



The Cajuns: Americanization of a People

Shane K. Bernard

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The past sixty years have shaped and reshaped the group of French-speaking Louisiana people known as the Cajuns. During this period they have become much like other Americans and yet have remained strikingly distinct. *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People* explores these six decades and analyzes the forces that had an impact on Louisiana's Acadiana.

In the 1940s, when America entered World War II, so too did the isolated Cajuns. Cajun soldiers fought alongside troops from Brooklyn and Berkeley and absorbed aspects of new cultures. In the 1950s as rock 'n' roll and television crackled across Louisiana airwaves, Cajun music makers responded with their own distinct versions. In the 1960s, empowerment and liberation movements turned the South upside down. During the 1980s, as things Cajun became an absorbing national fad, "Cajun" became a kind of brand identity used for selling everything from swamp tours to boxed rice dinners. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the advent of a new information age launched "Cyber-Cajuns" onto a worldwide web. All these forces have pushed and pulled at the fabric of Cajun life but have not destroyed it.

A Cajun himself, the author of this book has an intense personal fascination in his people.

By linking seemingly local events in the Cajuns' once isolated south Louisiana homeland to national and even global events, Bernard demonstrates that by the middle of the twentieth century the Cajuns for the first time in their ethnic story were engulfed in the currents of mainstream American life and yet continued to make outstandingly distinct contributions.

Shane K. Bernard serves as historian and curator to McIlhenny Company, maker of Tabasco brand products since 1868, and Avery Island, Inc. He is the author of *Swamp Pop: Cajun and Creole Rhythm and Blues* (University Press of Mississippi). His work has been published in such periodicals as *Louisiana History*, *Louisiana Folklife*, *Louisiana Cultural Vistas*, and the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*.

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