. Doing this he was able to distinguish that the waterway actually divides how Cajuns cook. Foret's (1989) findings, documented in the article, "A Cookbook View of Cajun Culture," were based on the fact that the physical geography of South Louisiana impacts the changes in recipes on either side of the Atchafalaya. According to Foret, Cajun recipes were based on variations of the natural landscape, although the above GIS shows this idea to be problematic.

The idea of dividing South Louisiana into cooking regions is one of the themes found in the 2005 book, *Stir the Pot* (Bienvenue et al., 2005). This book demonstrates a collaborative effort in discussing Louisiana foodways by Cajun history scholar Carl Brasseaux, his son Ryan Brasseaux, and Cajun chef Marcelle Bienvenue. The book, *Stir the Pot*, attempts to review the history as well as descriptions and recipes of Cajun cuisine in South Louisiana. In this piece the authors dedicate a chapter to separating Cajun cooking into highly generalized subregions. Unlike Foret, who divided Acadiana into just two cooking subregions, these authors find eight regions in Cajun cooking although they did not attempt any ethnographic research in compiling this cooking regions and therefore their work is speculative.

When it comes to African influence, one scholar has been pivotal in that approach. Scholar Jessica B. Harris (2003; 2011) has authored several books in which she discusses not only how foods in the New World are based on African dishes but also how those foods are Creole. Although geographically she discusses the United States, Harris does talk about foods from Louisiana. Harris follows the history of foodways flowing from Africa to the New World. Examples of works by Harris (2003; 2011) which have informed the current study include, *Beyond Gumbo: Creole Fusion Food from the Atlantic Rim* and *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America*.

Possibly taking a cue from Jessica B. Harris, food history aficionado Adrian Miller (2013) travelled the United States studying African American cuisine. In his book, *Soul Food*, Miller discusses how he visited Soul Food restaurants throughout the US in order to document an American tradition he feels is disappearing. Miller uses his study to discuss several dishes one might find in a typical Soul Food meal, a few of which is also found among South Louisiana dishes. It should be noted that Miller is a member of the Southern Foodways Alliance.

The Southern Foodways Alliance is a group headquartered at the University of Mississippi and specializes in the regional food of the southern United States. The mission of the Southern Foodway Alliance is to record and learn about the various foods for which the South is known. Although the Alliance gathers data from different Southern states, they have done work dealing with Louisiana, specifically in boudin and gumbo. The work of the Southern Foodway Alliance tends to focus on businesses that specialize in certain foods rather than regular people cooking the food (see [www.southernfoodways.org](http://www.southernfoodways.org), 2015).

Chef John Folse has been at the forefront of not only cooking but also researching the cuisine of South Louisiana. His works (2007) include researching both the history and development of dishes that comprise South Louisiana regional foodways. Chef Folse (2004) has also researched the various cultural influences that both added to and enhanced dishes of the area. Folse discusses, compares, and contrasts the two main ethnic groups that make up South Louisiana foodways through the exploration of Creole and Cajun foods.

The above illustrates how Louisiana food or Louisiana style dishes have been studied. Although more has been written about Louisiana foodways, I found these works helpful in documenting the gumbo dish. In one way or another the current project has been informed and critiqued by these works.

### **Ethnicity and Race in Louisiana**

One of the major issues in writing an academic piece on the South Louisiana region deals with ethnicity/race. There have been a plethora of ethnicities and cultural groups which have added to the assortment of people found in South Louisiana (see Ancelet et al., 1991; Bengé and Sullivan, 2007; Bienvenue et al., 2005; Dominguez, 1997; Gaudet and McDonald, 2003; Merrill, 2005). Although other ethnic groups have contributed to the culture of South Louisiana, this



region is mainly known for the French influence (see Ancelet et al., 1991; Bernard, 2003; Dorman, 1983; Trepanier, 1991). Therefore, before talking about gumbo, I need to define how French ethnic groups have been designated in this region of state. See Chapter 3 for a further examination on the history of ethnicities and race in South Louisiana.

Traditionally there are four French ethnic groups designated in Louisiana. These include white Creoles, Afro-French Creoles, Acadians/Cajuns, and Native Americans who speak French (Trepanier, 1991). Trepanier (1991:161) states of white Creoles, "It includes the descendants of the first French and French Canadian colonists, early gallicized Germans, and later political French refugees." As discussed below in Chapter 3, white (Euro) Creoles are generally people from New Orleans who tried to distinguish themselves as not having African heritage after the Civil War (see Brasseaux, 2005; Dominguez, 1986). Currently, Creole generally refers to people who are descended from African, French, and/or Spanish ancestors (see Valdman et al., 2010). Some Afro-French Creoles moved out of New Orleans and occupy sections of southwestern Louisiana (Brasseaux, 2005).

Cajuns are defined as white descendants of the Acadian people who left Nova Scotia in the 18th century and settled in South Louisiana (Ancelet, 1991; Bernard, 2003; Dorman, 1983; Trepanier, 1991; Valdman, et al., 2010). Although Cajun is an acculturation of other ethnic groups, generally they are referred to as white people of French descent who are Catholic (See Ancelet, 1991; Bernard, 2003). Some Native American tribes adopted the French language during the contact period and French colonialism. These Native tribes still retain a French cultural heritage (Amber, 2013; Trepanier, 1991).

For the purposes of this dissertation, African descended people from Louisiana I refer to as either Afro-French Creole (French Creole speakers or descendants of French Creole speakers)

or African American (Anglophones). In some instances a white person self-identified as Creole or both Cajun and Creole or someone of African descent self-identified as both Cajun and Creole as well. I make notations of this in Chapter 5. However, when discussing Cajun or Creole I am going by the labels as defined by how previous scholars studied South Louisiana. Yet, as this dissertation shows, these labels are problematized and not always followed by people who self-identify as something other than what scholars say they are.

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation is on the cultural geography of gumbo and the performance of cooking the dish in South Louisiana. I employ various methods to study the geography of gumbo. Below are summaries of the following chapters.

In Chapter 2, I look at how geographers have historically studied foods. There have been several approaches employed in the discipline of geography to investigate the spatial component of foods, foodways, and cuisines. Starting with geographers of the Classical Greek period and the theme of plant and animal domestication to revealing the geographic scale of food, I pinpoint certain ideas geographers have brought to food. I end the chapter discussing geographies of performance and how that pertains to food geography.

I give a brief history of the development of the South Louisiana region in Chapter 3. In this chapter, I pay attention to Creole and Cajun histories as well as discuss various other ethnicities found in southern Louisiana. This chapter explores the evolution of the region of the state which gumbo purportedly originates. I also explain how Creole and Cajun cuisines come to be and the supposed perceived differences between the two.

Chapter 4 is on the gumbo dish. I discuss the Columbian Exchange and why that is important to understanding how gumbo evolved. In this chapter I go into details about how to

cook the dish, what generally goes into the gumbo, and how it can be categorized. I also explain my analysis on regional cookbook gumbo recipes. The chapter concludes with a look at dishes that are related to gumbo and a description of other Louisiana dishes that came up while researching gumbo.

The focus of Chapter 5 is on the interviews I conducted for this research. In this chapter I discuss my methodology for interviewing people as well as where those interviews took place. I also spend time discussing the World Championship Gumbo Cook-Off which is where I conducted the majority of interviews. Coding and the types of codes that I encountered with this research are explained.

Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation. Here, I discuss my findings from the work I've done and what that means to geography. I explore the idea of hidden landscapes and masked performance in cooking the gumbo dish. I look at the theoretical implications to geography with the notion of hidden landscapes. Lastly, I explain what this all means to not only gumbo but also how Louisianans perceive themselves through the act of cooking gumbo.

The goal of this project is to add to the ongoing scholarship of the human geography of food. I also want to contribute my voice in the larger works of Louisiana foodways. It is my hope that the research I have done will help people understand the geographic associations Louisiana food has with the larger Atlantic Creole world. Moreover, I would like to blur the dichotomy of Creole/Cajun and for Cajun to be understood more in a Creole geographic context. Ultimately, I want this work to give a geographical understanding of a dish we cook, love, perform, and most of all eat in South Louisiana (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: Participants serving a pot of gumbo at the 2011 World Championship Gumbo Cook-Off, New Iberia, Louisiana.

## **CHAPTER 2: OTHER CHARACTERS - THE GEOGRAPHIES OF FOOD AND PERFORMANCE**

### **Introduction**

I panicked as I drove down Highway 14 in rural area between Delcambre and New Iberia, Louisiana as noticed the time on my clock radio. The blinking clock, 5:30 am, reminded me that I was already 30 minutes late in getting to Bouligny Plaza for my volunteer duties as Gumbo Police before the World Championship Gumbo Cook-Off was to begin. Finding a parking spot near the Iberia Parish Courthouse, a good four block walk from where I needed to be, I cursed my alarm clock and myself for not getting up in time to fulfill my role in the competition held on October 9, 2011.

Approaching the designated event space of downtown New Iberia in the early morning chill, I noticed movement in the pre-dawn darkness. Participants banged pots, gathered ingredients, and made last minute authorized preparations before the Cook-Off officially began. Finding Miss Scarlett, President and Chief Executive Officer for the Greater Iberia Chamber of Commerce (the organization that puts on the event), I profusely apologized in my lateness. Although I had missed my Gumbo Police duties which someone else had taken over, Miss Scarlet found another function that I could accomplish before the festivities began, that of wrapping utensils for the judges in the Chamber of Commerce building. Anxiously watching the clock, I aided another volunteer in the task until 6:25 am, five minutes before the competition began.

Walking briskly onto Main Street, I noticed that although the sun had yet to rise, the humidity started to set in. Sweat dripping down my forehead, I found a place to stand which overlooked the majority of Bouligny Plaza where the gumbo cooking booths were already set up. At 6:30 am a noise exploded over the darkened Bayou Teche. This was the sound all the

competitors were waiting for, the canon boom signaled that the competition had commenced, it was time to start cooking the roux.

A flurry of activity began. The overwhelming voices of men barked out orders to people at their respective booths. Gas tanks roared to life as people began cooking their roux for gumbo. The metal spoons scraping against cast iron and aluminum pots followed soon after. These noises lasted approximately fifteen minutes while people scurried around their cooking instruments to make sure they were making good time. As each booth got into the rhythm of the beginnings of gumbo preparation, the activity sounds made way to another sensory experience equally as noticeable in the air; the pungent bitter smell of roux cooking.

With the sun beginning to rise over downtown New Iberia, surrounded by the sounds and smells of gumbo cooking, I began to panic about the enormity of conducting fieldwork that morning and where this fieldwork on gumbo fits into the broader geography of food concept. Although I had talked to competitors at previous World Championship Gumbo Cook Offs, this would be the first one where I would not only be recording the interviews for transcription but also where I was officially a doctoral candidate, someone who has successfully passed General Exams, who supposedly had a research design, and knew what they were doing. I worried about how the obtrusiveness of sticking a recorder in someone's face could hinder the answers to the questions I had in my head. I also began to have doubts that anyone would even want to talk to me for fear that they would expose some secret ingredient or that I would know more about gumbo cooking than them since I was studying the dish. Lastly, I was worried that the questions I ask would have nothing to do with trying to add to the larger work in food geographies.

The stress began to overwhelm me as did the rising heat and humidity from both daybreak as well as the fire from the ninety plus competition booths cooking roux. Just when

my self- doubts and anxiety reached their maximum I heard someone call my name. It was Ms. Kim, Vice President of Operations with the Greater Iberia Chamber of Commerce. She asked if I had begun interviewing people to which I answered that I was just trying to get a feel of the gumbo landscape and, less emphatically, I did not know where to begin. Smiling Ms. Kim led me to one of the booths sponsored by a service organization. She introduced me to people at the booth and asked them if it would be okay for me to ask them questions with all of them saying yes. This did not alleviate my nervousness as I fumbled to get my digital recorder out of the bag I had slung across my shoulder.

Struggling with introductions and trying to explain my research, one of the cooks recognized me from attending meetings of a gourmet cooking club where my father was a member. An elderly Mr. Larry, extended his hand to shake mine and asked about my father. Instantly I began to feel relieved and more at ease with my role as researcher. After a minute or so of pleasantries with Mr. Larry and others at this booth, I took on the task of beginning the interview. Turning on my recorder I confidently asked the question that I began all my recorded conversations with that morning, “So where are y'all from”?

This chapter is about how geographers have historically studied food and where that research currently resides. Geographers have linked studies in food with animal and plant domestication, region, scale, and performance. Lastly, I conclude with a brief explanation of my fieldwork methodology and where this falls in the scholarship of food geographies.

## **Geography of food**

### Domestication and Food Taboos

Arguably food geographies began with the study of animal and plant domestication in the history of the discipline (Wolch and Emel, 1998; see also Mathewson, 2000). Domestication is

important to geography because geography is a subject that looks at how humans have manipulated the physical landscape with both agriculture and animal control (Sauer, 1952). Each culture area has animals that people have been able to tame (Wolch and Emel, 1998). Humans have used animals throughout history for various purposes including food, husbandry, and pets (Bennett, 1970). By studying animal and plant domestication, geographers can get a better idea of how both help establish the interrelationship of region and culture (Wolch and Emel, 1998). Geographers have studied domestication in many ways (see Mathewson, 2000). Examples include domestication origin, distribution of domesticated animals, and human agency in domestication (Towle, 1983).

As stated above, there is a legacy of studying domestication in geography. Classical Greek and Roman geographers were interested in how animal and plant domestication led to stages of cultural development (Anderson, 1998; Isaac, 1970; Kramer, 1967; Sauer, 1952). With later Christian geographic scholarship, domestication took a backseat to more biblical studies. However, plant and animal domestication came back to geographical thinking during the Middle Ages. The idea that domestication was a sign of cultural stages remained prominent in geography until 19th century (Kramer, 1967). Yet, this view began to be questioned by geographers in the mid to late 1800s (Anderson, 1998; Isaac, 1970; Kramer, 1967).

Geographers in the 19th century began to move away from the notion that animal domestication was a result of stages in human societies. Scholars such as Alexander von Humboldt, Fredrich Ratzel, and Edward Hahn changed how domestication was studied in the discipline such as viewing domestication as developing from religious means or as a result of societies becoming more sedentary (see Isaac, 1970; Kramer 1967; Rodrigue, 1992). Although



ideas of domestication evolved from this 19th century ideas, these geographers helped propel the question of domestication forward.

With more people doing ethnological studies in the early 20th century, ideas on domestication began to change (Isaac, 1970). The doctrine of environment determinism, the notion that the environment dictated how cultures adapted, influenced the study of domestication in the first decades of the 1900s (Isaac, 1970; see Huntington, 1925). However, by midcentury environmental determinism was considered an obsolete theory and geographers began to look more closely at where domestication originated and how religion fit into the process (Anderson, 1997; Sauer, 1938; Sauer, 1952). Technological and theoretical advances in the late 20th century allowed for a more critical approach for geographers to study and expand on plant and animal domestication (see Anderson, 1997; Chakravarti, 1985; Nast, 2006; Rodrigue, 1992; Wolch and Emel, 1998).

Tastes are guided by cultural and societal norms. These values also dictate what food is considered restricted or taboo among a cultural group (Atkins and Bowler, 2001; Bell and Valentine, 1997). Groups define space by using cultural traits such as taboos (Bonnemaïson, 2005). A taboo refers to something that should be avoided (Atkins and Bowler, 2001). Food avoidances can be found throughout time. Taboos relating to food can be mainly due to religious prohibitions (see Simoons, 1994). Evading certain foods can also distinguish boundaries between groups when one enters visits a culture in which a food s/he avoids is eaten (Kalcik, 1984; see Gutierrez, 1992). One geographer that studied food taboos in detail is Frederick Simoons (Atkins and Bowler, 2001; see Simoons, 1994).

Frederick Simoons (1994) an American geographer, who trained under Carl O. Sauer, wrote the seminal book on regional food taboos *Eat Not this Flesh: Food Avoidances from*

*Prehistory to the Present* (see Simoons, 1994; Atkins and Bowler, 2001). One of the regional food taboos Simoons elucidates on is the sacred cow of India in which he states that the origin of this taboo is steeped in religion. Simoons also stated that this taboo had a negative impact on the human population of India due to destruction of crops by the over burden of cows (Simoons, 1994).

This conflicted with anthropologist Marvin Harris' (1994) assessment of the Indian cow taboo. Harris argues the reason for taboo is because cows are economically more important in India alive than dead (Atkins and Bowler, 2001). In a debate between geography and anthropology that spanned several years, Simoons (1979) contended that Harris' argument harkened back to environmental determinism. Although a further study of the sacred cow taboo showed that was more of a localized issue within sub-regions of India than with the Indian nation as a whole (Chakravarti, 1985).

### Food Geographies: Scale, Region, Terroir, Performance

#### Scale

Food has connotations that go beyond just the biological need. It has cultural implications at various levels which is why scale is necessary in the study of food (Atkins and Bowler, 2001). Humans engage with the landscape via decisions and these decisions produce scale (Terkenli, 1995). Although in cartography scale means the relationship between representations on a map as they correspond to the physical ground, that definition in human geography changes. Scale has come to have various meanings and disagreements of those meanings in human geography. As Sayre and Di Vittorio (2009: 27) state, "The many uses and meanings of scale can be reconciled if they are understood in terms of relations and processes."

In this way levels are not hierarchical but are interconnected through the production of social relationships (see Jones, 2009).

The geography of food can be looked at differing interrelated scales such as international, national, regional, local, and home. Studying food through these scales can lead to dynamic understanding of food and how meaning of food can change depending on vantage point (Atkins and Bowler, 2001; Bell and Valentine, 1997; LeeRay and Besio, 2011). The meanings of food can change and even challenge each other when viewed at varying scales (see LeeRay and Besio, 2011). Geographers have used scale to study different aspects of food including social connections, gender, food as temporary cultural artifacts, neolocalism, and health (see Atkins and Bowler, 2001; Bell and Valentine, 1997; Cook and Crang, 1996; Shaw 2006; Shortridge and Shortridge, 1998).

At the scale of the home, meals are instrumental. Families are connected to place through the meals that they eat. Helping to determine this is the fact that meals are designated at defined times to be eaten (Bell and Valentine, 1997). All this allows food to strengthen the attachment of the family unit (Atkins and Bowler, 2001). Not only do meals draw the family closer but they are also useful in socializing children. How and what is eaten molds the child and influences their decisions on etiquette and food choices into adulthood. This influences what one thinks of as home when eating these foods later on (Bell and Valentine, 1997; see Manalansan, 2004). Children first realize relationships through the medium of food (Coleman, 2011).

Food is a way for people to socialize (Coleman, 2011). Eating food together helps designate families and communities. In this way food ties people together (Bell, 2002; see Coleman, 2011). Yet, communal eating can bring about strain amongst members of a group

(Bell, 2002). Also, the types of food that are eaten in a household or a particular locality can identify insiders versus outsiders. Meals can be used to introduce outsiders to the home by having them eat the food that is familiar to the family (Bell and Valentine, 1997; see also Gutierrez, 1992).

Home meals also dictate tastes. Tastes define which food is suitable to eat in a given culture. Tastes are also used to show who belongs to a group (Bell, 2002). The type of food eaten by tastes identifies the social status of a family. In this way, tastes can present whether or not a family is at a higher economic position than another family. This is seen through if only high status foods are available to definite families (Atkins and Bowler, 2001; see also Grigg, 2002). If enough tastes are similar in a particular area, tastes can be used to express identity as well (see Weiss, 2011).

The local scale of food consumption shows an interrelationship between home meals and food that is being produced and bought. This is done by studying food purchases of an area diachronically and the codependency of consumers and producers (Atkins and Bowler, 2001; Cook and Crang, 1996). Customers buy food that they have learned to be culturally conventional. In this way a trail of foods can be traced over different areas (Atkins and Bowler, 2001).

The study of gender is useful when looking at home/local scale and space as they pertain to food in geography (Atkins and Bowler, 2001; Christie, 2008; Cook and Crang, 1996). Previous studies show that females prepare foods (Atkins and Bowler, 2001). Males cook but supposedly not as often as women and when they do cook, it is usually done outside and more publically than women (Bell and Valentine, 1997; Christie, 2008; see also Bienvenue et al., 2005). With the advent of scholarship in the 19th century, kitchens have come to be

symbolically feminine space (Atkins and Bowler, 2001; see also Lawrence, 1982; Meah, 2014). How and where different genders cook and consume food illustrate who has power in a particular space. An example of this would be the process of eating as this can highlight which foods were purchased for consumption, who decided these foods were acceptable, and whose tastes were in mind when these foods were prepared (Atkins and Bowler, 2001; Bell and Valentine, 1997; Meah, 2014). However, private cooking can be a way for females in a household to assert some authority (see Meah, 2014).

Food is a temporary form of material culture. Material culture can be defined as matter that is culturally infused with symbolic meaning, connected to the space it inhabits, and the relationships material culture helps bond (see Cook and Crang, 1996). Food is a temporal cultural artifact existing in a spatial context (Atkins and Bowler, 2001). Food in space is connected to culture (Christie, 2008). Because of this food can also demonstrate a sort of dislocation as the food and its components can come from various regions while still maintaining its sense of local place (Cook and Crang, 1996).

An important idea to the study of scale and food is the notion of neolocalism. Neolocalism is also associated with advocacy groups in which local populations try to exert more power over their own social and natural environment (Parnell, 2007; see Meah, 2014). However, neolocalism started as a sense of nostalgia for things considered “close to home” (see Shortridge and Shortridge, 1998). According to Barbara and James Shortridge, neolocalism sprung up from people needing an identity from having non-sedentary lives (Shortridge and Shortridge, 1998). Neolocalism is a way for people to be tied to place (Schnell, 2007). Through food people experience place via neolocalism and therefore they reunite with home or region (Shortridge and Shortridge, 1998).

In the past two decades, some geographers have begun to look at food in relation to health and locality. This is done in the form of studying food deserts which is a term first used in the late 1990s (Shaw, 2006). Food deserts are generally defined as areas in which healthy/non-processed foods are hard to come by, perhaps not accessible at all (Bader et al., 2010; Coyle and Flowerdew 2011; Shaw 2006). Even though some scholars question the existence of food deserts, geographers try to establish their boundaries in order to better define food deserts, study health effects of these localities, and to help find solutions in providing healthier food in these areas (see Bader et al., 2010; Coyle and Flowerdew 2011; Shaw 2006).

Geographic scales of food can go past local or regional to national, international, and global (Bell and Valentine, 1997; see also Atkins and Bowler, 2001). At the national scale cuisines and the development of national foodways become part of geographic inquiry (Bell and Valentine, 1997). At the international and global scales, geographers become interested in the production, mobility, and economics of how food travels to various places in the world (Atkins and Bowler, 2001; Bell and Valentine, 1997; Cook, 2004). Studying food products in these ways show how the meaning of food changes as the product travels from one scale to another (Cook, 2004).

## Region

This dissertation focuses on the regional scale of a dish. The study of food and region in geography can be traced back as far as Herodotus, who lived from 484 to 425 BC in Greece. Although many consider Herodotus a historian, he made the case that history and geography are inextricably linked. Herodotus traveled and wrote ethnographies of the people he encountered (Martin, 2005). Herodotus often used food to describe cultures he met. He noted that what people ate became more bizarre the further one traveled from Greece (Dalby, 2003).

Region and food came to more prominence in geography with Paul Vidal de la Blache and the French school of geography in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (See Trubek, 2008). Vidal occupied the chair of geography at the Sorbonne beginning in 1898 (Martin, 2005). He concerned himself with the human relationship with the landscape through small uniform regions referred to as pays (Archer, 1993; Bonnemaïson, 2005; Martin, 2005; Trubek, 2008). A geographer added to the discipline by finding and studying these pays, according to Vidal (Archer, 1993; Bonnemaïson, 2005; Martin, 2005). However, Vidal wanted to go beyond just characterizing these small regions but to also understand the connections humans have with the environment within the pays (Archer, 1993; Bonnemaïson, 2005). Vidal's ideas were picked up and expounded upon further by his students (Martin, 2005; Sommers, 2008).

One central focus to Vidal's pays was food (Trubek, 2008; Vidal de la Blache, 1918). For Vidal, food inherently connected human beings to the physical landscape (Vidal de la Blache, 1918). Vidal in his writings demonstrated how environmental factors aided food choices (Trubek, 2008; Vidal de la Blache, 1918 ). Humans chose plants that they want to eat from the regional environment. With diffusion, a single plant could evolve into different strains in localized regions thus creating varieties of the original food item which are found in various pays (Vidal de la Blache, 1918).

Genres de vie describes how Vidal referred to these decisions humans made in their environment (Archer, 1993; Bonnemaïson, 2005; Martin, 2005). This went against the doctrine of environmental determinism, prevalent in geography at the time, because it gave humans choices. People decide what they want from what the landscape provided and this produced culture (Bonnemaïson, 2005). In contrast, environmental determinism, as previously written, stated that natural phenomena dictated the course of a culture (Huntington, 1925; Martin, 2005).

Geographers who believed in environmental determinism also studied food and region (Huntington, 1925). An example of this is found in Ellsworth Huntington's and Sumner Cushing's (1921) *Principles of Human Geography*. In this work Huntington and Cushing, both American geographers, investigate how diets in different regions are governed by climate especially in the cold reaches of Alaska and the tropical rainforests of Latin America (Huntington, 1925). Although the theory of environmental determinism eventually became obsolete, the misuse of environmental determinism came up again a few decades later with the study of regional food taboos as previously mentioned (see Simoons, 1994).

Research on the cultural implications surrounding food came to the forefront in the last two decades of the 20th century (Shortridge and Shortridge, 1998). Specifically, how regional food can reflect identity (Atkins and Bowler, 2001; Bell and Valentine, 1997; Cook and Crang, 1996; see Shortridge and Shortridge, 1998). Foodways of a region can give a better understanding of the people that live in a given locality (Shortridge and Shortridge, 1998). Cooking food a certain way, and thus echoing a cuisine, emulates cultural norms of an area (see Christie, 2008). Although regional identity is useful in studying geography of food, it needs to be remembered that cuisines are constructed and therefore caught up in cultural and political processes (see Bell and Valentine, 1997; Duruz, 2005; Schnell and Reese, 2003).

Ethnicity is also important in studying region and food. Ethnicity and region are similar since the meaning of both can change at varying scales (Raitz, 1979). Immigrant ethnic groups create their own space in a new place to reflect their needs and cultural associations (see Baker, 2004; Chacko, 2003; Wood, 1997). Food can aid keeping an ethnic identity among immigrants in a new country. Even though succeeding generations become more assimilated as far as what they eat in a host country, there are still foods they will associate with their ethnic group (see



Atkins and Bowler, 2001). Although cuisines reflect ethnicity of a particular region, they are still created foodways in which many ethnic groups could have had a hand in inventing (see Atkins and Bowler, 2001; Cook and Crang, 1996; LeeRay and Besio, 2011).

Ethnic food is also a way for consumers to be initiated in different foodstuffs that they eat. As American geographer Wilbur Zelinsky (2001) points out, most Americans experience various ethnic foods by eating out at restaurants. This outpaces other ways to know a cultural group such as learning their language. Although ethnic restaurants must mitigate their regional tastes with the host countries' palate, they still try to offer an authentic experience of a regional ethnic cuisine (Atkins and Bowler, 2001).

In the study of regional foods, place becomes significant especially in food consumption (see Atkins and Bowler, 2001; Bell, 2002; LeeRay and Besio, 2011; Trubek and Bowen, 2008; Weiss, 2011). Eating exotic food from various locales allows people to actually experience place through taste (Atkins and Bowler; Cook and Crang, 1996). Sometimes, particular foods become representative of a particular place (Shortridge and Shortridge, 1998). In this way labels become directly involved in the process of place creation (Cook and Crang, 1996; see also Wit, 1992). Products with labels associated with place allow consumers to believe that they are actually tasting the area from which those products are advertised as being from (see Wit, 1992).

### Terroir

A concept that has use in the geographic study of food is terroir. Terroir is a French term that comes from viticulture. Although the word does not have a direct translation to English, it basically encompasses everything including the landscape, climate, soil composition, and human manipulation that plays a role in the overall taste of wine (LeeRay and Besio, 2011; Murray and Overton, 2011; Sommers, 2008; Trubek, 2008; Trubek and Bowen, 2008). While the idea of

terroir started in France, other wine making countries have also incorporated the term to describe their own regions that generate wine (Warwick and Overton, 2011). It is also used in other contexts to relate food to place (see LeeRay and Besio, 2011). Terroir is important in the consumption of wine as it associates various wines with a particular location or region (Schnell, 2011; Warwick and Overton, 2011). In this way, terroir lets people experience a locale through the sense of taste (LeeRay and Besio, 2011; Schnell 2011; Trubek, 2008).

Terroir associates wine with place (Schnell, 2011). Because of this place becomes important in both the production and consumption of wine (Sommers, 2008). Producers use the idea of terroir to show how place influences the particular essence of the wine while consumers try to connect to place through the drinking of wine (Murray and Overton, 2011). Essentially a seasoned wine connoisseur knows a good deal about where a particular wine comes from in order to understand the complexities of its taste (Warwick and Overton, 2011; see Sommers, 2008). Knowing something about terroir and a wine's region allows for better appreciation of the wine drinking experience (Sommers, 2008).

In fact this association between terroir, region, and wine is so important, France created appellation d'origine controlee (AOC) (Atkins and Bowler, 2001; Trubek and Bowen, 2008; Trubek 2008). This is a series of laws which seeks to guard the reputation of agricultural regions, including wine through government certification. Even though other countries can produce wine, these wines do not have the same status as the AOC affords French wines (Atkins and Bowler, 2001; Trubek, 2008).

In contrast to wine, microbrewed beers are produced and consumed to experience a different scale (Flack, 1997; Schnell and Reese, 2003). People enjoy these beers because it gives a glimpse of an area that is more localized and less regional (Flack, 1997). In the partaking of

these spirits, consumers are more interested in getting a “sense of place” (see Schnell and Reese, 2003). According to Foote and Azaryhu (2009: 96), “Sense of place refers to the emotive bonds and attachments people develop or experience in particular environments, from the national, regional, or urban levels all the way to the personal scale of the neighborhood and home.” In this way people experience the distinctive character of a local strata (Foote and Azaryhu, 2009; Schnell and Reese, 2003).

Microbrewed beers allow people a better feeling of an area by experiencing a more limited scale (Flack, 1997; Schnell and Reese, 2003). In doing this, people become active agents in the production of place through the medium of microbrewed beers (Schnell and Reese, 2003). This shows that regions are not fully homogenized, difference does show up at smaller geographic scales through the beer consumption (Flack, 1997; Schnell and Reese, 2003).

#### Performance

In the past few years, geographers have developed more connections between performance and food. Geographers have used performance as a field of study starting with the humanists in the 1970s. Those humanist geographers became interested in a more phenomenological approach to study space. The concept of phenomenology entered into the discipline of philosophy via Edmond Husserl during the 20th century (Sokolowski, 2009; Kockelmans, 2009). Phenomenology examines the human experience in the lived world without any analysis (Kockelmans, 2009). Humanist geographers employed phenomenology as a way to engage the landscape through quotidian life experiences (Adams et al., 2001; Gregory, 2008; Pickles, 2009; Pratt, 2009). The phenomenological approach allowed these geographers to counter the work purely quantitative research geographers conducted during the 1960s (Pickles, 2009).

Some geographers, after the humanists, engaged directly with performance theorists. Specifically they looked to Erving Goffman and Victor Turner to inform their studies (see Crang 1994; Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000; Valentine, 1992). Goffman, a sociologist, wrote about the idea of the front which is the persona one plays in any given social situation and is interaction dependent (Goffman, 2007). Geographers have employed Goffman's ideas when looking at social interaction in space (see Crang, 1994; Valentine, 1993). Victor Turner (2004) was an anthropologist who introduced the idea of liminality. Borrowed from Arnold van Gennep, liminality is the state of "inbetweenness" during a rite of passage in which an initiate has not shed her/his old status. Liminality is a state of uncertainty which geographers have used to study ambiguous spaces (see O'Reilly and Crutcher, 2006; Sibley, 1995; Tuan, 1977).

Performance developed more in the discipline of geography with the rise of post-structuralist scholarship in the last two decades of the 20th century (McCormack, 2009; Morton, 2009). In particular, feminist geographers brought performance and performativity to the forefront (Rose, 1993; McCormack, 2009). They did this by making use of Judith Butler's (1990) ideas from her book *Gender Trouble* (Bell et al., 1994; Nelson, 1999; Gregson and Rose, 2000; Kurtz, 2007; Nash, 2000; Pratt, 2009). In *Gender Trouble*, Butler is concerned with how hegemonic processes dictate the performance of gender. For Butler, performativity is the repetitive performance of gender trying to reach the ideal which never occurs (Nash, 2000). Geographers who have employed Butler's ideas have done so by researching the spatiality of dominant discourse on gender and identity (Bell et al., 1994; Butler, 1990; Gregson and Rose, 2000; Little and Leyshon, 2003; McCormack, 2009).

How geographers dealt with performance started to change in the first few years of the current century with the use of Non-Representational Theory (Thrift, 2008; Thrift and Dewsbury,

2000). Nigel Thrift developed this in part as a reaction to the Cultural Turn in geography (Cadman, 2009). Geographers use Non-Representational Theory to go further than representation and to view common performances as embodied. Embodiment shows practices as being part of the self, knowing how to do something without instruction (see Longhurst, 2009). This is done so that commonplace performances are not ignored by a geographer's analysis (Cadman, 2009; Thrift, 2008; Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000). Non-Representational Theory practitioners see embodiment as key as it is a vehicle for culture to be realized through performances enacted in space (Thrift, 2008; Nash, 2000).

The way food and performance intertwine in geography has become subject of study in the past few years. This is done by applying visceral geographies to food. According to Hayes-Conroy and Martin (2010: 272) the visceral approach tackles, “the way the human body experiences the world.” Thus visceral geographies are concerned with how the body can engage with places through the senses (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008; Hayes-Conroy and Martin, 2010; Wiess, 2011). For this reason, food is key (Wiess, 2011).

One way the visceral approach is important in studying food geographies is that it can help realize the connection between food and place. The body comprehends a locality through the eating and cooking of food. Eating food allows people to grasp a region by taste (Longhurst et al., 2009; Wiess, 2011). On the other hand, cooking helps produce space by connecting people, who are part of a diaspora, to home (Longhurst et al., 2009; see Chacko, 2003; Manalansan, 2004). This production of space brings food and performance together in the study of place (see Wiess, 2011). Therefore the body becomes an active player in how place can be understood through the visceral senses (Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2008; Hayes-Conroy and Martin, 2010, Longhurst et al., 2009; Wiess, 2011). Although visceral geographies can enhance

scholarship in food geographies, a critique of this approach could be that it focuses too much on embodiment while disregarding the importance of interrelationships of people in place making (see Kozak, 2012).

The above demonstrates how geographers have utilized performance in geographic inquiry. With this dissertation I implement performance theorists that inform this work. Although I do employ Erving Goffman, I want to briefly mention here ideas from other people who I draw on with their ideas of performance. I explain more about using the following people in Chapters 5 and 6.

As I have mentioned before, by using the term performance I draw from Richard Schechner's definition. He states that performance is a way to enact cultural traits which have been performed before (Schechner, 1985; Taylor, 2004). Schechner refers to this as "twice behaved" or restorative behavior as it conveys social information (Schechner, 1985; see Bial, 2004; Taylor, 2004). While the action performed harkens back to an earlier one, it can alter from the prior performance and still transmit the intended cultural awareness (Schechner, 1985).

Erving Goffman's ideas of the front have been useful to geography, and as I demonstrate later, to this study as well. However, along with the front comes an area that Erving Goffman (1985) considered the "back region." According to Goffman (1959: 112) the back region is, "...a place relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course." The back region is what is used to present the mask of the front that is being performed (McCannell, 1973). The performance is built and checked for errors in the back region (Goffman, 1959).

Another performance theorist that enhances this study comes from German playwright Bertolt Brecht. Specifically, his idea on Alienation Effect (A-Effect) adds to gumbo

performance and space. For Brecht (1964: 143), A-Effect is, "...turning the object of which one is to be made aware, which one's attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected." In A-Effect, something that is thought of to be common place takes on a different, unaccustomed role, forcing the audience view this new reality as abnormal. This allows for a questioning of ascribed roles and even the space where the roles are taking place (Brecht, 1964). Later in this dissertation, I show that the familiar roles of gumbo and gumbo cooking can take on unusual aspects allowing for a critical view of the dish and the performances that surround gumbo.

## **Conclusion**

Food has been a part of geographic inquiry since Herodotus. This long lineage of food studies continues to enrich the discipline of human geography. How geographers have incorporated food into the discipline includes studying plant/animal domestication, food taboos, food in scale, and finally to performance and embodiment. Although it has been studied a number of ways a prevailing theme is how food can tie people to place. Due to this notion that food is a medium to which humans not only interact with but also experience a region, understanding foodways becomes intrinsic to geography.

Since this is a dissertation on a particular dish in a region I hope to add to the discipline of geography. I conduct this study in several ways including archival research, personal interviews with chefs and restaurateurs, attending regional gumbo cook-off meetings and events, home interviews, and to a lesser extent email questionnaires. This is done to both get a cultural historical overview of a dish rooted in a region and also to give an ethnographic account in order present how the meaning of gumbo is steeped in place.

In doing this I engage with the previous geographic research on food and I also deviate from what has been done. Because I am looking at region I harken back to French geographers, especially Vidal de la Blache, who championed regional studies. I also identify with those geographers who are interested in how food relates to space. Although the concept of terroir is more associated with wine, I hope to give it a broader importance to the geography of food as Trubek suggests (Trubek, 2008). Performance takes a significant part of this research. However, how I use performance will differ as I seek to engage directly with performance theorists in order to better understand the dish rather than just apply theories. Also, although cooking gumbo is a performance, I am more interested in how gumbo itself is a performance of place, specifically of South Louisiana. Although as I show in later chapters, gumbo and its variants are found in several places, the dish is mainly associated with South Louisiana and performance is a part of that association.

My goal with this research is to both further the study of food in geography and to extend how those studies have been conducted. I hope to do this through the methods I have discussed previously. The next chapter gives a cultural historical overview and culinary history of South Louisiana's Creole and Cajun cultures.



## **CHAPTER 3: THE CULTURAL AND CULINARY HISTORY OF SOUTH LOUISIANA**

### **Introduction: The Creole Cajun, What's in a Name?**

When I noticed my phone ringing, I became immensely excited as I had been hoping to hear back from Chef Landry in order to schedule a time to talk to him about gumbo after reading a book he had written in 2010 on Creole cuisine. Racing outside to take the call and I was happy to hear that Chef Landry was just as enthusiastic to meet with me to discuss the dish and my research as I was to interview him. What I thought would be just a two minute chat to set up an interview turned into a half hour conversation on the history of Creoles in southwestern Louisiana.

Towards the end of the call, after I steered the dialogue back to scheduling an interview, Chef Landry inquired if my last name was German. I emphatically answered that it is a French last name and that family lore states that the Hotard line in Louisiana started with brothers who had immigrated to Louisiana from France but I was not sure of the timeframe. Chef Landry disagreed with this assessment and stated, "I am pretty sure it is German."

A few days later I called Chef Landry to see if we could reschedule our meeting because of impending inclement weather. After choosing another time to meet at his Creole plantation in Evangeline Parish, La, he let me know that he had researched my last name. He explained that I was right about my last name; it is indeed French but not Acadian. I related to him that I knew it was not an Acadian last name but I do have Acadian ancestry as my mother is a Landry and my paternal grandmother was a Broussard. Chef Landry's voice enlivened as he explained that I was a "Creole Acadian." Taken aback I stated that I did not think that was a correct statement. No one in my family has ever said we were Creole. He countered, "Your last name is Creole as it

was in Louisiana prior to the Americans taking over in 1803. Since you also have Acadian ancestry that makes you a Creole Cajun, you are Creole"!

This Creole designation troubled me for several days and I cannot say I was comfortable with the moniker when I started editing this chapter a month later. Exemplifying Brecht's notion of A-Effect, the idea that I could be Creole took me out of my normal reality to make me question my "Cajunness." But why am I bothered by being called Creole? To my knowledge my family, and myself identified as just Cajun, even though our ancestral makeup includes Spanish (through my paternal grandfather's family) and German (through my maternal grandmother's family). As more fully discussed below, the word Cajun itself is a distortion of the word Acadian (Post, 1962). Cajuns are the French descendants of the Acadians who were deported from Nova Scotia in the 18th century. Modern Cajuns evolved through a process of acculturation in South Louisiana (Ancelet, 1991; Brasseaux, 2005; Dormon, 1983).

The ethnicity and word Creole are a bit trickier to discern. Scholastically, more work has been done in the realm of Cajun culture than in Creole ethnicity (Brasseaux, 2005; see also Kein, 2000). Creole is a major term used for descriptive purposes in South Louisiana. In the USA today, Creole is generally thought of as related to those living in southern Louisiana (Hall, 1992). Although mostly associated with New Orleans metropolitan area, "Creole" can also be found throughout the parishes that make up Acadiana. Coming from first the Portuguese word *crioulo* and then the Spanish word *crillio*, Creole has come to have several meanings since the colonization of the New World (Brasseaux, 2005; Dominguez, 1986; Kein, 2000; Hall, 1992). It is used as a term for aboriginal to the Americas (Brasseaux, 2005; see also Dawdy, 2008). However, in South Louisiana, the meaning of the term Creole has become politicized and racialized as well as used in regional cultural heritage (Brasseaux, 2003; Dominguez, 1986).

As already stated Creole has many definitions (Brasseaux, 2005; Dominguez, 1986; Dunbar-Nelson, 2000; Kein, 2000). Colonials used the word to demonstrate what was native to the New World (Brasseaux, 2005; Dawdy, 2008; Post, 1962). They utilized the term Creole to distinguish those who were born in the colony whose parents were of the Old World (Brasseaux, 2005; Dominguez, 1986). It is presently used in many different ways varying from meaning being of mixed race, describing various agricultural products, or delineating cultural elements including music and cuisine (Brasseaux, 2005; Dominguez, 1986; Gutierrez, 1992, Kein, 2000). Depending on the context, Creole can be used a number any number of ways (see Bernard, 2003; Brasseaux, 2005; Dominguez, 1986; Kein, 2000). During the past thirty years, the term has come to symbolize a part of ethnic and racial pride (Brasseaux 2005; Kein, 2000). In Louisiana the term Creole brings up connotations rooted in the history of the state (see Brasseaux, 2005; Dominguez, 1986; Kein et al., 2000).

Like my eventual meeting with Chef Landry, before we could talk about gumbo there had to be a long five hour discussion of South Louisiana cultural history. For the purposes of this dissertation what I call South Louisiana includes the twenty-two parish region known as Acadiana (see Figure 5) and the parishes that make up the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area. The following chapter briefly examines the adaptation old world populations had to Louisiana and the evolution of the cultures that now make up the southern portion of the state.

Although many different ethnicities contributed to the state's history, I focus on Cajun and Creole cultures since those two are the ones that are most associated in the public psyche with South Louisiana even though I do discuss other ethnic groups. Here I present the history of the South Louisiana region as a timeline. The chapter concludes with an overview of what the scholarship has distinguished as Creole and Cajun cuisines.

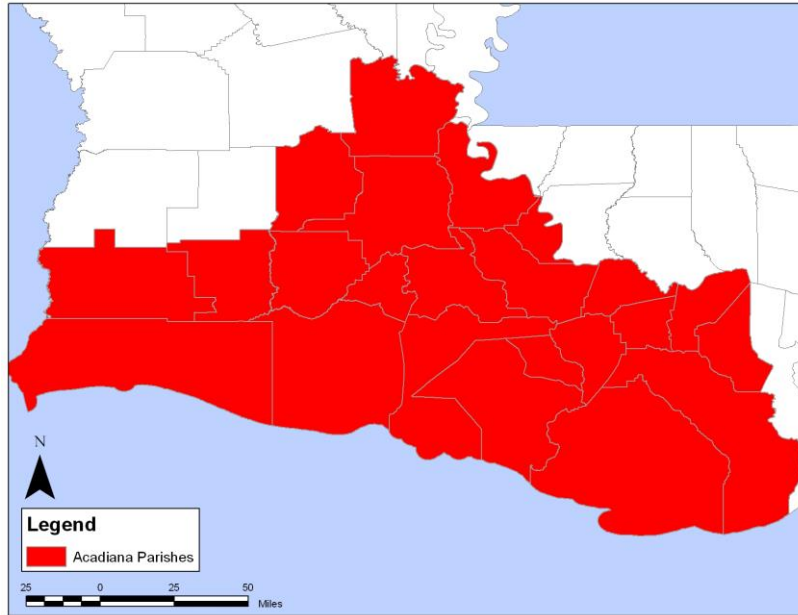


Figure 5: The Acadian Parishes of South Louisiana

## **A Brief History of South Louisiana: The Making of a Region**

### Louisiana Prehistory: 12,000 BP (Before Present) Until 1600s

Prior to European arrivals in the New World, Native Americans lived in the area which eventually became to be known as South Louisiana around 12,000 years ago (Neuman and Hawkins, 1993; Yodis et al., 2003). Typically the Native American groups are distinguished by the time periods they occupied. These are the Paleo-Indian, Meso-Indian, and Neo-Indian (Neuman and Hawkins, 1993).

This first group of Native Americans known as the Paleo-Indians were nomadic hunter gatherers (Neuman and Hawkins, 2003). They moved around from place to place, usually on a seasonal basis, and used stone or projectile points for hunting. It is thought that women gathered local fruit and nuts while the men hunted. The Paleo Indians lived in the territory that would eventually become Louisiana between 12,000 - 8,000 years ago (Neuman and Hawkins, 1993; Yodis et al., 2003).

The next Louisiana Native American cultural groups are known as the Meso-Indians or Archaic Indians (see Neuman and Hawkins, 1993). These groups lived 8,000 - 4,000 years ago (Yodis et al., 2003). These Native American groups were more sedentary than the Paleo Indians (Neuman and Hawkins, 1993). Meso-Indians began mound building, incorporated basket weaving, and had new technology like the atlatl which helped in hunting (Neuman and Hawkins, 1993; Yodis et al., 2003). The new technology for hunting along with mound building allowed for villages to develop (Yodis et al., 2003).

During the Neo-Indian period, Native Americans began to settle and stay in one place. This time frame which lasted from 2,000 B.C to 1600 AD allowed for different Native American cultural groups to form. Technology and villages facilitated groups to develop into tribes (Neuman and Hawkins, 1993, Yodis et al., 2003). These tribes are the people French colonials came into contact with during their explorations of the New World (Dawdy, 2008; Neuman and Hawkins, 1993; Yodis et al., 2003).

#### 1500s - 1600s

During the 16th century, European countries saw turmoil in terms of religions. For centuries most monarchs followed the Catholic faith but a new doctrine began to emerge (Sigur, 1983). Protestantism started to take hold during this time in several places across the continent. This caused much fighting between religious fanatics on both sides of the faith divide. France had its own share of strife between religious factions, especially in the central-west provinces (Brasseux, 2005; Brasseux and Edwards; 1991; Sigur, 1983).

The popular belief for many decades, due to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1847 tragedy poem "Evangeline," held that the ancestors of Acadians were from Normandy (Brasseux and Edwards, 1991). These people actually came from Poitou, Aunis, Angoumoi,

Saintonge, and Anjou (Brasseaux, 2005; Dormon, 1983). Protestant French Huguenot elites made inroads in French Centre-Ouest provinces during the 1500s (Brasseaux, 2005). The city of Poitiers in Poitou County especially had intense fighting in which the French peasantry endured on a daily basis (Brasseaux, 2005; Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991).

These religious wars ended in 1628. Yet contentment did not come to the people of this region. Years of war coupled with unfortunate weather conditions gave way to intense crop failures. The year 1631 brought the most disastrous plague in recent French memory (Brasseaux, 2005). Hardships continued for the people of this portion of France even after the religious warfare had abated (Brasseaux, 2005; Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991).

The peasants of France were part of a caste system in which the labereurs caste became ancestors of the Acadians. Labereurs were known for their work ethic and the ties they had with the land. Therefore, they became suitable candidates for the French colonies in the New World, particularly Acadie (Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991). The conditions in France were the impetus for these people to relocate to the New World (Brasseaux, 2005).

At the beginning of the 17th century, a French colony was set up in what was called Acadie, present day Nova Scotia (Brasseaux, 2005; Voorhies, 1983). This colony was meant for the purpose of trapping and hunting for the fur market. The Company of New France administered this colony and kept an office in the Poitou region of France for enlisting people to go to the colonies (Brasseaux, 2005). Once in the colony a person was compelled to work five years for the Company of New France (Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991).

Colonists began arriving to Acadie in early to mid-1600s from France. An estimated 55-70% of these people came from the Centre-Ouest provinces mentioned above (Brasseaux, 2005). The vast majority of the French colonists in Acadie were farmers while others chose different

economic pursuits such as fishing and trapping (Comeaux, 1983). Although keeping to themselves, these people traded illegally with colonists in nearby New England and had a steady alliance with the local Micmac Indians (Brasseaux, 2005; Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991).

The colonists in Acadie were largely disregarded by their mother country France (Brasseaux, 2005). This unconcern led to the Acadians having to fend for themselves and to acclimate to a physical environment they were not used to (Brasseaux, 2005; Comeaux, 1983). This created an autonomy among the Acadian colonists (Brasseaux, 2005). Yet, they still did not have all the resources they needed which is why bartering was important to survival in Acadie (Comeaux, 1983).

At the same time late in the 17th century another French colony emerged south of Acadie. Robert Cavelier de La Salle declared lands along the Mississippi River for France in 1682 (Ancelet, 1991). The land became officially recognized as a colony of France in 1699 with settlements established by the brothers Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville and Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne d'Bienville along the Gulf of Mexico coastline (Ancelet, 1991; Brasseaux, 2005, Dawdy, 2008).

### 1700s

Even though the colonists in Acadie were ignored by France that does not mean to suggest that other factions were disinterested in the land. Enemies of the mother country were constantly trying and succeeding in taking over Acadie (Brasseaux, 2005). In fact, the governorship changed numerous times between the late 17th and early 18th centuries (Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991). However, the Acadians were still able to keep their autonomy even when the territory of Acadie was transferred between France and Britain several times over during this period (Brasseaux, 2005).

In 1710, England became the final entity which would rule over Acadie with the success of Queen Anne's War. With the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, Acadie officially became a part of Great Britain (Brasseaux, 2005; Voorhies, 1983). The English wanted to Anglicize the Acadians by making them swear allegiance to the crown. This would ensure that the Acadians would not be a threat to the British as well give the English control to viable farmland for its colonies that the Acadians had harnessed (Brasseaux, 2005). The Acadians did not want to swear allegiance to Britain without an official statement saying that the Acadians would remain neutral in any conflicts with Britain and France (Voorhies, 1983).

For twenty years the Acadians put off signing an oath of allegiance to Britain (Brasseaux, 2005). However, they relented in 1730 thinking that neutrality was factored into the oath, being told so by the British (Brasseaux, 2005; Voorhies, 1983). The years following were relatively peaceful for the Acadians (Voorhies, 1983). Great Britain tried to get the Acadians to swear unconditional allegiance to the crown again in 1750 but the Acadians still wanted to abide by the 1730 oath. Coupled with the fact that some Acadians were found with French military at the commencement of the French and Indian War in 1755 led the British to believe that the Acadians could not be trusted and were in fact still loyal to France (Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991). The British governor of Acadie, Major Charles Lawrence, decided the only way to ensure that the Acadians would not pose a threat would be deportation which came to be known as Le Grand Derangement (Brasseaux, 2005; Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991; Dormon, 1983; Voorhies, 1983).

Le Grand Derangement began in the summer of 1755, after Acadians refused to take another oath swearing allegiance to the English crown (Brasseaux, 2005; Voorhies, 1983). Instead of sending them to French lands and colonies, Lawrence decided to send them to English soil. Acadian males thought to be the most seditious were sent to the English colonies further



away. These males ended up in present day Georgia, North and South Carolina. The rest landed in other colonies along the eastern coast of the American New England colonies (Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991). The Acadians suffered putrid conditions while en route to their next destination on the boats and then subjected to more mistreatment once arriving at their new destinations (Brasseaux, 2005; Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991). Not all Acadians left Canada right away as some stayed behind, some tried to book passages to other places like Saint Domingue (present day Haiti), while a few rejoined the French to fight against the British (Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991).

Exiled Acadians began arriving in Louisiana in the early 1760s (Brasseaux, 2005; Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991; Voorhies, 1983). In Louisiana, France had ceded the colony to Spain with the Treaty of Fontainebleau in 1762 (Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991; Goodwin et al., 1993). With this treaty, a portion of Louisiana was to be given to England, the area south of Bayou Manchac known as the Isle de Orleans was to be handed over to Spain (Servello and Blanchard, 1993). The Spanish hoped that Louisiana would become an economically beneficial colony (Goodwin et al., 1993).

The Spanish saw the newcomers as an asset to the colony due to the fact that they were Catholic, hardworking, and anti-British (Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991). This anti-British sentiment was demonstrated by the Acadians helping to fight against England in the American Revolution (Dormon, 1983). The Spanish settled the Acadians at different places outside of New Orleans along waterways including the Mississippi River, Bayou Lafourche, and the Bayou Teche (Brasseaux, 2005; Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991). The Acadians were also placed on international borders between Spain and England, such as Bayou Manchac (the present day border of East Baton Rouge and Ascension Parishes) (Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991; Goodwin

et al., 1993). The Spanish did this in order to create another safeguard against the British (Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991; Servello and Blanchard, 1993). This did not stop contraband flow, trading, and intermarriage between the two countries on Bayou Manchac (Goodwin et al., 1991). Acadian migration continued into Louisiana until 1785 (Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991).

The Acadians arrived when Creole identity was emerging in Louisiana. The Spanish used the word *criollo* in its New World Latin American colonies prior to the inception of colonial Louisiana (Brasseaux, 2005). *Criollo* became *creole* in French colonies (Kein, 2000). It was used in the French colony of Saint Domingue prior to use in Louisiana (Brasseaux, 2005). The first recorded uses of the term in the Louisiana colony comes up in colonial Catholic documents during the beginning of the 18th century (Dominguez, 1986). As stated above, *creole* was a way to designate those who were born in the colony from Old World parentage (Brasseaux, 2005; Dawdy, 2008; Dominguez, 1986). When it was first used, there were other words used to describe colonists and *creole* had no other associations, racial or otherwise than to mean "native" (Brasseaux, 2005; Dominguez, 1986)

In the 1700's, *creole* also became a way to tell the difference between slaves born in the New World as opposed to those originating in Africa (Dominguez, 1986; Hall, 1992). This was also a way to set apart the slaves being born in the New World as more complacent than those born in the Old World. Eventually, a small number of freed Afro-French Creole slaves became the *Gens du couleur libre* or the Free People of Color during the colonial period (Brasseaux, 2005). The numbers of the Free People of Color were greatly enhanced later on with people fleeing revolution on the island of Saint Domingue as I discuss further below (Brasseaux, 2005; Dunbar-Nelson, 2000)

People of African descent entered the colony in the early 18th century (Dunbar-Nelson, 2000). The cultural institutions of French colonial Louisiana were already set up similar to those already in France. The social classes inhabited a hierarchy where white Europeans were at the pinnacle; the next lower level included mixed race Creoles, and slaves at the bottom (Brasseaux, 2005). The white or Euro-Creoles held most of the plantations and helped set up commerce and businesses of the French Quarter in New Orleans. Although there were a few uprisings after the French transferred the colony, this system continued under Spanish rule of the colony into the early 19th century (Brasseaux, 2005; Dominguez 1986).

Afro-French Creoles were not just found in the New Orleans area of the colony. In the mid to late 18th century a “creoles of color” society emerged in the Attakapas and Opelousas areas of southwestern Louisiana, what is known as the prairie region (Brasseaux et al., 1994). These Creoles were the products of unions between French men and their African concubines (Brasseaux et al., 1994; Landry, 2012). The creole of color settlements in southwestern Louisiana enjoyed more freedom than other similar settlements in southeastern Louisiana (Brasseaux et al., 1994).

Other ethnic groups also came to Louisiana during the 18th century. These included the Germans and Canary Islanders, the Canary Islanders became known as the Isleños. The Germans along with some Swiss arrived in Louisiana during the 1720s (René and Conrad, 1967). These people settled near New Orleans along the Mississippi River, an area that came to be known as the German Coast (Cote des Allemands) (Ancelet, 1991; Merrill, 2005; René and Conrad, 1967). The Germans helped supply New Orleans with agricultural provisions. Eventually they became subsumed by the Louisiana French Creole culture (Merrill, 2005).

Although not much has been written in terms of the Isleños population, this is another group which migrated to Louisiana in the late 18th century. The Spanish brought them to Louisiana in order to enlarge the Spanish population since Spain ruled the colony during this time (Din, 1986). The Isleños settled several places in South Louisiana but through acculturation and marriage, most in this group became absorbed by the Acadian population (Brasseaux, 2005; Din, 1986). Although the Isleños in St. Bernard parish kept their cultural heritage that has endured to modernity (Beatrix; 2013; Bengé and Sullivan, 2007).

### 1800s

As mentioned above the Acadians settled along major waterways in Louisiana. These settlements were made using the arpent, or French long lot, system where there was water access in the front and land running longways to the backswamp areas. The French implemented this when they started to colonize Louisiana in the early 18th century (Chardon, 1980; Jordan, 1974).

Acadians had to get used to the new environment which differed in many respects from that of Acadie, particularly climate. At first diseases ran rampant in the Acadian community (Brasseaux, 2005). However, eventually the Acadians adjusted to their new surroundings and soon their population numbers mirrored those prior to Le Grand Derangement (Brasseaux, 2005; Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991). The Acadians in Louisiana were farmers who were able to subsist on the land and send remaining produce downriver to New Orleans (Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991)

With the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 there was an influx of Americans into the Louisiana territory. They began buying land for large plantation operations. Because plantations required waterfront access, some of this land was bought from Acadians (Edwards et al., 1991). This caused the Acadians to move more westward in Louisiana, towards and beyond the Atchafalaya

River (Brasseaux, 1997). Acadians soon preferred to live in the southwestern prairies of Louisiana, partly because they could grow a greater variety of agricultural products. In the coastal region of Southwest Louisiana, Acadian settlers were able to exploit resources of the natural environment in order to sustain themselves (Edwards et al., 1991). The movement westward led to more cultural cohesion among the ethnic Acadians (Brasseaux and Edwards, 1991).

In the antebellum period, the Acadian population stayed somewhat isolated. Though there were a few Acadians who became large plantation owners (Brasseaux, 2005). When the Civil War erupted, the Acadians held onto the mindset they had in Acadie which was one of staying out of political affairs. Even though some Acadians were drafted into the Confederacy, there is evidence of resistance (Dormon, 1983). The Civil War became a significant culturally changing event for Acadians (Bernard, 2003). This is when Acadian started changing to Cajun (Brasseaux, 2005).

In the years after the Civil War, the word Cajun began to be associated with Acadians (Brasseaux, 2005). Cajun was an Anglo alteration of the word Acadian (Post, 1962). The word Cajun was associated with negative connotations such as being poor and illiterate. Some Acadians tried to escape being known as Cajun by furthering their education. However, this was the minority and the Acadians started to be known as Cajun (Brasseaux, 2005; see also Dunbar-Nelson, 2000).

The postbellum period is when Cajun ethnic characteristics began to develop (Brasseaux, 2005; Dormon, 1983). The Civil War had devastated the South Louisiana economy. The freedom of the slaves led to another class of people competing with Cajuns for jobs and economic opportunities. The Cajun French language was also a barrier, especially with the

population of Anglo-Americans coming into the area during and after Reconstruction. Cajun French marked who was Cajun and isolated the group from their English speaking contemporaries in South Louisiana (Dormon, 1983; Post, 1962).

Although isolated, different cultural groups became a part of Cajun people (Ancelet, 1991; Baker, 1983; Dormon, 1983). Other ethnicities assimilated into Cajun culture during the 1800s (Baker, 1983). Germans, Spanish, French descended white Creole, and Anglo Americans who settled in the predominantly Cajun areas of South Louisiana integrated into Cajun society, generally by marriage (Ancelet, 1991; Dormon, 1983). This combination of people from different backgrounds helped develop the Cajun culture (Ancelet, 1991).

Also during the early 19th century, Afro-French Creole culture began to flourish with the influx of Afro-French descended people from Saint Domingue (Dunbar-Nelson, 2000). The Afro-French Creole people of Saint Domingue already had an established Creole culture on the island. These people brought a love of European high culture which helped change the city of New Orleans to be more cosmopolitan (Brasseaux, 2005). Although American Anglos started to come in more after the Louisiana Purchase, they were still small in population as compared with the Euro-Creoles and Afro-French Creoles (Dominguez, 1986). Creoles regardless of skin color banded together as they had a common disgust for the Americans that were populating the city (Dominguez, 1986; Dunbar-Nelson, 2000). They distinguished themselves by continuing to speak French as opposed to American English (Dominguez, 1986).

The division of Creoles (Euro- and Afro-French) and Americans in New Orleans reflected in the different districts each came to reside in (Dominguez, 1986). This division was so ingrained between the groups that New Orleans separated into three different cities during the early to mid-19th century, each city having its own administrative body but still all governed

under one mayor (Brasseaux, 2005; Dominguez, 1986; Dunbar-Nelson, 2000). This time period also saw an influx of more immigrants into the city including Irish, Italians, and Germans as well as more Americans. With a more diverse population, Creoles (Euro and Afro-French) began losing power they once held in the city. New Orleans reunited in 1852 (Dominguez, 1986).

The Afro-French Creole population in southwestern Louisiana increased in the 1800s (Brasseaux, et al., 1994). This is in part due to the white male slave owners having black mistresses (Brasseaux et al., 1994; Landry, 2012). The children of these unions were born into slavery owing to the fact that they retained the station of their mother. For this reason many masters would free their slave lovers so that their children could also be free, however, this became less frequent with more regulations of freeing slaves increased leading up to the Civil War. Although free people of color still suffered legal restrictions they could go into business as well as bring suit against whites (Brasseaux et al., 1994).

The Afro-French Creole and Euro-Creole cohesion that was enjoyed in the antebellum days quickly eroded after the Civil War (Dominguez, 1986). With the Emancipation Proclamation, slaves were freed thus creating two categories of blacks in Louisiana. These were the free Afro-French Creoles and the slaves that were freed (Dunbar-Nelson, 2000). The white Euro descended Creoles, who were struggling with the aftermath of the Civil War, had lost status and power. They unified with the Americans in seeing the blacks, and by association, the Afro-French Creoles as the cause of their problems and both began to campaign for dominance of the white race. This led to the discrimination of blacks and the passing of Jim Crow laws (Dominguez, 1986). Towards the end of the 19th century the Afro-French Creoles still tried to differentiate themselves from the freed blacks by calling themselves Creole. However, this upset

the white Creoles who began to claim that one must have an all-white European heritage in order to be Creole (Brasseaux, 2005; Dominguez, 1986).

### 1900s-2000s

The striving for better economic situations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries became the impetus for the decline of the Cajun French language (Brasseaux, 2005, Dormon, 1983). In order for a Cajun to be financially successful, s/he had to know and speak English. The English language was a way for a Cajun to be upwardly mobile and shed the impoverished life of post-Civil War South Louisiana. The state government of Louisiana also saw English as beneficial. The Louisiana legislature passed laws in the early part of the 20th century to ensure English would prevail against French through education and making English the official language of Louisiana (Brasseaux, 2005). Of course the fervor for English coincided with a sense of patriotism that swept over America around World War I (Ancelet and Allain, 1991).

Also during the early 20th century Euro-Creoles further separated themselves by starting their own Creole clubs. Making Creole exclusively white meant whites could be protected from being under Jim Crow laws (Dominguez, 1986). Afro-French Creoles began to see the advantages of falling in with typical Americans. The major advantage being they could benefit economically being part of the dominant American culture. For this reason many Afro-French Creoles migrated from the New Orleans area and moved to the North (Brasseaux, 2005).

World War II had a profound effect on Cajuns as it caused more incorporation into mainstream American society. French speaking Cajuns drafted in World War II were placed among other Americans who only knew English (Bernard, 2003). After coming home from the war, many technological changes also caused assimilation to the dominant American culture as



well as changes in Cajun culture during mid-20th century. There were some elements of rural Cajun culture that disappeared altogether resulting from further absorption (Brasseaux, 2005).

Cajun parents at mid-century started instilling in their children that in order to be successful, one had to go to college. An increase in enrollment at public Louisiana universities occurred during the 1950s and 1960s (Brasseaux, 2005). The educating of Cajuns spurred the Cajun Renaissance ethnic revival of the late 1960s into the 1970s. During the 1960s and 1970s, a wave of ethnic pride swept the United States; this was not lost on South Louisiana (Bernard, 2003). The creation of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODIFIL) in 1968 brought French education to schools (Bernard, 2003; Brasseaux, 2005). In 1971, the Louisiana legislature designated twenty-two parishes of South Louisiana as Acadiana. Acadiana defined the regional boundaries of Cajun French Louisiana (Bernard, 2003; Dormon, 1983). A renewed interest in Cajun culture began during the 1970s that lasted into the 1980s (Bienvenue et al., 2005; Trepanier, 1991).

The oil boom in South Louisiana during the 1970s and 1980s financially benefitted Cajuns. Cajuns could get jobs with little or no experience or education (Brasseaux, 2005). However, when the oil boom collapsed early to mid-1980s, this caused many Cajuns to leave South Louisiana for better job opportunities elsewhere in the United States (Brasseaux, 2005; Bernard, 2003; Webre, 1998). Pockets of Cajun blocks appeared in major metropolitan areas during the 1980s and 1990s (Bernard, 2003). Another out migration of Cajuns occurred in the 1990s and 2000s with recent Cajun college graduates leaving to find jobs elsewhere than Louisiana (Brasseaux, 2005).

Although Cajuns have left Louisiana, the sizeable population in South Louisiana still celebrates regional pride (Brasseaux, 2005). This is evidenced by the number of festivals that

occur anytime throughout the year (Henry and Bankston, 2002). Cajun activism also became prominent in the 1990s and is still very active today (Bernard, 2003). The internet helps those Cajuns who are not in Louisiana to stay connected to their home region and their cultural heritage (Webre, 1998).

On the other hand, Afro-French Creoles in the later 20th century are identified as mostly African Americans from Louisiana (Brasseaux, 2005; Kein, 2000). Afro-French Creole as an ethnic identity had a resurgence in the 1980s. Afro-French Creole questioned the notion of "white Creole." Creole leaders took issue with the Cajun activist movement which had started two decades prior (Brasseaux, 2005). The CREOLE Inc. organization was founded by people of Afro-French descent looking to have their own group to maintain their cultural heritage (Bernard, 2003; Kein, 2000). Today, both white and black Creoles recognize their rich history and recognize the culture they created through music and especially food (Brasseaux, 2005). Although many Afro-French Creoles feel that their cultural contributions to the South Louisiana has been co-opted by the resurgence of Cajun pride (see Chapters 5 and 6).

### **Conclusion: Developing a Louisiana Creole/"Cajun" Cuisine**

Both Afro-French Creole and Cajun foodways have become the familiar cuisines of Louisiana to the rest of the United States and, to a larger extent, the world even though both are considered part of the greater category of regional southern United States food. Through the history of the two cultural groups both cuisines developed from embodied knowledge and adaptation (Bienvenue et al., 2005; Kein; 2000). For many outside of Louisiana, the two foodways may seem similar because of standard styles of cooking and dishes that are found in both Cajun and Afro-French Creole food. However according to what has been written on the two cuisines, there are separate flairs that each bring to cooking dishes that make the two

cuisines supposedly distinct upon closer examination (Bienvenue et al., 2005; Guitierrez, 1992). Yet presently, it is often times difficult to tell the two cuisines apart so they are both considered a South Louisiana style of cooking (see Guitierrez, 1992; Folse, 2004).

Modern Cajun cuisine developed mainly through adaptation to New World geographic settings and natural environments (Guitierrez, 2003; Henry and Bankston, 2002; Leblanc-Sewell, 2005). Native surroundings produced ingredients used for cooking. Cajun cooking is descendant of Acadian foodways but modern Cajun cuisine varies greatly from Acadian dishes (Bienvenue et al., 2005). The French colonizers who settled Nova Scotia and eventually became the Louisiana Acadians altered their diet to reflect the different plants and animals that were in the New World (Bienvenue et al., 2005). The Acadians of Nova Scotia were farmers, hunters, and trappers (Brasseaux, 2005). Typical meals involved cooking thick dishes in heavy pots. This type of cooking carried over with the expulsion of the Acadians and their eventual settling of South Louisiana (Folse, 2004).

The major difference for Acadians in Louisiana was the warmer climate as cooking techniques and dishes remained virtually the same (Folse, 2004). It was in the settling of South Louisiana where Acadian cooking started to develop into Cajun cuisine during the 18th and 19th centuries. Initially, corn was an important food to the Acadian population but in the 20th century rice began to dominate Cajun dishes (Bienvenue et al., 2005).

Cajun cooking has been influenced by other ethnic groups which also came to Louisiana. Namely these groups include Africans, Germans, and the Spanish as well as the Native Americans who were already in Louisiana (Henry and Bankston, 2002). Cajuns relied on what they could produce on the farm such as vegetables, cattle, and pigs. Seafood became more important during the oil boom of the late 1970s and early to mid-1980s as Cajuns working

offshore had more access to fishing. Also more Cajuns at home began to test out different dishes with seafood (Bienvenue et al., 2005).

Cajun food began to become noticed to larger audiences in the 1970s (Henry and Bankston, 2002). This started with the introduction of Cajun style food that tourists ate while visiting prevalent restaurants in New Orleans like Brennan's (Zelda, 2009). Also, during 1980s and 1990s Cajun food reached prominence with the economic success of Cajun chefs outside of Louisiana (Bienvenue et al., 2005; Henry and Bankston, 2002). Mainly Chef Paul Prudhomme brought Cajun food into both the national spotlight and international spotlights (Bienvenue, 2009; Henry and Bankston, 2002). Today, Cajun cuisine is made up of "...gumbos, fricasees, etouffees, sauce piquantes, jambalayas..." (Henry and Bankston, 2002: 190; see also Bienvenue et al., 2005). Present day Cajun cuisine ostensibly reflects the assimilation of physical geography and the mixed cultural makeup of South Louisiana (Bienvenue et al., 2005; Henry and Bankston, 2002; Gutierrez, 1992; Gutierrez, 2003; Leblanc-Sewell, 2005).

Modern Creole cuisine is considered the dishes found in the greater New Orleans area which, like Cajun food, also evolved from the borrowing of different cultural foodways (Beriss, 2010; Folse, 2007; Kein, 2000; Liliane, 1978). The history of Creole cuisine can be followed through the geography of slaves in the New World (Kein, 2000). Creole cuisine was first mentioned by Lafcadio Hearn in his 1885 publication *La Cuisine Creole* (Hearn, 1885; LaFleur, 2010). In New Orleans, Creole cooking started with a small uprising during early colonial rule. This is known as the "Petticoat Rebellion" (Folse, 2004; Folse, 2007; LaFleur 2010; Landry, 2012; Mitcham, 1978).

The Petticoat Rebellion happened in 1718 (Folse, 2004). During this protest, a group of colonial women descended on the house of Governor Bienville (Mitcham, 1978). Pounding on

pots with cooking utensils, the women were upset with the food offerings of the colony. The governor instructed his housekeeper, Madame Langlois to teach the women how to cook (Folse, 2004; LaFleur, 2010; Landry, 2012; Mitcham, 1978). Madame Langlois had spent time with the local Native Americans and learned how to use Louisiana ingredients in cooking (LaFleur 2010; Landry, 2012; Mitcham, 1978). Madame Langlois began educating colonial women through cooking classes (Folse, 2004; LaFleur, 2010; Landry, 2012; Mitcham, 1978). These classes became the initial cooking school in the New World (Folse, 2007).

Today's New Orleans Creole cuisine has evolved from the haute cuisine of 19th century Europe. Namely Creole cuisine was inspired by the Spanish and French during the 1700s and 1800s (Bienvenue et al., 2005). However, African slaves left a profound mark on New Orleans cuisine because the slave cooks prepared the meals for the Euro-Creole aristocracy (Folse, 2007; Kein, 2000; Liliane, 1978). The African slave cook may have prepared dishes to her master's palate but she relied on her own memory and embodied knowledge to make meals (Kein, 2000; Liliane, 1978; Paddleford, 1960). For this reason, Creole cuisine has a strong connection to African ways of cooking (Kein, 2000).

In post-Katrina New Orleans, food is a major attraction to the city (Beris, 2010). Modern Creole cuisine historically connects too many countries on various continents (Folse, 2007; Kein, 2000). It is a present day representation of the people who settled in and around the New Orleans metropolitan area over the past few centuries (Folse, 2007). The Creole culture of New Orleans keeps the cuisine of the city unique (Beriss, 2010).

Yet in Louisiana there is another Creole cuisine tradition that exists outside of New Orleans in the prairie parishes of southwestern Louisiana (LaFleur, 2010). Like Cajun food, this is considered a more rural cuisine than New Orleans (LaFleur, 2010; Shelly, 2012). This Afro-

French Creole cuisine harkens back to the food eaten by Bienville in the early days of the French colony of Louisiana and it retains that practice (LaFleur, 2010).

Traditionally, the major difference between Cajun and Creole cuisines has been that Cajun cooking represented the rural population of Louisiana while Creole cuisine was restricted to the New Orleans area (Bienvenue et al., 2005; Folse, 2007; Shelly, 2012; Zelda, 2009). Cajun food is prepared in one pot which can contrast to the way Creole dishes are prepared in courses (Bienvenue et al., 2005; Folse, 2007; Leblanc-Sewell, 2005). Creole cuisine is considered more refined in both technique and preparation when compared to Cajun food (Bienvenue, 2009; Folse, 2004; Shelton, 2012). For this reason, Creole New Orleans' food is considered more cosmopolitan. Yet, in the past few decades the differences between Creole and Cajun food have become more blurred (Zelda, 2009). However, both Creole and Cajun cooks use food as a way of socializing and bringing people together (Bienvenue et al., 2005; Paddleford, 1960).

The geography of South Louisiana has developed through time with the different ethnicities and cultures which have settled the area. This melding of geography and cultures led to the development of Creole (Euro and Afro-French) and Cajun cultures which South Louisiana is known for. The evolution of the two present cultural groups have created foodways of which many South Louisianians pride themselves on. One dish that is found in both Creole (Euro and Afro-French) and Cajun cuisines is also symbolically representative of the region. That dish is gumbo.

## CHAPTER 4: GUMBO - THE P(L)OT THICKENS

### Introduction: Categorizing Gumbo - A Debate



Figure 6: September 2012 meeting of the World Championship Gumbo Cookoff Committee.

The September 2012 meeting of the World Championship Gumbo Cookoff Committee (see Figure 6 above) began with a somewhat touchy subject among members. The first item on the agenda discussed clarifying the *mélange* and seafood categories for the 2012 competition. According to competition guidelines the *mélange* category incorporates many ingredients thus making it a mixture while the seafood designation means the gumbo just contains seafood. However, this has confused competitors in the past. For example if a gumbo contains mostly seafood but incorporates another meat such as sausage does that change the category in which the gumbo is competing?

Miss Lisa, a middle aged committee member, began the discussion suggesting that if a seafood gumbo contains other main ingredients then it should be placed in the *mélange* category. However, Mr. Leo vehemently disagreed. Mr. Leo, whose face turned bright red with his rebuttal, angrily expressed that if a gumbo contains any seafood then it should be considered a

seafood gumbo, regardless of what other ingredients the gumbo may have. This one disagreement started a very active discussion lasting close to thirty minutes among committee members regarding how to define types of gumbo. Towards the end of this exchange, another committee member jumped into the conversation. Mr. Jason stated that the main ingredient should decide what type of gumbo a competitor is cooking.

During this dialogue, I sat quietly typing notes on what was being said among members. Typically at Gumbo Committee meetings, I prefer not to talk because these meetings are mainly about logistics. Also, since these meetings are during lunch hours, I do not want to interrupt due to the limited time people have before they go back to their various jobs. However, Mr. Jason's comment made me think about how my interviewees define their gumbo. I decided that I might be able to give some insight from my research to perhaps help the committee come to a resolution. I politely raised my hand to show that I had something to say. When it was indicated that I could talk, I said, calmly, that Mr. Jason has a good point, in my research and interviews people will define their gumbo by what they feel is the main ingredient or ingredients.

Suddenly, Mr. Leo faced me, making direct eye contact, and began questioning if I even knew what went into a gumbo. Feeling attacked, I stated, confidently, that I had been cooking gumbo and doing this research for several years, so yes, I knew what a gumbo encompasses. Frustrated, he repeatedly asked me, "What is a stock"? I explained that a stock is a broth made from boiled ingredients such as poultry bones or shrimp shells. He then, still very irate, explained why he asked about stock. According to Mr. Leo, the stock is the most important ingredient so he then sarcastically asked me, "So what is a gumbo where you have chicken and sausage but used a seafood stock"? Boldly I said, "A chicken and sausage gumbo." "No"! he emphatically expressed, "It is a seafood gumbo because the seafood stock is the most important



ingredient”! I tried to explain; again, based on my research, defining a gumbo has to do with main ingredient, not necessarily important ingredients. Mr. Leo responded thusly, “So, just because I put an onion in my pot, that makes it an onion gumbo”?

I decided at that point it was best if I went back to just typing notes and looked down at my laptop, trying not to provoke Mr. Leo’s wrath any more than I already had. The committee members took a vote quickly after my exchange with Mr. Leo. With a majority vote, one dissenting, they decided the matter. A seafood gumbo, for the competition, would just contain seafood as a main ingredient. If something else was added to the seafood gumbo then it would be considered a *mélange* gumbo. A committee member quickly commented after the vote that it did not matter what they decided as a committee since the chefs and cooks were just going to call their gumbo whatever they wanted, based on the main ingredient.

After the meeting had concluded, I felt ashamed for speaking up. I thought I was trying to do a good thing by giving the committee members edification from my research. When several people had left I apologized to a couple of board members, stating that it was not my intention to fuel the debate but to bring more clarification. These particular board members laughed and stated they appreciated the information I had volunteered since it helped sway their vote. They also said that because I attended the meetings that it would only be a matter of time before Mr. Leo argued with me. As one explained, “He argues with everybody”!

This episode is an example of Goffman's back region (Goffman, 1959). These committee meetings construct the performance that eventually turn into the front known as the World Championship Gumbo Cook-Off. Here, ideas of gumbo are debated and negotiated. The negotiations lead to what becomes the mask or event. The front of the event masks these meetings as participants and the audience are unaware of these arguments, compromises, and

omissions. Without the back region, the front of the World Championship Gumbo Cook-Off would not be realized.

The following pages detail gumbo more fully. From its development to how it is prepared, this chapter gives a more complete picture of why this is an important regional dish. Because gumbo is born from colonialism, I discuss other dishes which could be considered in the same family line as gumbo. Hopefully this chapter will lead to a better understanding of this iconic soup and why people, such as Mr. Leo, exude such a passion for the dish.

### **The Columbian Exchange**

In the late 15th century, navigators from the Iberian Peninsula began a process that had far reaching implications for the world (Opie, 2008). The excursions of Christopher Columbus did more than just open up the New World to explorations by Europeans. The continents of Europe, Africa, South and North America became intertwined via travel routes in the Atlantic Ocean (Sandberg, 2006). These voyages resulted in a phenomenon known as the Columbian Exchange. The Columbian Exchange, a term first proposed by historian Alfred W. Crosby in the 1970s (1973), refers to the period of initial interchange of people, tools, animals, plants, and diseases occurred between the New and Old Worlds (Crosby, 1973; Grennes, 2007; Nunn and Qian, 2012). Populations were introduced to different customs, including crops and foodways (Nunn and Qian, 2012). Prior to this period, animals and plants diffused in the Old World but usually to places with similar environments (Grigg, 2001). The introduction of new foods on both sides on the Atlantic had global impacts (Nunn and Qian, 2012; see also Harris, 2003, 2011).

Both hemispheres contributed to the swapping of species and foods (Grennes, 2007). In the centuries leading up to the Columbian Exchange, agricultural products were already traded

between the Old World continents (Carney, 2001; Grigg, 2001; Opie, 2008). Although both Old and New Worlds interacted in the Columbian Exchange, the New World benefited more since its species were not as diversified (Grennes, 2007). With the Columbian Exchange many New World crops became part of Old World cuisines including tomatoes, maize, peanuts, and manioc (Andrews, 1993; Earle, 2010; Grennes, 2007; Harris, 2003; Nunn and Qian, 2012). In fact peppers, a New World food item, became so intrinsic to Old World cuisines that people later believed that they derived from Asia (Andrews, 1993). However, colonists also introduced crops to the New World in an effort to recreate their accustomed foods in a very unfamiliar environment. Moreover, settlers had to sometimes improvise New World substitutes for unavailable Old World ingredients (Trigg, 2004; see also Dawdy, 2010; Harris, 2003).

Soon, colonists realized that some Old World crops could be cultivated in the Americas. There was plenty of rural land that began being used to grow agricultural products for the Old World market (Nunn and Qian, 2012). The introduction of domesticated animals to the New World made large scale farming possible (Grennes, 2007). Sugarcane was also introduced to the Western hemisphere due to the abundance of land and its profitability of mass cultivation of that land (Opie, 2008). This led to the rise of a plantation economy supported by slave labor imported from Africa (Carney, 2001; Nunn and Qian, 2012; Opie, 2008; Sandberg, 2003). The slave trade started in the 16th century and lasted for centuries (Harris, 2011).

African food was procured for the slave ships journeying to the Americas for the crew and slaves to survive (Carney, 2001; Harris, 2011). Slave traders thought feeding the slaves food indigenous to Africa would sustain the slaves better (Carney, 2001). This is how African crops such as rice, black eyed peas, and okra or gombo were established in the Americas (Carney, 2001; Harris 2011) while vice versa, crops from the New World could have been reintroduced to

the Americas via slaves (see Dawdy, 2010). Gombo, known colloquially today as okra, was said to have been transported to America via seeds in the hair of slaves (Harris, 2011; also Shelly, 2012) although that is unlikely (Harris, 2011). Gombo was first introduced to South America by slaves in the 17th century and made its way to both the Caribbean and North America in the 18th century (Carney, 2001). Slaves cooked dishes using gombo as a thickener. The foodways of the slaves, especially those with West African roots, shaped the African American diet (Opie, 2008).

The Columbian Exchange caused a mixing among different people which created new ethnicities along the Atlantic rim, including along the East coast of the United States (Sandberg, 2006). This allowed for foodways to become more dynamic (Harris, 2003). Today the gumbo dish is one of the most well-known results from the blending of cultures and food that happened because of the Columbian Exchange (see Nobles, 2009).

Following is a more detailed discussion of gumbo. This discussion of gumbo is given in the context of Louisiana and I also give descriptions and connections of gumbo cognate dishes in the Atlantic world. I begin this conversation with what most people in South Louisiana start cooking for a gumbo, a roux.

## **Gumbo**

### First You Make a Roux

As the Louisiana proverb goes, "First you start with a roux" many dishes of Creole/Cajun extraction begin with this thickener (Bienvenue et al., 2005; Feibleman, 1971; Folse 2004). One of the earliest mentions of a roux recipe is located in a cookbook that dates to 1651 when Francois Pierre de La Verenne (Wheaton, 1983) wrote in his *Cuisinier Francois* that roux was made from pig fat and flour. The cooking of roux in Louisiana is a holdover from French cuisine preparations and possibly the most popular ingredient in South Louisiana foodways (Ancelet,

1991; see also Folse, 2004). Although in French cooking roux does not start a dish but is added to the soup or stew that is being cooked (Carey, 2004).

Roux is measured in gradations of brown (Carey, 2004). There are three types of roux found in classical French cooking customs. These types of roux, indicated by color, include white, blond, and brown roux (Folse, 2004; Folse, 2007; Montagnè, 1961). The color of the roux is determined by the amount of time taken to cook the ingredient (Folse, 2004, Montagnè, 1961). Depending on the dish that is being prepared will dictate which roux is to be cooked (Folse, 2004; Folse, 2007). Figure 7 presents an example of the type and color of roux used for gumbo.



Figure 7: Roux being cooked for a Louisiana gumbo.

As mentioned above, roux is used as a thickener in the preparation of South Louisiana dishes (Bienvenue et al., 2005, Folse 2004). Similarly to La Verenne's recipe, roux has traditionally been a combination of a fat and flour in Creole/Cajun cooking (Ancelet, 1991; Folse, 2004). A roux is considered an ingredient and is not supposed to be eaten on its own (Bienvenue et al., 2005). Typically in the past there has been a difference between how roux is cooked in Louisiana between Creoles and Cajuns. Creoles (Afro-French and Euro), of New Orleans extraction, used butter as the fat while Cajuns cooked with lard for the roux (Folse, 2004). Using butter for the roux stems from French cooking (Carey, 2004).

Traditionally, cooking roux is a slow process with the cook preparing roux on a low to medium fire continually stirring until the appropriate desired color is reached (Behr, 1995; Gutierrez, 1992). Modern cooking techniques have changed how roux is cooked (or not) in South Louisiana. For example roux can now be cooked in a microwave, baked in the stove, or just bought already prepared in a jar at a local grocery store (Ancelet, 1991; Folse, 2004). In some instances a health conscious cook may want to reduce their fat intake and prepare a roux without using oil, also known as oil-less roux (Folse, 2004). With the recent trend of gluten free diets, some people become more inventive using flour produced from another ingredient instead of wheat (Hallie, 2011; Norman, 2011).

#### Gumbo: A Dish, Categories, and a Symbol

In the *Dictionary of Louisiana French: As Spoken in Cajun, Creole, and American Indian Communities* (2010), the entry for "gumbo" has several definitions. These definitions range from being another word for okra, to the gumbo dish, to being a descriptor for the amalgamation of ethnicities that reside in the state of Louisiana (see Valdman et al., 2010). Etymologically the term gumbo has African origins (Ancelet, 1991; Behr, 1995; Bienvenue et al., 2005; Dawdy, 2010; Folse, 1989; Gutierrez, 1992; Hall, 1992; Harris, 2011; Land, 1954; Nobles, 2009; Weber and Weber, 2005). Gumbo is the English rendering of the French gombo (Behr, 1995; Harris, 2011). Gumbo means okra which is derived from different African language families including Bantu and Bambara (Bienvenue et al., 2005; Hall, 1992; Harris, 2011; Weber and Weber, 2005). However, evidence also shows that the word gumbo can actually be Native American in origin. Specifically gumbo comes from kombo, a Choctaw word meaning filé. Filé is a condiment added to gumbo after the dish is prepared (see Nobles, 2009).

Gumbo is thick soup dish, especially iconic in Louisiana (see Figure 8). Although gumbo is a dense soup, it is thinner than a stew. As discussed further below, a stew consists of a thick gravy and served on a plate rather than a bowl (see Bienvenue et al., 2005; Gutierrez, 1992; Shelly, 2012; Wuerthner, 2006) The soup is associated with both Cajun and Creole cuisines of South Louisiana, although it is considered a signature Cajun dish (Beinvenue et al., 2005; Martin, 2000). It is dish found throughout southern Louisiana (Nobles, 2009). While it can be served as an appetizer, gumbo is really a meal by itself (Carey, 2004; Feibleman, 1971). Vegetables that go into the dish can vary but like most Creole and Cajun food, vegetables consist of the "Holy Trinity" of onions, bell peppers, and celery (see Folsie, 2004). There is no one way to cook gumbo. Each person who cooks gumbo does it differently not only from others who prepare the dish but it also changes every time gumbo is cooked by the same person (Bienvenue et al., 2005; Feibleman, 1971; Leblanc-Sewell, 2005).



Figure 8: A pot of chicken sausage gumbo.

The development of gumbo began as a way for people to use ingredients that were available in their homes (Ancelet, 1991; see also Hearn, 1885). Though there are many ingredients that can go into a gumbo, it should be noted that in modern gumbo preparation beef is typically not cooked in a gumbo unless it is in the form of sausage (Ancelet, 1991). However, recipes dating back to the early 20th century and even modern cookbooks expose that veal has been used when cooking gumbo, especially in the New Orleans area (see Eustis, 1904; also Janice, 2013). Traditionally some gumbos were served with grits but historically rice is placed into a bowl of gumbo when being served (Ancelet, 1991; Gutierrez, 1992; Nobles, 2009; Post, 1962). Cooking a gumbo usually turns into a social event centered on the dish (Bienvenue et al., 2005). The actual preparation time of the dish can take up to a few hours (Gutierrez, 1992).

Cajun scholars, chefs, and food writers insists that French bouillabaisse is the progenitor of gumbo (Feibleman, 1971; Folse, 1989; Folse, 2004; Gutierrez, 1992; Paddleford, 1960; see also Nobles, 2009). Colonists cooked bouillabaisse in Louisiana prior to the Acadians arriving in the colony (Dawdy, 2010; Feibleman, 1971). Most ethnic groups in Louisiana had a part in adding to the dish that became gumbo. These groups include French, Spanish, African, Native American, and German (Ancelet, 1991; Bienvenue et al., 2005; Brasseaux, 1997; Carey, 2004; Folse, 1989; Nobles, 2009; Weber and Weber, 2005). However, it can also be true that gumbo is mainly an Afro-Caribbean influenced dish (see Behr, 1995; Harris, 2003; Harris, 2011; Land, 1954).

There are a few ways to categorize the types of gumbos that are cooked in South Louisiana. One way is to organize the dish by the thickener being used. In this way a gumbo can either have okra or filé powder as the thickening agent (Carey, 2004; Feibleman, 1971; Gutierrez, 1992; Paddleford, 1960). As previously stated, filé powder is made from sassafras



leaves, has Native American origins, and is added to gumbo after the dish is cooked and served (Ancelet, 1991; Bienvenue, 2005; Folse, 2004; Gutierrez, 1992; Paddleford, 1960). This is unlike okra, since okra is cooked with the dish from the beginning (Folse, 2004). Historically, when okra was out of season filé powder would be used as a thickener to the dish (Carey, 2004; Folse, 2004; McKee, 1986). Okra and filé are supposedly not to both be used in the same gumbo (Behr, 1995; Fiebleman, 1971; Leblanc-Sewell, 2005; Nobles, 2009; Paddleford, 1960). However, that is not often the case which makes this categorization problematic (see below).

Another way to distinguish gumbos is by main ingredients. In this way, gumbo would fall into three categories which are poultry, seafood, and gumbo z'herbes (Bienvenue et al., 2005; see also Gutierrez, 1992). Gumbo z'herbes, also referred to as a green gumbo, is one which is mainly green leafy vegetables (Bienvenue et al., 2005; see McKee, 1986). Although pork can be added to this gumbo, it developed as mainly a Lenten dish when Catholics were supposed to refrain from eating meat (Bienvenue et al., 2005; Carey, 2004; Gutierrez, 1992).

I examined 126 gumbo recipes from 26 regional South Louisiana cookbooks, published between the years 1950 through 2011, to get a better view on how gumbos are defined by their names (see Appendix A). It should be noted that this was not a scientific survey and one's findings could change depending on what other cookbooks were examined. I designated the ethnic makeup of people who authored these recipes by either the cookbook title or recipe name. Overwhelmingly Cajun represented 72% of the recipes with other ethnic groups such as Creole (7%) and Isleños (8%) rounding out the other two top ethnic recipes. Dual ethnicities such as Jewish/Cajun (3 recipes) and Creole/Cajun (2 recipes) also came up in this search.

Going by both how authors name their recipes and ingredient lists, I found six ways to group gumbos. These include ones already mentioned such as seafood, poultry, gumbo z'herbes

and okra while I identified two more including combination and other. As the name suggests combination gumbos consist of a mixture of the first two categories. The other designation would be gumbos which did not fall into known categories such as gumbos using squirrels, beef, or another animal that is not found in the bulk of cookbook recipes.

Of course designating gumbos this way can be challenging. An example is if a recipe is named seafood gumbo but contains okra as an ingredient, does that mean it is an okra gumbo (reminiscent of the argument presented in the beginning of this chapter)? For this reason I mainly grouped gumbos according to how they were named and used ingredients as a secondary identifier. This became an issue when a gumbo was named after the author such as “Ouiser's Gumbo”, in that case ingredients became the important indication of categorizing gumbo.

Table 4-1: Categories of gumbo based on frequency of recipes.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of Recipes</b>
Poultry	42
Seafood	30
Okra	23
Combination	18
Gumbo Z'herbes	9
Other	4

Table 4:1 shows the quantity of recipes in each category examined. These categories could further be subdivided. Poultry gumbos can be separated into recipes that are just poultry and those which also contain sausage. Seafood gumbos usually include those with the favorite grouping of crab, shrimp and oyster. However, seafood gumbos can also contain the preferred assemblage with a fourth ingredient such as crawfish or sausage. A minority of seafood gumbos actually contained fish. Okra gumbo also includes subcategories such as okra and shrimp, okra and chicken, okra and tasso, or just okra by itself.

Thickeners are an important aspect of gumbo. These recipes show eight ways in which to thicken a gumbo. Roux, okra, filé, or some mixture of these three are used in gumbos. As Table 2 illustrates, using roux and filé together is the preferred method to thicken a gumbo. Two gumbo z'herbes recipes did not indicate a thickener.

Table 4-2: Frequency of thickeners in cookbook gumbo recipes.

<b>Thickener</b>	<b>Number of Recipes</b>
Roux (Alone)	34
Filé (Alone)	2
Okra (Alone)	12
Roux and Filé	43
Roux and Okra	22
Okra and Filé	1
Roux, Filé, Okra	9
Roux with Filé or Okra	1
NA	2

Cooking times varied by categories. The shortest cooking time that a recipe called for was thirty minutes while the longest recipe took six hours to prepare. Table 3 breaks down shortest, longest, and average cooking times for each category. The majority of these times did not include the preparation time, notably, the recipe did not indicate the time to cook the roux. Therefore these times could lengthen if roux cooking would have been taken account. However, a possible explanation for this absence could be that each person has their preferred way to cook their roux and the color of the roux they like. This would cause a great variety in roux cooking times. These times are based on what the recipes actually called for in cooking the gumbo.

As I discuss in the next chapter, the use of tomatoes in gumbo is thought of as an indicator of New Orleans Creole cuisine rather than Cajun (see Gutierrez, 1992). Although geography could explain this disparity (see Gutierrez, 1992), the gumbos which include tomatoes are from recipes that span cities and towns across South Louisiana. In fact, 24% of Cajun recipes scanned consisted of tomatoes. Most often than not, tomatoes are used in conjunction

with okra in these gumbo cookbook recipes. It is noteworthy that tomatoes are used in almost a quarter of examined Cajun recipes.

Table 4-3: Gumbo cooking times by category

<b>Category</b>	<b>Shortest Time</b>	<b>Longest Time</b>	<b>Average</b>
Seafood	30 Minutes	3 Hours 22 Minutes	1 Hour 24Minutes
Poultry	45 Minutes	6 Hours	2 Hours 15 Minutes
Gumbo Z'herbes	30 Minutes	3 Hours	1 Hour 30 Minutes
Okra	30 Minutes	2 Hours	1 Hour 31Minutes
Combination	45 Minutes	4 Hours	1 Hour 57 Minutes
Other	1 Hour 30 Minutes	4 Hours	2 Hours 20 Minutes

Although gumbo can be eaten any time of the year, the dish is used to describe a change in temperature. "Gumbo Season" denotes that the weather has become cooler and therefore a good time to cook and consume the soup (Weber and Weber, 2005). As Figure 9 shows, restaurants indicate Gumbo Season by placing announcements on signs. Mardi Gras day is another time of the year in which gumbo is associated, especially in southwestern Louisiana. On Fat Tuesday, masked riders participate in the courir de Mardi Gras. The riders collect ingredients from the community. These ingredients are cooked later in the day for a gumbo enjoyed by the public (Ancelet, 1991; Bienvenue et al., 2005; Gutierrez, 1992; Nobles, 2009). This Mardi Gras gumbo serves as a last gluttonous meal prior to the beginning of lent (Bienvenue et al., 2005).

Authors contend there are no definitive origins of the gumbo dish (Bienvenue et al., 2005; Gutierrez, 1992). One of the first mentions of gumbo in the context of Louisiana comes from an 18th century investigation of a runaway slave. In this exchange an investigator asks a female slave if she had given the runaway, gumbo (Hall, 1995; Nobles, 2009; see Bernard, 2011). 19th century visitors to Louisiana found gumbo to be a special dish in the distinct cuisine of Louisiana (Bienvenue et al., 2005). Documentation reveals that travelers encountered the dish at

an Acadian home along the "Acadian Coast" and at a governor's party in New Orleans in the early 1800s (Bienvenue et al., 2005; see also Gutierrez, 1992; Nobles, 2009; LaFleur, 2010). The dish comes to prominence in the 19th century and is both cooked and enjoyed by all people of different socioeconomic statuses (Bienvenue et al., 2005; see Hearn, 1885). Also in the 19th century, gumbo had been around long enough that several different kinds of gumbo already existed (see Nobles, 2009; LaFleur 2010; see also Hearn, 1885).



Figure 9: Photo taken on October 21, 2012; A restaurant in New Iberia, Louisiana letting customers know the temperature is right for gumbo.

Going beyond the dish, Louisianans use the word gumbo symbolically as a way to describe the people, music, and cultures that make up the region (Ancelet, 1991; Leblanc-Sewell, 2005). Gumbo is used metaphorically as a mixture when referring to South Louisiana, and

Cajuns specifically (Ancelet, 1991; Bienvenue et al., 2005; Leblanc-Sewell, 2005). Gumbo is considered a uniquely Louisiana dish (Ancelet, 1991; Folse, 1989). Moreover, the dish can be seen as an emblem of Cajun cuisine (Bienvenue et al., 2005). However, the following section demonstrates that not only are their similar dishes to gumbo found in other countries but also gumbo shows up in different areas of the Atlantic world.

### **Gumbo Cognate Dishes**

The dishes mentioned below are soups (or rice dishes) that have a connection to gumbo or are a regional version of gumbo. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list but these are dishes that have come up in my research which have been compared in some capacity to gumbo. Because gumbo is a dish born from the Columbian Exchange, I look mostly at dishes found on the Atlantic rim into consideration when handling gumbo cognate dishes.

#### France

##### Bouillabaisse

Bouillabaisse is a fish soup dish that originates in the south of France, particularly the Provence region (Montagnè, 1961). Some have argued it is one of the contenders for being the ancestor dish of gumbo (Bienvenue et al., 2005; Folse, 2004; Folse, 1989). The knowledge of cooking bouillabaisse came to Louisiana via the early colonists and the Acadians, although they would have to have substituted New World ingredients in order to make the dish (Dawdy, 2010; Feibleman, 1971; Folse, 2004; Gutierrez, 1992). Bouillabaisse developed as a dish in which fisherman cooked fish that was leftover from the day. To cook bouillabaisse, fish is boiled in fragrant liquid and then served together in a bowl (Child et al., 2001; Montagnè, 1961). During Lent, bouillabaisse is cooked with leafy green vegetables (Folse, 2004; Folse 1989).

## Court Bouillon

Court bouillon is another dish that some deliberate as being the ancestor dish to gumbo, although South Louisiana has its own variety of court bouillon (see Folse, 2004; Folse, 1989). A classic court bouillon is a liquid in which flavors are accentuated by boiling (Child et al., 2001; Folse, 1989). This liquid is used as a poaching mechanism for fish or other ingredients (Child et al., 2001; Harris, 2003). Court bouillon in the New World is cooked differently than how it is utilized in France (Harris, 2003). In Louisiana, a court bouillon includes roux and tomatoes (Bienvenue et al., 2005; Folse, 2004). The change in the dish, as well as it being served over rice in Louisiana, reflects the influence of other cultures (Bienvenue et al., 2005).

## Chaudrée

The west coast of France offers an additional fish soup in the form of chaudrée (Willan, 2012). Chaudrée came to the New World via French colonists of Nova Scotia and it turned into chowders along the New England coast (Ferguson, 2004; George, 2008; Willan, 2012). The name chaudrée comes from the pot that the dish is cooked in which is referred to as a chaudière (Ferguson, 2004; George 2008). The cooking of the dish takes place in one pot (Ferguson, 2004). In chaudrée, fish is first sautéed in butter and herbs then taken out so that liquid can be added to the pot to make the soup. The fish is then returned to the pot once the liquid is finished cooking (Willan, 2012). Chefs consider chaudrée the mother dish of clam chowder (see chowder below) (Ferguson, 2004; George, 2008; Willan, 2012). Chaudrée is a soup that is known and cooked in the Poitou region of France which is also the area in which the Acadian colonists were extracted (see Ancelet, 1991; Willan, 2012).

## Spain/Portugal

### Caldo

Caldo is a dish of Spain and Portugal. Caldo comes from the Galicia region of Spain. Galicia borders to the north with the former Portuguese province Minho, in which caldo was representative (see Bonechi, 2006). This particular soup is also found in New World areas which were colonized by these two countries. Caldo in Spanish once referred to both the dish and a pot (Mullins, 2012). In the Spanish language, caldo means broth and there are several ways to make this broth including beef, fish, and chicken (Roden, 2011; see Barrenechea, 2005). The actual soup, caldo gallego, is similar to gumbo in that it combines vegetables and meat in one pot then cooked (see Barrenechea, 2005; Beatrix, 2012; Roden, 2011). The Isleños colonists brought caldo with them to Louisiana (Beatrix, 2012; Bengé and Sullivan, 2007).

## Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Benin, Mali

### Supakanja/Soupikanya

Supakanja is an okra dish found in the Atlantic Ocean nations of western Africa (see Harris, 1998; Wright, 2005). Although described as a soup (see Saine, 2012; Wright 2005), it can also be a stew (see Harris, 1998). It is a dish in which seafood such as fish and shrimp is added to okra, although it can just as well be made with beef (Harris, 1998; Saine, 2012; Wright, 2005). Supakanja can be served over rice (see Harris, 1998; Saine, 2012; Wright, 2005) or can be just eaten with bread (see Wright, 2005). The okra and shrimp aspect of this dish makes it similar to gumbos in Louisiana that also combine these two ingredients. Jessica B. Harris (1998) attests to the oily texture of the dish. Most cooks in Louisiana would not tolerate sliminess in an okra gumbo (see Catelyn, 2013; Monique and Anita, 2013).



## Caribbean Islands

### Callaloo

Callaloo in the Caribbean, has several meanings, similar to gumbo in Louisiana. In one sense, callaloo refers to leafy plants that grows in the region (Allsop, 2007; Harris, 2003; Higman, 2007). Callaloo is also the name of a soup (or in some cases stew) that is found on several islands (Allsop, 2007; Harris, 2003; Hamilton and Hamilton, 2007; Higman, 2007). The term is utilized as a representation of the cultural mix, which is analogous to how gumbo can be used in Louisiana, which resides in the Caribbean (Khan, 2004; Houston, 2005). It reflects the African heritage of region (see Hamilton and Hamilton, 2007).

In Trinidad and Tobago, callaloo is the official dish of the nation (Allsop, 2007; Houston, 2005). The dish itself is made from leaves from various plants of the same name (*Amaranthus spinosus*, *Amaranthus tricolor*, and *Colocasia esculenta*). Depending on which part the Caribbean one is in when making this dish, either the Eastern or Western portion, will dictate which plant is used for the dish (Houston, 2005). Other vegetables, like okra, are added and cooked down. A protein in the form of meat or seafood is added to the dish (Davies, 2008).

### Pepperpot

The dish callaloo became known in Jamaica as pepperpot (Higman, 2007). This is a ubiquitous dish found throughout the island (Hawkes, 1978). Pepperpots in the Caribbean are cooked in two different ways. The pepperpot of the southern Caribbean is akin to dishes made in South America while in the northern Caribbean pepperpots use more "root vegetables" (see Harris, 2003). The Jamaican dish pepperpot still uses callaloo and okra as main vegetables for the soup but rely more on chicken and beef as the protein in the dish (Cassidy and Le Page,

1967; Higman, 2007). Like in some gumbo recipes of Louisiana, okra acts as a thickener for pepperpot (DeMers and Benghiat, 1998)

### Giambo

Giambo is a dish found in the Dutch island dependencies of Aruba and Curaçao. Also referred to as yambo, giambo is an okra soup located in the southern part of the Caribbean (Geddes, 2001; Philpott, 2002). The soup is similar to bouillabaisse (Philpott, 2002). It is a dense dish which can include fish or salt meat. Although it is a dish that is commonly found in festivals, it can be ordered anytime of the day in the islands (Geddes, 2001). The dish is green in color and almost resembles that of gumbo z'herbes found in Louisiana (Geddes, 2001; see Harris, 1991). It is related closely to other soups in the Caribbean (Harris, 1991).

### Quimbombo/Guingombo

Quimbombo and guingombo are taken directly from a Bantu language, both meaning okra (Harris, 2001). Okra in Cuba is called quimbombo (O'Higgins, 1994) and guingombo in Puerto Rico (Harris, 2003). This ingredient is used in a number of soups and stews which also incorporate rice into the dishes (O'Higgins, 1994). Cooking quimbombo in a variety of dishes illustrates a mixing of African and Cuban food preparation methods (O'Higgins, 1994; Randleman and Schwartz, 1992). The rice and African influence makes this dish akin to gumbo.

### Ajiaco

Another Cuban dish that is metaphorically related to gumbo is ajiaco. Ajiaco is a stew (or soup) in which meats and vegetables are combined with sofrito and boiled together (Folch 2008; Luis, 2001). Sofrito is a mixture of vegetables (green pepper, onions, garlic, and tomato), herbs, and spices that serves as a basis for numerous Cuban dishes (Folch 2008; Lindgren et al.,

2004). The stew can be served over rice (Folch 2008) or with Cuban bread (Lafrey, 2005; Lindgren et al., 2004).

Although found in other regions of the Caribbean, ajiaco is often used to illustrate Cuban character just as gumbo describes the *mélange* of cultures that make up Louisiana (Garth, 2013). Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (1991) was the first to come up with this metaphor for this Cuban dish being a blending of people that culturally make up the island (Arnedo, 2001; Folch, 2008; Garth, 2013). However, whether or not this metaphor is a useful analogy can be questioned (see Folch, 2008).

## Brazil

### Caruru

Caruru is a Brazilian stew which comes from the Bahia region of the country. The name caruru for the dish originates from the Brazilian natives believing the okra pod looked similar to a plant already indigenous to the area (Hamilton, 2005). This dish derives from the Sudan and has ingredients that harken back to African cooking (Opie, 2011; Kijac, 2003). The use of palm oil, called *dende*, and okra exemplify the African contribution to the dish (Kijac, 2003). Seafood, namely shrimp, and other ingredients native to Brazil are added to the dish (Hamilton, 2005; Hamilton and Hamilton, 2007; Kijac, 2003).

Although the dish can be eaten at any time, traditionally it is served during religious festivities of *Candomblé*. These include a festival that honors the Virgin Mary in the city of Cachoeira and the saints' Cosme and Damian festivals which take place during September (Hamilton, 2005; Hamilton and Hamilton, 2007; Kijac, 2003). While the dish derived from Bahia, there are different versions of the dish found throughout Brazil (Hamilton and Hamilton,

2007). Because of the okra and African cooking styles, it is considered a Brazilian gumbo (see Opie, 2011).

### Angola

#### Kalúlu

The etymology of the word kalúlu can be confusing. There are sources that say it is an African word (see Walker, 2001) that was loaned to the Portuguese language while others contend it is a Brazilian Portuguese word borrowed by Angola (Hamilton and Hamilton, 2007). The latter seems to be the agreed upon theory as kalúlu is a dish with African influence that was brought to Angola via the Brazilian dish caruru (Hamilton, 2011; Hamilton and Hamilton, 2007). As in the Brazilian dish, the basis of kalúlu is okra (Hamilton and Hamilton, 2007; see Walker, 2001).

### Philippines

#### Adobo

Although not along the Atlantic rim, a dish from Southeast Asia needs to be mentioned in the study of gumbo cognate dishes. On the various islands that make up the nation of the Philippines, Filipinos cook a dish called adobo (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Fernandez, 2003; Magat, 2002). Influenced by Spanish and Mexican cuisine, adobo is generally a stew made up of chicken or pork (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Fernandez, 2003; Magat, 2002).

Each island in the Philippines has its own way of making the adobo. The instructions on how to cook the dish is passed down between the generations (Anna, 2014). Lastly, going beyond the dish, adobo also refers to a style of cooking within the Philippines (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Fernandez, 2003)

Like gumbo, people prepare adobo by cooking a meat (generally chicken) in a broth while combining other spices (Anna, 2014; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Fernandez, 2003). Also, adobo is a one pot dish like gumbo. Similarly to gumbo, adobo is served with rice although the rice is usually served separately instead of being placed within the dish after it is finished cooking (Anna, 2014).

### United States

#### Chowder

As mentioned above the word chowder can be traced to the French word/dish *chaudrée* (Ferguson, 2004; George, 2008; Willan, 2012). Although one view is *chaudrée* entered the New World by way of French colonists in Nova Scotia and then turned into chowder, an alternate view is that chowder actually came from England (Walker et al., 2011). The dish still would have been from France but it journeyed from Brittany to England by French fisherman (Hooker, 1978). In any case, chowder ended up in Newfoundland and found its way to the New England region of the United States (Hooker, 1978; Walker et al., 2011).

Chowder is a milk based soup which usually has seafood but the dish does come in non-seafood versions (Walker et al., 2011). Chowder's connection to *chaudrée* ties it to gumbo as *chaudrée* is found in the area of France the Acadians originated (see Ancelet, 1991; Willan, 2012). Chowder, like gumbo, is used a representative dish of a region (Walker et al., 2011).

#### Pepperpot

The Philadelphia pepperpot dish is similar to the pepperpot that is cooked in Jamaica, as discussed above. This dish was created due to Philadelphia being a port city and therefore had a role in the slave market (Harris, 2003). It is a pre-revolutionary dish that has roots in the Caribbean (DeWitt, 2010; Harris, 2003). The initial preparation of Philadelphia pepperpot

included using turtle meat and African dumplings (DeWitt, 2010; Harris, 2003). These dumplings, referred to as fou fou, is a starch added to the dish, much like rice is the starch that is added to gumbo. Female African Americans sold pepperpot in the streets where it was also consumed (Harris, 2011). It is still cooked today although with other meats and vegetables such as tripe, fish, and potatoes (Harris, 2003).

### Lowcountry Gumbo

The lowcountry region in the United States encompasses the coastal areas of South Carolina and Georgia which extends to northern Florida (Hamilton, 2007; Martin, 2000). Lowcountry cuisine is concentrated in Charleston, South Carolina (Hamilton, 2007). Although, South Carolina was an English colony, the cuisine has been influenced by different ethnic groups including African slaves, who came to be known as Geechee, and the French Huguenots (Martin, 2000). Here, plantations cultivated African rice which became an important staple in the New World diet (Carney, 2002; Edelson, 2010, Harris, 2011). Rice is a mainstay in Lowcountry cuisine (Harris, 2011).

Lowcountry has its own version of gumbo which differs from gumbo cooked in Louisiana (Hamilton, 2007; Martin, 2000). Gumbo in the Lowcountry is more dependent on okra in the dish (Dabney, 2010; Hamilton, 2007; Martin, 2000). Also, Lowcountry chefs and cooks eschew from using filé to thicken the dish (Martin, 2000). Lowcountry gumbo includes tomatoes, hot peppers, and roux (Dabney, 2010; Hamilton, 2007; Martin, 2000).

### Louisiana

#### Jambalaya

From the offset it would seem that jambalaya does not have a connection with gumbo because jambalaya is not a soup. However, in my interviews jambalaya often comes up as

similar to gumbo because both dishes are cooked with readily available ingredients in one pot. Also, some cooks will incorporate a minute amount of roux to jambalaya to help thicken the dish (Hotard, 2008; see also Gutierrez, 1992). Jambalaya is a Louisiana dish whose possible ancestor is the rice dish paella which derived in Spain and Portugal (Folse2004; Gutierrez, 1992; see Nobles, 2009). However, the dish could also have African origins as well (see Ancelet, 1991; Bienvenue et al., 2005; Gutierrez, 1992).

Folklore surrounding the word jambalaya dictates that it is a grouping of French or Spanish and African words since jambon in French and jamon in Spanish both mean ham while *yaya* an African word for rice (Folse, 2004; Bienvenue et al., 2005; Nobles, 2009). Yet, this for the most part is speculation (Hotard, 2012). In this dish various meats and vegetables are cooked then rice is added to the concoction (Gutierrez, 1992; Valmand et al., 2010). The flavors infuse the rice while it cooks (Gutierrez, 1992). The color of jambalaya changes with geography in South Louisiana. Brown jambalayas are typical of southwestern Louisiana while red jambalaya, red because of tomato being an ingredient, is found mostly in the New Orleans region (Bienvenue et al., 2005).

#### Stew/Fricassee

Like gumbos in South Louisiana, stews and fricassees (see Figure 10) are generally roux based dishes that are served over rice (Gutierrez, 1992; Wuerthner, 2006; see also Bienvenue et al., 2005). Onions, bell pepper, and celery (the "Holy Trinity") are often the vegetables used in stews and fricassees (Wuerthner, 2006). Although cooked like gumbo, these dishes tend to be thicker in consistency (Gutierrez, 1992; Hotard, 2012, 2013). Also unlike gumbos, stews and fricassees will mostly only contain one main meat such as a shrimp stew or chicken fricassee (Gutierrez, 1992; see also Folse 1989, 2004).



Figure 10: Chicken Fricassee (left) being cooked for Creole Culture Day at Vermillionville, Lafayette, Louisiana, June 10, 2012.

### Bisque

Bisques are similar to stews and fricassees. This is another dish which incorporates roux, the "Holy Trinity", and is also served over rice (Gutierrez, 1992; Folse, 2004). While there are several variations of a bisque (see Folse, 2004), probably the most well known in South Louisiana is the crawfish bisque. In this dish, crawfish heads are gutted and then stuffed with a number of different ingredients including bread and vegetables (Gutierrez, 1992; Folse, 2004). These stuffed heads are added to the thick soup like mixture before placed over rice. Once considered a part of upper class cuisine, this dish is now cooked by a good bit of South Louisianans from different socio-economic statuses (see Bienvenue et al., 2005; Feibleman, 1971).

### Étouffée

In French, the word étouffée means, "to smother" (see Bienvenue, 2005; Folse, 2004; Gutierrez, 1992; Wuerthner, 2006). Although this entails the braising of any number of main ingredients, generally crawfish étouffée is the most common version of this dish found in South Louisiana (Bienvenue, 2005; Gutierrez, 1992). Basically this étouffée entails smothering down ingredients in a pot and it is then served over rice (Bienvenue, 2005; Gutierrez, 1992; Wuerthner,



2006). Whether or not a roux is used in this dish depends on who is cooking the étouffée. Some contend it should not contain a roux while others state that a roux can be used to make more gravy (see Folse, 2004; Gutierrez, 2005; Wuerthner, 2006).

#### Pot Fried Crab

To my knowledge pot fried crab is a South Louisiana dish that has not been written about by scholars or regional cookbook chefs. This dish is made exclusively by the Pointe au Chien Indian Tribe located in the Pointe au Chien and Montegut communities of Terrebonne Parish (Amber, 2013b). This dish is cooked similar to an étouffée but incorporates fewer ingredients. Here, hard shell crabs are declawed, cleaned, and stabbed. They are then added to a pot of onions, which have been sautéed in oil, and then cooked. The crab, onion, and oil make a gravy that is served over rice (Amber, 2013a; 2013b).

#### Other Louisiana Food

The following foods found in South Louisiana are not necessarily related to gumbo. However, they have been brought up by interviewees in one form or another. For this reason, I feel it necessary to briefly mention them here.

#### Macques Choux

Macques choux is a corn based dish (Bienvenue et al., 2005; Folse, 2004). This dish is of Native American origin but has been incorporated into the broader cuisine of South Louisiana. Macques Choux contains corn and other vegetables cooked together in a fat. A meat such as crawfish, sausage, or chicken can be added but it is not necessary for the eating of the dish (Bienvenue et al., 2005)

## Couche-Couche

Couche-couche is basically battered cornmeal fried in oil which is usually served in milk or sometimes syrup (see Bienvenue et al., 2005; Gutierrez, 1992). Typically this is a breakfast dish (however, I can attest to the fact that it can be served at other meals, my grandmother would frequently make this for supper when I lived with her growing up) (Bienvenue et al., 2005, Folse, 2004; Gutierrez, 1992). Even though authors agree this is a Cajun dish (see Bienvenue et al., 2005, Folse, 2004; Gutierrez, 1992), couche-couch is cooked by southwestern Louisiana Afro-French Creoles as well (Monique and Anita, 2013).

## Fry Bread



Figure 11: Fry Bread being cooked at Native American Culture Day, Vermilionville, Lafayette, Louisiana, September 21, 2013.

This food is found in both the Native American and Afro-French Creole communities of South Louisiana (Hotard, 2013; Monique and Anita, 2013). Some consider this the mother dish of beignets as they are cooked and served similarly; Folse (2004) insists beignets had been known in Europe prior to American colonization. Fry bread consists of mixing oil and flour then

shaping the combination into small pancakes (see Figure 11). These are then deep fried in a skillet filled with hot oil. It can be served topped with powdered sugar (Hotard, 2013) or a fruit preserve (Monique and Anita, 2013).

## **Conclusion**

The first time I ate adobo occurred the week that Cyclone Haiyan slammed into the island nation of the Philippines in November 2013. The local Philippine restaurant in Lafayette was donating all the profits that day to Haiyan relief for family still in the Philippines. Being a fan of both Philippine food and wanting to help out, I ordered a dish I had never eaten before in the pantheon of Philippine cuisine but I had read about in doing this research as something that might be similar to gumbo (see Burnt Lumpia, 2007). I went to the restaurant, ordered an *adobo* dinner and chatted with an understandably distraught server about the Philippines and relief effort.

Paying for my dinner, I took it home with the smell of herbs and vinegary broth filling my truck. Salivating by the time I made it to my parents' house I couldn't take it anymore. I hurried up and took a bowl out the cabinet, spooned in some rice and poured the still warm chicken adobe into the bowl. Filling a spoon with rice and adobo broth including chicken pieces that fell off a thigh bone, I put it in my mouth. My initial reaction, for a lack of a better description, I was floored. I took another bite just to make sure. Although it had a tangier taste, there was no mistaking it, I was eating gumbo!

The intermingling of different people across continents and oceans during the Columbian Exchange led to a melding of foodways. Because of the Columbian Exchange national cuisines began to develop through an interchange of vegetables and cultural knowledge. This

combination brought a rise of new dishes in both the Old and New Worlds. One of these dishes that developed as a result is gumbo.

Although there is no specific agreed upon origin of gumbo, it has been cooked in Louisiana at least since the late 18th century. It is an iconic dish to the South Louisiana region. Even though gumbo recipes can be categorized in at different ways (through thickeners, ingredients, or recipe names) no two people cook gumbo alike nor does one person cook the dish the exact same way more than once. In Louisiana, gumbo is not just a dish but it is used to describe the ethnicities and the cultural markers that make up the region.

Despite the fact that people claim gumbo has a French origin, the word “gumbo” is actually derived from several African languages, in which it means okra. Also, there is a possibility the word can be Native American in origin meaning sassafras. While gumbo is considered indigenous to Louisiana, it shows up in other parts of the Atlantic rim and even Southeast Asia either as a regional version or a cognate dish. From Africa, to South America, to the Caribbean, to Southeast Asia, to North America varieties or at least sister dishes of gumbo are found in many places. This chapter has examined twenty-one dishes that have a connection to gumbo and Figure 12 illustrates where in the world these dishes occur. These were just dishes that happened to come up in the research. As I look at Figure 12, I wonder how many more dishes that originate in the colonial world share a lineage with gumbo. It is important to note the lack of African dishes on the following map. Although I researched cognate dishes I did not find the amount of African dishes that connect to gumbo that I thought I would in the amount of time I had. A further investigation into African dishes would allow me to populate the African part of the map with more gumbo cognate foods.

Yet gumbo is more than a word, history, description, or recipe. It has a meaning beyond what is written in the scholarship especially in South Louisiana. The next chapter details the ethnographic fieldwork on gumbo that I conducted in southwestern Louisiana. Everyone in the region has an opinion on gumbo that often does not come across in the literature based research done by scholars and chefs on the dish. These everyday cooks are definitely not afraid to share or argue over what they believe to be correct or "authentic" information on the dish that has come to define a region within the Atlantic world.

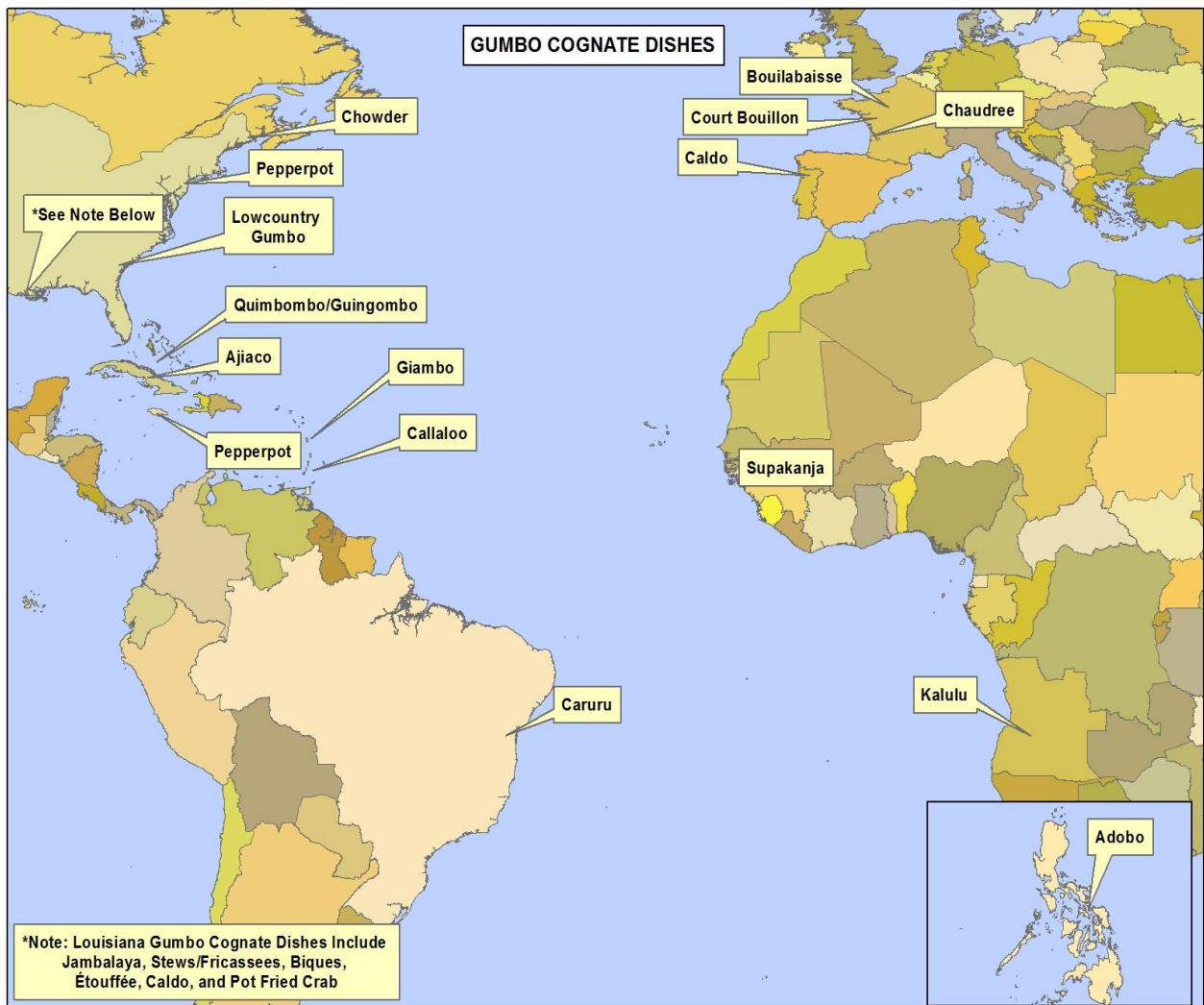


Figure 12: A map of gumbo cognate dishes found during this research

## **CHAPTER 5: GUMBO IN CONTEXT - COOKING GUMBO IN SOUTH LOUISIANA**

### **Introduction: The Mask of Gumbo**

It was a very balmy South Louisiana July day when I pulled into the parking lot of a popular local restaurant along the Highway 90 oil and gas industry corridor at approximately 2 pm. During the summer of 2011, I was going around to various regional restaurants after the lunch crowd had died down to see if I could schedule times to interview head chefs about the gumbo that they served at their particular food establishment. The temperature bordered on the extreme as I walked from my truck and to the front door of a restaurant I not only admire for their food but also for the rustic ambiance that exudes from the wooden interior. Bashfully entering the much appreciated air conditioned restaurant, I asked an employee if I could speak to the manager. The employee then said to me that she was the manager.

I explained to the manager, a very personable white middle aged female, about my research and how I was interested in how this restaurant cooked gumbo. I politely asked if it would be “ok” to talk to the person that makes the gumbo, assuring that they did not have to reveal any secret ingredients. She expressed that I could, in fact, have a conversation with that particular cook and told me to wait as she went to go get, "The Gumbo Guy" for their restaurant. The manager disappeared into the kitchen and a few moments later introduced me to Dave, a black man in his thirties.

After brief introductions, Dave told me that he cooked the gumbo, a recipe based on his grandmother's gumbo, for the restaurant. He stated the gumbo he cooked was an Afro-French Creole variation. I showed deep interest in talking to him more, when he had adequate enough time to discuss the dish. So we planned to meet at the restaurant a few days later to have a

conversation about his "Creole" gumbo. Dave let the manager know that I would be coming back so we could have a conversation on the gumbo he cooks at the restaurant.

When I showed up at the appropriate time to meet Dave again, I encountered the manager at the door. She explained how "Chef" was excited to talk to me about my research. Preparing my digital recorder for the interview, I followed the manager to the kitchen area, fully expecting to talk to Dave about how he learned to cook gumbo from his grandmother and why he considered his gumbo a "Creole" style. However, the manager did not bring me to Dave, she presented me to the white Cajun middle aged head chef of the restaurant who was busy making a crab stew. As I stood there confused in front of Chef, the manager introduced us and explained that I was there to ask questions for my research. Chef eagerly shook my hand and I fumbled through the first sentences until I became more at ease with the fact that I was interviewing someone who I had not intended to interview. I felt even more uncomfortable when, during the interview, Dave passed me by, several times, in getting his kitchen work done.

The interview with Chef lasted a little over ten minutes. I had recorded some really great information about how he learned to cook gumbo and what he considered are the differences between Afro-French Creole and Cajun gumbos. It was a good interview. However, I could not help but feel conflicted about who was supposed to be my interviewee as I pulled out of the driveway. For several months, even as I frequented the restaurant and Chef would come out to greet my friends and I while dining, when he was able, I was not sure what to do. When I interviewed Chef he told me how I could go back to the kitchen, anytime, to ask him whatever I wanted or to observe him just cooking. I did not want to lose that access while questioning who I was supposed to really talk to about their gumbo.

As I continued my research, this episode bothered me and always stuck out in the back of my mind. I wondered if this was a race issue or was this an episode in power relations since perhaps only the head chef is allowed to speak to people, such as myself, about the cuisine served at this notoriously Cajun restaurant. One day, I just could not take the self-torture anymore. I purposely ordered a to-go dinner from this restaurant so I could question the manager about this.

It was nightfall and much cooler when I finally found my courage. Luckily it was a Friday night, a night I knew that particular manager would be working. Recognizing me as I walked in, she offered me a beer which I quickly drank as she gathered my food together. When she brought me the bill, I took my chance. I asked her about the fact that when I first talked to her about my research that she had introduced me to, "The Gumbo Guy" and he was not Chef. I wondered if I could talk to their, "Gumbo Guy" just because I felt like it would give me a broader perspective about gumbo in general.

Nervously, the manager answered with, "No." She explained that the only person who could talk to me about the gumbo served at the restaurant was Chef. Because Chef dictated their menu, he was the only one qualified to discuss any food items. Thanking her for both the beer and getting my to-go order together, I left the restaurant. That conversation did not make me feel any more contented about the situation or the interview that I had with Chef previously. I drove away wondering why the fact that I could only talk to Chef was not brought up from the beginning and how the possibility of their gumbo being Afro-French Creole was hidden. Even as I write this I both regret and I am at odds that I could not talk to Dave even though Chef was very accommodating.



I wonder what I missed not pursuing the issue more and what was masked by not getting to have a gumbo conversation with Dave. If given the opportunity again, I would have taken more advantage of the limited time I initially had with Dave. I would have asked him about his grandmother and why did he consider his gumbo, Afro-French Creole. Talking to Dave could have given a richer understanding of Afro-French Creole gumbo and why this restaurant masks its dish as Cajun.

The above description illustrates both Goffman's notion of the back region and Brecht's A-Effect. As an example of back region, this incident displays the contradiction of the performance between the front and the back. The front for this restaurant exhibits that this is a Cajun restaurant that serves a Cajun gumbo. By having an Afro-French gumbo cook who prepares a Creole gumbo, the back challenges the front on the notion that it is specifically Cajun.

Brecht's A-Effect is shown here as well. By changing the person I was initially to talk about the restaurant's gumbo, I was pulled out of what I thought was going to occur. Since I expected I would be interviewing the Afro-French cook about his Creole gumbo and then being presented to the white Cajun head chef, I began to question whose gumbo represented the restaurant. Here A-Effect allowed me to start thinking critically about how the Cajun gumbo finished product could come from an Afro-French Creole performance of preparation and how that performance is masked or hidden.

## **Fieldwork: Methodology, Demographics, and The World Championship Gumbo Cook-off**

### Methodology

This dissertation is based on five years of ethnographic fieldwork which entailed several methods in various cultural venues and locations throughout southwestern Louisiana. I performed data collection through email questionnaires, interviews, and participant observation.

The majority of the information presented here comes from interviews that I conducted with people regarding gumbo.

Most of the interviews can be considered informal. Although I had specific questions to start these conversations, the interviews became just discussions regarding the informant's own gumbo dish (see Crang and Cook, 2007). Even though these conversations changed depending on what the person being interviewed wanted to talk about, I did generally ask the same few questions in each interview. The list of questions I always asked included where the person originated, how long have they cooked gumbo, who taught them how to prepare the dish, and to give a description of their gumbo cooking process in as much or as little detail they wanted to divulge.

Important to note that I made sure to tell the participants prior to the interview that they did not have to answer any question or talk about something they felt uncomfortable revealing. The most common topic that was left out or redacted from these conversations revolved around secret ingredients or secret cooking methods. Although, sometimes talking about an issue too personal for the interviewee became another reason I turned off the recorder or cause for further redactions.

Interviews took place in a variety of locales such as a participant's home/work place (non restaurant or store), restaurant/store, cultural days at a living history museum near Lafayette, and gumbo cooking competitions. Figure 13 illustrates the percentages of how/where interviews took happened. In addition to interviewing people I also participated in a "Cajun Soups" class in which we cooked gumbo as a chef from a local culinary school supervised. I also joined committee meetings as well as volunteered in various capacities for the 2011 and 2012 World Championship Gumbo Cook-Off in New Iberia, Louisiana.

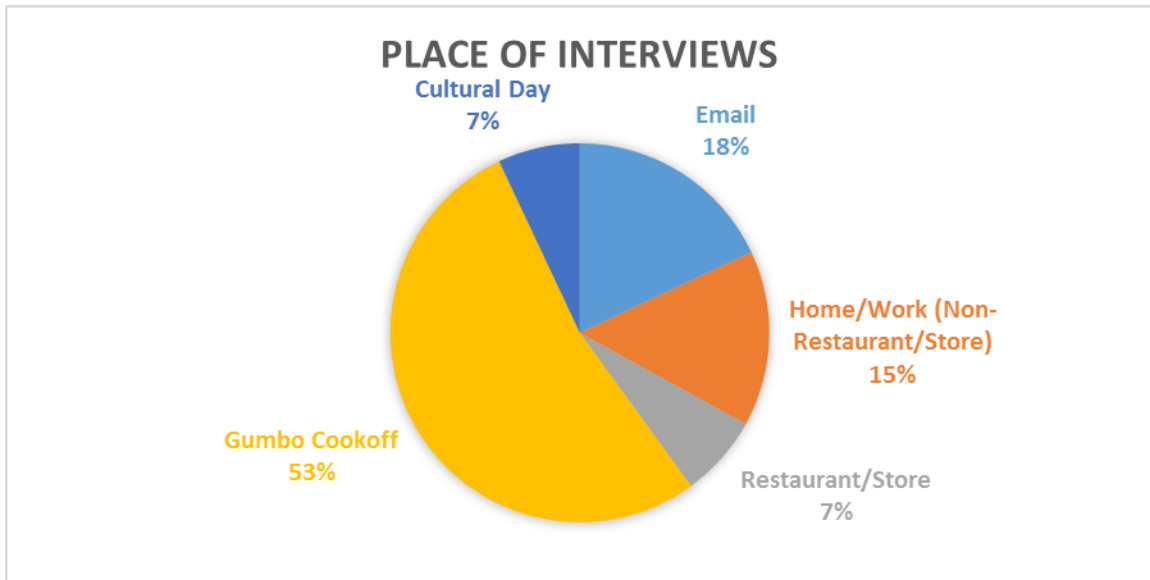


Figure 13: Percentages of where interviews took place.

Duration of interviews varied between less than a minute to as much as over three recorded hours. Shorter times indicate those interviews conducted at gumbo cooking contests where contenders did not have much time to talk due to the fact that they were involved in activities surrounding the competition. As Figure 13 shows, the majority of interviews took place at gumbo competitions, specifically The World Championship Gumbo Cook-Off in New Iberia, Louisiana which is discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

I chronicled these interviews via a digital recorder. Also, I wrote copious notes for the few non-recorded interviews that took place. All recorded interviews were transcribed and then reviewed to make sure the transcripts were accurate. As stated above, I redacted from the transcriptions anything the interviewee asked me not use or that I felt was too personal and therefore didn't pertain to this project. I employed pseudonyms for everyone interviewed, even if the person said it was acceptable to use their real name. Also, sometimes I address people as "Miss" or "Mister." Growing up in South Louisiana, using this before a first name is a sign of

respect for someone who is older. I analyzed all transcriptions, notes, and analytic memos through a process of coding which I discuss later in this chapter.

### Demographics: Gender, Race, and Place

I talked to both men and women for this project but most of the conversations represent white male cooks. Out of the 120 people questioned, 67 were male and 51 were female. Two people from the email questionnaires did not specify a gender. The male majority demographic represent the mostly gumbo competition interviews. As has been noted elsewhere, men are more likely to cook in public (see Bell and Valentine 1997; Bienvenue et al., 2005). However, this does not mean to suggest that women lacked presence at these competitions. As I will discuss later, women who were not head cooks at these events had a substantial presence in helping prepare and serve the dish while also trying to attract customers (see Meah,2014).

Racially, 69% of the interviewees were white while 15% were Afro-French Creole or African American. Other races of people I talked to include 5% of Native American descent and 2% who were Asian. The lack of racial information comes from email questionnaires where race was not always designated. This lack of racial acknowledgement makes up 9% of the interviews.

Geographically, the participants mainly come from South Louisiana. Fourteen parishes of Louisiana are represented in these interviews. I noted the home parish of people living in other states that I interviewed. The South Louisiana parishes that people/gumbos are from include Acadia, Calcasieu, East Baton Rouge, Evangeline, Iberia, Lafayette, Lafourche, Orleans, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, Terrebonne, and Vermillion. Caddo parish is the only North Louisiana representation in this project. Figure 14 illustrates the parishes that are represented in the collected recipes.

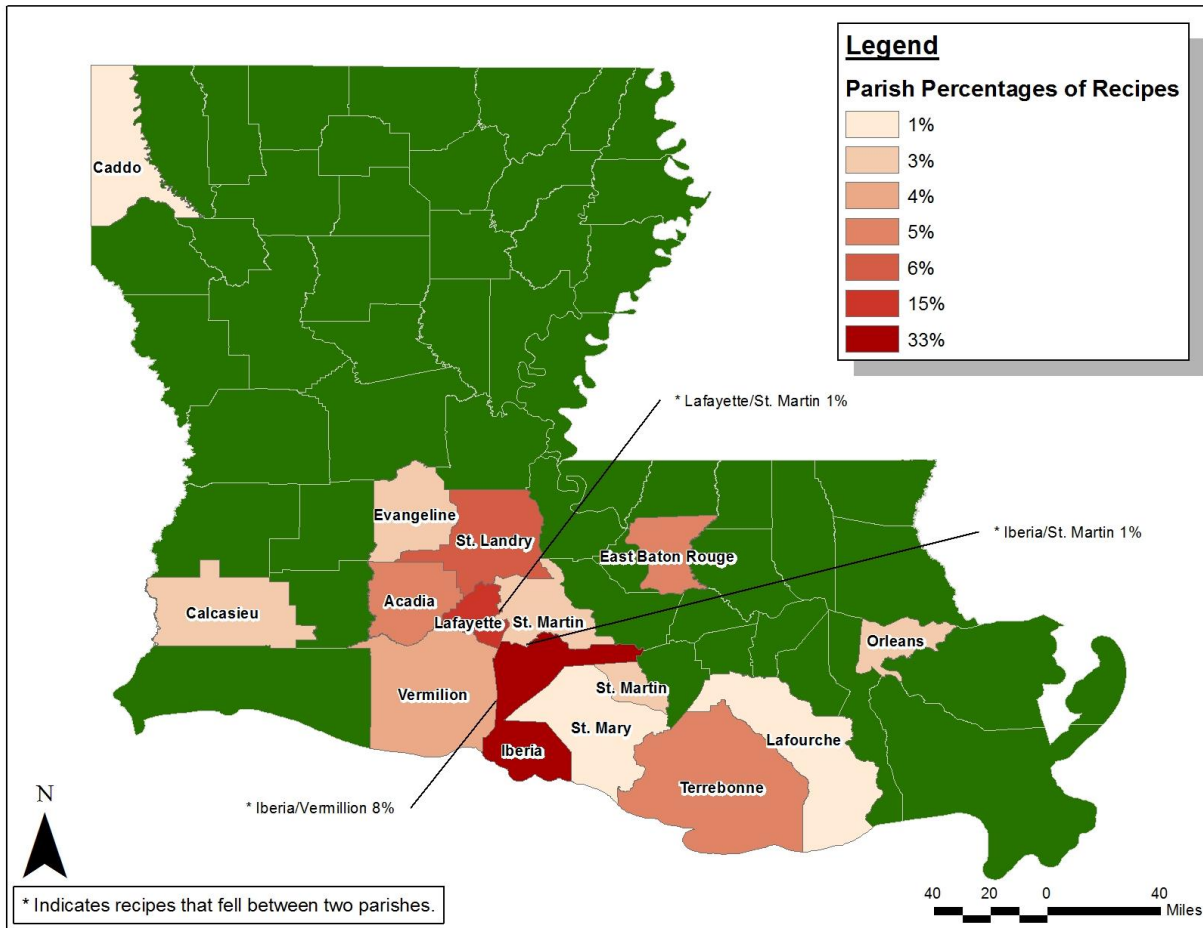


Figure 14: Parishes represented in the recipes/people for this project.

Most of the towns/cities that I interviewed or interviewees originate from are in Louisiana. In the sections that follow I mention the places the participants mentioned as their hometown. Figure 15 depicts where in Louisiana these cities are found.

Five people I interviewed came from outside of Louisiana. All but one were interviewed during gumbo competitions. Two people derived from inside the United States: a Georgia native participated in a cook-off competition in Delcambre with a local friend and one person in charge of an out of state gumbo cooking team hailed from Indiana. Asian countries also have a presence in this dissertation. A Filipina immigrant interviewed as part of a local cooking team and one person was the head chef of a team that came from Sapporo, Japan. Both took part in the World

Championship Gumbo Cook-Off. Another Filipina cook was interviewed at a local Filipino restaurant.

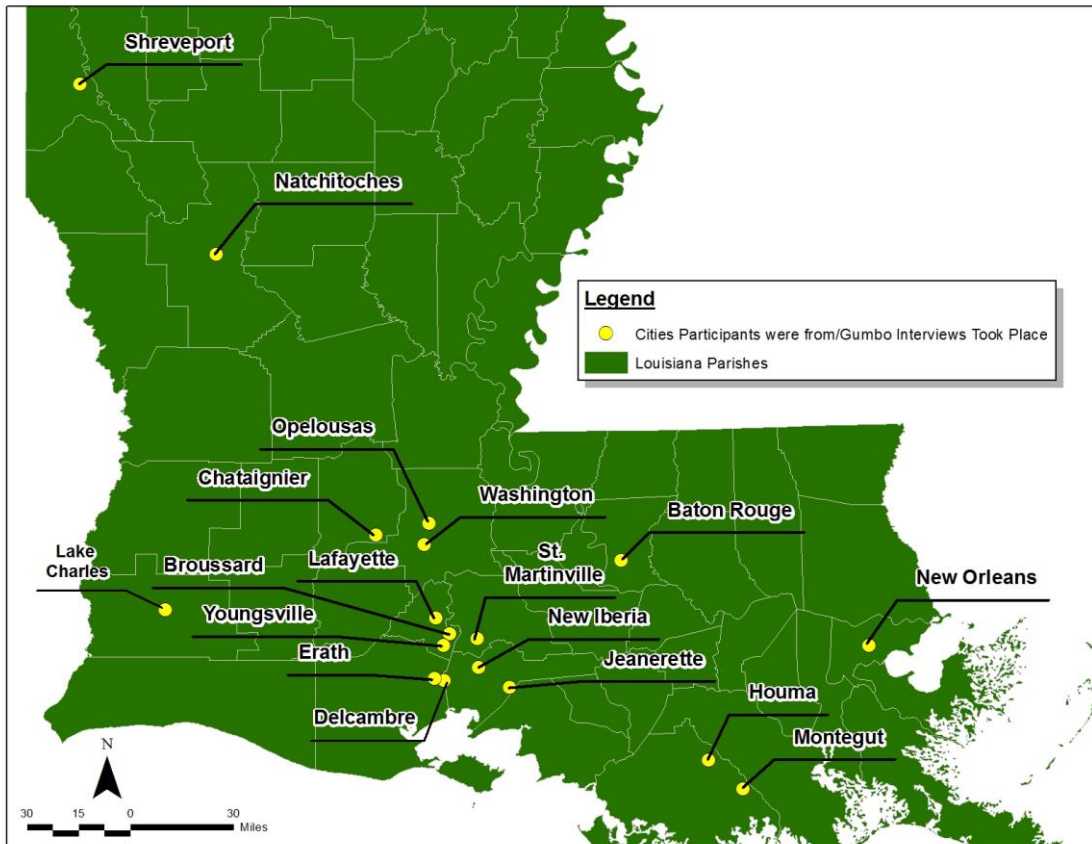


Figure 15: Louisiana cities/towns where interviews took place or interviewees were from.

As discussed in Chapters 1 and Chapter 3, there are racial/cultural differences in South Louisiana. Cajuns are generally those who are descendant of the French Acadian people who came from Nova Scotia but also can include people with Spanish, Canarian, and German colonial ancestry who have assimilated to Cajun culture. Cajun exclusively means one is white. Creole, today, usually someone of Afro-French heritage although some whites do self identify as being Creole (viz. they have French and/or Spanish colonial ancestry, see below). African American refers to people of African ancestry with roots in the Anglo colonies or United States.

I identified people in the interviews by how they self-identified. I kept to what people called themselves or their gumbo as closely as I could.

### The World Championship Gumbo Cook-Off in New Iberia, Louisiana

Although I attended gumbo cooking competitions in other places in South Louisiana, notably Delcambre and Lafayette, the World Championship Gumbo Cook-Off in New Iberia is where I spent a significant amount of time volunteering, conducting interviews, and observing gumbo cooking techniques. In fact, the World Championship Gumbo Cook-Off makes up 91% of gumbo cook-off interviews. For these reason I think it is necessary to discuss this event briefly for this project.

The World Championship Gumbo Cook-Off (WCGC) takes place the second week of October in downtown New Iberia, La. The Greater Iberia Chamber of Commerce sponsors the competition which acts a fundraiser for the organization (Hotard, 2011). The WCGC started out as a one day event in November of 1990 which 27 teams participated (Mergist, 1990). The Chamber invited members of the public to Boulogny Plaza, a parking lot on Main Street (see Figure 16), in order to sample gumbo for \$1 a bowl. Cooking teams divided into three categories including professional, clubs and organizations, and amateur (May, 1990).

Changing from its beginnings 25 years ago, the WCGC is now a three day event. Once confined to Boulogny Plaza, the competition now spills out to other streets in downtown New Iberia, so much so that Main Street is closed down for the three day cook-off. The WCGC starts on a Friday night with a Fais Do Do, which is a South Louisiana public dance where bands play live music (Hotard, 2011; 2012).

Saturday teams are allowed to cook anything other than gumbo. Foods cooked on Saturday comprise traditional South Louisiana fare including étouffée, stews, and creoles but

some teams venture into fusion foods such as boudin eggrolls. Since 2010, a “Mean Beans” competition has been instituted on the Saturday. This constitutes preparing the dish red beans and rice. Yet, some teams choose not to participate in the food festivities of Saturday and spend their time focusing on preparation for Sunday. Saturday is also the day teams decorate their booths depicting the theme for that particular year (Hotard, 2011; 2012).



Figure 16: Bouligny Place in New Iberia on a normal day.

On Sunday, participants compete and try to cook their best gumbo. Early that morning teams are busy putting pots and burners in place, getting ready to start cooking. Volunteers designated as “Gumbo Police” by the Chamber of Commerce go around to each booth to make sure there are no contraband ingredients, namely precooked roux. Although competitors can have pre-chopped vegetables and pre-made stocks, roux has to be cooked on site. Gumbo Police also make sure that competitors do not have outside drinks (especially alcoholic drinks), all



drinks must be bought from concessions sold on the premises. Officially the contest starts at 6:30 am with the shooting of a replica Civil War canon (Hotard, 2011; 2012).

After the firing of the canon, contestants start to prepare their gumbos. All gumbos must be cooked by 10:30 am, the time when judging starts. Judges are sequestered away from the competition, most recently at a local restaurant downtown, so that there is no contact between judges and competitors. There are about 70 judges, members of the public the Chamber has asked to take part in the competition. Although the judging is blind, in that the judges have no idea which booth/team's gumbo they are eating, judges are divided based on the category of gumbos that are cooked. These categories are professional which can be seafood or non-seafood gumbo and amateur which contains seafood, chicken and sausage, and the *mélange* (mixture) types (Hotard, 2011; 2012).



Figure 17: Bouigny Plaza on the Sunday of the 2012 WCGC competition.

Selling of gumbo to the general public begins at 11:00 am but people start pouring into the competition around 9 am (See Figure 17). Bowls of gumbo can cost anywhere between \$3 - \$5, depending on the type and exoticness of the gumbo. Other than gumbo there are also

different activities the public can take part in such as face painting for children and dancing where the Cajun/Zydeco bands play during the day. The 2014 WCGC added a gumbo competition for young cooks (Hotard, 2014). Awards are given around 3 pm for the competition and the space is cleared by 5 pm, restoring downtown New Iberia to its everyday landscape (Hotard, 2011; 2012).

A conspicuous element of the gumbo cooking competition is booth decoration. Every year there is a central theme in the Chamber of Commerce puts out for the WCGC. This theme changes annually. The WCGC theme for 2011 notably called, "Peace, Love, and Gumbo" while 2012s theme shifted to surrounding the popular reality TV show, "Swamp People" in which one of the cast members made a guest appearance on the Saturday of the event. In 2010, the theme. "Roux Dat" reflected the Saints football team winning the Super Bowl that year, bringing to mind the popular saying of, "Who Dat" during a Saints' football game. No matter what the theme, as Figures 18 and 19 point out, decorations still incorporate notions of recognizable South Louisiana cultural geography (Hotard, 2011; 2012).



Figure 18: A scene from 2011s WCGC theme with elements of the gumbo ingredient, Mardi Gras, and Southwest Louisiana rural culture while making reference to the 60s counterculture theme.



Figure 19: A "Swamp People" skit incorporating a booth's decoration, 2012 WCGC

The WCGC influences the local economy of Iberia Parish significantly. In 2011, the Chamber of Commerce estimated about \$2,000,000 brought into the community by the WCGC. That year tourists came from over twenty states as well as internationally. As far as hotels are concerned, about 85% of the rooms in New Iberia were booked. In addition to money brought in by tourism to the event, participants also purchase ingredients, except for rice that is provided, which also adds to the economy of the parish (Greater Iberia Chamber of Commerce, *Measuring Gumbo*, 2011).

The WCGC can be viewed as ritual. Victor Turner (1988: 75) defines ritual as "...a transformative performance revealing major classifications, categories, and contradictions of cultural processes." The WCGC is a ritual in that the event is organized in such a way that it reveals cultural distinctions of South Louisiana. As I show below, the WCGC also brings up

inconsistencies in gumbo through the recognition of Cajun and Creole in the South Louisiana region.

## **Coding and Codes: Analyzing Gumbo**

### The Coding Process

I compiled all notes and emails stemming from the fieldwork I conducted into one large transcript. According to Cope (2009: 350), “Transcripts are text documents that can originate from several sources in the process of research.” As shown above, my fieldwork entailed participate observation and interviewing in various locales. Since this part of my research is qualitative in nature, I found process of coding the most helpful in examining the transcript.

People who employ qualitative methods use coding as way to classify the data they have encountered while completing field work (Cook and Crang, 2007). The actual practice of coding includes one going over their written data, then finding choice words or phrases that are recurring in the transcript. These repeated items are then designated with a code and the code is placed in the appropriate part of the transcript (MacKian, 2010). Coding elucidates something that is not obvious while the research was conducting fieldwork (Cope, 2009; MacKian, 2010).

Initially I had about thirty codes that I narrowed to down to fifteen. Because of the intricacy of each code, I found the codes needed subcategories. The codes I have used range from describing gumbo, ingredients, recipes and transmission to more nuanced groupings such as contradictions, marriage/love, and acknowledgement. See Appendix B for a list of codes and subcategories that I applied to this research. In the following section I go into detail about the information I gathered through coding under three broad classifications. These themes range from detailing the gumbo dish, cooking, and codes that go beyond gumbo.

## Codes

### Gumbo: Types, Thickeners, and Metaphors

Gumbo recipes collected through interviewing fell in line with the categories mentioned from the examination of cookbook recipe discussion in Chapter 4. These include poultry, seafood, combination, okra, gumbo z'herbes, and other categories. The difference between the two investigations shows that poultry gumbo is more overwhelmingly preferred in talking to people about the dish. Table 5-1 below presents the percentages of gumbo types discussed in the interviews. Although gumbo z'herbes was mentioned a few times in interviews, only one recipe was given which was due to it being cooked by a single participant at a gumbo cook-off.

Poultry gumbo consisted of the majority of recipes with 66 being collected. Out of those 66 recipes, 64 paired poultry with sausage. Although type of sausage was not always specified, andouille sausage was mentioned ten times. In poultry gumbos chicken is by far the preferred bird followed by turkey, duck, quail, and goose. Sometimes interviewees explained that their recipe called for a combination of different game birds with poultry. Two recipes called for other portions of poultry such as turkey necks or chicken eggs.

Table 5-1: Gumbo categories and percentage of recipes from interviews.

<b>Gumbo Category</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Poultry (including Game Birds)	56%
Seafood	27%
Okra	9%
Other	4%
Combination	3%
Gumbo Z'herbes	1%

Several interviewees stated that they preferred seafood gumbo but cooked mostly poultry gumbos because of seafood costs. Seafood gumbo is the second most discussed and cooked category in my interviews. When talking about seafood gumbo, people did not discuss what

seafood they used but from the cookbook discussion the types generally used include shrimp, crab, and oysters. One person I interviewed three different years at the WCGC stated shrimp and crab was her specialty gumbo while another group of participants I interviewed two years in a row at the WCGC stated they liked to make crawfish gumbo.

The third type of gumbo people liked to discuss included okra gumbo. Okra gumbos could be subdivided into okra and seafood, okra and poultry, or okra alone sub-categories of gumbo. What stands out when discussing okra gumbos with people is how the word “okra” is actually pronounced in South Louisiana. For the most part when talking about okra it was pronounced colloquially. However, 23% of participants preferred to call the vegetable, "okrie" while one participant used the words interchangeably. Though there does not seem to be a geographical reason for using okrie over okra, the tendency to use okrie seems to be done by a more diverse racially and ethnically group of people.

The combination gumbo category consists of joining the poultry and seafood gumbo kinds. The last category of gumbo contains those which are not easily definable with the other types. These include gumbos with wild games such as rabbit, squirrel, or wild fowl.

Thickness of the dish, while very subjective, is an important concept to all who participated in this study. I have already discussed the three ingredients that thicken the gumbo throughout this dissertation (roux, okra, and file). In examining cookbooks I found eight ways in which to condense the dish (see Chapter 4). The interviews presented six ways to thicken a gumbo. These include just using the roux, okra, or file by themselves as the condensing agent. Similarly three combinations of these ingredients can be used such as roux and file; roux and okra; and roux, okra, and file altogether.

The vast majority of recipes from interviews called for roux either by itself or in combination with other thickeners. In fact using roux comes up 93% of the time. Although the use to roux is almost universal, the color a cook finds useful varies. Most people detail the color of roux in variations of brown: a dark chocolate brown, a medium brown, peanut butter brown, and dark caramel brown are just some of the descriptions. One person who participated in this study over email used racial, and somewhat offensive, descriptions with the color of roux he uses. As he stated, "...a light [roux] Halle Berry color for seafood [gumbo], dark Whitney Houston color [roux] for hen [gumbo]..." (John, 2008). Race, gender, and gumbo will be discussed further in this chapter.

Roux can either be homemade or bought premade from the store. Homemade roux makes up 69% of recipes where the cook used roux. However, most of the interviews take place at the WCGC where roux must be prepared at the competition. Yet, even when asked there was a clear preference for homemade roux over premade store bought roux. The favoritism towards homemade roux is examined in more detail below.

Using okra as thickener poses its own problems for cooks who decide to employ it as an ingredient. Nearly all cooks who use okra agree that one must cook the slime out of the vegetable in order for the gumbo to be edible. An anecdote from Miss Monique, an Afro-French Creole Iberia Parish explains how the slime can ruin the gumbo, "...we went spent a day with my auntie [redacted] she was a kindly old lady born here in Louisiana, she had cooked okrie [sic] [gumbo] that Sunday...my mother told us don't say nothing if the food wasn't good. So she made okrie [gumbo]...all of a sudden my sister start [gagging] and she jumped from the table and hit [the door]....[because] that slimy okrie [sic] [gumbo]" (Monique and Anita, 2013). Okra

must be cooked for several minutes in order to get the right texture for the gumbo (Shelly, 2012; Monique and Anita, 2013; Catelyn, 2013).

In the interviews, and as previously stated, filé is added into individual bowls after the dish is served. Filé is usually used in conjunction with roux in order to help thicken the dish as well as add flavor. However, as I will demonstrate later there is one group of people who use it exclusively as the only thickener when they make gumbo (Kelsey et al., 2012; Amber, 2013).

Several interviewees discussed the gumbo dish as a geographic symbol or metaphor. One WGCC participant discussed how the gumbo his team was cooking was a "true metaphoric gumbo" because just as the dish has several ingredients, people on his team cooking the dish hailed from several places around the United States and globally (GP-5A, 2011). Many interviewees go into how gumbo is a dish that helps define South Louisiana culture. They address how gumbo reiterates being from this region of the world. As Shelly, an Afro-French Creole chef originally from Youngsville said in our interview, "They [people from other geographic areas] think that a gumbo is in your purse....[redacted]. It's an icebreaker, everywhere you go around the world, you say, 'Louisiana', the first thing they want to know is gumbo!" (Shelly, 2012).

#### Gumbo Intricacies: Vegetables, Spices, Side Dishes, and Time

A variety of vegetables and herbs can go into gumbo preparation. I have counted six vegetables as well as herbs that are used in any number of combinations for flavor enhancers. I am not including okra as part of these vegetables because these ingredients play a more supporting role in the gumbo while okra can be a gumbo category as well as a thickener. The six vegetables include onions, bell peppers (green or red), celery, garlic, green onions, and tomato.



The main herb used in gumbo cooking is parsley while clove, French basil, and bay leaves have also been mentioned in recipes.

Cooks incorporate many different groupings of the above vegetables and herbs. People prefer the use of onions over all other vegetables brought up in the interviews. The combination of onions and bell pepper (green or red) is the most used when participants talk about their gumbo recipes. Interestingly enough using the "Holy Trinity"<sup>1</sup> (see Chapter 4 for discussion) only came up in 17% of gumbo discussions which may suggest it is not as common in gumbo cooking as some may suggest.

It should be noted that the tomato was only mentioned as being used five times. Two females, a Cajun female from Baton Rouge and an Afro-French Creole female from New Orleans, acknowledged using tomatoes when cooking okra gumbo. There were three other incidences where interviewees used tomatoes in recipes. An Afro-French Creole Male from New Iberia cooking both chicken and sausage and seafood gumbos at the WCGC; An Afro-French Creole sibling cooking team from Opelousas, La also cooking at the WCGC; and a recipe emailed to me from a white female originally from Opelousas, La. The following table shows the number of mentions each vegetable received in the interviews.

Table 5-2: Number of times vegetables were mentioned in interview recipes.

<b>Vegetable</b>	<b>Number of Mentions in Recipes</b>
Onion	52
Bell Pepper	45
Celery	21
Garlic	16
Green Onion	15
Tomato	5

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<sup>1</sup> Although "The Holy Trinity" usually consists of onions, bell peppers, and celery; one male participant acknowledged that he considered the trinity to use garlic instead of celery.

Cooks season gumbos a number of ways. They generally use a combination of powdered pepper, seasoning mixes, hot sauces, and salt, along with other ingredients to enhance the flavor. The most used seasoning is powdered pepper with Cayenne pepper being the favorite followed by red, black, and then white. The second most used seasoning include seasoning mixes, the most widely used being Tony Chachere Creole Seasoning, often referred to just as Tony's. The next favorite flavoring after seasoning mixes is hot sauce, the preferred hot sauce being Tabasco. It is actually surprising Tabasco hot sauce did not come up more in the interviews since Tabasco is a corporate sponsor of the WCGC. Salt comes next as the favored seasoning. One of the reasons salt might come so far behind other seasonings is that seasoning mixes and hot sauces contain salt so people may not use it as much. The fifth seasoning people favor includes integrating garlic powder into their gumbos. Other seasonings that were mentioned include chow chow (pepper relish), onion powder, Accent, and Worcestershire sauce. Figure 20 shows the percentages of seasoning categories from the interviews.

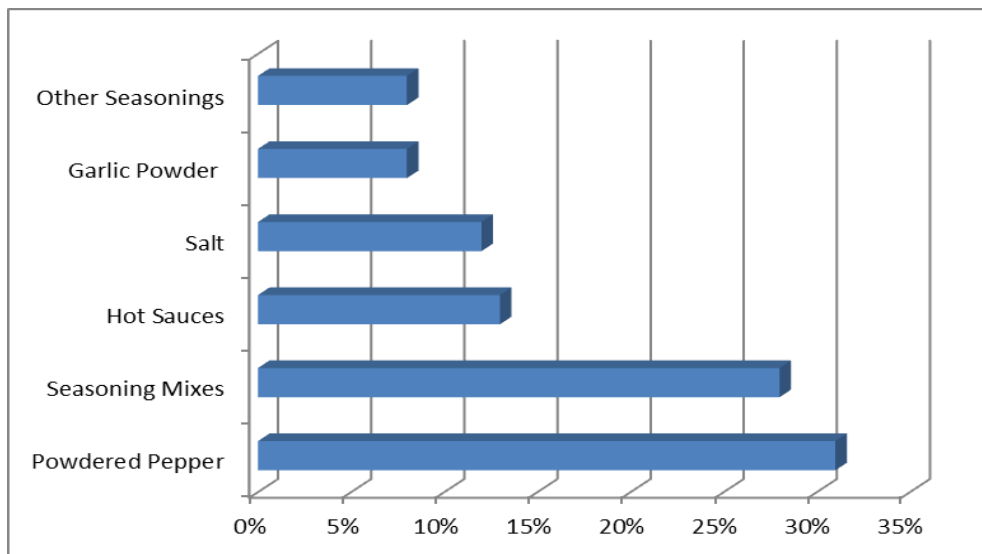


Figure 20: Types of Seasonings in gumbo recipes from interviews

Gumbo is served with rice but usually also comes with a side dish. In the interviews the favorite side dish revealed is potato salad. However, other sides mentioned include a green salad

or a slice of fresh French bread. Of particular interest, however, is the side dish of sweet potatoes or yams. William, a middle aged Cajun male from Chataignier, La states in an email, "...baked sweet potatoes are also a favorite with gumbo." (William, 2013). Lily, a Cajun female from Natchitoches, La says, "...you may add a sweet potato to the bowl for a delectable treat." (Lily, 2008). However, Miss Monique, an Afro-French Creole female originally from Jeanerette, La explains how eating yams was a traditional Afro-French Creole side dish to gumbo, "... when I was little, we had baked yams [with gumbo]...Creoles always had baked yams." So although potato salad is considered by most participants the key side to gumbo, sweet potatoes and yams also found their way along the dish.

People mentioned time in three different ways. The first and most obvious deals with how long it takes to prepare the dish. The average time to cook gumbo lasts for 3 hours and 20 minutes. The longest in terms of hours came from a Cajun male in Youngsville, La who cooks his poultry (chicken and sausage) gumbo for 8 hours. While the shortest cooking time of 1 hour 5 minutes, also coming from poultry (chicken and sausage) gumbo, hails from a white female originating in Erath, Louisiana. The actual longest preparation period period I could not put down in terms of hours because the cook starts the night before without quantifying a time. The gumbo in question is part of the "other" category and the Cajun male cook from Delcambre, La states he finishes the dish the next day.

Another way gumbo preparers talk about time is in terms of seasons. This is consistent with the cookbook research I have talked about in Chapter 4. Most people discuss cooking gumbo when the temperature in South Louisiana becomes cooler in the autumn season. As Gerri a white female from Iota explains the time she cooks gumbo for her convenience store employer in Iberia Parish who sells plate lunches, "...the first really good cold front that comes through, we'll

do a gumbo... [in] summertime [gumbo] don't sell as much [sic]" (Gerri, 2011). Interviewees often suggested that gumbo was generally an autumn, winter, early spring but not a summer dish.

Time presents itself in the form of the past in the gumbo transcript. Several people have remembrances of their grandparents, parents, or other close family member cooking gumbo. It is through these memories cooks try to recreate gumbo. Gumbo brings up pasts Christmases for people. Oftentimes people in South Louisiana ate the dish for Christmas Eve. Still, some interviews discussed how gumbo allowd for family gatherings. Jane, a Cajun female originally from Lafayette reflects on this aspect of time by explaining, "I remember...relatives coming over...and there's a big pot of gumbo and there was [sic] always plenty for everybody..." (Jane, 2012). When asked if she had any special rembrances of gumbo, Rita (white female from Baton Rouge) recalls, "... rounding up cattle in cold, rainy weather, and coming in to a warm house filled with the sounds of family and the smell of gumbo..." (Rita, 2013).

#### Cooking Gumbo: Pots/Utensils, Intuition, and Gender Roles

There is more to cooking a pot of gumbo than just having a recipe. The tools one uses in preparation of the dish can be just as important as the knowledge of how to make the dish. One eats gumbo with a spoon but this utensil is also cited as important in the making of the dish. For example, three people mentioned the significance of using wooden spoons to make the roux while one person stressed the essentiality of a metal spoon in gumbo cooking. Local businesses even sell specialized wooden spoons with the end filed down as "roux spoons" to aid in cooking this thickener, Figure 21 presents examples of "roux spoons."



Figure 21: "Cajun Roux Spoons" hanging in a cook's home kitchen.

Of course types of pots used are instrumental in fixing gumbo almost as much as the ingredients people put into the dish according to some cooks. While various cooks used words like large and big to describe the type of pot needed others went on to say that the pot needed to be made from a certain type of material. Usually this type fell into either cast aluminum or cast iron pots. A few people described that only the roux should be cooked in a cast iron pot while others stated a preference for cooking the whole dish in one type or the other. At gumbo cook-offs I observed the preference was for cast aluminum pots but Figure 22 shows both could be used. Basically the concensus is that gumbo should be cooked in a large, heavy pot.



Figure 22: Cast aluminum and cast iron pots being used to cook gumbo at the 2012 WCGC.

The majority of cooks I talked to do not measure ingredients when making gumbo. Rather, they go by the physical senses of taste and especially sight. A Cajun male from Erath demonstrated taste as measurement when he mentioned, "...there's no such thing as measuring...we taste as we go..." (DP-5A, 2011). Macarena, a white female originally from New Iberia stated the same way of determining how much ingredients in an email questionnaire, "I go [cooking gumbo] depending on how it tastes..." (Macarena, 2012).

Yet, even while giving out recipes to other people, they do try to quantify measurements although they will stress that when they cook themselves, they generally go by "eyeballing it." A

white male from Baton Rouge explains at the 2011 WCGC, "Uh, I eye it man, I've made it enough that I can eye it um, I don't go by measuring, I'm one of those cooks that could never be a baker...I just throw it in the pot..." (GP-11A, 2011). This idea that you cook gumbo by sight is even done by people from out of state who were really unfamiliar with the dish before they started cooking gumbo. A white male from Indianapolis, IN who, at the time of the interview, competed in the WCGC for seven years stated he did not know how to cook gumbo when he first entered the competition. However, after years of practice and help from his new Louisiana friends, gumbo had become second nature. When asked if he measured he said, "...um, not really... you kind of watch to see what it looks like..." (GP-13A, 2011).

Gumbo cooks, do so, by using another less tangible sense. Cooking by feeling or intuition comes up quite often in the interviews. Preparers of the dish have said to me, "...I go by feeling..." or as Hallie, a Cajun female from Lafayette explains, " I think it's something people do that if you know how to do it, it's a matter of feel more than it is measuring..." (Hallie, 2011). Knowing what needs to go into the pot or feeling that a gumbo needs more of something is a way of measurement and cooking gumbo that people use.

Most people acquired their recipe from a female figure. Out of the people who answered who taught them how to prepare the dish, 53% learned exclusively from a female family member. When interviewees express they attained their knowledge from family members of both sexes then the presence of a female in the gumbo learning experience increases to 74%. Mother by herself is mentioned most as the gumbo mentor with 30%. Although this number might seem low, compare it to people who learned exclusively from their father at 8%. Generally, half the people responded that they were taught by a combination of family members,

with a combination of mother and grandmother being the most learned from at 30%. This shows that gumbo is a matrilineal dish.

Since gumbo is usually cooked inside, the notion that gumbo knowledge is attained mostly from a female family member could reinforce what some have said regarding cooking spaces in that outside cooking is mostly a male domain while cooking inside is where females cook (see Bienvenue et al., 2005; Bell and Valentine, 1997 ). In fact Mr. Gilbert, a middle aged Cajun man from New Iberia, explained at Acadiana Realtors Association Gumbo Cook-Off in Lafayette, “I learned my outdoor cooking from my dad and my indoor cooking from my mother.” (Gilbert, 2011). However, this idea of male/outside and female/inside dichotomy is problematized at gumbo cook-offs (see Meah, 2014).

The majority of head cooks at the WCGC and other cook-offs tend to be male, see Figure 23, with females having a supporting role, see Figure 24. However, on closer observations, females are actually doing most of the work. While men stand in the back of cooking spaces stirring pots, women are at the front of the booths selling, filling containers, and trying to draw people to buy that group’s particular gumbo. One booth at the 2012 WCGC had a female singer perform to charm the audience that gathered to buy a bowl. On the day before the competition, both women and men work together to pre-chop ingredients (pre-chopping is allowed for the WCGC) for the next day’s gumbo contest as shown in Figure 25. Gendered cooking spaces are not so cut and dry (see Meah, 2014).

I find it hard to generalize gumbo cook-off outdoor spaces as specifically male when females have a significantly obvious presence. Yet, even in these spaces men tend to stay in the back with females being more towards the anterior. Moreover, these spaces are not static with both genders moving through both the back and the front. (Hotard, 2009 – 2012).





Figure 23: Men cooking in the back of a booth at the 2012 WCGC.



Figure 24: Women getting ready to serve at the front of a booth at the 2011 WCGC.



Figure 25: Females and males pre-chopping ingredients at the 2010 WCGC.

Utensils used in gumbo cooking, how people learned to cook gumbo, and who is doing the cooking reflect the performance ideas of Richard Schechner as being restorative or twice behaved (see Schechner, 1985). The act of cooking gumbo reiterates a performance that has taken place before. There might be changes as in a man learning to cook from a female figure or utilizing a different pot/utensil than what someone was told to use, the performance still conveys cultural traits which are transmitted through the act of cooking or performing gumbo.

#### Gumbo Approval: Love, Place, and Acceptance

According to a few cooks, the verb “marry” is useful to describe cooking gumbo. Whether the marriage is joining ingredients or flavors, nuptials are happening in a pot of gumbo. A middle aged white man explained, “All the vegetables, all the meat, we have our stock already done from um, from Friday. So we just throw everything in a pot and just let it marry itself together.” (GP-1A, 2011). Miss Cindy, a white female from Shreveport who participates with

her South Louisiana family members at the WCGC also states, "...just turn the fire off, put the lid on it, and let it all marry together..." (Miss Cindy, 2011). Marcia, a Cajun female from New Iberia states in an email questionnaire, "...the gumbo simmers for about an hour to allow the flavors to marry and definitely pick up the smoky flavor of the meats." (Marcia, 2013).

The idea of marriage brings up notions of love, which people mention in various ways during interviews. People expressed to me that one has to have a love of cooking in order to prepare the dish since the preparation itself is a labor of love as well as being labor intensive. As Miss Cindy expresses during the 2011 WCGC, "...and just put a lot of love in [gumbo]! Lot of love [sic]! That's what we...cook with is love..." (Miss Cindy, 2011). People also talk about a love of using certain ingredients and/or a love of a particular type of gumbo.

In talking about gumbo, interviewees discuss of a love of place. A love of South Louisiana or of a particular place in South Louisiana is a common theme in the transcripts. Several people at the WCGC expound on how much they love New Iberia and that is the impetus for participating in the event. One of the people I interviewed from out of state explained that his daughter moved down to New Iberia because she came with year after year for the WCGC competition and she fell in love with the area.

This association of gumbo and Louisiana place also comes up with those interviewees who are from South Louisiana and have lived out of state. Some people said that when they lived or visited out of state, people assumed they knew how to cook gumbo. Liza, an Afro-French Creole female from Delcambre stated how she instructed her husband how to cook gumbo over the phone because he was working in North Dakota and that his coworkers who ate the dish were enthralled with gumbo. Gumbo is a way to connect back to Louisiana as Shelly

says when she lived in Illinois, “I started craving Louisiana food so from that point that's when I learned how to make gumbo because I had to call my mom [to get her recipe]...” (Shelly, 2012).

Being able to cook gumbo is a form of acceptance through the recognition of love. A number of interviewees stated how they are known for the dish because people love how they make gumbo. Attending the WCGC, one notices booths that display the many trophies that team has won over the years because of how their gumbo preparation skills as evidenced in Figure 26. One WCGC participant during the interview pointed to a trophy shelf his group displayed in front of their booth to let me know how his gumbo is received by the public and the judges (Hotard, 2011). The head of the team from Indiana explained how in learning how to cook gumbo, it became a part of being accepted into the gumbo cooking community of South Louisiana. As he explains, “...last year we made the finals in our class, uh, the top 5 out of 19... it made me feel like it gave us some legitimacy, uh, we weren't just a novelty...” (GP-13A, 2011).



Figure 26: A trophy display for a booth at the 2011 WCGC.

Love, place, and acceptance in gumbo cooking exemplifies Goffman's notions of performance having both a back region and front (see Goffman, 1959). Love of cooking and love of place is the background needed in order to give an authentic gumbo performance. This background translates to the front, especially at the WCGC where booths display trophies to show their gumbo cooking prowess. The back region of love is needed to present the front which shows that performances of these gumbo cooks are not only good but accepted. However, the front also hides the back region. By looking at the front the audience does not see the arguments, compromises, and contradictions that make up the final gumbo performance.

#### Gumbo Discrepancies: Difference/Contradictions, Ethnicity, and Hiding/Masking

Difference permeates both the dish and interviews. As what has been written about gumbo and what people have told me, no one cooks gumbo the same way twice. Yet differences are stated in other ways. For example, people demonstrate the difference between old and new ways of making roux and gumbo. Shelly instructs people at an Afro-French Creole cultural day on this dichotomy during a cooking presentation stressing that the old way of cooking roux and the new way of buying premade dry/wet roux. As she further explained in an interview, “The old way was a big black cast iron skillet...um hot oil, a cup [of] oil and then, and then as it gets real hot you start adding the flour and you brown the flour to a...dark brown chocolate consistency...” (Shelly, 2012).

Difference between old and new also comes up in the context of the WCGC. One competitor who had been in the contest since its inception felt that there was a definite difference from the WCGC beginnings. He stated, “In the very beginning everybody kind of helped out each other, ‘You need this, I got some of this’ back and forth...now it is more of a competition...” (GP-1B, 2011).

Dietary restrictions cause differences between the old and new ways to cook gumbo. Hallie showed me how she changed her gumbo in order to follow her [ex] husband's gluten restrictions by using a root instead of wheat flour for the roux and making cauliflower "rice" in the place of conventional rice (Hallie, 2011). Macarena expressed how due to health concerns in her family, she had to switch to a vegan diet. Now, she makes a vegan gumbo that follows her mother's recipe but without any animal products (Macarena, 2012). Even though these gumbos were updated from their original recipes, both Hallie and Macarena still considered these as traditional South Louisiana gumbos because they followed the basic concepts of the dish mirroring Schechner's ideas of restorative behavior (Hallie, 2011; Macarena, 2012, Schechner 1985).

Place in Louisiana shows there is a difference in how gumbo is perceived. Janice, an Afro-French Creole, being from New Orleans explains how she does not like her husband's gumbo, her husband being an Afro-French Creole from Opelousas. She states, "He cooks a Southwest Louisiana gumbo which is chicken and sausage and a roux gravy. And uh, [stutters] I don't know, I still can't get accustomed to that..." (Janice, 2013). The difference between how gumbo is cooked in both South and North Louisiana can be considered grounds for divorce. Lily, a white female originally from Baton Rouge explained via email how her ex-husband's North Louisiana chicken and sausage gumbo caused consternation in their marriage. His use of fried chicken in a gumbo along with other ingredients bothered her. She stated, "What a mess! We are no longer married...I couldn't take it anymore..." (Lily, 2008).

Taking the idea of difference further, contradictions are found in cooking gumbo. This is mainly discovered when talking to people about the use of homemade or pre-made (store bought) roux. When I asked whether people used pre-made (store bought) roux, several respondents

acted indignant saying that they do not utilize store bought roux because it is not as good as homemade roux. Yet, after saying that, they would in turn say they only use store bought roux if they did not have adequate time to make a roux.

Brad illustrates this inconsistency, “Well the first and the most important thing is you make your own roux, don't use store bought. [laughs] Now that doesn't mean I don't use store bought...from time to time.” (Brad, 2011). While interviewing Chef Henri, a Cajun male from New Iberia, during dinner preparation at his restaurant said of the two, “I make my own [roux] but you know...uh, we usually have it [store bought roux] over here as a backup and you can taste the difference...” (Chef Henri, 2011). Some interviewees fully admitted their use of store bought roux not really sensing a difference between the two. Kyle demonstrates this when he said, “I use dry roux out of the jar, call it cheating if you want, it's still pretty good” (Kyle, 2012).

One WCGC competitor offered another contradiction without realizing he was doing so. While discussing the type of gumbo he was cooking, he said that gumbo cooking was strictly a male tradition in his family. When I asked if he learned how to prepare the dish from his father, his facial expression changed to surprise. He exclaimed, “No, my grandmother taught me”! (Morgan, 2009). From the onset this is considered a contradiction, however, it could also demonstrate how sometimes things are kept hidden in gumbo.

Difference also is mentioned in terms of ethnicity and gumbo. Although most people did not self-identify themselves or their gumbo with a particular ethnic group, 49 people did. The majority of people stated that they or their gumbo was Cajun at 55%, Afro-French Creole followed with 27%, after that comes people who were part of a Native American tribe with 12%, people identifying with both Afro-French Creole and Cajun was 4%, and lastly 2% identified with being Isleños. When asked the difference between ethnic gumbos in Louisiana, people

would answer generally with tomatoes being used in an Afro-French Creole gumbo while others expressed there was no difference between ethnic gumbos.

A few expressed that Cajun gumbos are spicier than Afro-French Creole gumbos although the recipes I collected through interviews do not support this assumption. In fact, the interviews show the opposite to be true. Out of the interviews I conducted, Afro-French Creoles mentioned seasonings in 54% of their recipes while Cajuns mentioned seasonings in 30% of their recipes. The disparity of the two is probably less because I interviewed more people who identified as Cajun than Afro-French Creole, however, obviously Afro-French Creoles are not seasoning less than Cajun. It should be noted that 60% of people I talked to actually mentioned seasoning.

People from Native American tribes in the Terrebonne/Lafourche parishes, but mainly from near the town of Montegut that I interviewed stated that their gumbo was different from rest of South Louisiana gumbos because they do not use a roux. They use filé exclusively as a thickener in their gumbos (Amber, 2013; Patty, 2013). A fact substantiated by interviewees Chantal and Chris who, being from Lafayette, both had worked in the Houma area (Chantal, 2012; Chris 2012). As Chris, a Cajun male explains that when he worked offshore outside of Houma, "I worked for a tugboat captain....so he cooked gumbo...they didn't have no roux or nothing [sic]. That's how they make it down there. No, if it has roux in it it's so light of a roux that you can't even tell it's in there, it's not a gumbo..." (Chris, 2012).

Of particular interest in talking to Native Americans from the Houma and Montegut region, they used the words filé and gumbo interchangeably (Amber, 2013; Patty, 2013). As one Point au Chien Tribe member described her gumbo to me, "...and then you cook that [onions], let that brown, and you add your shrimp, your chicken, whatever, your sausage, whatever you



want to put in in and you put your water. You let that cook and when its, that's, you think its cook [sic] I put my gumbo in it, filé." (PC1, 2013). Amber, also part of the Pointe au Chien tribe explains further, "...that's how they [tribal members] make the gumbo from that plant [sassafras] and um, actually some people don't put the gumbo [using the terms gumbo and filé interchangeably] itself into their pot until it's cooked and you add the gumbo because it will get thick..." (Amber, 2013)

Hiding and/or masking in cooking gumbo started out in the interviews as a way for people to conceal ingredients and habits. Sometimes a cook makes gumbo for a group that contains one or two picky eaters who don't like certain components that make up the dish. An example of this comes from Mary, a Cajun female originating in Delcambre. She starts boiling her water quickly so she can put in her vegetables because as she states, "half of my family doesn't like to see the onions and bell peppers..." (Mary, 2011). Another instance of hiding when it comes to Louisiana food in general is when Zelda, a Cajun female from St. Martinville, talks about how her mother eating boiled crabs in a restaurant had to do so in a room behind a curtain as to not offend other patrons with the slurping sounds that come with eating the creatures (Zelda, 2009).

When I began to interview Afro-French Creole cooks, hiding took on a different form. The masking of race in cooking gumbo and Louisiana food more generally became more apparent. These gumbo cooks and chefs intimated that their food had been co-opted as Cajun cuisine when really it is all Creole. This is reiterated when I asked people, "What is the difference between Creole and Cajun food" and the majority answer was, "there is no difference" or "I don't know." Yet people still separate the two.

Zelda, who worked in the New Orleans restaurant scene and has authored several Cajun cookbooks, talks about how as time has passed, Cajun and Creole cuisines have become more blurred but they remain separate. She explained that Cajun is food of the rural southern parishes of Louisiana and Creole is the refined food of the New Orleans urban area. However, like the tomato argument, this confuses the types of Creole that are in Louisiana. Creole goes beyond the New Orleans city limits.

One thing not talked about, especially in restaurant settings, are the people helping the main chef in Cajun style food establishment. Generally, it is Afro-French Creoles supporting the head chef. Shelly, an Afro-French Creole, uncovers, "...you know we [Afro-French Creoles] need to be given some kind of credit, Chocolate hands creating those dishes. Chocolate hands stirring [stutters] that pot. Chocolate hands creating a lot of dishes, chocolate hands don't get the credit." (Shelly, 2012). She goes on to further say, "...many of those recipes started with the mother hand..." (Shelly, 2012).

However, Afro-French Creoles did not just work in restaurants. While talking about the lack of difference between southwestern Louisiana Afro-French Creole and Cajun food, Miss Monique revealed, "... all the Creoles had to work for the Caucasians...some of them knew how to cook and some didn't know how. So we cooked the way we cook at home for them...and they liked it...so they started learning it..." (Monique and Anita, 2013). Norman, a white male originally from New Iberia, talked about his grandmother's maid, an Afro-French Creole would cook for him when he would visit from school. He states, "...when I think about gumbo I think about uh Frida [grandmother's maid] in my grandmother's kitchen with a big pot cooking gumbo." When I asked Norman if there was a difference between his grandmother's and Frida's gumbo, he said, "I don't think so because I'm going on the bet that she [Frida] probably helped

them along with their gumbo. Uh, very, very similar to what my mom would do and what my grandmother would do as well." (Norman, 2011). Jaqueline, an Afro-French Creole (folk healer) from Opelousas, reiterated, "Cajuns didn't cook, the slaves cooked" (Hotard, 2012). She also opined about the restaurant industry and the fact that in South Louisiana, most of the restaurant help has been people of Africa descent (Hotard, 2012).

The point of the fact that there might be more of an African/Creole story to gumbo was driven even further when I visited an Acadian Cultural Day in Lafayette during August 2012. Although there were "Acadian" food demonstrations and "Cajun" men cooking jambalaya, there was also a food station where attendees could get "Cajun" food along with regular American fare. Of particular curiosity is the fact that blacks (whether Afro-French or African American) were not only working this station but also cooking the food as shown in Figure 27. Now, this does not show in itself that Afro-French Creole and African Americans created Louisiana foodways but it does underscore the fact that there is more to the story of Louisiana Creole and Cajun cuisines than just one cuisine is of the city and the other is of the country.



Figure 27: African Americans (Afro-French?) working a food station at an Acadian Cultural day in Lafayette, La, August, 2012.

In a discussion with Chef Landry, a self-identified white Euro Creole man, who studies the history and foodways of South Louisiana, he talked about people hiding the fact that they were Creole in lieu of being Cajun. To him, all of South Louisiana food is Creole food, no matter what the ethnic designation (see Trepanier, 1991). He stated this for two reasons. The first reason is that there was already an established Creole culture throughout southern Louisiana by the time the Acadians started arriving so they mimicked the food that was already cooked here. His second reason includes defining the word Creole. By the definition of colonial Louisiana Creole, the first generation of Acadians born in the colony would be Creoles as the term meant native to the colony and the Acadians were in Louisiana 40 years before the purchase by the Americans. For Chef Landry, the use of Cajun in the state of Louisiana is a way to get more tourist money and detracts from the actual Creole history of the area (Landry, 2012).

What does this mean for gumbo? As a few people claimed in the interviews, they felt gumbo is both Cajun and Creole. A couple of Afro-French Creole chefs claimed their gumbo was a Cajun gumbo because they added more spice. However, they could have been cooking a Creole gumbo in the guise of Cajun. A white man from New Iberia at the 2012 WCGC identified himself and gumbo as both Cajun and Creole. He stated, "I don't know, I don't, that's what I was fixing to say I, I consider myself a Cajun and I con...Creole. I mean, Creole is South Louisiana, you know..." (WP-2A, 2012). However, Chef Landry explained that gumbo predates colonial Louisiana, that Native Americans were cooking gumbo before colonial powers got to the state (Landry, 2012). As I pointed out earlier, the Native Americans I talked to from a state recognized tribe used the terms gumbo and filé interchangeably (Amber, 2013; Hotard, 2013; Patty, 2013).

The above are examples of both Goffman's back region and Brecht's A-Effect (see Goffman, 1959; Brecht, 1964). The contradiction of using homemade versus store bought roux illustrates how a performance in the background adds to the gumbo performance of the front as accurate. The back region of gumbo cooking also demonstrates the fact that other races and ethnicities are involved in the gumbo performance although the performance is presented as Cajun.

A-Effect is shown by Creoles stating that gumbo is a Creole dish, not a Cajun one. By saying this, the commonplace idea of gumbo being Cajun is questioned. This allows for the questioning of what actually makes up the gumbo. Therefore, the cultural landscape of South Louisiana as a Cajun landscape can be critiqued.

## **Conclusion**

A well-known chef drives down a deserted Louisiana road, surrounded by the rural lush green country landscape of Acadiana for his popular national television show. The chef pulls into a parking lot of a rustic, out of the way restaurant in St. Martin Parish, Louisiana. The light skinned Afro-French Creole female owner and servers pile heaps of brown thick foods on a white Styrofoam plate for the chef. As the audience takes in the charm of this South Louisiana Creole establishment, the chef speaks through a voiceover. He proclaims, "The sign might say 'Creole Kitchen' but the food is as Cajun as it gets."<sup>2</sup> A relative of the restaurant owner told me that after that episode aired, he along with others who knew this was actually an Afro-French Creole restaurant expressed their grievances publicly and over social media to no avail (Beaux, 2014).

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony Bourdain's No Reservation's Travel Channel television show, Cajun Country episode, 2011.

In this chapter I presented the methodology and discussed my fieldwork. I conducted informal interviews as well as sent email questionnaires all of which I compiled into one transcript. Interviews ranged from people originating in state to those who lived outside but wanted to cook gumbo. I then coded the transcript to organize the qualitative data I collected in the field. All of this done to understand the dish we celebrate in Louisiana more.

Coding allowed for a further examination of the gumbo dish. The process coincided and differed from the cookbook research that I completed for Chapter 4. Some things expanded on the cookbook research such as gumbo categories, time/seasons, and ingredients while other ideas emerged from the fieldwork such as gender roles, difference, and acceptance.

However, what sticks out most with this research is the fact that there is a hidden/masked landscape that is either unknown or known and not talked about. Gumbo brings to the surface issues some conceal by the performance of cooking the dish. I examine this hiding of the South Louisiana cultural landscape through the performance of cooking gumbo in the last chapter of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION - MASKED, HIDDEN, AND CONNECTED GUMBO LANDSCAPES

### Introduction: Gumbo Realities

In the beginning of January 2014, a polar vortex reached South Louisiana gripping the region in especially frigid temperatures not typical for the area, even during winter. A few days before, my stepfather had been admitted into one of the local hospitals in Iberia Parish. He contracted a virus after New Year's Day, which happens to also be my mother's birthday. Huddled near a heater that fluctuated from working too well and not well enough, my mother and I sat in a cold and grey room watching my stepdad sleep as IV lines worked to rehydrate his body, severely depleted of fluids.

We scarcely talked as my mother slowly sipped coffee that I had picked up for her at a local coffee shop and I nursed a diet cola. Not knowing what to say that would alleviate my mother's fears about my stepfather's health, I stared at icicles draped on leaves outside the window. Since I am not fond of awkward silences, I began to speak about death. I told my mother if something happened to me before my time that I wanted to be cremated. I related to her that I know if I died before her she might be tempted to not follow through with my wishes; she may want to keep my body intact. I jovially explained that my father knew of my cremation desires so she would not be able to have her own shrine to memorialize me in the yard.

My mother began to talk about her and my stepfather's funeral procedures. Not going into too much detail here, she basically expressed that they both have legal plans in place should something happen to one or both of them. They did this so that there would be no question as to what we, the children, would have to do when they passed. Tears welled up in my mother's eyes as she stated her worries about my stepfather being in the hospital, how she was afraid his health

could start deteriorating because of his age, and that she did not want this to be the beginning of the end.

As she express these uncertainties to me, an Afro-French Creole middle aged nurse from New Iberia opened the door to the hospital room with a tray of food that hopefully my stepdad would be able to eat that day. The nurse rolled the tray next to the bed as my mother got up from the chair she was sitting in to elevate the hospital bed to wake my stepfather up. My mother asked the nurse, who was still putting the food tray in place, what she had brought. The nurse enthusiastically said, “He got some chicken gumbo today”!

Wiping tears from her eyes, my mother sounding relieved, “Oh good, that’s his favorite, he is going to be so happy”! My stepfather awoke, groggily asking what was for lunch. Taking off the lid from the soup bowl, my mother said with hope in her voice that it was gumbo. The gumbo smells filled the sterile hospital room. I told him how I was jealous because the gumbo looked appetizing and that he better hurry up and eat before I steal it from him. Hiding her fears about his health, my mother began to feed my stepfather his gumbo, which he ate and slurped greedily. Masking my concerns both about my stepfather’s wellbeing and my mother’s own advancing age, I kept commenting on the smell of the gumbo and how it was making me hungry.

A few weeks after the above event, I knew I wanted to introduce my last chapter with this anecdote. However, upon writing these details I felt that something was missing from this story. As I drove home one night I realized what that missing element consisted of: I had never interviewed my mother regarding her own gumbo recipe on which my gumbo is based!

One breezy March evening after work, I read my mother this passage and asked her if she remembered this happening. As her hazel eyes began to show signs of tearing, she expressed to me that she remembered our discussions about death but had forgotten about the gumbo. My



mother proclaimed that she really enjoyed the story and was glad I shared it with her. I told her I felt the story was still lacking. When she inquired what I thought that was, I answered with: "Your gumbo."

I began with my general questions that I ask all my participants. She described her gumbo cooking process, an explanation I had already heard nine years prior over the phone when I was living in Florida and trying to cook gumbo for the first time. We started talking about her "okrie" gumbo, which in contrasts to Afro-French Creoles and Cajuns I have interviewed, she stated she likes her "okrie" gumbo to be a little slimy. When I asked if grandma taught her, she said, no, that she learned from just watching my grandmother and asking for tips when she needed help. This is reminiscent of what my grandmother had told me on how she cooked gumbo, by watching my late grandfather's mother cook gumbo.

Lastly, I asked my mother if she had any special memories associated with gumbo, a question I like to end my interviews with. She explained that she remembers always having duck and oyster gumbo for Christmas Eve, especially when she was married to my father. Immediately I began to think of my childhood Christmas Eve's, specifically the taste of gumbo and of wine mixed with 7 Up (the only time of the year my siblings and I were allowed to drink alcohol).

My mother continued with this association of gumbo and Christmas Eve and related a story about my oldest cousin's birth. One Christmas Eve my grandparents, parents, and aunt and uncle were eating duck and oyster gumbo. My grandmother had accidently left the gumbo out that night and my pregnant aunt had awakened with an appetite for two. She ate the gumbo, got sick from the lack of refrigeration, and went into labor later giving birth to my cousin. My mother laughed and exclaimed, "I will never forget that gumbo"!

I pondered more about this conversation that night. I thought about how gumbo has the capacity to hide certain things but has a bigger ability in connections. On my mind was how my gumbo connected to my mother's whose gumbo connected to my grandmother's whose gumbo connected to my great-grandmother. Through this gumbo I am linked to my aunt and cousin. By using gumbo as a way of masking fears, both my mother and I are connected to my stepfather and his children. The hidden ingredients and masking of races inescapably attached to the gumbo I cook, ties me to the South Louisiana landscape.

This anecdote presents Schechner's (1985) idea of performance being twice behaved. The connection of my gumbo to my mother's and by extension to my family is restorative. I am basing my gumbo off of gumbo that has been cooked before. Even though I may have changed the recipe, the gumbo I cooked is based on cultural perpetuation that comes from my family. By cooking the gumbo I am restoring the South Louisiana cultural landscape through performance.

Geographers have talked about how people connect with a past through imagined landscapes (see DeLyser, 1999; Till, 2001), a landscape that is only in the mind and is stereotyped in how it is experienced. However, as this research has shown and what people have expressed to me, interaction with the landscape in cooking gumbo is very much real, is very much connected, and very much visceral. We are not imagining a South Louisiana landscape when cooking gumbo. The performance of cooking gumbo allows us to create, recreate, challenge, and connect to a landscape we inhabit that we as cooks are only a marginally a part of, even if that performance is temporary. As long as the pot is on the stove, as long as there is gumbo still in our bowl as we are eating, we are linked to a real South Louisiana. This landscape is not imagined, we can smell it, we can taste it, and most importantly, we can cook it. However,

the landscape that is conjured when cooking is only a mask, there is a hidden landscape that needs to be explored in order to understand the region more (see Schein, 1997).

### **Hidden Landscapes/Masked Performances**

In the 1993 article, "Negotiating and Managing Multiple Sexual Identities: Lesbian Time-Space Strategies," geographer Gill Valentine evokes Erving Goffman's ideas of performance. In this piece, Valentine expresses how sexuality is portrayed via the front depending on the social space a lesbian might find oneself (Valentine, 1993; see Goffman, 1959). Lesbians act differently in a heterosexually defined space, such as work, than they would portray themselves at a gay bar or at home. Although in places where they perform heterosexuality, lesbians find other gay people in order to talk to or identify with. In these defined heterosexual spaces, gay people talk to each other in codes only they would understand or try to subvert the dominant identity of the space. While the overarching space is defined as heteronormative, there is another space being constructed amongst gay people that is hidden or in the background (Valentine, 1993). Performance constructs this hidden space. The front dictates what the majority sees and what a few people can decipher.

As seen in Chapter 2, theories from performance inform human geography (see Crang 1994; Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000; Valentine, 1993). Theories by sociologist Erving Goffman have been used in geography. For Goffman, performances in social situations can fall into one of two categories. In one the social performer believe the act s/he is putting on and in the other they do not, thus they are cynical. Although the act can flow between believed and cynical, Goffman states that the front one puts on is the performance. The front changes depending on one's social situation. It also can change with geography, if the geography changes then the front follows suit (Goffman, 1959; see Valentine, 1993). However, Goffman's front implies that there

is something behind the front, we put on what we think people want to see in that space. If the performance of the front is something that is useful to geography then what is hidden behind the front should be as well (Goffman, 1959). The back region of the performance is a behind the scenes area where the front is negotiated and produced (Goffman, 1959).

As I have discussed before, Bertolt Brecht, a German playwright, introduced performance theories with his ideas on Epic Theatre. In Epic Theatre, Brecht felt that the audience should be active and engage with the action they see on stage. In this way, the audience can use Epic Theatre to question their situations and change their world (Willet, 1992). Specifically, Brecht does this through A-Effect (Alienation Effect). A-Effect takes an idea, object, or action that is ordinary and changes its meaning so that the audience is jolted from their normal reality. This allows for a deeper evaluation of the situation by the audience (Brecht, 1964)

In performance, masking is a useful concept. Masking allows for the performer to become something else (see Schechner, 2003). In everyday geographies, masking allows people to put on a different persona depending on their social situations (see Valentine, 1993). However, the use of masks can hide feelings and reduce audience sympathy (Willett, 1992).

How does all this impact the cultural geography of gumbo? The front is evident in gumbo cooking. When cooking gumbo, a cook takes on the persona as someone from South Louisiana. In doing this the cook connects to a specific geography rooted in that front. The dish itself can be a front as it is a representative Louisiana dish. However, this front does not tell the whole story as cooking gumbo is rooted in a history of a region that has been racialized and politicized as a Cajun identity. The gumbo front also masks the fact that cognates of the dish can actually be found in geographies other than Louisiana. Just as in Valentine's article suggests,

people use the front to pass as a particular member of the South Louisiana region. However, in the passing elements are hidden, especially those which are Afro-French Creole.

The front also comes up particularly in gumbo cook-offs. Here the literal front of booths, gumbo cooks display trophies and decorate booths in stereotypical South Louisiana motifs. The front here also shows they are members of South Louisiana via acceptance and recognition. To cook gumbo you are a part of a Cajun South Louisiana. However, what is not seen is the back region which creates these fronts. More than one ethnic group is attributed to creating gumbo by looking at the back region of the gumbo performance. The whole gumbo dish has elements from other cultures including German, Spanish, Native American, and African that is not seen by just looking at the front.

A-Effect is prominent when the idea of gumbo being Cajun is probed. Creoles questioning that the dish is exclusively Cajun changes the meaning of the gumbo performance and of the South Louisiana cultural landscape. This allows for a broader understanding that gumbo is not just a white Cajun French invention. Others have contributed not only to the dish but also to the region's cultural landscape. Performance A-Effect in cooking gumbo shows the audience that there is more to the dish than the stereotyped public image of gumbo.

People who cook gumbo present a mask. By cooking the dish, gumbo has masked as something other than is said to be. Cooking gumbo allows the performer to wear a Cajun mask. This hides all the other ethnic and racial attributions people have given the dish. The restorative behavior in the gumbo performance reiterates the South Louisiana landscape due to cultural knowledge being passed on through cooking. However, this is presented as a white Cajun understanding. By unmasking this performance, the lines between Cajun and Creole become further blurred as do the boundaries of race. The mask of gumbo allows for Cajun and Creole to

remain separate, thus perpetuating the stereotype of a specifically white and French South Louisiana cultural landscape. The fear in unmasking this performance is that there is more to the landscape of South Louisiana other than the one told to us by white Cajun male activists who began this façade. Behind the mask is a gumbo that has African, Native American, and female influences that are not seen in the guise of Cajun.

Afro-French Creoles in general are becoming more vocal about the fact that they have felt hidden in the cooking landscape of the South Louisiana region, especially in Southwest Louisiana. Afro-French Creole cooks/chefs reiterated to me the reason they talk to people about the food they prepare is to show that the food of South Louisiana is an Afro-French Creole food and represents a Creole region. More recently, Afro-French Creoles won a new victory in reasserting themselves in the landscape in the form of "I'm Creole and Proud" state of Louisiana license plates (Jones, 2014). By placing themselves on vehicles they are showing that they are still a part of the landscape, their identity is not hidden but now can be in plain view on cars.

These are not silenced geographies. Afro-French Creoles have always been part of the South Louisiana landscape since colonial times. The dominant Cajun culture that took over the landscape in the late 1960s and 1970s hid the Afro-French Creole landscape. Yet Afro-French Creoles were still there, knowing and calling their gumbo a Creole dish, cooking the dish for the white Cajun people they served in homes and restaurants. Silenced implies that there was a power discourse in which Afro-French Creoles were not vocal. Yet Afro-French Creoles were speaking but the dominant Cajun culture happened to be louder, so much so that South Louisiana became known for being Cajun, thus hiding the actual historical Creole landscape. By using A-Effect and exposing the back region of cooking gumbos, Creoles are making their presence and contributions to the regional cultural landscape more known.

## **Where Does Geography go from Here: Future Research**

Although visceral geographies are a good start with engaging with embodiment, I think more can be done in terms of geographers interacting with theatre and performance theorists in their studies. Yes, in visceral geographies the body is performing, however, there are other experiences, other stories, other performances the body is missing out on. By just focusing on how the individual encounters or reinterprets spaces through the senses, visceral geographies miss the performances of others that are happening. These other performances aid in making the embodied experience feel authentic to participants.

Another avenue of geographic research that deals with embodiment and performance is Nonrepresentational Theory. This theory tries to look at spatial every day, ordinary performances as a way to further cultural geographic theory. However, this approach neglects the fact that there are performances in the landscape that are hidden or not talked about which is underneath these common tasks within a geographic space. Until Nonrepresentational Theory recognizes that fact, it does little to further human geographic inquiry.

In terms of this research, one of the biggest hidden but not silenced landscapes is found in the LGBT community of South Louisiana. Louisiana Cajun/Creole scholarship has neglected this community although geographers from outside of Louisiana (see O'Reilly and Crutcher: 2006) have mentioned the existence of homosexuals. When the issue of the LGBT has been mentioned (see Bernard, 2003), the community is treated as if it is part of a "counterculture" movement rather than viewing these people as a neglected subject in South Louisiana scholarship. The fact is the spatiality and cultural heritage of the LGBT community has largely been ignored especially by academics who are both from and study South Louisiana.

When I started this research, people assumed that the reason I studied gumbo was because I needed a way to find a girlfriend and/or wife. Unbeknownst to them, I am openly gay although I did not disclose that to most of my interviewees. As a geographer doing fieldwork I felt I had to mask, put on a front (see Goffman, 1959), who I was in order to do research. I did not discuss my sexuality for the most part even when it bothered me that my interviewees compared cooking gumbo to a strictly heterosexual concept of love or when they made very homophobic slurs.

I definitely think that more academic work needs to be done in this area especially in regards to South Louisiana when family is thought of in a strictly heterosexual sense. I did not think the current study was appropriate for that kind of research, although I feel the impacts and guilt of not pursuing that avenue. If I were to do this research differently, I would have made it known from the offset that I was a gay member of the South Louisiana community completing a project on gumbo and that there are boundaries that would not be crossed while doing insider research.

Another issue in studying a community that I am supposed to be a part of was how participants treated me when asking questions about gumbo. I felt I had to portray a certain "Louisiananess" when talking to participants (see DeLyser, 2001). Interviewees questioned why I was asking about a dish I should already know how to make. Several times, I was told, "Aren't you from here [Louisiana], you should know how to make a gumbo!" (Hotard 2010-2012). Often I had to reassure interviewees that yes, I knew how to make a gumbo but I was interested in how they made their gumbo. I think complications like this should be further explored in "insider" research where although the researcher is doing work on their community, their affiliation with that community is questioned.



Also, because of my experiences in doing this project, the idea of hidden landscapes needs to be addressed more in geography. Rather than assuming that there are cultural landscapes that are silenced, geographers need to realize that actually they are not silenced. People in hidden landscapes do make their presence known and are vocal, even when the dominant cultural landscape is louder. The Afro-French Creoles in this research are an example of a hidden/masked landscape that were not silenced. People are starting to become more aware of the Creole landscape that makes up South Louisiana due to the active Creole (Afro-French and white) voices that never stopped speaking or accepting who the dominant Cajun culture said they were.

Lastly, I really do feel there needs to be more acknowledgement of Afro-French Creole influence of South Louisiana culture. Instead of making Afro-French Creole separate but equal to (white) Cajun culture, there needs to be more recognition of the fact that Creole culture helped shaped the South Louisiana region. Several Afro-French Creole (and one Euro) interviewees have relayed to me that they are considered heretics/racists among Cajun scholars because of the fact that they are trying to make their voices heard over what the dominant white Cajun culture dictates as "real". South Louisiana is a Creole culture which has ties to the Caribbean and the greater Atlantic world. This is seen in the food, music, performance, and other cultural traits (see Ancelet et al., 1991; Gaudet, 2001; LaFleur, 2010; Shelly, 2012; Ware, 2001; Zelda, 2009).

In order for us to understand South Louisiana's place in the Atlantic World, we must do more to appreciate the idea and culture of Cajun in the context of Afro-French Creole geography which has ties to the greater Atlantic Rim region via colonialism. Until then the whole truth about the history, connections, and shared cultural traits are not being fully told to the detriment of the Creole history of South Louisiana. Only when we as scholars accept that South Louisiana

is a Creole culture with sub-ethnicities such as Cajun can the academic research of South Louisiana move forward in a more open and honest way to fully understand our shared cultural heritage, regardless of skin color, ethnicity, and sexuality.

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation was about the gumbo dish and how that ties into the larger subjects of human geography and geography of food. I started this study with pilot project in which I tried to identify gumbo cooking subregions of Acadiana. I have since expanded the geographic area to cover all of the South Louisiana region. The study also began with an examination of cultural landscapes, how a culture leaves a mark on the natural landscape. Cooking gumbo creates and reinforces a South Louisiana landscape, albeit, a temporary one.

In order to demonstrate how gumbo falls in line with geography of food, I discussed how geographers have historically studied food. Starting with animal/plant domestication, to food taboos, to geographic scales, to defining region the study of food in geography has been wide and encompassing. I also looked at how geographies of performance and visceral geographies deal with food in the discipline. By focusing on gumbo we see how food can define a region in geography. By talking about performance, gumbo helps people experience the region through the performance of cooking and eating. Through visceral geographies, gumbo helps people embody South Louisiana through the senses.

In the discussion on the history of the South Louisiana region, I showed that several ethnic groups and races added to this part of the world. Native Americans and people who immigrated here (either voluntarily or forced) brought their own embodied cooking knowledge to South Louisiana. All this culminated into two recognized South Louisiana cuisines which are Creole and Cajun. Although there are perceived differences between New Orleans Creole and

Cajun cooking, southwestern Creole and Cajun are similar and have the same dishes. Both Creole and Cajun share the gumbo dish.

Gumbo is a dish born of the Columbian Exchange, a time when both the New and Old World exchanged goods and ideas. I explored the etymology of gumbo, cooking the dish, and how to categorize gumbo. I also demonstrated that gumbo has sister or cognate dishes in other parts of the world but mainly along the Atlantic rim region.

The fieldwork I completed including interviewing people who cook the dish in various avenues but mainly at gumbo cook-off competitions, specifically the World Championship Gumbo Cook-Off in New Iberia, Louisiana. I transcribed and then analyzed the interviews through a process called coding. Although I had fifteen codes, the code that intrigued me included how cooking gumbo allows for hiding or masking to take place. This can mean hiding of ingredients but more importantly a masking of an Afro-French Creole landscape.

Through a discussion of performance theories, I showed how the action of cooking gumbo reinforces the cultural landscape of South Louisiana. Looking at Schechner's, Goffman's, and Brecht's ideas I present that preparing the dish perpetuates the notion of South Louisiana but also allows for people to challenge that stereotyped image. Cooking gumbo allows for Afro-French Creoles to reassert themselves in the cultural landscape through performance.

By writing this dissertation, I do not mean to suggest that Cajun is irrelevant. There is a Cajun self-identified population but I think scholars have focused so much on Cajuns that they intentionally or unintentionally ignored the Afro-French Creole history of the state which has skewed academic scholarship and the public perception of South Louisiana. Cajun needs to be looked at in the greater context of Creole geography in the Atlantic world, otherwise only part of the geography is being told and a portion of the state is being disregarded.

I started writing this dissertation relating an incident in October 2012 in which a cold front came through the region and how people marked that by eating gumbo. In the last part of the first week of October 2014, temperatures dropped from highs in the lower 90s to lows in the upper 50s. As I write this conclusion, friends on social media are posting pictures of the gumbo they are cooking and asking others if others are cooking gumbo today or tonight. I had already decided at the beginning of the week when I saw that the temperatures would be dropping that I would prepare a chicken sausage gumbo on the night of October 4, 2014. In cooking the dish, I know I will be performing and recreating a landscape rooted in the southern portions of Louisiana but I will recognize and appreciate that it is an Afro-French Creole dish I am preparing in Figure 28. A Creole dish that has definitive ties to both the past and other geographies that perpetuate stereotypes of South Louisiana, even if hidden, at least with me, acknowledged.



Figure 28: Cooking a pot of chicken and sausage gumbo.

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## APPENDIX A: COOKBOOKS USED FOR RECIPE ANALYSIS

No.	Year	Cookbook Title
1.	1979	Rotary's Cookbook of St. Martinville, La
2.	1993	The Tabasco Brand Cookbook
3.	2000	Boudreaux's Cajun Party Guide
4.	2000	Tell Me More
5.	2004	Talk About Good
6.	2005	Monge Avec Voinche
7.	2006	In a Cajun Kitchen
8.	2007	Cajun Comfort Food
9.	2007	The Evolution of Cajun and Creole Cuisine
10.	2008	Pirate's Pantry
11.	1979	Talk About Good II
12.	1989	Cajun Country Cookin'
13.	1987	Kosher Cajun Cookbook
14.	2006	Tom Fitzmorris's New Orleans Food
15.	2005	Something to Talk About
16.	1950	River Road Recipes
17.	1973	Louisiana Lagniappe
18.	1976	Tigerbait Cookbook LSU Alumni Federation
19.	2010	Creole: Gourmet Secrets of Louisiana
20.	2010	Lily's Little Cajun Cookbook
21.	2009	Cooking in Cajun Country
22.	2000	Los Islenos (Canary Islanders) Cookbook
23.	2011	The Louisiana Seafood Bible: Oysters
24.	2002	Cooking with Cajun Women
25.	2011	If You Can't Stand the Heat: The New Orleans Firefighters Cookbook
26.	1994	Cajun Men Cook

**APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT CODES AND SUB CODES**

<b>Code Number</b>	<b>Code Designation</b>	<b>Sub Codes</b>
1	Gumbo	1.1 Type 1.2 Metaphor 1.3 Defined 1.4 Economy 1.5 Dustbin
2	Roux	2.1 Color 2.2 Importance 2.3 Type 2.4 Burning 2.5 Dustbin
3	Ingredients	3.1 Vegetables 3.2 Name Brand 3.3 Stock 3.4 Okra 3.5 Spices/Herbs 3.6 Filé 3.7 Sausage 3.8 Exotic/Don't Belong 3.9 Dustbin
4	Other Dishes	4.1 Roux based 4.2 Side Dishes 4.3 Other Dishes 4.4 Dustbin
5	Recipe	5.1 Ownership 5.2 Transmission 5.3 Lack of 5.4 Dustbin
6	Senses	6.1 In cooking 6.2 Seeing/Eyeballing 6.3 Smell 6.4 Touch/Texture 6.5 Taste 6.6 Feeling/Intuition 6.7 Dustbin
7	Pots/Utensils	7.1 Pot 7.2 Utensil 7.3 Dustbin

8	Ethnicity/Race	8.1 Creole 8.2 Acadian/Cajun 8.3 Race 8.4 Influence on Food 8.5 Defining 8.6 Dustbin
9	Time	9.1 Cooking 9.2 Lack of time 9.3 Weather/Seasons 9.4 Holidays/Occasions 9.5 Dustbin
10	Difference/Contradiction	10.1 In Cooking 10.2 Between Old and New 10.3 Changes 10.4 Contradiction 10.5 Dustbin
11	Place	11.1 Home 11.2 South Louisiana Places 11.3 Leaving/Left 11.4 Dustbin
12	Gender	12.1 The Cook/Chef 12.2 Division of Labor 12.3 Dustbin
13	Marriage/Love/Family	13.1 Ingredients 13.2 In Cooking/Serving 13.3 Love of Place 13.4 Dustbin
14	Recognition/Acknowledgement	14.1 Known for Gumbo (Best) 14.2 Acceptance in cooking 14.3 Trophies 14.4 Skills 14.5 Lack of 14.6 Dustbin
15	Hidden/Masked	15.1 Ingredients 15.2 Who is Cooking 15.3 Identity 15.4 Not Talked About 15.5 Dustbin

## VITA

Mr. Corey David Hotard began this gumbo journey around Christmas time when he was six years old by burning his finger on hot roux because he thought it was chocolate. Since then he has been on a trek, familiarizing himself with Louisiana foodways. While on that journey he earned both a BA and MA in anthropology from Louisiana State University. Mr. Hotard is currently a doctoral candidate at Louisiana State University in the Department of Geography and Anthropology. He is an adjunct geography instructor at South Louisiana Community College in Lafayette, a GIS professional, as well as a part time archaeologist. His goal is to experience the kräftskiva (crawfish party) in Sweden one day.