

UNDERSTANDING AN INDIGENOUS CURRICULUM IN LOUISIANA
THROUGH LISTENING TO HOUMA ORAL HISTORIES

A Dissertation

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For Aidan, Laurie Anne, Elizabeth, and Robert,
and for the elders of the United Houma Nation

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Preface

An Indigenous Thanksgiving Prayer

Dear Lord I come before you this day in the presence of atayk nahollo, the white man, because it is this day that he calls Thanksgiving. On this day he likes to remind himself of the Indian people that helped him survive all those years ago, indeed he now calls the whole month of November Native-American month.

We are shown pictures of smiling pilgrims and smiling Indians as we stand in his schools and at his festivals in our feathers and buckskins and say that we too are thankful.

But Lord today I reflect, as an Indigenous man, on what Thanksgiving is to us. I still, with a grateful heart, give you thanks that my people are still here and I realize that the trials that we've faced were not sent by you. Though many things were done to Native people in your name they were the works of men and not the acts of God.

Though they say you were with them, I do not believe you walked with those same Pilgrim Fathers as they robbed and killed the same people who helped give them their first Thanksgiving.

I know you were not with the 'Christian' Lord Jeffery Amherst when he ordered smallpox infected blankets sent out to the tribes of the Ohio territory and unleashed a pandemic that killed over one hundred thousand people.

Neither were you with the 'Christian' American army as it used this same tactic on the tribes of the upper Missouri or with the genocide they attempted at Horseshoe Bend, on the Trail of Tears, at Sand Creek, Washita, Wounded Knee and the hundreds of other such "incidents."

Nor do you stand with them today as the genocide continues against the Diné at Black Mesa, with Shoshone of Newe Segobia, on the Cree of Lubicon Lake and the Lakota of Paha Sapa. I pray Lord that you stand with those same Diné, Shoshone, Cree and Lakota and all Native people as

they continue to fight the unholy doctrine of Manifest Destiny and the destruction that it brings.

Lord my prayer also goes for those around the world who also continue to suffer because of the avarice of the beast. I pray for the Maya of Guatemala, the Zapatista of Mexico, the Palestinian people and the people of Iraq as they all continue to bleed, I know now that the 'Indian Wars' didn't stop in 1890 but they continue today.

Lord today I lift all these up in prayer, I'm thankful that we survive and I pray for the strength and courage to continue. I know your love knows no bounds and that the suffering of the children of Iraq or the elderly Dine' is as dear to you as anyone else.

We pray for the strength you gave our ancestors, a power and faith that has brought us this far and we remember the words of Jesus...

"Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled."

These words have always rung true with us, for they were spoken to our hearts long before atayk nahollo set foot on our land. So Lord like the Ghost Dancers of years ago we have faith that all things will be made right but we realize that we must have the courage to fight towards that end.

So we give you thanks today Lord, not for the hypocrisy of atayk nahollo and his American way, but for the true grace and mercy of the Creator of Life.

By, T. Mayheart Dardar

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Preface	v
List of Figures	ix
Abstract	x
Introduction: A Marsh Made of Dawn	1
Endnotes.....	16
Chapter 1: Toward Deconstructing a Literature of Dominance	19
Uncle Sam’s Colonial Curriculum for Stealing Indigenous Land	21
Establishing Educational Prison Camps: The Carlisle Industrial School	26
Instituting Policies of Racial Discrimination in Louisiana	29
Recruiting God’s Children: Indian Missionary Schools	37
Establishing Indian Settlement Schools in Louisiana	46
Denying and Delaying Entrances to Colonialism’s Educational Forts.....	51
Decolonizing a Literature of Dominance.....	54
Endnotes.....	56
Chapter 2: Understanding Houma Oral Histories	58
Academic Gatekeepers.....	63
Entering the Field	67
Toward Understanding Tribal Research Protocols	72
A Life History Methodology	78
Building Relationships of Reciprocity.....	85
Toward Decolonizing Our Research Methodologies.....	89
Endnotes.....	91
Chapter 3: Understanding a Houma Curriculum Outside the School	92
At Dorcas’ Closet.....	96
At Whitney Dardar’s Oyster Shack	104
At the Shrimp Sheds	112
Banana Bread Back at Dorcas’ Closet	119
Unsettling Houma Settlements	128
Endnotes.....	135
Chapter 4: Surviving a Curriculum Inside Louisiana’s Colonial Schools	136
Qu’est-ce Que Tu Dis?.....	140
A Kitchen Filled with Rice	145
An Understanding of Colonial Teachers at the Settlement School.....	150
A Curriculum of Psychological Violence During Desegregation.....	158
Uncle Sam Grant Us Adult Education	164

Moving Toward Self-Determination.....	168
Endnotes.....	171
Chapter 5: Toward Understanding an Indigenous Curriculum of Place	173
An Educational Stepchild: The Lafourche American Indian Education Program.....	177
“Don’t Preserve Houma Heritage, Live It!”	185
An Indigenous History of Resisting Colonial Education.....	193
Keeping the Curricular Drumbeat Alive.....	200
Endnotes.....	201
Epilogue	202
References.....	208
Appendix	
A Road Map of Louisiana	220
B Map of Louisiana Parishes	221
C Parishes Inhabited by Houma Settlements.....	222
D Map of Lafourche Parish	223
E Map of Terrebonne Parish	224
F Map of Plaquemines Parish.....	225
G A United Houma Nation Historical Timeline.....	226
H List of Formal Interviews.....	229
I Description of Study for Internal Review Board.....	230
J Consent Form.....	232
Vita	236

List of Figures

1. An Indigenous Child-Centered Curriculum.....	187
2. An Indigenous Cross-Cultural Curriculum.....	190

Abstract

Indigenous communities have inhabited Louisiana since time immemorial. However, the national project of teaching the rise of the West as a heroic story remains the curricular centerpiece in elementary and high school history classes in North America. As a curriculum theorist, and former science and history teacher, I am concerned with the ways in which my teachings of colonialism’s cultural, historical, and national narratives suppress and silence the stories of the colonized. Therefore, the purpose of this paper (based on a four-year qualitative study) is to share oral histories of the United Houma Nation in order to illustrate their daily lives inside and outside the colonizers’ institutional systems.

Louisiana’s political, judicial and educational institutions recently settled the longest desegregation lawsuit in American history. My dissertation research illustrates historically how Louisiana’s State apparatus dictated educational exclusion through the infamous Jim Crow policies of racial segregation. Like many African-American communities in the south, the United Houma Nation did not have any access to “White” systems of public education until the mid-1960s. An Indian identity denied the United Houma Nation from having access to African American schools as well. Community members were excluded—racially—from Louisiana’s educational institutions. Very little research has been done the United Houma Nation and their historical relationships with Louisiana’s educational systems. The potential social significance for revisiting history via qualitative research methods that stress situating and contextualizing local voices is that it becomes a way for transforming both the content and the purpose of history.

Introduction: A Marsh Made of Dawn

The shadows are the creations of the tribe, and shadows are memories heard in stories. Shadows, memories, and imagination endure in the silence of translation.

(Vizenor, 1994, p. 74)

Thus, Indians knew stones were perfect beings because they were self-contained entities that had resolved their social relationships and possessed great knowledge about how every other entity, and every species, should live.

(Deloria, 1999, p. 34)

A crawfish sits on a stone dreaming in the absent shadows of darkness. Eagerly awaiting the first light of dawn, snowy egrets nestle together on an old dying cypress tree. The marsh grass dances and sways in the southeastern breeze. Mallard ducks gather in the small brackish ponds. The humdrum of mosquitoes disrupts the illusion of predawn silence. It is late November.¹ The Louisiana landscape is a place that holds untold stories, not yet translated, waiting in the shadows of Houma elders' memories. "The shadow is," Vizenor (1994) writes, "the unsaid presence in names, the memories in silence, and the imagination of tribal experiences" (p. 73). Today, traveling in Joshua's white dodge Dakota pickup truck, we visit the memories hidden in the shadows of his grandfather's traditional land, which lies just below the corporate limits of a small trawling town called Golden Meadow. Starting in Raceland, Louisiana, our drive takes us through the rural communities of Matthews, Lockport, Larose, Galliano, and Cut Off (see appendices A). Joshua and I listen to the Franco-Cajun tunes playing on the radio. Advertisements for fresh shrimp, crab, alligator, turtle meat, crawfish, oysters, and seafood gumbo adorn the roadside restaurants and corner store billboards. Brown mullets skip periodically on

Bayou Lafourche, which runs alongside Highway 1. Just outside each township, the sugarcane fields are littered with rows of spring seedlings and cattle grazing. The Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary's natural resources, like sugar, cotton, corn, oil, gas, and seafood support these rural municipal economies.

It is 5:30 a.m. Still dark. Trawling boats line the shores of Bayou Lafourche, once the Mississippi river over 700 hundred years ago. Heading north, a tugboat pushes its barge. Soon after, a Lafitte skiff bobs in its wake. Further south, a swing bridge opens up for a local fisherman. The front of his boat is loaded down with burlap sacks overflowing with oysters. Usually, just before reaching Golden Meadow we stop at the Crab Shack, a popular gas station with sportsmen from New Orleans and Baton Rouge. I grab a biscuit and egg sandwich. Meanwhile, Joshua buys live shrimp for bait. Our drive continues as we eat our food. Like clockwork, each morning at 6:00 a.m., "Notre Père, qui est aux cieux..." (Our Father) comes on the radio station. Chuckling together, we join in on the recital. Soon, our drive takes us into and through the township of Golden Meadow. Shortly after leaving the southern corporate limits, Joshua turns the truck onto his grandfather's land, just up the road from the old Indian Settlement School, now the United Houma Nation Tribal Center.

Weary of the neighbor's barking dogs, Joshua carefully navigates his truck through the subtropical foliage on Whitney Dardar's property (his grandfather's traditional land). Cyprus and live oak trees draped with Spanish moss provide a shaded canopy for the thickets of palmetto to grow. The palmetto plants, once utilized for thatching roofs, are still used today by Houma elders who practice the artful skills of basketry. Eventually, we stop near the edge of a small bayou at the back of Whitney's

land. Joshua and I unload our pirogues amongst the persistent annoying bites of mosquitoes and gnats. With the foreshadowing of first light, I watch Joshua glide into his pirogue, and make his way silently across the bayou. Clumsily, I paddle not far behind.

Long before the unapproved Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the Houmas migrated back and forth, between their larger summer agricultural villages in the north, and their smaller winter hunting, trapping, and fishing villages in the south (Dardar, 2002). No one owned a written title to the land back then. Instead, the Louisiana land was open to host an interrelationship with indigenous communities who mindfully migrated and traded within the shifting shadows of its seasons. Loewen (1995) makes clear,

The biggest single purchase from the wrong tribe took place in 1803. All the textbooks tell how Jefferson “doubled the size of the United States by buying Louisiana from France.” Not one points out that it was not France’s to sell—it was Indian land...Indeed, France did not really sell Louisiana for \$15,000,000. France merely sold *its claim* to the territory. (p. 123)

Like other southeastern indigenous communities, the Houmas traveled in correlation with the seasonal floods of the Mississippi River Delta, and the comings and goings of migratory waterfowl.² Since the Louisiana Purchase, and the increased immigration of Europeans, Houma communities have taken permanent refuge in the southern limits of the marshlands (see appendices B and C).

During our crossing of the bayou, a prehistoric garfish dancing just beneath the water’s surface lazily rolls, plunging its pointed snout into the depths of the bayou, and then leaves us with an applauding splash. The ensuing ripples disrupt the morning calm. The garfish reminds me of a time before writing our memories of the landscape into history, or marking our human scars into the land. Tapping the water with his paddle just

moments before reaching the other side, Joshua yells, “Yah, Yah!” hoping to ward off potential alligators and snakes also waiting for the first light of dawn.

After arriving at the other shore, Joshua and I pull our pirogues 100 feet up the bank, and across the levee, to reach the waters of the salty marsh. “The Great Flood of 1927,” Tidwell (2003) maintains, “killed over a thousand people in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana” (p. 31). As a result, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers constructed a massive system of unbreachable levees along the entire lower Mississippi (Tidwell, 2003). Like in many other southeastern parishes, the local levee system separates the fresh water of Lafourche Parish from the damaging effects of the Gulf of Mexico’s salt-water incursion, and thus halts the continued erosion of the remaining land. But before this levee system was put into place, the mouth of the Mississippi river, like the Houmas and the mallards, migrated back and forth along the coastline of Louisiana.

Every thousand years or so, when the Mississippi’s own sediment load lengthened—and then blocked—the river’s route to the Gulf of Mexico, the mother stream would change course completely, finding a shorter route to the sea. Then it would build a new delta, thus spreading the gift of land creation along a wide coastline, fashioning over time the entire bayou region of Louisiana. (Tidwell, 2003, p. 30)

The levee system now protects most communities of, above, and below the corporate limits of Golden Meadow, but it has also cut off the sediment and nutrients returned and needed each year to replenish the sinking land.³ The levees have “frozen the river in its present course, which streams past New Orleans and out into the Gulf where its sediments no longer create any land whatsoever, tumbling instead thousands of feet over the clifflike edge of the continental shelf” (Tidwell, 2003, p. 31). Although the levee system now provides protection, it also changed the seasonal migrations that historically

fed the land (Streever, 2001). Now, the very land many Houmas inhabit is sinking and disappearing into the shadows beneath their feet.

During the hurricane season, the levees also protect the communities from the dangers and traumas caused by the inundation of tidal surges. However, many of the United Houma Nation people live outside of the levee system's protection, like those at Isle de Jean Charles, Grand Isle, Venice, and Shrimpers Row in lower Dulac. On August 29th of 2005, Houma communities who lived outside and inside the protection of the levees suffered the physical and emotional scarring of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita's tidal surges. Many Houmas in these marginal communities had as much as six feet of water in their houses, if not more. In lower Dulac, Ti-Roy Billiot, a retired trawler, returned to his home, now inundated with a putrid stench of over three feet of muddy marsh water. With a continued loss of the Louisiana coastline, the Houma must now deal with the effects of flooding during high tides or strong winds from the southeast.

After both hurricanes, Houmas in Dulac were forced to relive the traumas of reburying the deceased that resurfaced. The dead literally rose from the land. Furniture, mattresses, and precious family memorabilia lay strewn in piles across many front yards, ruined by the permanent stench of the decomposing marsh mud. In the solitude of the marsh this morning, I marvel at the beauty of the Louisiana landscape, where the following tales of the Houma take place. At the same time, I am reminded by the specters which haunt Houma memories of the marsh—that the potential violence of the Louisiana landscape is also a feared and respected place amongst their people. As the first light of dawn arrives at the horizon, Joshua and I watch a flock of white pelicans spell out their

patterned formations into the reddish-orange sky. Meanwhile, a blue heron wades purposefully, stalking crabs in the shallows of the marsh.

Dragging our pirogues over the top of the levee, Joshua and I try to avoid this season's mustard weed, which is sometimes harvested by his family to eat. Catching our breath at the top of the levee, Joshua carefully observes the "pedagogy of the land" (Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2002, p. 451). In turn, I watch Joshua attune himself to what the marsh "shall cry out" and teach him this morning (Tinker, 2004, p. 105). Joshua scans the open water for signs of any movement and takes note of the direction and level of the tide. In the distance, like a golden meadow, the marsh grass now reflects the early morning sun. He watches for red Drum tailing, or for their momentary reflections in the watery shadows that recede back into the marsh. Eventually, we drag our pirogues down towards the saltwater, walking through the stench of decaying mud. "Ah...boue pourrie," Joshua complains to himself softly, as his feet sink into the soft marshy ground.

At the water's edge a sign reads, "Apache Mineral, no trespassing!" The gas and oil company now owns most of the marsh, including some of his grandfather's former land. As a boy, his grandfather could paddle from the back step of his current house, along a narrow ditch his father dug out with his own two hands, to reach where Joshua and I just set in. Now, the Apache Mineral Company owns most, if not all, of the marshland behind his grandfather's house. The levee protection system and the resulting small fresh water bayou it created cuts off what was once legally Whitney Dardar's land. The Apache Mineral Company leases out this acreage of marsh to local Cajun crabbers, trappers, and sportsmen. Joshua hopes that some day he will be able to lease back the

land. For now, he watches, not without irreverence, two Borne brothers, lease out the rights to hunt the mallards and fish on his grandfather's former land.

The discovery of oil in South Louisiana began in the early 1900s. Curry (1979) stresses that “suddenly the land that the Houmas had called home for so long became even more important and of prime interest to non-Indians—oil was under it” (p. 20). Louisiana became one of the richest areas for oil and natural gas (Curry, 1979). One of the economically poorer States, Louisiana supplies one third of the oil and gas consumed by the American population. Nonetheless, the federal government refuses to increase oil and gas royalties, a demand that is continually requested each year by the Louisiana government, in order to improve its education, levee, and coastal restoration systems. The United Houma Nation has yet to see any royalties from the land they previously inhabited.

Brenda Dardar Robichaux, Joshua's mother and the current principal chief of the United Houma Nation, explained that the discovery of oil in the late 1800s and early 1900s helped further displace her community of its traditional inhabitation of the Louisiana landscape.⁴

In 1909 an Indian family made a great discovery of a freshwater lake amid the marshes. After 20 years of making their home there with gardens, cattle and a house, they were warned by a stranger to move. When they were unwilling to do so, an oil company blocked the path leading to their home, destroyed the lake by digging a channel, and ruined the marshes by drilling a well which caused oil to spread into the area. Finally, with no home, no garden for food, and their source of fresh water destroyed, men came and shot the family's cattle. Like many others, they left. They couldn't win. (Curry, 1979, p. 20-21)

Earlier this year, while surveying their duck-hunting lease, the two local Cajun brothers pulled up to Joshua and I in their mudboat. The younger brother asked us not to fish on the leased land during this upcoming hunting season. “You never know, with hunting and all... accidents can always happen with the other hunters who hunt on our lease,” one brother said. The two brothers did not mind our fishing on their lease during the closure of the duck-hunting seasons. These are Houma memories of their relationships to the land hidden from Louisiana textbooks, and relegated instead, to the shadows of the marsh.

Due to the community’s initial contact and close international trade relationships with France, for the most part, the Houma people learned how to speak French (Dardar, 2002; Harrell, 1997). After the Louisiana Purchase, Battle of New Orleans, American Revolution, World War I and II, most of the Houmas were unable to speak, read, or write with the English colonial language, in the now former Spanish, French, and British colonies of foreign occupation. Duncan (1998) suggests that during the early 1900s “speculators, employed by various oil companies, blatantly took advantage of the Houma’s illiteracy and inability to speak English, as well as the financial crisis that the United States was suffering” during the Great Depression (p. 42). Another “legal” means of dispossessing Houmas of the land was by implementing a Louisiana patriarchal law, which did not allow illegitimate children to inherit their father’s land. “The Indians, who did not go in for white marriage procedure,” Underhill (1938) writes, “are all technically ‘adulterous bastards,’ with no rights of their father’s lands” (quoted in Stanton, 1979, p. 101). The Houmas’ marriage customs were not “legitimate” in the eyes of the colonizers’ religious and judicial systems.

Houma tribal members, such as Henry Billiot and Elvira Billiot, among others, organized themselves politically and judicially in order to challenge the ongoing theft of land and economic crisis it created in their communities (Curry, 1979). The survival of the next generations' future rights as an indigenous nation was clearly at stake. Yet Houmas now scattered, because of Euro-American colonization, across the different parishes of southeast Louisiana, struggled to gain access to the gates of Jim Crow's colonial education and economic systems. Although it took over 50 years to enter the segregated gates of Louisiana's institutionalized forts, many parents were not deterred, as we shall see in chapters two and four. Meanwhile, the theft of traditional land continued, denying Houmas of their future management of the United States' black gold once buried beneath their very feet.

Under the growing shadows of dusk, back on top of the levee, contrary to the tales found in Louisiana history textbooks, Joshua shares the tragic stories of his grandfather's stolen land, respective fishing and hunting rights taken away, the exploitation of human labor, the institutional implementation of racist identity policies, segregation inside and outside public school walls, and the American government's continued denial of his national indigenous identity. Joshua's story about the Houmas and their relationships of survival from, resistance to, and appropriation of, colonialism's culture is excluded from Louisiana history textbooks, and thus remains, intransitive in the shadows and memories of his people.⁵ "Textbook authors," Loewen (1998) maintains, "still write history to comfort the descendants of the 'settlers'" (p. 99). The national project of teaching the rise of the West as a heroic story remains the curricular centerpiece in elementary and high school history classes (Willinsky, 1998). Therefore, as a curriculum scholar, and former

history and science high school teacher, I am concerned with the ways in which my teachings of colonialism's cultural, historical, and national narratives work to suppress and silence the stories of the colonized.

In response to such concerns, I do not write historical narratives with this dissertation that comfort the descendants of colonizers. The sound of others' "silence breaking" Miller (2004) writes, "is harsh, resonant, soft, battering, small, chaotic, furious, terrified, triumphant" (p. 68). Over the last four years, I have listened, recorded, and transcribed elders' memories still hidden within the shadows of the Louisiana landscape. Attuning my research in this dissertation to such silences breaking within the curricular shadows, in this dissertation I attempt to critically examine the vexed relations between the United Houma Nation and the segregated colonial institutions of schooling.

Louisiana's political, judicial and educational institutions recently settled the longest desegregation lawsuit in American history. My dissertation research illustrates historically how Louisiana's State apparatus dictated educational exclusion through the infamous Jim Crow policies of racial segregation. Like many African-American communities in the south, the United Houma Nation did not have any access to "White" systems of public education until the mid-1960s. An Indian identity denied the United Houma Nation from having access to African American schools as well. Community members were excluded—racially—from Louisiana's educational institutions. Very little research has been done the United Houma Nation and their historical relationships with Louisiana's educational systems. The potential social significance for revisiting history via qualitative research methods that stress situating and contextualizing local voices is that it becomes a way for transforming both the content and the purpose of history.

Conducting life history research with the United Houma Nation can be used to change the focus of history itself and open up new areas of educational inquiry. Utilizing a combination of ethnography, historiography, and oral history methods my dissertation research is specifically concerned with the life histories' of United Houma Nation elders who experienced the complexities of institutional racism during Louisiana's educational policies of segregation.

Before turning the pages of this dissertation towards an understanding of such historically situated relations, let us walk across the four hyphens below, a narrative bridge if you will, in order to situate the importance of having a "complicated conversation," within the field of curriculum studies, between a first generation immigrant to Canada studying at Louisiana State University and a First Nation's community located within the international territories of the United States (Pinar, 1995, p. 848).

As I write, I am standing on land that indigenous peoples first occupied and travelled.

(Haig-Brown, 2003, p. 1)

On the banks of the Rideau River, red, brown, orange, and yellow leaves fall, and sail slowly towards the ground. Sitting on rocks, under a weeping willow, the last of the Canadian geese preen themselves in preparation for the long migration south. In anticipation of a long winter to come, the snapping turtles dig down into the mud, hibernating and reflecting, amongst the bulrushes at the edge of the riverbank. From the Cummings Bridge, I watch a black mink shiver in front of its burrow, and then take

refuge from the unrelenting north wind. It is a year later, still November, and our introductory narrative of the Houma shifts momentarily from one colonial capital to another.

I sit at my writing desk, reflecting in hindsight on how to situate the importance of the research presented in this dissertation with regards to the field of curriculum studies. In the next room, Laurie Anne feeds our son, born three months ago, in Canada's federal capital, Ottawa. Each day, I leave our apartment located in city's east end, an urban area inhabited by new immigrants and walk along the Rideau River, then crossing the Cummins Bridge in order to teach pre-service secondary teachers at the University of Ottawa. Often, I stop on the bridge hoping to get another glimpse of the mink and reflect on who were the original inhabitants of the land that our family now lives on?

Like the new immigrants now living in the east end of Ottawa, in 1975 our family emigrated from Guyana to Canada. Shortly after our arrival, our family settled in Kapuskasing (which means "Bend in the River" in the local Anishinaabe language), a small rural logging town situated in Northern Ontario. Twenty-five years later, in my master's thesis, using Pinar's (1975/2000, 2004) autobiographical method of *currere*, I interrogated "not only the diasporic routes"—my father's family from China to Guyana, and mother from Ireland to Scotland—which eventually took us to Kapuskasing, "but I also interrogated my relation with and consciousness of (primarily a lack thereof) First Nations people" (Haig-Brown, 2004, p. 13). Haig-Brown (2004) reminds us,

Continuing immigration augments the possibility of perpetuating ignorance as long as this nation fails to posit history in relation to the first peoples of this land. Why doesn't the citizenship exam ask whose traditional land one lives on as one way to begin to redress the attempted erasure of indigenous people from the land? And while it

may be clear that every research in the area will not emphasize such a focus, in the same way that race, gender, and class analysis must be addressed in some way in current critical scholarship, historicization of lands and the current place of Aboriginal people must be part of more thoughtful research. (p. 14)

Before taking a graduate course, called *Decolonizing Research Methodologies*, with Celia Haig-Brown, I never considered who the original inhabitants were on the land my family now lives on. Not until being asked to consider my relationship to the land, and the original people who live on it, did I start to question how I reproduced the “limit-situations” of my “successful” integration into the dominant colonial culture in Canada.⁶

As a first generation immigrant, I continue to listen to the voices of those who traditionally inhabited the land. Such voices remind me that not all inhabitants have profited, like me, from the colonial system of education. “Coming to know the past,” Smith (1999) writes,

...has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges. The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledges is that they can form the basis for alternative ways of doing things. Transforming our colonized views of our own history (as written by the West), however, requires us to revisit, site by site, our history under Western eyes. (p. 34)

I suggest that the oral histories reported in this dissertation can help curriculum scholars to further reflect on alternative histories, on how the colonial education system we work within affected, and continues to affect, indigenous communities, like the United Houma Nation, in contentious and complicated ways. I conducted qualitative research with the United Houma Nation over the last four years, not only to learn about alternative knowledges, but also to understand the limit-situations of my colonized worldviews.

As curriculum theorists, we make inquiries into and critiques of past and present colonial and curricular landscapes in order to understand and improve the processes of teaching and learning. In 2000, a new organization called the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies formed (see Pinar et al., 2003; Pinar, 2003). One of the main goals of the organization is to “work against the cultural and economic imperialism associated with the phenomenon known as *globalisation*,” or in my case to work against international neocolonization (Pinar, 2003, p. 1). Indigenous communities who live within the geographical international boundaries of North America differ from other minority communities in that the Canadian and the United States governments recognize certain indigenous communities as sovereign nations. As a result, “tribal governments have the legal right to make decisions about how to educate tribal members” (Tippeconnic, 1999, p. 39). How might we then, as curriculum scholars, begin to make inquiries towards understanding the ways in which indigenous communities, like the Houma, inter-nationally experience the colonizers’ national curriculum?

To answer such questions, I draw on various theoretical and methodological strategies. The first is to review the ways in which the colonizers’ academic institutions documented the Houmas’ historical reality as a linear and universal narrative of extinction in order to appropriate the resources of the Louisiana landscape. Chapter one illustrates how colonizing projects were split between assimilation and segregationist ways of dealing with indigenous peoples. The historical documentation produced by social scientists reviewed in this chapter emerged out of positivist epistemologies, which assumed that the truth of history and culture is objectively knowable (Munro, 1998b;

Thompson, 2000). Nonetheless, “such views do not recognize that scientific neutrality is always problematic” and “arise from an objectivism premised on the belief that scientific knowledge is free from social construction” (Lather, 1991, p. 52). Furthermore, “history” as Munro (1998b) makes clear, “is not the representation of reality, it never has been” (p. 267). Instead, she asks us to understand how history as an evocation of memory, “becomes our relationship to, and experiencing of, the identities made possible or impossible through historical narrative” (p. 267). Therefore, in chapter one I interrogate how indigenous cultural and national identities are made possible or impossible by the existing historical narratives found in what Vizenor (1994) calls the literature of dominance.

Another strategy is to utilize a postpositivist research design to respond to the historically situated and socially constructed knowledge on the United Houma Nation found within the historical literature of dominance. Postpositivism, Lather (1991) explains, “is characterized by the methodological and epistemological refutation of positivism...” and “...the increased visibility for research designs that are interactive, contextualized, and humanly compelling because they invite joint participation in exploration of research issues” (p. 52). Rather than focusing on the validity of the historical evidence in the existing documented literature versus Houma oral histories presented in later chapters, I focus on the memories of elders’ daily experiences with the instituted policies of colonization. Therefore, in chapter two, I examine the possibilities and limitations of creating a postpositivist research design that utilizes collaborative methodologies to interpret the multiple meanings shared within the Houmas life histories.

In chapters three and four, drawing on oral history data, I present the daily lived experiences of Houma community members, which take place inside and outside the Indian Settlement School in Golden Meadow. In chapter five, I describe and interpret how the current American Indian Education program in Lafourche Parish attempts to meet local indigenous students' cultural, as well as, academic needs. Let us now turn towards deconstructing the literature of dominance.

Endnotes

- 1 Joshua took me fishing at least a dozen times during the four years of research I conducted with the United Houma Nation. This particular fishing narrative is based on a trip we took in November 2004.
- 2 The scope and focus of this dissertation has limited my illustration of the depth and complexities of early European colonization and its relationship with the Houmas' displacement and inhabitation within the geographical terrain of Louisiana. For further "non-indigenous" written accounts, see Curry's (1979) *A History of the Houma Indians and Their Story of Federal Nonrecognition*; Kniffen, Gregory, and Stoke's (1987), *The Historic Tribes of Louisiana*; Duncan's (1998) *Everyday Isn't Sunday: The Houma of Southeastern Louisiana*. For a United Houma Nation's interpretation of colonial history see Dardar's (2000) *Woman-Chiefs and Crawfish Warriors: A Brief History of the Houma People* and his writings on unitedhoumanation.org.
- 3 *Saving Louisiana, Rising Tide*, and *People of the Bayou* are excellent books that detail the history, science, and social effects of the deterioration of the marsh on the inhabitants of Louisiana.
- 4 An interview conducted with Mrs. Dardar Robichaux on March 22, 2002 at the Lafourche Media Center.
- 5 Louisiana history is taught in grade seven or grade eight depending on what elementary school you attend. In *Louisiana the History of an American State*, the current textbook used by the elementary teachers, two half pages are dedicated to the United Houma Nation's history. Although the textbook acknowledges that the Houma were driven from their summer farmlands near Angola, it fails to trace how the colonial population continued and continues to profit from their appropriation of Houma traditional land. History textbooks used in Louisiana high schools, such as *American History*, *The American Journey*, and *A History of The United States* discuss the historical details around the Louisiana Purchase for example, but fail to explain how the American Republic refused to uphold the treaties France had with indigenous nations prior to the purchase. The detrimental effects of appropriating and exploiting the newly purchased

territory profit on indigenous nations, such as the Houma, are not part of the colonizer's historical narrative.

- 6 What are limit-situations? A clue to answering this question is provided when Freire (1970/1990) references Alvaro Viera Pinto's work in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. "Limit-situations," Viera Pinto (1960) suggests, are not "the impassable boundaries where possibilities end, but the real boundaries where our possibilities begin," they are not "the frontier, which separates being from nothingness," but rather "the frontier, which separates being from being more" (p. 284). People are able to challenge their "limits-acts" with actions, Freire (1970/1990) writes, rather than passively accepting their given situations. It is not the limit-situations themselves—a common national curriculum for example—that creates a sense of hopelessness, but rather how teacher and students *perceive* its (dis)contents.

Freire (1970/1990) introduces us to a second term, *epochal units*. Freire describes epochs "as a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and challenges in a dialectical interaction with their opposites, striving towards plenitude" (p. 101). An attempt at the concrete representations of such curricula—ideas, concepts, hopes, and so on—and the obstacles that impede its full potential for humanization, constitute the *themes* of that epoch, a third term Freire introduces. "Historical themes," Freire continues, "are never isolated, independent, disconnected, or static; they are always interacting dialectically with their opposites" (p. 101). Yet how might we visit, wrestle, and suspend our understandings of curricular issues—such as race, gender, class, sexuality, place, and so on—between the spaces of such oppositions? It is perhaps by wrestling and suspending our teaching and learning between such spaces in their classrooms, that teachers and students are provided a place to visit a generative unfolding of the limitless possibilities contained within the limit-situations of each theme. "In the last analysis," Freire notes, "the *themes* both contain and are contained in limit-situations; the task they imply require limit-acts" (p. 102). Themes are concealed by limit-situations. And in turn, create partially blinded perceptions, which shape the corresponding historical limit-acts, that can neither authentically, nor critically be fulfilled.

Politically, historically, culturally, socially, psychologically, and economically, limit-situations have served the needs of certain members of American and Canadian nations. Of course any given society—nationally and locally—within larger epochal units, contains "in addition to the universal, continental, or historically similar themes, its own particular themes, its own limit-situations" (Freire, 1970/1990, p. 103). In the South, individuals who were/are coded by the words, "Black" and "Indian" did/do not experience Jim Crow laws (segregation and institutional racism and sexism) the same as various populations who were coded by the words "White" and "Male." Yet each of these—historical, social, cultural, psychological, and geopolitical—subdivisions are related and interconnected to narratives that represent and/or exclude an American whole.

Freire reminds us however, that in spite of our differences, we share similarities due to our inherent humanness. Teaching and learning through certain critical forms of reading and writing in a classroom can provide a place, a curriculum, and reflective practice in action, for teachers and students to explore the limits of their perceptions in

ways that may reveal a generative unfolding to the possibilities of a moving beyond each of our limit-situations. Such limit-acts call upon us to make connections between the perceived limit-situations of our inner-experiences and the places we choose not just to *visit*, but rather inhabit, learn from, and teach.

Chapter 1: Toward Deconstructing¹ a Literature of Dominance

As we move into this new century we should have a renewed sense of confidence in the collective ability of the Houma people to face the challenges of our future. We have lived in the shadows as a *hidden nation* far too long, it is time we express ourselves to the extent of this collective ability.

(Dardar, 2002, p. 1)

The scholarly literature often traces the United Houma Nation's high rates of adult illiteracy, unemployment, and economic poverty back to a denied access to public schooling during the 1900s in Louisiana (see Faine & Bohlander, 1986). In this chapter, I seek to understand how municipal and State governments denied Houma communities' access to the systems of public education and, in turn, the opportunities to appropriate colonialism's culture and economic capital. In order to interrogate the United States' strategies to colonize, dispossess, and assimilate its neighboring "indigenous" nations, I read the existing historical literature presented in this chapter from what Hingangaroa Smith (2000) calls a proactive anti-colonial position that challenges neocolonial interpretations of written history.²

The chapter begins by examining the various ways in which the United States utilized judicial and educational policies to dispossess indigenous nations of their lands. Depending on where indigenous nations were geopolitically located, each nation experienced the American institutions of colonization and discrimination in its own particular fashion. The remainder of the chapter seeks an understanding of the United Houma Nation's unique historical and educational experiences with colonialism's

culture, an institutionally disavowed national identity, and Louisiana's racialized policies of segregation.

Before moving on to the next section, I want to remind the reader of the limitations incurred through inhabiting the national, cultural, and political body of a non-indigenous researcher. In my critical readings of what Vizenor (1994) calls the "literature of dominance," I am always in danger of reinscribing representations that essentialize the indigenous national and cultural identities simulated in the following narratives (p. 23). Aware of reiterating such neocolonial possibilities, I strategically read indigenous theories in this chapter against the nonindigenous documentations of Houma culture and history (Battiste, 2000; Churchill, 2003; Mihesuah and Wilson, 2004; Smith, 1999), which remain contested between United States government officials, ethnohistorians (Davis, 2001, 2004), anthropologists (Campisi & Starna, 2004), and the political body of the United Houma Nation (Dardar, 2002).

Although reading the works of various indigenous theorists as a politically "indigenous" conscious act does not resolve the dangers of essentializing indigenous representations (Churchill, 2003; Owens, 2001), it does provide a methodological filter, if you will, for how one might situate and negotiate the following interpretations of the literature of dominance. To illustrate the broader historical context of the United States' judicial colonizing policies for displacing indigenous communities and stealing their land, I draw on historical narratives which document indigenous educational experiences with foreign occupation.

Uncle Sam's Colonial Curriculum for Stealing Indigenous Land

First, the societies that are the perpetrators of genocide often *pass laws* designed to bring about or prohibit certain behaviors, and these laws are thought to appropriately give license for the complete destruction of a people in their midst.

(Cook-Lynn, 2001, p. 190)

The two major thrusts of federal policy from the very beginning have been the education of the next generation of Indians in the ways of the white people and the exploitation and/or development of the reservation resources.

(Deloria Jr. & Wildcat, 2001, p. 123)

Understanding the United States' historical laws and policies of institutional discrimination directed towards indigenous nations who live within its geographical borders is a complex endeavor. In this section, I examine the larger historical context of such laws and policies, which are important for a "non-indigenous" reader to be somewhat familiar with in order that they might understand the dynamics of why local governments in Louisiana denied the United Houma Nation access to the public education systems in the 1900s.

The current United States judicial and educational policies towards indigenous nations, such as the Cherokee can be traced back to a series of Supreme Court decisions and Acts of Congress. By the early 1800s, the Cherokee nation, located in Georgia, had a national government and educational system well in place before American colonization. On December 22, 1830 Governor George C. Gilmer encouraged the Georgia legislature to pass a statute that would prevent the Cherokees from operating under their national

constitution. The Cherokee sought an injunction (*Cherokee v. Georgia*) asking the Supreme Court to restrain state officials from enforcing and executing the statute (Churchill, 2003). Chief Justice John Marshall turned down their request and maintained the Cherokees were not a foreign nation capable of filing any actions in the Supreme Court against a State of the Union.

Meanwhile, Samuel Worcester and six missionaries who were preaching the gospel and translating the scriptures into the Cherokee language, on Cherokee lands, were in violation of the newly imposed State statute (Deloria, Jr., & Lytle, 1984). In July 1831, they were arrested and in September of that year they were convicted and sentenced to four years of hard labor. The missionaries' appeal (*Worcester v. Georgia*) reached the Supreme Court where, once again, the Chief Justice upheld the State's statute and declared that the Cherokee were a domestic dependent nation.³

During the *Worcester v. Georgia* trial, Chief Justice Marshall acknowledged the Cherokee's rights to sovereignty but designated the indigenous nation a ward of the United States:

[I]t may well be doubted whether those tribes which reside within the acknowledged boundaries of the United States can, with strict accuracy, be denominated foreign nations. They may, more correctly, perhaps, be denominated *domestic* dependent nations. They occupy territory to which we assert a title independent of their will...Their relation to the United States resembles that of a ward to his guardian [emphasis original]. (Marshall quoted in Churchill, 2003, p. 9)

Unfortunately, Marshall's paternalistic characterization of the Cherokee set a precedence that continues to affect the cases concerning indigenous sovereignty that sit before the Supreme Court today. More importantly, the language within the ruling—"Indians" like

children need protection—provided subsequent politicians with an excuse to steal, “in trust,” the remaining indigenous lands.

Shortly after President Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, such protection involved the American military rounding up indigenous people east of the Mississippi, herding them into temporary detention camps, and then marching them west to what is now known as Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Kansas (Stannard, 1992). Under this legislation of so-called protection, one in four Cherokees died marching in their trail of tears (Nies, 1996). “The higher death rate of the Creeks, Seminoles, and Cherokee,” Stannard (1992) writes, “was equal to that of the Jews in Germany, Hungary, and Romania between 1939 and 1945” (p. 124). Prior to Jackson’s systematic genocide of indigenous nations east of the Mississippi river, the Cherokee had the necessary wealth of natural resources and educational systems in place to teach their children tribal knowledge and manage the future value of their natural resources.

In 1887, the United States passed the Allotment (Dawes) Act, which further dispossessed indigenous nations of land. “The main ingredient of the allotment act,” Churchill (2001) writes, “was that each Indian recognized as such by the United States would be assigned an individually deeded parcel of land within existing reservation boundaries” (p. 40). The size of land varied, Churchill (2001) continues, depending on whether “the Indian was a child (40 acres), unmarried adult (80 acres), or head of family (160 acres)” (p. 40). The allotted land was usually held in trust for twenty-five years, at which time the heir received title to the land as well as US citizenship (Lomawaima, 1994). After the allotment, the federal government purchased the remaining land, and in turn, sold it to immigrants for homesteading. “The General Allotment Act,” Deloria

(2001) stresses, “was justified on the basis that the Indians needed to learn how to manage their property” (p. 105). In 1891, Congress amended the law and “gave the secretary of the interior the power to manage allotments owned by minors, the elderly, and anyone who could not take care of their property” (Deloria, 1997a, p. 19). Since then, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has misappropriated billions of dollars supposedly set aside for indigenous people “in trust.” By 1934, after passing and then implementing the Allotment Act, the federal government was able to appropriate two-thirds of the approximate 150 million acres that indigenous nations had retained at the outset (Churchill, 2001).

In the early 1800s, failing to fulfill its obligations under the Louisiana Purchase agreement, the United States government rejected all land claims made by the Houma Nation. Stripped of their rights to what was previously communal land, the Houmas were forced to resort to individual land ownership (Faine & Bohlander, 1986; Dardar, 2002). The continued violent persecution of Houma people by incoming European colonizers forced them off the newly established land-base in the Terrebonne (good land) and Lafourche (the fork) Parishes (Curry, 1979). In order to survive the influx of European and Acadian settlers, Houmas sought refuge in the southeastern Louisiana marshland of those parishes, where they continued to live in relative isolation until the early 1900s.

The United States used two colonizing strategies in order to prevent the neighboring “domestic dependent” nations from receiving entitled allotments or maintaining their claims to traditional lands. It is important to note that the Office of Indian Affairs, initially located within the War Department, formulated educational policies, and in turn its hidden school curricula, based on these colonizing strategies

(Taylor, 1984). In order to be eligible for an allotment, individuals had to prove that they were indeed, part of an indigenous nation. Responsibility for ensuring this task was left up to individual federal agents (Churchill, 2001). In practice, potential allottees had to demonstrate that they possessed no less than one-half degree of blood of the specific group in which they wanted to be tribally enrolled. What resulted with this institutional policy of eugenics is that it denied not only one-third to two-thirds the eligibility of receiving allotments of land, but also federal recognition to citizens of indigenous nations (Churchill, 2001). By denying their national identity, the federal government was no longer required to negotiate with the indigenous people as a sovereign nation, or economically as a ward of the United States. Indigenous communities who internalized such racist colonial policies disenfranchised tribal members who did not meet the minimum blood quantum necessary to be deemed a citizen of their nation (Churchill, 2001). One wonders how much “American” blood individuals currently need to be deemed citizens of the United States.

The Federal government implemented a second strategy of assimilation in order to transform indigenous nations into an “obedient” colonized and civilized culture. If the United States could melt the “foreign” indigenous citizens into the larger colonizing society theoretically they would no longer be forced to negotiate any land claims with, or grant education funding to, such “domestic dependent” nations in the future. Therefore, during and after the era of allotment, the federal government took it upon itself to further dissolve indigenous nations by implementing educational policies that functioned to redesign the infrastructure of indigenous families and their respective languages, cultures, and ways of knowing. Even so, initial attempts “to teach children English, Christianity,

and the moral superiority of a clean life of honest labor were constantly undermined by the so-called bad influences of family and tribe” (Lomawaima, 1994, p. 3). The United States’ solution to their “Indian problems,” among other things, was to separate children from their families and send them to off-reservation boarding schools where school officials attempted to teach indigenous youth how to become complicit citizens of the foreign occupying nation. In the next section, I further elaborate on this second colonial strategy by examining the Carlisle Industrial School, an educational “prison camp” created by Captain Pratt, who supported curricular policies of cultural assimilation in order to “civilize” the future “savage” inequalities of “indigenous children.”

Establishing Educational Prison Camps: The Carlisle Industrial School

America’s desire to control knowledge, to exclude heterogeneous, and to assure a particular kind of being-in-the-world depends upon a total appropriation and internalization of this colonized space, and to achieve that end, America must make the heterogeneous Native somehow assimilable and concomitantly erasable.

(Owens, 2001, p. 18)

The concept of cultural genocide, or ethnocide...refers to measures taken by the oppressor group to stamp out indigenous culture and its social institutions.

(Lobo & Talbot, 2001, p. 186)

In 1879, youth from various indigenous nations arrived at the Republic of America’s first indigenous boarding school (educational prison camp) in Carlisle Pennsylvania. Not including missionary schools, the Carlisle School was the first educational institution

used by the United States to culturally assimilate its neighboring indigenous nations' children (Lomawaima, 1994). The initial school buildings were the remnants of an old colonial post built by the British Army 130 years earlier, and later used by the US cavalry (Cooper, 1999). With no formal training in education, Captain Pratt, the schools' director, enforced a curriculum that promoted the belief "that the sooner all tribal relations were broken up and the sooner Indians lost all their old ways, even language...the better their lives would be" (Cooper, 1999, p. 22). Students who arrived at the school were stripped, quite traumatically, of their long hair, traditional clothes, names, and in turn, of their indigenous national identities.

Pratt's philosophy of assimilation grew out of his command experiences with the Buffalo soldiers, a military unit comprised of African-Americans, trained to hunt down so-called "renegade" tribes (Cooper 1999).

In Pratt's mind the Negro furnished the example. Slavery transplanted him from his native habitat and tribal affiliation into a new cultural environment, where he had to adapt to a new language, new dress, and new customs. As a result, in a span of several generations he had been shorn of his primitivism and elevated to American citizenship. Pratt believed profoundly that as the Negro had been civilized, so could the Indian be civilized. (Utley, 1964, quoted by Lomawaima, 1994, p. 4)

Pratt's curriculum of cultural assimilation quickly became the educational practice for many occupying government officials, boarding school bureaucrats, and teachers. Captain Pratt's military training influenced the disciplined regimentation of students within off-reservation boarding schools. "These forms of discipline," Smith (1999) writes, "were supported by paternalistic and racist policies and legislation; they were accepted by white communities as necessary conditions which had to be met if

indigenous people wanted to become citizens (of their own lands)” (p. 69). Students spent half their days in classrooms, and the other half laboring in the kitchens, laundries, sewing rooms, and caring for the schools maintenance and livestock (Lomawaima, 1994). Many of the attending students covertly and overtly resisted the colonial pedagogies, which implemented a disciplined vocational curriculum of cultural assimilation (Lomawaima, 2002).

Pratt’s successes at the Carlisle School prompted the American government to open more boarding schools with similar curricular policies. “By 1899,” Lomawaima (1994) maintains, “twenty-four off-reservation boarding schools were in operation, with an average daily attendance overall of 6,263 students” (p. 6). During the Depression, off-reservation boarding schools reached their zenith in the United States. For indigenous people, enrollment in mission, federal boarding, and public schools was both voluntary and involuntary (Lomawaima, 2002). At the end of the 1920s until after WWII, several actors within the Progressive Education Movement were able to influence and change some of the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ educational policies (see Szasz, 1999). In 1928, after the publication of the Meriam Report and its scathing evaluations of the existing U.S. Indian policies and educational facilities, federal officials attempted to promote and implement culturally appropriate curricula in off-reservation schools (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). However, the move towards implementing such changes was slow, if not, non-existent in many indigenous communities such as the United Houma Nation.

Many indigenous nations recognized “the value of colonial education as a training ground for successful relations with Euro-American governments and citizens” (Lomawaima, 2002, p. 423). But the question remains for some indigenous nations, was

such success worth the assimilating costs? Indeed, the “success” of this mainstreaming and civilizing vocational era produced tradesmen not scholars, welders not lawyers, and barbers not teachers and indigenous intellectuals (Cook-Lynn, 2001). What it did produce was more land and another source of (enslaved) cheap human capital needed to fuel the United States’ growing industrial economy. Due to their isolation and federal non-recognition, Houma children were not removed from their families, and in turn, sent to government boarding schools. Nor were their children directly affected by the espoused curriculum at the Carlisle off-reservation boarding school. Nonetheless, in the next section, I examine how institutional discrimination denied Houma children access to public education and, thus, facilitated the continual theft of traditional lands, as well as diminished their capacity to challenge the judicial language of the colonizers.

Instituting Policies of Racial Discrimination in Louisiana

Their exclusion from white public schools ranks second only to their loss of their traditional lands in the emotions stirred within carriers of the Houma traditions today.

(Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982, p. 31)

What is needed is a critical examination of the institutions that surround all of us, Indians and whites, with racist strategies.

(Cook-Lynn, 2001, p. 167)

In the larger context of the United States’ educational policies towards indigenous nations, there was an increasing emphasis on educating (culturally assimilating) their youth in the ways of the dominant society, a trend consolidated by the 1880s. However,

within the geographically and racially segregated Louisiana landscape, a significantly different story developed. Unlike other indigenous nations in America, who suffered the colonizing violence of boarding schools, the Houma did not suffer any “official” movement to establish publicly funded schools in Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes until the 1940s. For the Houma, the Louisiana State apparatus dictated policies of educational exclusion through the infamous Jim Crow policies of racial segregation. These institutional policies of discrimination, among other things, prevented individuals categorized as non-white in the South from attending white public schools. Like the African-American communities in Louisiana, Houma children experienced what Packard (2002) calls the American Nightmare.

According to most southern States’ racial policies, if one had one sixty-fourth African heritage “running” through one’s veins, one was considered of colored descent (Miller, 2004). In the early 1800s, Curry (1979) explains, census marshals first classified Houmas as “...illiterate swamp Cajuns...” who were “...strangely intelligent for all their apparent ignorance” (p. 19). Later, in the mid-1800s, census marshals confusedly identified Houmas as Indians, Negroes, or Mulattos. During this latter period, “one’s race was,” Curry (1979) maintains, “determined by what appeared on one’s birth certificate, which was in turn determined by whoever signed it” (p. 19). In one specific family, the children were “classed as white, black, and Indian. Eventually all were changed to Indian due to the insistence of the family” (Curry, 1979, p. 19).

This historical example illustrates not only the arbitrariness of racial classification based on visual identification policies of color but also the power such classification held and, correspondingly, the power held by those in positions of authority to assign race.

What resulted from this institutional and hierarchal classification system of race was the arbitrary exclusion of many Houma children from white public schools in Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes. As a result, many families relocated to cities, like New Orleans, where their children could “pass as white,” and therefore, attend white schools. The eugenic ways in which the United States census officials as well as anthropologists constructed social and cultural categories continues to haunt the United Houma Nation’s current petition for federal recognition (see Davis, 2001, 2004; Campisi, 2004; Fischer, 1968; Parenton & Pellegrin, 1950; Roy, 1959; Stanton, 1979).

At one point there was a school, on Point au Barre east of Bayou Terrebonne, which Houma children and whites attended until 1910. The school’s demise is unknown (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982). In 1917, when Houma parents such as Henry Billiot presented petitions or filed lawsuits for their children to attend the so-called white public schools, both the local school boards and the court systems denied them access. The “school board argued that they could not legally be admitted because they were not of the white race,” hence reinforcing the South’s segregation policies (Bowman and Curry-Roper, 1982, p. 32). Citing State law the local court system ruled that the children could not attend white public schools due to their “mixed” ancestry. The Louisiana Supreme Court dismissed the case stating that there already existed an Indian school in the area, but, unfortunately for the Billiotics, it was four miles away. Henry Billiot’s case was the first formal recorded assault, Bowman and Curry-Roper (1982) assert, on the white establishment’s anti-Indian policies. No other legal challenge was put forth until 1963.

Meanwhile, the local public school system’s superintendents told the Houma communities to send their children to the “negro schools.” Houma parents refused to send

their children, for racial and economic reasons, to the poorly funded African-American schools in Terrebonne Parish. Although *Plessy v. Ferguson* stated separate but equal, schools were separate, but not equal (Ravitch, 2000). Between 1917 and the 1940s, Houma community leaders, with fervor, persistently petitioned local school boards to allow their children access to white public schools, where the State provided “qualified” teachers (a relative term) and the necessary funding to buy educational resources. A major educational figure opposing their entrance to Terrebonne Parish’s white public school system was superintendent H. L. Bourgeois. In his 1938 master’s thesis, Bourgeois clearly expresses the racist sentiments of the day towards the parents and children of the Houma community.

Bourgeois’s thesis examines four decades of public education in Terrebonne Parish beginning with the 1890s and ending with the late 1930s. Most of the thesis details the limited funding provided for whites and blacks within the rural educational system in Terrebonne Parish. One chapter is titled the “So-Called Indians.” Bourgeois (1938) begins by stating, the “school board has made constant efforts to provide instruction for every white and colored child falling under its jurisdiction” (p. 69). However, Bourgeois (1938) maintains, “there is one group of the population, the so-called Indians of Terrebonne Parish, that has not responded to the board’s offer of educational advantage. They have resisted every effort made for the schooling of their children, except under the most ridiculous conditions” (p. 69). Surely, Houma parents asking for public schooling facilities, with qualified teachers and sufficient educational resources, was not a ridiculous condition for their children’s education.

It is conceivable that Bourgeois's administration lacked the necessary funding to open new schools due to the economic crisis created during the Depression. Nonetheless, throughout his tenure, Bourgeois continued to disavow the Houmas' indigenous identity as a nation, as well as their United States citizenship (Bourgeois, 1938; Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982). "They call themselves Indian," Bourgeois (1938) states,

... and claim a social status comparable to that of the white man. But, as a matter of fact, they are not Indians. They are the descendants of that union the Indian and the free *gens de couleur* of many generations back, with large infusions of white blood. **They are pariahs.** They disdain contact with the Negroes, and they find the doors of the whites closed against them. Consequently they thrust themselves into an imaginary racial zone standing midway between the whites and the blacks [emphasis added]. (p. 69-70)

Earlier in the thesis, Bourgeois (1938) outlines the Cajuns (Acadians) initial arrival in Louisiana in the 1700s after their exile from Canada. It is important to note, the Catholic, French-speaking Cajuns also suffered institutional discrimination incurred after the Republic, consisting mostly of Protestant English colonizers, purchased Louisiana. "European settlers in the colonies," Smith (1999) explains, "were not culturally homogeneous, so there were struggles within the colonizing community about its own identity" (p. 23). Therefore, it is not surprising that a foreign settler, who traces his biographical genealogy to the descendants of a persecuted Acadian community to imagine identity categories that redrew former colonial and institutional policies of racial and cultural discrimination.

What remains elusive in Bourgeois's (1938) thesis is his capacity to imagine cultural and national categories of indigenous identities. Or to acknowledge the disdain he had for others categorized as nonwhite. In this instance, the colonizing settlers created

and utilized an institutionalized and racialized discourse to control the legitimization and disavowal of white and nonwhite, civilized and uncivilized, Indian and non-Indian categories (Thomas, 1994; Smith, 1999). Bourgeois's thesis illustrates that institutional discrimination was securely in place in Louisiana, and thus denied certain parts of the local population an equitable opportunity for a culturally appropriate education. At best, Houma children experienced a foreign curriculum implemented by an occupying American nation.

On December 11, 1931, Charles J. Roads, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs received a letter from Roy Nash depicting his visit with the United Houma Nation and their dire educational circumstances.

These are all mixed bloods. French and Indian is the characteristic cross, a mixture which in Canada is considered pretty fine. But there is a five per cent which shows unmistakable Negro Blood, and that is where all the trouble lies. The whites will not admit any of the Indian mixed breeds to their schools because of the possibility of admitting someone with a few drops of colored blood; the "Indians" will not attend the colored schools. The result is that none of those with Indian blood attend any school whatever. (Nash 1931, quoted in Downs & Whitehead, 1976, p. 3)

During his visit, the Terrebonne parish school board acknowledged these circumstances and agreed to establish an Indian school the following fall. Furthermore, the State's school board officials promised to use their influence towards establishing schools for these "social outcasts" (Nash, 1931, p.3). Although the school board made the necessary budgetary amendments on paper the following year to open three schools, "no teachers were hired" and "no schools were opened" (Bowman and Curry-Roper, 1982, p. 35). Throughout the 1930s local congressmen and school superintendents continuously

corresponded with the Office of Indian Affairs and petitioned the Federal government for financial aid (see Downs & Whitehead, 1976, pp. 4-6).

Under FDR's New Deal, the Johnson-O'Malley Act of 1934 "authorized the secretary of the interior to enter into contracts with states and territories to pay them for providing services to Indians rather than having to deal with each school district individually, as had been done since 1891" (Reyhner & Eder, 2004, p. 225). However, State and Federal governments refused to categorize the Houma settlement of the Louisiana landscape as a federally recognized indigenous nation. As a result, Commissioner Roads refused to place the responsibility for Indian education in Louisiana squarely on the shoulders of the federal government.

A main objective in the work of the Federal government for the Indian is to bring him to the point where he can stand on his own feet in whatever community his lot happens to lie.

...Without Federal aid the Indians of Louisiana exist, free of the handicaps of wardship; to impose wardship upon them would be to turn the clock backward.

...we do not believe that for the Federal government to assume jurisdiction over the Indians of Louisiana today would be any kindness to these Indians [original emphasis].
(Roads quoted in Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982, p. 35)

Previously, we saw how designating certain warring and non-warring indigenous nations as wards enabled the United States to displace, appropriate (steal) land, construct reservations of surveillance, separate children from parents, and institute a military vocational curriculum of cultural assimilation. On the surface, the Johnson-O'Malley Act seems like a progressive change in attitudes towards indigenous nations, but the administrators' colonial and institutional policies remained the same. Surely, providing educational aid to the "tax paying" United Houma Nation did not necessarily mean that

they would have to become a “domestic dependent” of the United States. Apparently, using the term “ward” was a convenient categorization for appropriating (stealing) indigenous land, while at the same time, denying the Houma an equitable access to public education.

During 1934, the federal government provided \$920 in emergency relief to cover the labor costs the Board said would be incurred to build a one-room Indian school. Although Bourgeois agreed to build the school that year on Bayou Pointe-Aux-Chenes near the border of Lafourche Parish, the building was not built for many years (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982, p. 40-41). On October 6, 1937 and again on August 20, 1940 the School Board’s reports show no school was built. Not until November 1941 do the Board’s records report a school operating for Indian students in Terrebonne Parish (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982, p. 41). “Most federal funds,” Szasz (1999) notes, “including both Johnson-O’Malley money and the money made available through legislations in the 1950s and 1960s, were used in the general school budgets and often affected non-Indian pupils more than Indians” (p. 6). Where did Superintendent Bourgeois spend the federal funding allocated to build the much-needed Indian school? According to Bowman and Curry-Roper (1982), throughout the 1930s Bourgeois repeatedly denied the indigenous identity of the Houmas as a “so-called Indian” nation, and forestalled their access to the Louisiana systems of education. A year after Bourgeois published his 1938 thesis, a group of twenty indigenous students from different communities, some of whom were almost indistinguishable from white, were dismissed from the McDonell School in Houma (Speck, 1940, p. 13). Ironically, Bowman and

Curry-Roper (1982) footnote, one high school in Houma is named after Bourgeois and the mascot is an Indian brave.

Unlike other indigenous nations, the United Houma Nation did not resist the United States' occupation by declaring war. As a result, the federal government did not negotiate any treaties with them. But, if we recall, the United States did agree to uphold all treaties previously made under the Louisiana Purchase agreement (Dardar, 2002). Although Commissioner Roads supported a progressive curriculum for the existing American Indian education programs, when convenient, he continued to deny the necessary financial aid rightly due to indigenous nations still in the process of challenging their refusal to be recognized and the on-going theft of traditional lands.

Meanwhile, tribal activists like David Billiot continued to send letters petitioning government officials, including President Roosevelt, to restore stolen land and to provide public education for his children (Downs & Whitehead, 1976, p. 8). With institutional policies of discrimination securely in place, the ongoing debates regarding financial responsibilities between municipal, state and federal governments, and the contestation of the authenticity of the Houmas' claim to an ancestral Indian identity, no schools were opened for their children in Terrebonne parish until the 1940s. Although the public school board refused to provide schools for its local "tax paying" Indian population, various church organizations did offer private schools, as we shall see in the next section.

Recruiting God's Children: Indian Missionary Schools

Missionaries sought to Christianize, civilize, and assimilate Indians into European culture.

(Reyhner & Eder, 2004, p. 15)

It has been said of missionaries that when they arrived they had only the Book and we had the land; now we have the Book and they have the land.

(Deloria Jr., 1969/1988, p. 101)

The Church in the colonies is the white people's Church, the foreigner's Church.

(Fanon, 1963, p. 42)

In the previous section, we saw how the local school board officials used colonial strategies that refused the opening of public schools for Houma children. Despite such systematic discrimination, various Christian—Catholic, Baptist and Methodist—institutions opened up private schools (Roy, 1959). There is, however, little historical documentation of the establishment of the various parochial schools in Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes and, in turn, of the Houmas' experiences within such institutions. Did the Houmas petition local church organizations to open up schools? Or did such institutions take it upon themselves to provide a place of education for Houma children? What was daily life like at those schools? Such questions remain relatively unanswered within the existing scholarly literature. Although the scope of this dissertation does not address these historical questions in detail, I do provide oral histories in chapter three and four that testify to some Houmas' educational experiences outside and inside the parochial schools in Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes. According to one elder within the United Houma Nation community, Houma parents asked the Catholic Church to open schools for their children.⁴ However, without funding from the school board, the Catholic

Church initially refused to provide private schools for Indian children in Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes (Roy, 1959).

A former chairman of the United Houma Nation during the 1980s, and currently a Methodist preacher who is also head of the Indian Education program in Terrebonne parish, Kirby Verret explained that the Catholic Church did not want to initially spend its funds to open new schools for the Houma children. The church was more interested in maintaining its policies of conversion, which it could continue to do at Sunday masses, rather than educating the local indigenous communities in the “literature of dominance” necessary to challenge the colonizer’s colonial land policies (Vizenor, 1994).

During an interview at the American Indian Education office in Houma, Kirby Verret reported how the Catholic Church played a role in colonizing his Indian identity by allocating him a baptismal “Saint Name.” Often, the Church denied Houma parents the authority to name their children, and thereby negated their prerogative to name the reality of their indigenous world and respective ways of knowing. The public ownership of naming was also taken away from the Houma community when the colonial empires, Spanish, French, British, and American redrew territories and renamed the bayous, rivers, and towns that marked the land still inhabited by indigenous peoples (Smith, 1999). By implementing colonial strategies of renaming the landscape, occupying nations were able to redraw their national boundaries of material and cultural ownership.

Currently, many Houma members do not go by their baptismal names. Kirby Verret’s baptismal name is Cyril but people in the community call him by his given nickname, Kirby. Although the church has attempted to tattoo its “western spirit” onto Houma language with the discursive system of baptismal naming, Houma individuals

have resisted such practices of negation by responding to their nicknames used orally throughout the community, often known only by family members. Like the government's renaming and re-appropriating of the land, baptismal naming is another strategy for claiming ownership—ownership in the name of an instituted religion over one's identity. Yet at the same time, members of the Houma community have appropriated the lived curriculum of various religious denominations in order to celebrate spiritual relationships with the more-than-human world.

Outside the Church walls, local white communities referred to Houmas and, in some instances, still do as “Sabines.” Although there is a Sabine River in Louisiana, it is not clear within the existing literature, how the use of the word originated or was later assigned as a derogatory label that disavowed the United Houma Nation's national identity (Parenton & Pellegrin, 1950). Institutional control over such labeling helped maintain the racial categories socially constructed by the local Acadian communities in Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes, and later by anthropologists who conducted research on the Houma people (Davis, 2001; Fischer, 1968; Stanton, 1979; Roy, 1959). The word itself helped descendents of colonizers objectify and reduce Houma people to a “thing,” a non-human status, and thereafter implement institutional policies, which continue to deny indigenous nations, like the Houma, appropriation of former communal lands.

During the American Indian Movement (AIM) of the 1970s, Mrs. Gindrat, chairwoman of the Houma Nation Inc. told the following story about the local Catholic Church's “Christian policies” of institutional discrimination.

In those days, people bought pews for their family. Indian families did not have the money to buy pews. So they stood at the back. But my parents owned a local grocery and trucking business in Golden Meadow, and they were able to

buy a pew. When my parents and our family showed up in the pew that we paid for...the priest did not like that. In fact, he wanted to give my mother the money back. But my mother said, 'My money is as good as anyone else is in this church.' And so we sat in our pew.⁵

Even the cemeteries were segregated (Roy, 1959). Like public educational institutions, the church had its own curriculum of discrimination (Crow Dog, 1991; Deloria Jr., 1969/1988; and Smith, 1999). It was not until Methodist and Baptist denominations provided schools that Houma children were able to receive an education (Fischer, 1968; Roy, 1959). Eventually, afraid of losing their congregations, the Catholic Church further petitioned the local school board, and later opened up schools in Terrebonne Parish.

In 1922, the Methodist church began its evangelistic efforts within the Houma community at Dulac (Roy, 1959, p. 57). A Methodist mission school was established for the Houma children in an old dance hall during the year of 1932 (Curry, 1979). "Miss Wilhemina Hooper," Curry (1979) reports, "the Methodist teacher, bought a house and moved the school to it in 1933 and continued to do social work in the area" until the late 1970s (p. 22). By the late 1930s, there were four church-related schools: Baptist schools in Pointe-Aux-Chenes and Dularge, and Methodist schools in Dulac and the Falgout community on Bayou Dularge (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982, p. 41). With the help of the Methodist Church, the Houmas purchased 45 acres of land, of no value to the oil industry (Curry, 1979). In order for their children to attend these schools, many tribal members converted from Catholicism to either Methodist or Baptist faith, depending on where they resided and which school was available.

In 1939, parochial efforts increased, "with the advent of a boat school sponsored by the Baptist on Bayou Grand Caillou," a school on the Lower Bayou Terrebonne, and

in a “Catholic church building at the end of the road in Pointe-Aux-Chenes” (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982, p. 41). Catholic schools such as St. Isaac Jogues School (formerly called the St. Charles Church) at Bayou Pointe-Aux-Chenes, and a houseboat on lower Bayou Terrebonne opened in 1940. The parish school board paid for the salary of the teacher at St. Isaac Jogues School (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982, p. 44).

According to Roy (1959), the Methodist mission program was a dynamic school that had, by far, the most dedicated schoolteachers within the Houma community. Mrs. George Deforest and Miss Wilhelmina Hooper, Roy (1959) stresses, “...labored month after month doing educational, social, and religious work. Education was for all Indians regardless of religious belief” (p. 57). In 1936, Miss Mary Beth Littlejohn replaced Mrs. Deforest. The school board records indicated that 262 Indian students attended the mission school by 1938 (Roy, 1959). The schoolteachers and administration complained to Superintendent Bourgeois regarding the overpopulation at the school, as well as the lack of necessary staff and administrative support of the school board (Roy, 1959).

Despite the lack of funding, due to the teachers’ empathy and dedication, there was limited success with students at the school (Roy, 1959). Although the Houma children could only receive a grade seven and later grade eight education, Roy (1959) reports, that one student under Miss Wilhelmina Hooper’s tutelage was able to study with the Armed Forces in England during World War II and then gain forty hours of credit at Cambridge University. Another student, under the Methodist mission scholarship fund went on to become valedictorian at Vashti High School in Thomasville Georgia. The student hoped to go onto the National College in Kansas City in order to become an elementary school teacher. Throughout its existence the Methodist school continued, Roy

(1959) writes, to raise the necessary funds to send Houma students, who were willing to go to an affiliated private high school in Georgia.

Meanwhile, in 1939, Superintendent Bourgeois approved four schools to be opened: 1) on Isle de Jean Charles, 2) on Bayou Terrebonne below Montegut, 3) on Bayou Grand Caillou and 4) on Bayou Du-Large. Bowman and Curry-Roper (1982) explain that each of the schools was to operate for a session of eight months. The teacher's salary was set at fifty dollars a month. Although the school board record detailed the Lower Montegut Indian School's opening at the beginning of the 1942-1943 school year, it is unclear within the available board documents and oral histories, whether the remaining three schools authorized on paper ever materialized (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982, p. 42). Or possibly, the other three schools were so short-lived that the Houma elders who went to such schools cannot remember attending (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982).

Just before the 1941 school year, Rev. Abel Caillouet requested that the school board provide transportation for students to attend the Dulac Catholic Indian School (Bowman & Curry-Roper, p. 44). Yet, the school board refused to provide the necessary transportation. The board explained to State and Federal authorities that Indian parents remained adamant about their children's integration into the white public schools and, therefore, continued to refuse any attendance at segregated public schools, as well as the private parochial schools.

Many students had to walk or paddle in their pirogues four to seven miles just to attend the Catholic school in Lower Terrebonne parish (Curry-Roper, 1982). A census collected at that time by an appointed school board committee placed the number of

Indian children of educable age within the Terrebonne parish at 526. Of those children, 345 were registered in the aforementioned private parochial schools. However, there remained 155 students who did not receive the benefit of any education (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982, p. 45). Arguing that such prospective students should seek out the existing (poorly funded) parochial schools, Bourgeois and the school board refused to meet its educational obligations towards the remaining Indian children.

During his reign as Superintendent, as I iterated before, Bourgeois enforced educational policies that denied Houma children the necessary education to negotiate the difficult terrain of colonialism's culture. Furthermore, and not surprisingly, Willard Beatty, Director of Indian Education for the Office of Indian Affairs, filed in his reports at the U.S. Department of the Interior, that less than half the number of Indian children reported by the appointed committee were actually attending the church sponsored schools (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982).

In 1945, in order to convert the Houmas who were dissatisfied with the Methodists segregated worship seating, the Catholic Church opened a school, Chapel Cure D'Ars, two miles below Dulac (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982; Roy, 1959). A Baptist mission school opened up in 1948 on Isle de Jean Charles; this event inaugurated the first sustained period in which Houma children did not have to travel by pirogue to Pointe-Aux-Chenes in order to receive an education. The jurisdiction of the mission school was transferred later to the Lafourche school board (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982). Religious institutions continued to provide education throughout the 1950s until local authorities were forced by the Federal government and court authorities to integrate their schools. Although religious institutions and their respective missionaries provided a

place of education for the Houmas, within church services, they also reproduced the dominant culture's policies of racial segregation. After losing many Houmas from their congregations, various Churches discontinued such practices of racial segregation.

It is important to look at the colonial relationship between the Church and the Houma community with "complicated eyes" (Pinar, 2004, p. 114). According to Corine Paulk, who attended the Methodist missionary school in Dulac, there were women like Wilhemina Hooper within the Church, sympathetic (and not empathetic) to the dire educational situation of Houma adults and children, and their illiteracy, or better yet legitimacy, in the colonizer's language.⁶ However, for the most part, the teaching provided within the rural missionary schools was inferior when compared to the textbooks, curricula, and pedagogical practices used by qualified teachers in the public school system (Roy, 1959). Although missionary schools worked to assimilate and convert the Houma community to practice a specific instituted literacy of religion, it also provided indigenous adults and children an educational space to learn, and thus appropriate, the colonizer's colonial language.

During the 1930s, Woodrow Difilice, the Lafourche Parish Superintendent, helped open the first publicly funded Indian Settlement School below the corporate limits of Golden Meadow. However, many teachers lacked the proper qualifications, and remained unempathetic to the dire circumstances of the Houmas' educational, economic, and cultural situation (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982). Meanwhile, the Terrebonne Parish school board did not establish public segregated Indian Schools until 1944. Nonetheless, Houma parents continuously petitioned the local school board officials, such as Bourgeois, to open publicly funded schools for their children. Let us turn our

attention towards the historical establishment of Indian Settlement Schools in the next section.

Establishing Indian Settlement Schools in Louisiana

The missionary schools were so successful that the public schools only theoretically existed and remained so until the fall of 1944.

(Roy, 1959, p. 56)

Native students and parents frequently protested the low academic standards of the Indian schools, and limited job opportunities after graduation, but to little avail.

(Lomawaima, 2002, p. 430)

As we saw, Superintendent Bourgeois relied on parochial schools to fulfill the public school board's obligation towards the local tax paying Houma community in Terrebonne Parish. In 1940, with mounting pressure from the State and Federal governments, Bourgeois capitulated and agreed to support a private Catholic School at the lower end of Bayou Pointe-Aux-Chenes, and provided the necessary funds to pay a teacher to teach. As long as the local catholic priest, Henry C. Bezou, could find a "girl" with a high school diploma willing to teach, the Houmas could have their own school (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982, p.34). However, the first *public* Indian school was not opened until 1941 in Bayou Terrebonne (Roy, 1959).

During 1942-1943, the Lower Montegut Indian School was established. Although the opening of such schools is documented within the Terrebonne Parish school board records, the actuality of such openings remain debated within the existing anthropological

and historical literature (see Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982; Fischer, 1968; Roy, 1959). “It was not until the fall of 1944,” Roy (1959) maintains, “that public education was made available to the Indian” population in Terrebonne Parish (p. 58). Most of the teachers in the missionary schools were not certified by the Louisiana Department of Education. Aware of such separate and unequal educational realities, Houma parents continued to petition local authorities, the State, and Federal governments for access to an equally funded public education system with “qualified” teachers.

The Catholic Church in Dulac provided a hall for a public Indian school to be opened in 1944. Two Acadian girls who had only attained a high school education were hired to teach at the school (Roy, 1959). Nevertheless the teachers were not able to “control” the students. As a result, the school board hired Mrs. Ezelle Dillard in 1946 to act as the principal and end the non-compliance by (i.e., resistance of) Indian students to the non-indigenous outsiders’ curriculum and forms of colonial discipline (Roy, 1959, p. 59). “A local historian and former school teacher” on Isle de Jean Charles during the 1930s, Mrs. Ledet explained that teachers sent to the Indian communities in Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes, “were not prepared for the cultural uniqueness of the area and did not understand the Indian people” (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982, p. 48). Cooks at a neighboring white public school “reluctantly” provided free lunches for students at the newly opened Dulac Indian school (Roy, 1959). Enrollment at the school during the 1950-1951 year was 106 Indian students.

The school remained in the Church hall until 1953, but not without conflict. In 1951, Father Boudreaux learned that the hall would not be rented for that school year. At

a school board meeting, Boudreaux demanded that Bourgeois continue to financially support the school in the hall and assume its maintenance responsibilities.

Board minutes show that the superintendent and the cleric traded verbal barbs before the board voted to acquire land and to construct a four-room school for Indian children on the site. Despite opposition of three board members, a resolution was also passed to rent the Catholic Church hall until the new building was completed. Target date was January 21, 1952 and target site was near the Dulac Bridge, some 3.5 miles south of the white school. (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982, p. 49)

During the summer of 1953, both the Methodist mission and school board coordinated their efforts, albeit not without further conflict, to establish a building for the Dulac Indian School. Five classrooms, Roy (1959) notes, and a kitchen made up the new school. Four teachers were employed to teach that fall semester. In 1954, he continues, the enrollment was 166 Indian students by the end of May.

That same year the Methodist mission school closed. As a result, Bourgeois asked for a four-room expansion in order to accommodate the 100 students who attended the former parochial school (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982). The teaching staff was increased to seven teachers and then again to nine in 1955 (Roy, 1959). The next year the student population overwhelmed school staff and resources. Another teacher was hired and the principal's office was turned into a classroom.

The Dulac Indian School's student population continued to grow exponentially each year. In 1957, the Dulac school attendance, reached a crisis, having seventy-five students too many (Roy, 1959). That year the African-American community received a new brick building for their school. In order to accommodate the extra students, the board suggested moving the students to the now vacant two-room wooden building (the former

African-American school). The building was located in the African American community. “The Indians were very opposed,” Roy (1959) suggests, “to their children ‘going to a Negro school’” (p. 60). Once again missionary workers interceded and helped the principals of the two schools keep the peace.

In 1958, the Dulac Indian school was remodeled. The building added six more classrooms, a large dining hall, and restrooms (Roy, 1959). The grounds were extended in order to allow for a physical education program. The staff consisted of thirteen teachers and one principal. The school taught grades one through eight. That year 274 students attended the school. The school board, Roy (1959) explains, moved the former African-American school to Houma, where it was used as a high school for the non-recognized Indians of Terrebonne Parish. A second missionary school, further up the bayou from Dulac in the community of Ashland, was taken over by the school board in 1953 and had enrolled seventy-six students by 1958 (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982). Other mission schools within Terrebonne Parish later became segregated public Indian schools. Kirby Verret remembers attending the Baptist elementary school in lower Dularge. In 1955, with federal pressure on the local school board, that same school became the Lower Dularge Public Indian School.⁷

In 1936, Mrs. Hilda Naquin’s mother, who was Houma, sold a piece of land to the Lafourche school board in order for her community to obtain a public Indian school.⁸ After four years of lobbying, the local school board finally provided a much-needed two-room building on that land for the community’s children. There is little written historical documentation about the Golden Meadow Indian Settlement School in the existing

literature. In chapter four, I examine daily life at the school through the voices of students who attended, as well as some of the teachers who taught there.

Roy (1959) suggests that white schools in Lafourche and St. Mary parishes allowed Indian students to attend. However, according to Bowman and Curry-Roper's (1982) collection of oral histories, many members of the Houma community were also denied access to that same public schooling system. The limited amount of students who did gain access encountered racist faculty and students (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982). As a result of such institutional racism, many of those students did not drop out, but were rather, as Dance (2002) makes clear in her study of inner-city African American adolescent males, "pushed out" of the public school system. What remains unclear in the scholarly literature is why some students were accepted, and others denied.

Although some Houma children could attend segregated Indian schools after the 1940s, many were restricted to a grade seven or eight education. In the eyes of the indigenous community, these separate but unequal schools continued to employ unqualified teachers, many of whom remained unempathetic towards the dire educational and economic situation of the Houma people. After graduating from such schools, students were further denied access to the educational benefits of studying the "capitalist culture" reproduced within white public high schools (Foley, 1994). Therefore, some students had to leave their parishes, State, local communities, and families, in order to attend high school. This practice was also not uncommon among African-American communities. The few who had disposable income were sometimes tutored at home. It was not until an enforced federal integration of the Louisiana educational system in the 1950s and 1960s that Houma students were given access, in theory, to the colonizer's

public high schools, and in turn, colonialism's "cultural capital" (Dance, 2002). Yet, as we shall see in the next section, institutional racism functioned to deny and delay access during and after the initial phase of integrating racially segregated public schools.

Denying and Delaying Entrances to Colonialism's Educational Forts

They have sought a social or racial parity with the white through the acceptance of their children in the white schools. Their constant demands for their inclusion in the white schools, their never ceasing visits to the office of the school board, have been odysseys of woe for themselves and the parish officials.

(Bourgeois, 1938, p. 73)

Throughout the 1950s, Houma parents continued to petition local school board authorities to grant their children access to white public schools that were geographically closer to their children, had qualified teachers, and enjoyed access to the available educational resources. Until 1954, segregation continued statewide including in Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes.

"On May 17, 1954," Packard (2002) explains, "the most important legal social ruling in American history was announced to a nation many understood was approaching the edge of a racial abyss" (p. 232). In this historical case, the plight of a young African-American girl who was forced to ride a bus five miles in order to attend a black school instead of being free to attend the white school only four blocks away was presented to nine Supreme Court judges (Packard, 2002). Yet the larger issue within the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, Packard (2002) continues,

was the damage perpetrated in the name of white supremacy against millions of American children: damage from ill-

trained teachers, from lack of school libraries, from patently inferior school buildings to which black [and Houma] children were required to walk great distances rather than being permitted to attend nearer white schools, from being made to sit in classrooms far more crowded than those used by their white contemporaries—and mostly, from being saturated with the belief that they weren't good enough, clean enough, or smart enough to join the 90 percent of children whose skin was not black. (pp. 232-233)

Soon after the *Brown v. Board* decision, the Supreme Court directed public schools to integrate with all deliberate speed. However, like other southern districts, the Terrebonne Parish school board dragged its feet and delayed its policies of desegregation to the tempo of a Cajun waltz. Unfortunately, the interpretation of “integration with all deliberate speed” was left up to local school boards. Instead of immediately implementing integration, on September 8th of 1958, four years after the Supreme Court decision, the Terrebonne school board opened a segregated Indian high school in Houma (Roy, 1959, p. 61). The school offered the first ninth grade class to Indian students. A grade was added each year after the opening of the school until 1962.

Although the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling took place in 1954, the Houma did not gain access to public schools until after winning a legal challenge in 1964. In 1963, with the help of Dr. Anne Fischer, an anthropologist studying herbal medicines, and New Orleans attorney John P. Nelson, the Houma community began to construct their case against the public school systems instituted policies of racial discrimination (Fischer, 1968). That April, *Margie Naquin, et. al v. Terrebonne Parish* was filed with the U.S. District Court (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982). Fifty-five students who wanted to attend white public schools were named as plaintiffs in the case. After visiting the community on February 2, 1963, Attorney John Nelson agreed to take the lawsuit without

charging any fees (Fischer, 1968). After the opposition's numerous challenges to delay the case, Fischer (1968) maintains, the judge finally heard the plaintiffs ten months later. In 1964, the judge found in favor of the plaintiffs, Bowman and Curry-Roper (1982) explain, but handed down a phased plan for integration—grades 11 and 12 the first year, and 7 through 12 during the following years.

At first, many of the fifty-five Houma students chose not to attend the white public schools. In Terrebonne Parish, 22 students who did attend South Terrebonne High School as a result of the suit, experienced “unpleasant treatment at the hands of persons who exploited Indians” (Bowman & Curry-Roper, 1982, p. 50). After the Civil Rights Act in 1964, and the official desegregation of grades 7 through 12 in Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes, more students registered at white public elementary and secondary schools.

By the fall of 1964, some sixty children were admitted to six previously all-white schools (Fischer, 1968). Houma parents of future generations encouraged their children to attend the newly integrated schools. As a result, the Terrebonne School Board slowly closed the Indian Schools. In 1968, Rita Duthu Dion was the first student to graduate from an integrated Terrebonne Parish School (Faine & Bohlander, 1986). During the following years, the number of Houma students who registered at the integrated public schools continued to increase. However, many students dropped out due to economic reasons, or were “pushed out” due to the ongoing institutional discrimination.

On June 23, 1972, Richard Nixon signed into law the Indian Education Act. Part C of this new legislation, Szasz (1999) explains, amended the Adult Education Act, and “provided grants for adult-education projects, with preference to be given to Indian tribes,

institutions, and organizations” (p. 198). That same year the Houma community in Golden Meadow received its first federal grant for an adult education program. Houma communities in other parishes also received grants. In chapter five, I will examine in more detail the effects of the Indian Education Act (Title IV) on the United Houma Nation during the 1970s and through the present. Before discussing my research methodologies in the next chapter, let us briefly review the Louisiana historical institutional policies of racial discrimination shared in this chapter.

Decolonizing a Literature of Dominance

American Indian history is a field dominated by white, male historians who rarely ask or care what the Indians they study have to say about their work.

(Wilson, 1998, p. 23)

It is unfortunate that, in spite of the burgeoning body of work by Native writers, the greatest body of acceptable telling of the Indian story is still in the hands of non-Natives.

(Cook-Lynn, 1998, p.112)

In this chapter, we examined how the United States’ federal and state governments enforced judicial and educational policies that deprived indigenous communities of their children, homelands, natural resources, prosperity, languages, and self-determination. The colonizer’s curriculum of allotment and off-reservation boarding schools functioned to dispossess indigenous nations of their land and indigenous knowledge. Indigenous nations experienced, and continue to experience, the colonizer’s colonizing policies in

their own particular fashion depending on where each community was, and is, geographically situated. The ways in which indigenous identities are culturally and politically defined varies amongst and within different indigenous nations. Although the United Houma Nation did not experience off-reservation boarding schools, their land was systematically dispossessed, their access and capacity to self-determine their education was denied, and their national indigenous identity was, and still is, disavowed. Due to the colonizer's social constructions of their indigenous identity, the Houma experienced the institutional—Jim Crow—policies of discrimination projected onto communities categorized as nonwhites living in southern states.

The literature of the nonindigenous scholars reviewed in this chapter continues to disavow cultural and national indigenous identities (Bourgeois, 1938; Davis, 2001; Duncan, 1998; Fischer, 1968; Roy, 1959; Speck, 1940; Stanton, 1971). Nonindigenous researchers like Speck (1940) and Fischer (1968) did help the Houma gain access to the colonizer's public systems of education. Nonetheless, the eugenic ways in which they, other anthropologists, and ethnohistorians constructed social categories to define indigenous identities was, and still is, detrimental to the United Houma Nation's current petition for federal recognition (Campisi & Starna, 2004).

Most of the scholarly literature acknowledges the Houmas' past and current economic poverty is due to their denied access to the colonizer's system of education during the 1900s (Duncan, 1998; Faine & Bohlander 1986; Fischer, 1968; Stanton, 1979). Even so, such scholars fail to acknowledge that many Houma are economically poor due to the federal, state, and local authorities' complacency, when oil and gas industries, systematically cheated these indigenous communities out of their land and future profits

from mineral rights. Unfortunately, such interpretations of the Houmas' historical and national narratives are not part of the literature of dominance.

More recently, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has cited many of the scholars reviewed within this chapter in order to deny the United Houma Nation's Federal Recognition. However, much of the anthropological literature on the Houmas fails to acknowledge the historically situated limitations of the positivist "conceptual tools" used by previous anthropologists who studied indigenous communities (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972/1988, p. 3). How might a curriculum theorist situate and decolonize positivist curricula and pedagogies utilized by nonindigenous researchers to understand indigenous nations? In response to such a question, the following chapter examines a research praxis, which works towards decolonizing positivist ways of knowing.

Endnotes

1 Deconstructive work involves tracing genealogies, and uncovering the historical layers from which such concepts and their translations emerge, and thus are promised, and made possible through language. The United States, albeit not globally alone, continues to invest in a cultural, linguistic and economic capital which attempts to reproduce a common subject, with a common curriculum, and thus disseminates its empire through ideological apparatuses—juridical, educational, medical, religious, etc.—which makes the subject of deconstruction, and the deconstruction of the literature of dominance all the more pressing today. In "Privilege," Derrida (1990/2002) continues to work, without settling for a resolution, through the oppositions, paradoxes, and aporias of "*what is*," and "*what is not*" philosophy. Who has the "rights" to such philosophical institutions? In following such lines of questioning, *what are* and *what are not*, the "rights" of an indigenous subject? As First Nation peoples, what are the rights of access to the institutions which house a knowledge of citizenship, its language, and in turn one's en-title-ment to, the *right* to name and to *naming* one's rights?

Derrida (1990/2002) makes it clear that

...the title given (or refused) someone always supposes, and this is a circle, the title of a work, that is, an institution, which alone is entitled to give (or refuse) it. Only an institution (the title of the body entitled to confer titles) can give *someone* his or her title. (p. 4)

But who then, entitles an (colonizing) institution? It is presupposed, Derrida (1990/2002) explains, that institutions (philosophical, governmental, juridical, medical, educational, etc.) are already entitled to give someone his or her title. Institutions entitle themselves through an exemplary system, a system of circular examples, (which, through a tradition of Western logocentrism proves, offers proofs of its logic) originated, established, and privileged by an instituted foundation of *what is* and *what is not*.

Deconstruction, therefore, is a “questioning in the sense of search, exploration, reflectivity, rejection of all assumptions, not as an act of demolition, but as striving for awareness” of alterity, heading towards the possibility of otherness which resides at the marginal limits of such institutions (Eg ea-Kuehne, 1995, p. 299). Derrida (1992/2001) suggests that if you call deconstruction “...an ethics of affirmation, it implies that you are attentive to otherness, to the alterity of the other, to something new and other” (p. 180). How do “migrant and indigenous subjects” of deconstruction negotiate their (human) rights to name, of naming, their rights of otherness, their citizenship in the language of a colonizing other? How do the institutions of schooling and their languages work in the configurations of such entitlements? What knowledges are privileged and presupposed in (colonizing) educational institutions?

- 2 Smith (1999) explains that “indigenous peoples is a relatively recent term which emerged in the 1970s out of the struggles primarily of the American Indian Movement (AIM), and the Canadian Indian Brotherhood” (p. 7). “The term,” Smith (1999) continues, “has enabled the collective voices of colonized people to be expressed strategically in the international arena” (p. 7). Similarly, Alfred (1999) explains, “Indigenous brings together words, ideas, and symbols from different indigenous cultures to serve as tools for those involved in asserting nationhood. It does not, however, supplant the localized cultures of individual communities” (p. 88). Therefore, the terms indigenous or indigenism, their unifying vocabulary, provide a means for local indigenous communities to collectively confront non-indigenous governments.
- 3 For a more in depth discussion on the effects of these two Supreme Court decisions see *Acts of Rebellion*, and *The Nations Within*.
- 4 Interview conducted with Kirby Verret on February 22, 2002 at the Terrebonne Indian Education in Houma.
- 5 Interview with Helen Dardar Gindrat at the Grand Bois Intertribal Powwow in Bourg Louisiana on March 16, 2001.
- 6 Interview with Corrine Paulk, 2005, February.
- 7 Interview conducted with Mr. Verret on February 22, 2002 at the Terrebonne Indian Education in Houma.
- 8 Interview conducted with Laura Naquin Billiot, a former principal chief in the early 1990s, on March 22, 2002 at the Tribal Center in Golden Meadow.

Chapter 2: Understanding Houma Oral Histories

The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous vocabulary.

(Smith, 1999, p. 1)

Colonial-power-knowledge communicates particular cultural presuppositions that elevate Western knowledge as real knowledge while ignoring other knowledge.

(Doxtater, 2004, p. 619)

It is a late Monday afternoon in April. The spring's rain has let off, but only for a moment; the azaleas have finished blooming, and another term of teaching nears its end. The faint scent of magnolia outside is sweet and fresh. In relative isolation, I sit at my office desk on the third floor of Peabody Hall at Louisiana State University trying to shift my mindset from fieldwork to deskwork. I spent the past weekend in Raceland visiting with friends, setting up final interviews for next week at the Indian Settlement School in Golden Meadow, and working on the United Houma Nation's website.

Four years have passed since I arrived at Louisiana State University. In July 2001, I migrated to Baton Rouge to pursue a doctorate in curriculum theory. During my master's thesis at York University in Toronto, Canada, I focused on how one might understand autobiographically a curriculum of colonization and decolonization (Ng-A-Fook, 2001). At that time, I was partly interested in understanding a research method that interrogated institutional pedagogies and curricula and their respective reproductions of colonial knowledge and power. In this chapter, I continue to question how research

methodologies supported by institutional structures continue to reproduce colonialism's culture (Smith, 1999).

I established research relationships with the United Houma Nation during my first year at Louisiana State University. Personal relationships developed soon thereafter. I now realize that such relationships are perhaps inseparable while one conducts qualitative research with and within an indigenous community. During the spring term of 2002, I took my first anthropology course with Miles Richardson, where we studied the theoretical and practical underpinnings of various ethnographic methodologies (see Briggs, 1986; Foley, 1994; Tannen, 1989). "In theory," Lassiter (2000) explains, "ethnography has two purposes: (1) to elaborate cultural diversity through a close study of the so-called 'native point of view'; (2) is to provide a culturally informed critique of Self and Society (however situated)" (p. 603). My initial research relationship with the United Houma Nation emerged out of an ethnographic lens. Having said that, "the fundamental thesis of the anthropologist," Deloria (1969/1988) warns us, "is that people are objects for observation, people are then considered objects for experimentation, for manipulation, and for eventual extinction" (p. 81). When I first introduced myself to the Houma community, I was not aware of Deloria's critique of social science research, or the past and potential future ways in which its curriculum might function academically and politically to colonize indigenous communities. Although I went on to read articles and books, which discussed the limits and possibilities involved with ethnographic research, I lacked first-hand educational experiences with and, therefore, knowledge of establishing appropriate research relationships with indigenous communities. Can nonindigenous scholars ever?

As a graduate student steeped in postcolonial studies (Loomba, 1998; Spivak, 1999; Ashcroft & Griffiths & Tiffin, 1995), gender studies and curriculum theory (Munro, 1998b; Pinar, 1996, 2004), my research praxis with the United Houma Nation initially juxtaposed such theories with critical ethnography and oral history (Behar, 1996; Haig-Brown, 1995, 2001; Munro, 1998a; Thompson, 1988) which allowed me to shift my research agenda in ways that were responsive to their research and cultural protocols. For the most part, I was taught educational research methodologies supported by Euro-American¹ epistemologies (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998; Creswell, 1998; Perks & Thomson, 1998).

Later, I learned through reading the works of various indigenous scholars (Mihesuah, 1998; Smith, 1999) that the foundations of Euro-American theories—social, cultural, psychological, ecological, and educational—are often complicit in the ways in which they reinscribe “colonial-power-knowledge” through our research methodologies, and concomitantly, the knowledge such research produces (Doxtater, 2004, p. 618). Institutions of academic research often perpetuate an intellectual colonization and material commodification of indigenous knowledge (Battiste, 2000; Deloria, 1997a; Churchill, 2003; Hingangaroa Smith, 2000). Furthermore, American universities are gatekeepers and legitimators of which knowledge is, and is not, of most worth (Apple, 1990; Mihesuah, 2004).

Initially, my research question interrogated how the United States’ neocolonial systems of colonization—educational, political, economic, and judicial—manifested and manifest themselves within the Houma community. Furthermore, in which ways did the geographically diverse Houma communities resist, survive, appropriate, and negotiate the

federal government's local and national curricular policies of assimilation and erasure? These questions loosely framed my observations while I was in the field. Since my matriculation as a graduate student and researcher, I have asked more curricular questions, including: How can a nonindigenous curriculum theorist conduct research with indigenous communities in ways that do not function to reproduce and reinscribe pedagogies and curricula of colonial-knowledge-power? In turn, how might a curriculum theorist, a nonindigenous public educator, understand relationships of colonization and decolonization through working with an indigenous community?

In order to respond to such questions, this research dissertation draws largely from ethnographic data, life histories, newspapers, and the existing scholarly literature on the Houma in order to examine the psychological, social, and cultural effects of colonization. Over a period of four years, I utilized a combination of critical ethnography and oral history methodologies to study the Houmas' various educational experiences with the Louisiana parochial and public schooling systems in the southern geographical limits of Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes (see Lomawaima, 1994; Haig-Brown 1988/1998; Munro, 1998b; Portelli, 2001; Thompson, 1988/2000). During the course of this study, I conducted participant observation at multiple sites in southeast Louisiana and at different events within the community such as the State and Federal Indian Education meetings, Lafourche Indian Education office, American Indian Education workshops, Tribal Center, Dulac Community Center, Tribal Council meetings, Powwows, Festivals, funerals, fishing trips, Christmas banquet, summer cultural camps, election campaigns, and at tribal members' houses (Bogdan and Bilken, 1998; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1997).

In addition to participant observation, I gathered data through formal and informal interviews with various tribal members at the aforementioned sites or at individuals' homes (see Appendix B). Since this study is concerned with placing the daily lives of the Houma community within a broader social and historical context, I also collected historical data regarding the communities and the time period in which they were denied public schooling (Munro, 1998a). Therefore, my analysis included an examination of current and historical documents such as academic journals, local newspapers, historical books on the Houma community, dissertations and thesis written at Louisiana State University, the Bureau of Indian affairs proposed finding for federal recognition, the United Houma Nation's rebuttal, the tribe's archive at the Tribal Center in Golden Meadow and historical documents located at the appointed tribal historian's house in Venice Louisiana.

In this chapter, I reflect critically on what Lather (1991) calls postpositivist methodological strategies to answer the proposed research questions stated in the introduction. Therefore, in the first section I review how academic institutions knowingly and unknowingly guard the gates of knowledge production and authority over its legitimacy. In the second section I reflect on how I first entered the field. In section three, I seek to understand the United Houma Nation's tribal research protocols. In the fourth section I explain the various methodological strategies utilized to produce historical knowledge of the Houma collaboratively with members of their Nation. In the last section of the chapter I attempt to understand how an international nonindigenous researcher studying in a foreign place might bridge research relationships between the university and a local indigenous community. First, let us open up the gates to the academy.

Academic Gatekeepers

...Indigenous knowledge exists and is a legitimate research issue. Many parts of the existing Eurocentric academy have not fully accepted this principle, arguing that there is no such thing as an Indigenous perspective.

(Battiste, 2000, pp. xix-xx)

More than anything else, colonialism is a way of thinking.

(Alfred, 2004, p. 90)

During the eighteenth century, professional cadres of geologists, naturalists, astronomers, ethnographers, philosophers, historians, geographers, painters, and poets staffed the research and development arm of European empires, many of whom held day jobs as sailors, soldiers, missionaries, and bureaucrats (Willinsky, 1992). Most of these imperialist research positions, if not all, belonged and belong to non-indigenous scholars. The colonizers' historical and institutional exclusion of indigenous epistemologies reproduced knowledge which continues to support and legitimize colonialism's culture (Thomas, 1994). For indigenous peoples, "colonialism became imperialism's outpost, the fort and the port of imperial outreach" (Smith, 1999, p. 23). Historians within the academy used the term "imperialism" to refer to a series of developments—discovery, conquest, exploitation, distribution, and appropriation—leading to European economic and political expansion (Smith, 1999). Meanwhile, indigenous ways of critiquing imperialism and the culture of colonialism and reproducing indigenous ways of knowing were and, for the most part still, are ignored within the walls of academia, including many Faculties of Education (Kuokkanen, 2003; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004).

The social and cultural theories, which informed some of the research on the United Houma Nation, emerged within an academic milieu of evolution, social Darwinism, and eugenics (Lassiter, 2000). Anthropology, Cook-Lynn (2001) makes clear, “was and is the handmaiden of colonialism” (p. 153). “Non-Western peoples were generally perceived to be,” Lassiter (2000) writes, “at a lower level of cognitive development than Westerners; by extension, ‘less fit’ than Westerners and, by virtue of their non-White ‘race,’ biologically inferior to Westerners” (p. 603). Bourgeois’s (1938) thesis is a prime example of such historically situated meta-epistemologies. Since then, the field of anthropology has *supposedly* shifted its pedagogical and curricular conversations away from racial constructions of indigenous communities towards cultural interpretations (Barnard, 2000).

Anthropologists have since acknowledged that “current styles of cultural description are historically limited and are undergoing important metamorphoses” (Clifford, 1988, p. 24). Aware of the historical situatedness of existing anthropological literature on indigenous communities, some anthropologists have become conscious of privileging nonindigenous research, the knowledge produced, as well as the vulnerabilities incurred with studying the cultures of *others* (Behar, 1996). Many cultural and linguistic anthropologists, as well as ethnohistorians, continue to carry out research which attempts to understand the United Houma Nation’s cultural and national identities in terms of race, rather than in terms of culture (Davis, 2001, 2004; Duncan, 1998; Parenton & Pellegrin, 1950; Rottet, 2001; Roy, 1959; Stanton, 1979). “The conflict between Indians and anthropologists in the last two decades has been, at its core,” Deloria (1997b) writes, “a dead struggle over the control of definitions. Who is to define what an

Indian *really* is [original emphasis]?” (p. 215). This body of institutional knowledge functions to reinscribe and legitimize its power through colonial definitions of what it means *to be* and *not to be* Houma.

Perhaps, more poignantly, the academic legitimization of these researchers’ colonial-power-knowledge of indigenous communities enabled the United States government, once again, to disavow the United Houma Nation’s cultural and national identities. By securing and limiting entrances to the gates of imperial posts and institutionalized intellectual forts, colonialism’s culture ensures its narrative construction of the expansive legacy of the American Empire. “The settler,” Fanon (1963) reminds us, “makes history and is conscious of making it” (p. 51). There are few, if any, Houmas who occupy positions in which their interpretations of Western knowledge, oral histories, and non-indigenous research are institutionally recognized and privileged, particularly when it challenges the United States’ legitimate claims to represent the “*true*” historical evidence of their existence as an indigenous nation.

Due to the absence of an Indigenous Studies program at Louisiana State University, many Houma students must leave the State, their families, and community in order to study indigenous knowledge within local and global contexts. By excluding such programs at LSU, the colonial culture is able to maintain an iron grip on the gates of knowledge production, and in turn, its power and authority (Mihsuah, 2004). As a result, research that attempts to understand indigenous peoples and their shared language for articulating—the history, sociology, psychology and politics colonialism—their struggle against and survival of colonialism’s devastation, remains marginalized, even excluded, within the walls of Louisiana State University (Cook-Lynn, 2001; Deloria,

2004; Smith, 1999). Overt and covert colonial and institutional policies of control dispossessed, and continue to deny, the United Houma Nation of their international rights to traditional land and self-determination.

Mihesuah and Wilson (2004) call for the *indigenization of the academy*. “As academics committed...” to indigenous nations, Mihesuah and Wilson (2004) ask us to “...resist institutional cooptation and continue to challenge the dominant conventions of our disciplines,” and “...use whatever authority, benefits, and power that derive from our positions to further promote” the causes of indigenous people (p. 14). However, the institutional hierarchy built into the university limits a graduate student’s, as well as marginalized others’, power to effect such change within the university. Academic power and its potential danger lie in the publication of a dissertation, and concomitantly, its future use by academic scholars and institutional bureaucrats. Currently, the federal government is using the knowledge produced in previous nonindigenous theses and dissertations to deny the United Houma Nation its national recognition. Although I strategically position tales of the field in this dissertation towards promoting the political causes of the United Houma Nation (Van Maanen, 1988), it does not negate the potential dangers of their future use by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Haig-Brown, 2001).

At the same time, I do not want to over-romanticize an indigenization of the academy. Indigenizing the academy does not guarantee equitable power relationships between those who identify themselves as indigenous scholars and the communities they in turn work with (Smith, 1999). “If, however, anthropologists and other social scientists begin to speak critically to the shortcomings of their own society using the knowledge which they claim to have derived from observation of the tribal peoples,” Deloria (1997b)

explains, “that will be a signal that something of real value is contained within the tribal context” (p. 221). As a curriculum theorist, and a former science and history teacher steeped in the traditions of the reconceptualists and concerned with the limits of social science research, I continue to challenge the dominant conventions of our educational disciplines (Pinar, 2004, 2000; Pinar et al. 1996). With these concerns in mind, I turn our conversation towards my initial enmeshment with the geographically diverse Houma communities.

Entering The Field

No, the worst of it is that not only is the observer vulnerable, but so too, yet more profoundly, are those we observe.

(Behar, 1996, p. 24)

I first learned about the Houma on the website which was not “officially” endorsed by their community on the Internet. Initially, I wanted to work with the community because their elders spoke French. Appropriating the French language in the 1700s permitted the Houmas to further develop their trade relationships with France’s colonies in Louisiana (Dardar, 2002). My elementary and secondary education was with the French Catholic separate schooling system in Kapuskasing, a rural logging town in northern Ontario. I hoped that sharing the commonality of the French colonial language and growing up in a rural town would facilitate my initial relationships with the Houma community, which it did.

Although a contact number was posted on the website (Viey, 2001), I did not attempt to contact the United Houma Nation's Tribal Center before entering their community. I wanted to introduce myself and explain my research agenda to community members in person. The Houma communities are dispersed within the following Louisiana Parishes: Terrebonne, Lafourche, Jefferson, St. Mary's, Plaquemines, and St. Bernard (see appendices B and C). However, the majority of the communities live in the Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes. In February 2001, I decided to drive to Golden Meadow on a Saturday afternoon and introduce myself to one of the Houma communities. On that occasion, as a Canadian, I witnessed some of the local Mardi Gras rituals for the first time.

While I was watching a parade in Golden Meadow, a lady, known later as Mrs. Terrebonne, introduced herself and her family. Once she learned that I was from Canada, she invited me into their family shop, which fixed the local shrimp trawlers trawling nets, for some Cajun fair. Mrs. Terrebonne took pride in their Acadian heritage and enjoyed discussing her ancestors' diaspora from Nova Scotia. Meanwhile, many families sat in lawn chairs at the side of the road drinking beer or mixed drinks from plastic cups. Children were running up to the floats and begging for beads. Many of the floats were decorated with the colors of the American flag, most likely, commemorating the events in New York on September 11th. The people on the floats, who were dressed in different costumes, and dancing, and drinking, threw multicolored beads of various sizes into the crowds of "bead beggars." In Louisiana there is a complex culture of giving, begging, and trading beads. After the last float went by, Mrs. Terrebonne invited me to eat some oysters, which were in a burlap sack outside the store. She tried one first and said, "its too

salty!” Davis, an employee at the net shop who was shucking the oysters said with a thick Franco-Cajun accent, “da saltiness has to do with da amount of rain, da moon, and da tides.”²

Instead of searching for the Houma, I was caught up with watching people watch the parade. I never formally tried to consciously engage life through an ethnographic lens before. Except perhaps, when I went hunting and fishing with my father in the backwoods of northern Ontario. Through reading various texts (Benedict, 1934/1989; Geertz, 1973; Walcott, 2001; Van Maanen, 1988), ethnographies (Brody, 2000; Dance, 2002; Foley, 1994; Haig-Brown, 1988/1998; McCarthy-Brown, 2001; Walcott, 1967), and auto-ethnographies (Behar, 1996), I learned that there are different ways an ethnographer can conceivably watch and write about others in the field.

When I first entered the field often, instead of watching, I searched for something or someone no longer there. Initially, my imaginations of “Indians” were trapped within the confines of an ethnographic present. “Ethnographic present,” Lobo and Talbot (2001) explain, “is the cultural description of an indigenous people not as they are living in the contemporary world, but as they were thought to have lived in the past” (p. 4). When I first went to Golden Meadow, my ethnographic desire longed for certain fictional stereotypes of “real” Houma Indians. I searched for a cultural construction that existed within my imagination. As a result, “Indian people,” Deloria (1969/1988) writes, “begin to feel that they are merely shadows of a mythical super-Indian” (p. 82). During that first trip to southeast Louisiana, amongst the throwing of beads, I did not meet any “real Houma Indians” who lived within the township of the Golden Meadow community.

To be honest, I feared my first encounter with the Houmas. As a result, I did not search for that long. Such fears were based on my fantasies of American Indians, which in turn, were influenced by books, films, and academic articles—what Churchill (1998) calls fantasies of the master race. Due to the negative influences of research conducted by nonindigenous scholars in the past, I also feared the Houmas' rejection of yet another nonindigenous researcher wanting to conduct research with their community. Instead, I watched the local parades and fraternized with various Cajun families. When I asked the Terrebonne family if they knew of the Houma community, their answer was no.

I probably should have written a letter, or phoned. Deloria (1969) stresses that each researcher “desiring to study a tribe should be made to apply to the tribal council for permission to do his study” (p. 95). Later, I learned that one of the United Houma Nation's tribal research protocols involves writing an official letter to the council, which explains the nature of one's research agenda. If the tribal council finds that the research contributes to their community, one is then invited to present one's research agenda at a monthly council meeting. The United Houma Nation holds meetings every second Saturday of each month, except during June and December, in the various parishes that have an established political branch of the tribe.

Taking Miles Richardson's advice in class that week, I drove down to Dulac the next weekend, still without contacting anyone from the Houma community. The landscape changes after exiting highway 10 and journeying south on highway 90 towards the township of Houma. Oil refineries, farmlands, and sugar cane fields scar the beauty of the Louisiana landscape. Further south, on a smaller two-lane highway, large and small trawling boats lined Bayou Grand Caillou. I stopped at the Texaco gas station located at

the southern corporate limits of Dulac to ask the local shopkeeper where I might find the Dulac Community Center.

The man working behind the counter appeared to be of Asian descent. There is a large Vietnamese population in Houma. Some live in Dulac. Later Kirby Verret, a tribal council representative from Dulac, explained that many of the local Vietnamese owned the big fishing boats that trawl in the Gulf of Mexico. Many Vietnamese families relocated to Louisiana during and after the Vietnam War. The man at the gas station told me that the Houma community was just a little further down Highway 57. I continued south for a few miles and eventually turned right onto Coast Guard Road. There it was, a large blue and white building with the words “Community Center” on it. The Methodist Church continues to manage the Dulac Community Center and provides various social services for the local Houma community.

I walked up the stairs that led to the main office of the community center. A woman who worked for the Methodist Church greeted me. I asked her if she knew where I could find members of the United Houma Nation. She directed me to the center’s gymnasium. There were three women and a man picking up clothes on one of the tables at the back of the room. The man who later introduced himself as Lawrence Billiot and a member of the Houma community approached and cordially asked if I needed any help. I explained that I was a student from Louisiana State University looking for the United Houma Nation Tribal Center Inc., and members of the community. To my surprise, the Tribal Center was not in Dulac, but actually in Golden Meadow.

Lawrence introduced me to Zoanna Verret who was busy putting away clothes with her two cousins. Once a month, the community center functions as a clothing bank

for the tribal members who live in Dulac. Zoanna Verret was the first person to whom I formally introduced myself, and talked to at length about my research agenda. I expressed my interests in conducting historical research on the Houmas' educational experiences with the Louisiana systems of public schooling. She then set up a meeting for me in Houma later that afternoon to speak with her husband Kirby Verret, a former chairperson of the United Houma Nation, and now head of the Terrebonne Indian Education program.

Kirby and I met after lunch in his office. Once again, I introduced myself and explained my research agenda. We talked for over an hour. Kirby said that he liked my friendly demeanor. He shared stories about his experiences with the missionary and public schools of Terrebonne Parish. I asked him if he minded my taking notes, which he did not. Before leaving his office, Kirby invited me to attend a council meeting on Isle de Jean Charles the following weekend. During that week, I gave little thought to the invitation, to what might take place, or to what was proper cultural protocol at the meeting. But I knew, having read Smith's (1999) *Decolonizing Research Methodologies*, proper protocol called for establishing relationships of respect and honesty. In the next section, I turn toward understanding tribal research protocols.

Toward Understanding a Curriculum of Tribal Research Protocols

The unhappiness expressed by many Indian communities against scholars, such as anthropologists in the 1960s and 1970s, in part was due to the indifferent way in which data were collected and published, and that resulted in little benefit to the host Indian community.

(Champagne, 1998, p. 183)

Only when a researcher takes the time to learn and honour cultural protocol can people begin to talk together.

(Haig-Brown, 2001, p. 21)

When I decided to conduct research with the Houma community, I was not aware of its government's research and cultural protocols. The community had yet to decide whether or not they wanted to conduct research with me. The political body of the United Houma Nation has put in place tribal research protocols in order to control the indigenous and nonindigenous research conducted within their community. "Despite the negative connotations of 'tribe,'" Smith (1999) explains, "it is used here generically to describe one form of indigenous organization" (p. 128). Like for the Maori, for the Houma the tribe is the larger political body of several smaller groups linked by genealogy and shared cultural practices (Smith, 1999). As acknowledged earlier, the United Houma Nation has had a long history of nonindigenous researchers conducting research within their community. Often, as graduate students, we are concerned with the research procedures enforced by our universities. Nonetheless, we stand in danger of failing to respect the tribal research protocols established by the indigenous communities who choose to work with us. In this section, I discuss how I became aware of the United Houma Nation's tribal research policies, and in turn, how I have tried to recursively incorporate them into my research methodologies.

The tribal council meeting took place in the First Church of Christ on Isle de Jean Charles. Kirby greeted me when I arrived. Tribal council members sat at the front and faced their community members sitting in the church pews. The tribal council prepares

and publishes in advance the meeting's agenda for those who attend. Each council meeting proceeds with a call to order, prayer, pledge of allegiance, role call, reading and approval of minutes, treasurer's report, committee reports, old and new business, setting a date and place for the next meeting, and then usually everyone has lunch together. At the end of each business session the council is open to public comment. Kirby introduced me to the council at the end of the new business session's public comment. The principal chief, Brenda Dardar Robichaux, then asked me to describe my research agenda.

I explained to the council that I was interested in listening to some of their stories, which involved their educational experiences with the Louisiana systems of schooling. Brenda Dardar Robichaux asked, "what kind of stories?" to which I responded, "what kind of stories are you willing to share?" She, in turn, smiled and laughed. Although I had theoretical questions that loosely framed my research, I was not sure of what stories the Houma community would be willing to individually and collectively share. I was never officially told during the meeting that I could conduct future research with the Houma community. After the meeting was over, the principal chief said that I needed to meet and speak with her son Joshua. Later that year, at another meeting in Dulac, I witnessed the tribal council deny another researcher access to their community. The Tribal Council expressed that the content area of his research possibly endangered their current petition for Federal Recognition due to the ways in which his research agenda's questions worked to construct their national identity, once again, through racial categories.

The Houmas' political body is aware of the power, authority, and potential dangers of the academic legitimization of nonindigenous research conducted with their

community. Ethnohistorians, like Davis (2001, 2004), continue to research and write about the Houma community without the tribal council's permission. His ethnohistorical research attempts to establish the cultural, economic, and legal circumstances that favored self-identification as Indian generally, and as Houma Indians specifically, during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Campisi & Starna, 2004). The historical knowledge reproduced within Davis's (2001) research harms the United Houma Nation's current petition for federal recognition. "As BIA researchers have noted," Davis (2001) writes, "the existence of the new Houma was essentially Cajun: they spoke French, dressed like whites, lived by fishing and trapping, made and ate foods like tasso and gumbo file that were common among the Cajuns of southern Louisiana and so on" (p. 483). Davis, who has yet to visit the community, continues to disavow the legitimacy of the current Houmas' national and cultural indigenous identities.

For the duration of Miles Richardson's course, I traveled to Raceland in Lafourche Parish on weekends and stayed at the principal chief's house with her family. Once there, I participated in various family activities and community events. Joshua, slightly younger than I, was temporarily appointed as my community teacher. His responsibilities included supervising and introducing me to his extended family and to others in the community. Each community member that I met through Brenda Dardar Robichaux's family received me generously.

Once my ethnographic project for the course was over, I continued personal and professional relationships with her family and the community. While she was cooking a crawfish étouffée for dinner one night, Brenda Dardar Robichaux expressed that the hardest part of working with university academics is when they leave. During the last

four years, I have spent most weekends and summers with her immediate and extended family. Establishing familial relationships are an important part of understanding indigenous research and cultural protocols (Bishop, 1998). I have come to realize that the Houma granted more than a temporary international research visa to listen to their stories four years ago. Indeed, the Houma community accepted me as a member of their extended family. Such acceptance brought on various personal and professional responsibilities.

Often community commitments took precedence over my research agenda. When necessary, I provided voluntary labor at community events. The United Houma Nation rely on community members to volunteer their time and labor in order to support communal events like the Elders' Festival which takes place each year at the Dulac Community Center. Respecting and taking care of elders' are integral parts of maintaining and practicing Houma traditional values. During the festival not only are elders provided various physical activities, but it also gives a chance for the youth to intermingle and learn from their elders. The community recognizes elders as walking histories. My assigned responsibilities were to help set up for the festival, to serve food, and take pictures of the elders engaged in the various activities. Each elder received a group picture at the end of the festival.

The Houma government also relies on volunteer workers to run their food booth at the Jazz festival in New Orleans each year. The food booth enables the community to raise the necessary, but still limited funds to support community events like the Elders' Festival. Aware of my research agenda in the field and desire to record my educational experiences, Brenda Dardar Robichaux asked me to videotape and take pictures at all

their major community events. In turn, I provided the United Houma Nation government with copies of all pictures and video recordings. They were then archived at the United Houma Nation Tribal Center, the appointed tribal historian's, and Brenda Dardar Robichaux's house. Brenda Dardar Robichaux, also head of the Lafourche Indian Education program and current Principal Chief of her nation, uses the recorded data to present at educational and cultural workshops in Louisiana and at the National Indian Education Association's annual conferences.

Since my initial introduction, I have attended many council meetings and learned more about the United Houma Nation's research and cultural protocols. On July 9th of 2005, I attended a council meeting in Morgan City. Prior to the meeting, I asked the tribal council if they could include me on that meeting's agenda. At the meeting, I explained my dissertation proposal to the council and attending community members. I then asked the council if I could utilize the research data collected over the last four years. Each council member was presented with a copy of the research proposal I had submitted to the Louisiana State University Internal Review Board.³ After my presentation, council members commented on how I was the first university academic to spend any substantial time participating in their cultural events and family activities before requesting to report my research. During the public comment session, no one openly objected and the tribal council approved the publication of my research agenda.

Asking for permission a second time was important for me. At the first council meeting four years ago, I asked had to be granted access to the community but did not have a clear idea at that time of what types of stories the community members would share, or in turn, what direction my research might take in response to their shared

stories. I also asked the United Houma Nation government to appoint council members who would supervise the writing up phase of my dissertation. In the next section, I examine how in utilizing an oral history method for educational research perhaps enables an educator to potentially produce knowledge collaboratively with an indigenous community.

A Life History Methodology

Oral history is a history built around people...It brings history into, and out of the community.

(Thompson, 2000, p. 23)

...a life history is a living thing.

(Portelli, 2001, p. 61)

Oral tradition, stories, and memories are a major part of Aboriginal teaching.

(Henderson, 2000, p. 267)

These stories in our oral tradition, then, must be appreciated by historians not simply for the illumination they bring to the broader historical picture but also as an essential component in the survival of culture.

(Wilson, 1998, p. 27)

Although few Houmas occupy academic positions within universities, many conduct tribal research within their communities. Elders within the community recognize the authority of Michael Dardar, Laura Billiot, Helen Dardar Gindrat, Brenda Dardar

Robichaux, as well as others, on their nation's historical and educational knowledge. Michael was one of the community members responsible for collecting historical data for the Houmas' petition for federal recognition. Due to the historical and educational focus of my research, I asked the Tribal Council if Michael Dardar, Brenda Dardar Robichaux, and Joshua Pitre could represent the community on my dissertation committee. During the writing phase of my dissertation prospectus all three were provided with copies to read critically. In turn, all have provided valuable feedback on my interpretations of their community.

I thought that having a tribally appointed research committee would help me negotiate the constructions of meaning ascribed to my interpretations of the historical knowledge in the following chapters (Lather, 1991). "Negotiating such meaning," Lather (1991) maintains, "helps to build reciprocity" (p. 61). I incorporated this strategy into my research methodology in an attempt to produce knowledge collaboratively with members of the United Houma Nation (Lassiter, 2000; Haig-Brown, 2001; Munro, 1998a). "In trying to achieve a collaborative research relationship," Munro (1998a) maintains, "the process and product of the research cannot be separated" (p. 131). Therefore, I utilized various research methods to collect my data depending on the context of my research agenda in the field (Hermes, 1998). Oral history methods were used to record the United Houma Nation's educational experiences with the Louisiana systems of schooling (Friedlander, 1998; Gluck & Patai, 1991; Ives, 1997; Thomson, 1988/2000). However, American universities continue to negate the legitimacy of such indigenous oral histories (Deloria, 1997a; Wilson, 1998).

Ethnohistorians, like Davis (2004), still privilege the primacy of Euro-American documentary evidence over oral tradition. “By ‘history,’” Davis (2004) argues, “I must assume that they [Jack Campisi and Bill Starna] refer to Houma oral tradition, and if I am accused of privileging documentary evidence over oral tradition, I readily plead guilty” (p. 795). “Unfortunately,” as Mihesuah (2003) makes clear, “many scholars, historians in particular, have been loath to use Native oral accounts as source material” (p. 4). As a curriculum theorist and history teacher, engaged with critical feminist and postcolonial theories, oral history enables me to perhaps recover the marginalized voices of the Houma community (Lather, 1991; Munro, 1995; Thompson, 1988/2000). Still, the ways in which I transcribe, translate, represent, and interpret Houma life narratives risk reinscribing the colonial representations found in the existing literature of dominance. “All research,” Munro (1998a) stresses, “is implicated in power relations, and life history research is no exception” (p. 12). Nonetheless, like Munro, I am committed to the potential ways in which life history research can enlarge our understandings of the complex ways we make meaning.

Oral history enables a student of history and community to introduce new evidence from the underside, shift the historical focus, open new areas of inquiry, challenge some of the assumptions and judgments of former researchers, and bring recognition to substantial groups of people who have been largely ignored (Thompson, 1988/2000). I acknowledge that oral sources are subjectively constructed. “Rather than being a weakness,” Portelli (2001) explains, “this is however, their strength: errors, inventions, and myths lead us through and beyond facts to their meaning” (p. 2). Furthermore, Portelli (2001) reminds us, that our intersubjectivity “applies to every

source, though the holiness of writing often leads us to forget it” (p. 53). “Colonialism has,” Thomas (1994) explains, “...been mediated and enframed by structures of meaning” (p. 2). Historical truths thus remain socially constructed, situated, partial, and contested (Miller, 2004; Munro, 1995).

In the following chapters, I examine what meanings the Houma communities assign to their daily educational experiences inside and outside the walls of the Louisiana schooling systems, during and after segregation. To do so, I interviewed twenty community members primarily in the Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes who attended the Golden Meadow and Dulac Indian Settlement Schools. I also interviewed a teacher who taught at the Golden Meadow Settlement School. My interview questions focused primarily on the recollections of community members’ experiences with the Louisiana educational system. I began my questioning by asking the interviewees where and when they were born. I then proceeded to ask questions about what life was like as a child outside and inside the Indian Settlement Schools. In turn, I asked teachers what it was like to live and teach in an indigenous community.

Community members had to be older than the age of eighteen and willing to volunteer. Furthermore, I consulted my tribal research committee for their approval of all interviewees who accepted to be part of the oral history project. My tribal research committee has yet to deny my access to any of the potential interviewees. With the permission of each interviewee, the interviews were digitally tape-recorded and videotaped. Each interviewee had the option not to be tape-recorded or videotaped. Filmed oral histories enable interviewees to convey their stories to the viewer via the written word, spoken word, and filmed word (Sipe, 1999). However, the institutional

formatting for this dissertation negates the ways in which I might share the United Houma Nation's life histories via moving images. Initially, I conducted a one to two hour interview with each interviewee. If needed, I conducted supplemental interviews. And, I began each interview with a brief statement that explained the nature of my study (Hampton, 1995).

I was aware that some interviewees might experience psychological discomfort when sharing possible traumatic memories of their educational past in the Louisiana schooling system. I explained to all the community members who were willing to share their life histories that they had the right not to answer any of my questions. Before each interview began, I also expressed to interviewees that they could request that specific questions not be asked during the interview. After each interview, I debriefed the interviewee about the interview process and asked for feedback. Community members who are included in the dissertation had the right to read the final draft of the dissertation and determine whether or not the excerpts chosen from their interviews may be included or not, before the dissertation defense. Interviewees who were unable to read the written word were considered vulnerable participants (see Appendix C). If a participant was unable to read the consent form, I asked the United Houma Nation tribal council to appoint a reader.

I informed interviewees that their life histories would be stored at my house and copies would be available at the Tribal Center with their permission. Interviewees had the option to withdraw from the project at any time. I also explained that the identities of the participants would not remain anonymous unless they requested otherwise. At any point during the interview, each community member had the option to ask that the information

they shared remain confidential. These were some of the steps taken during the collection of oral histories in order to protect an interviewee's confidentiality. I also gave copies of the transcribed interviews to each of the interviewees in order for them to add context to some of their answers when needed.

After Miles Richardson's course was over, I spent a year in the field listening to elders' stories, taking notes, pictures, and videotaping important annual community events, such as the Elders' Festival. During that year I did not formally tape-record interviews. Once I completed the requirements to begin my dissertation research, I recommenced tape-recording and videotaping various tribal members life histories. Initially, during my stay in the field, I transcribed most of the interviews. As my collection of the life narratives came to an end, I hired Nicole Crosby a member of the Houma nation to transcribe most of the remaining interviews. Once Nicole gave me the transcripts, I would read the transcripts while listening to the interviews.

I then began a preliminary analysis of their transcriptions. Initially, I read through the transcripts making notes in the margins and worked towards generating conceptual categories (Creswell, 1998; Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). Once I color-coded my transcripts, I looked for central themes that seemed to have some bearing on my initial research questions. I cut the similar themes within each interview and then pasted them into a separate folder on my computer (Creswell, 1998). Using Microsoft Word, I also used the word search option to analyze the transcriptions for conceptual categories. I then analyzed the texts for conceptual categories, which did not necessary relate to my initial research questions. Being attuned to the possibilities of other conceptual categories which did not necessarily relate to my initial research questions helped to further complicate my

initial understandings of how the various Houma communities across the southern tips of Louisiana experienced, or not, the colonial institutions of schooling.

Discussing the transcripts with my tribally appointed dissertation committee members also helped to further develop and deepen my understandings of the conceptual categories. Some of the main conceptual categories, which emerged because of my analysis of the transcripts, for example, were daily life outside colonial institutions, educational experiences inside colonial institutions of schooling, and appropriating indigenous control of the institutions of schooling. During the process of writing up my analysis in chapter three, four, and five, I further refined my conceptual categories from daily life outside colonial institution to how European colonization effected and mediated daily labor within the Houma community, by implementing institutional policies of segregation for example.

I also utilized methods of triangulation in order to construct conceptual categories by comparing the data derived from my research questions through the interviewing of Houma elders in different parishes across Louisiana (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1997). Although Houma elders lived in different parishes and attended different Indian Settlement Schools they shared similar experiences inside and outside the colonial schooling system. After rereading the transcripts of different interviews conducted annually with the same elders over three years, I noticed that certain elders like Helen Gindrat Dardar repeated parts of her life history verbatim in each of the interview transcripts. Therefore even though I interviewed Helen Gindrat alone in 2001, with Laura Billiot in 2004, and with the women at Dorca's Closet in 2005, she repeated parts of life narrative verbatim. Looking at the transcriptions of the interview conducted with Helen

over those three years provided a form of temporal triangulation, which also helped to “validate” certain conceptual categories.

In the chapters that follow, I have made a conscious decision not to overanalyze the elders’ life narratives presented in each chapter. One of the criticisms by indigenous scholars is that the focus of such research then becomes the nonindigenous researcher’s analysis, rather than on what the oral histories have to share and teach us about the community. Rather than focusing on one individual’s life experiences in each chapter, I have attempted to construct a narrative, which attempts to represent the Houmas’ communal practices of valuing multiple voices. Although elders recognize that they share similar life histories with other tribal members, such elders often restrain from speaking on behalf of the entire community. Part of such communal practices, as we shall examine in the next section, is working towards establishing relationships of reciprocity.

Establishing Relationships of Reciprocity

Genuine reciprocity entails not only sensitivity to the research relationship, but also an account of the research process and relationship in the final text.

(Munro, 1998a, p. 131)

Academic work is largely an exercise that is outside the concerns of most Indian communities and cultures.

(Champagne, 1998, p. 188)

Over the last four years I tried to build a reciprocal relationship with the United Houma Nation. Hopefully, the research I conducted with the United Houma Nation will lead to a

future academic position at some university and the socioeconomic privileges that come with it. I am not sure that my final dissertation will pay the same dividend for the United Houma Nation. However, I believe that research processes with indigenous communities should work towards building relationships of reciprocity. Nonindigenous researchers have attempted to do so through action and critical feminist research (Haig-Brown, 1995, 2001; Lassiter, 2000; Lather, 1991; Miller, 2004; Munro, 1998a; Tax, 1952). In this section, I examine various ways in which I tried to build relationships of reciprocity with the Houma communities.

Collaborative research strategies to produce textual representations of indigenous communities emerged in response to a critique of traditional genres of ethnographic writing (Bishop, 1996; Lassiter, 2000). “Reciprocity implies,” Lather (1991) writes, “give and take, a mutual negotiation of meaning and power” (p. 57). However, Munro (1998a) reminds us to ask: can research processes ever truly be collaborative? Although collaborative research does not negate the dangers of reinscribing colonial-power-knowledge, having my tribal research committee read my interpretations of their stories critically, enables the United Houma Nation to take some part in negotiating the textual knowledge produced within this dissertation. Part of a collaborative research process entails inviting research participants to share in the authority of transforming their oral histories into written texts. Nonetheless, the interpretive process remains a subjective process, and thus, my research participants’ interpretations are no more and no less valid than mine (Munro, 1995). Therefore, I continue to struggle with how I might interweave our multiple voices into this dissertation. Building reciprocal relationships between

researchers and indigenous communities also entails more than negotiating textual authority.

Documenting Houma life histories is an important research project for the Tribal Council. I collaborated with Brenda Dardar Robichaux to create archives of all my research data at her house, Michael Dardar's, and at the Tribal Center. Houma graduate students, like Jamie Billiot and Joshua Pitre, who are interested in conducting future research on their communities, have access to that historical data. Although not expected to do so, I also helped students with the processes of applying to graduate school. Often undergraduate students at various universities asked me to edit their course papers.

In June of 2004, Brenda Dardar Robichaux also invited me to the Lafourche American Indian Education cultural enrichment program to teach some of the secondary students how to do life history research, and in turn, for me to learn their local American Indian Education curriculum.⁴ Some of those students are now collecting oral histories within their community. Elders within the community recognized my experiences of working at an academic institution and sometimes called on me to share my knowledge of academic institutions with the younger generation. Due to their denied access to the colonial institutions of schooling in Louisiana, many of the younger generation are the first members of their extended families to go to the university, let alone, graduate school. The Lafourche American Indian Education summer cultural enrichment programs have helped in the preparation for their students to be successful at universities.

Once a year the Tribal Council gathers to develop and implement a curriculum to meet political, educational, and economic needs. At one of those meetings two years ago, the Council expressed that they wanted to start a website but did not have the necessary

technological knowledge or economic funding to do so. Although I did not have any expertise at the time with web page design, I volunteered to do some research on that technology at LSU. With the help of the Curriculum and Instruction technology staff, I was able to learn how to use web design software (Dreamweaver).

Earlier in the chapter, I described how I first learned about the United Houma Nation on the Internet. People who have formerly done research with the community created many of those websites. The tribal council was not happy with some of the knowledge shared on many of these websites. Not having control over their own website meant that the United Houma Nation was not able to exert any authority on, and weave visions of, their community on the World Wide Web (WWW). The capacity to express their voice on the Internet was important for the tribal council. After a year of research, I worked collaboratively with the United Houma Nation to develop their first official website (www.unitedhoumanation.org). The tribal council is now able to produce knowledge on their website which challenges the colonial-knowledge-power shared on other websites. Currently, Michael Dardar and Jared Crosby maintain the website.

After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the website played a crucial role during the tribal government's recovery efforts. The United Houma Nation utilized the website to educate people about their losses during both hurricanes, and more importantly, how others outside their community could help them. Since the devastation, the website has had over 40,000 visitors. Once the dissertation is done, and after we reflect on the complexities of our research relationship, Micheal and I hope to develop a web page, which shares the United Houma Nation's research agendas and protocols with the World Wide Web.

Although establishing relationships of reciprocity is perhaps impossible, I tried to serve as a bridge that was not a bridge between university technological resources and the United Houma Nation's technological needs (Aoki 1981/2004). I am still not sure what a collaborative research process is or if it is even possible, but I continue to work with indigenous communities who want to build and bridge relationships between the university and their communities. What I have learned over the last four years is that striving towards producing collaborative knowledge and reciprocal relationships involves an ongoing process of negotiating my research agendas with the United Houma Nation's research agendas, and in turn, their ever changing research protocols. In the next section, I examine how such work involves a continuous critical reflection on the potentials of reinscribing colonialism's culture through one's research methodologies.

Toward Decolonizing Our Research Methodologies

I use the term “anti-colonial” to describe the proactive position of resistance that Indigenous peoples should adopt to these neocolonial formations.

(Hingangaroa Smith, 2000, p. 215)

I suggest five distinct phases of a people's decolonization. They are (1) *rediscovery and recovery*, (2) *mourning*, (3) *dreaming*, (4) *commitment*, and (5) *action*.

(Poka Laenui, 2000, p. 152)

After surviving centuries of colonial violence—physical, emotional, and intellectual—the United Houma Nation is currently pursuing research agendas, on their own terms, to rediscover, recover, and teach traditional knowledge. The Tribal Council is committed to

actively developing research strategies that fulfill their community's future dreams. Regardless of a nonindigenous researcher's presence or absence within the community, the United Houma Nation continues to develop tribal research protocols, in response to their community's socioeconomic, educational, and cultural needs. Can nonindigenous researchers help play a role in the processes of decolonization? Should we? Such work involves a critical recursive reflection of how colonialism's cultural and institutionalized research methodologies reinscribe colonial-knowledge-power.

As an international academic, who strategically appropriates colonialism's institutional culture, I am perhaps fully colonized by colonial epistemologies. Churchill (2003) reminds us,

You have, after all, been colonized far longer than we, and therefore much more completely. In fact, your colonization has by now been consolidated to such an extent that...you no longer even see yourselves as having been colonized. The result is that you've become self-colonizing, conditioned to be so self-identified with your own oppression that you've lost your ability to see it for what it is, much less to resist it in any coherent way. (p. 234)

Interrogating how a curriculum of colonization manifested and manifests itself within the Houma community helps me understand my own complicit participation in the institutional processes of colonization. Elders, such as Michael Dardar and Brenda Dardar Robichaux, continue to teach me tribal research protocols, which question the various ways nonindigenous academic research reinscribes colonialism's curriculum. During the writing phase of this dissertation, I continue to negotiate the knowledge produced with my appointed tribal research committee. Meanwhile, we continue to experiment collaboratively with bridging reciprocal relationships between the university

and Houma community. Let us attune ourselves towards an understanding of Houma curricula outside the school, in the next chapter.

Endnotes

¹On the one hand, I am apprehensive in using the term “Euro-American.” It has the dangers of assuming and erasing the multiplicities that may emerge from the various dynamics of European history, philosophy, literature, and so on (see Derrida, 1991/1992). On the other hand, John Willinsky (1998) illustrates in *Learning to Divide the World* how European thought, its (continued) colonization of America, and the foundation of the American universities with canonical European texts has established a body of knowledge that continues to represent and validate certain systems of discourse while excluding and/or marginalizing other epistemologies—for example, indigenous epistemologies.

²Throughout the dissertation I try to mimic the various Franco-Cajun and Franco-Houma accents when quoting certain research participants. However, most of the research participants quoted in chapter three, four, and five did not have thick Franco-Houma accents when they spoke English.

³The Louisiana Internal Review Board exempted my research. The university has a copy of my proposal and consent form on file.

⁴The camp took place during the second week of June 2004.

Chapter 3: Understanding a Houma Curriculum Outside the School

The oil boom of the 1930s is what brought a lot of foreigners into the lower bayou communities. And, exposed a lot of outsiders to our community. You know, to this day, if you talk to the real old people on Isle de Jean Charles, they talk of people outside of the community as Americans.

(Michael Dardar, 2005)

That was one of mom's things...that I dressed as well as she could provide for us, because I grew up very poor. I mean, when I think back, my dad trawled and we lived from catch to catch. But yet, I have no recollection of being poor.

(Brenda Dardar Robichaux, 2002)

Thick clusters of bluish clouds float across the marsh. A thunderous foreshadowing hovers over the green sugarcane fields of Lafourche parish. A humid invisibility, damp and heavy, suspends itself over the landscape's eroding skin. Dusk's receding sunlight shines momentarily through the shifting gaps of grayness. At the edge of Bayou Lafourche, a single raindrop trickles slowly towards the heart of a palmetto plant. Meanwhile, on a favorite log an Anhinga with a snake-like neck preens its black and white tail feathers rather diligently.

It is the first Friday of August 2005. I left Baton Rouge late this afternoon for Raceland to interview Cody Danos about her experiences at the Indian Settlement School in Golden Meadow.¹ I also planned to help Brenda Dardar Robichaux prepare for next week's summer cultural enrichment camp at Bayou Signette, a local State park. Her husband, Michael Robichaux, a local physician and former State senator, can trace his Acadian ancestry back to a forced emigration from Nova Scotia to the shores of

Louisiana. Generations of his family have been living on the land where their house now stands. In fact the property next to, and behind, their house, is still inhabited by the various members of his extended family. At the front of the six acres of land, live oak, pine, and magnolia trees surround his deceased parents' house. Still furnished, it sits there, emptied of people, but it echoes with memories. Underneath the partial shading of the canopy, orange, pear, and grapefruit trees begin to bare this season's fruits. In the springtime, azalea bushes with purple, white, and pink flowers, add to the beauty of this canvassed landscape. At the back of the property is another house in which Brenda and her family now live. And behind that house, are fields of lush sugar cane, which extend out towards the horizon.

Shortly after exiting Highway 90 for Raceland, I take a left onto Rue Des Chenes in order to reach the backhouse on their large property. Taking note of the roadside sign, "No trespassers! Speed Limit 10 miles an hour," I drive slowly along a dusty gravel road lined with large live oak trees. Eventually, I arrive at the back of the Dardar Robichaux family's big white house. Standing tall in the middle of the property, a twenty-foot post for traditional Houma stick-back games sways gently back and forth in the southern breeze. After closing my car door, and while walking towards the back steps of the house, I glance over at the flocks of cattle egrets grazing in the neighboring fields. Snowball, the family's pet cat, greets me by playing seductively at my feet. Meanwhile, the sound of thunder rumbles in the distance.

A few months earlier, I made the short drive from the Dardar Robichaux house further south to Galliano in order to conduct an interview with six Houma women of different generations. The trawling season for brown shrimp in the region was still not yet

underway. Each year during the month of May, local trawlers along with the brown pelicans wait eagerly for the local government officials' permission to drop their trawl nets. Meanwhile, Houma elders, like Whitney Dardar, work patiently on their boats in the dry docks, patching up nets and getting supplies ready for another hard season of trawling. Laura Naquin Billiot and Helen Dardar Gindrat, two of the six women I planned to interview that morning, helped to arrange our meeting.² Laura, who still trawls with her husband, asked me to meet them at Dorcas' Closet, a second-hand clothing store. Both her and Helen started up the store two years ago for community members who are in need of such social services. Due to the seasonal nature of trawling, many families continue to live from paycheck to paycheck. Increases in local competition, the inflation of gasoline prices, and deflated prices at the shrimp sheds due to (the supposed) foreign imports from China, contribute to the present troubling economic times for those Houma families who rely solely on trawling as their main source of financial income.

The store is located at the back of the former Galliano elementary school now owned by a local Christian organization. Four years ago, Brenda Dardar Robichaux first introduced me to Helen and Laura at the Grand Bois (Big Forest) Powwow, which takes place each March in Bourg, Louisiana. Brenda thought both women's life narratives would help with my research questions because of their past leadership as chairwomen of the Houmas, and their present political roles as tribal councilwomen. Helen, born in 1931 and now 74, was chairwoman of a political organization based in Lafourche parish called the Houma Tribe during the 1970s. In 1979, she helped to unite her settlement's political body, the Houma Tribe, with the Houma Alliance, another major settlement located in Terrebonne Parish (*The Daily Houma Courier and Terrebonne Press*, 1979). She also

established a much-needed adult education program in the late 1970s, which continued through to the mid-1980s.

Laura, in turn, was chairwoman of the Houma Nation during the aftermath of hurricane Andrew in 1990s and was forced to deal with the ensuing political challenges that took place within her community (*The Courier*, 1993, May 27). Before becoming chairwoman, she also helped to teach Houma adults how to read during the implementation of the adult education program. I originally interviewed both women at the Grand Bois Powwow, then later at the Tribal Center, and twice together at Dorcas' Closet. Laura thought an interview recorded on video camera with her mother and three aunts would be an important historical opportunity for my work. And therefore, Laura arranged for her mother, Hilda Naquin, and two aunts, Enola Hanson and Annette Collins to meet up with me at the store. Their other sister, Henrietta, could not make the meeting. Helen and her daughter Helen Anne would also be there. All the women now lived in Golden Meadow, Galliano, or New Orleans.

In chapter one, I reviewed the historically situated literature on the colonizer's policies of institutional discrimination, the Churches' establishment of missionary schools, and the Houmas' political struggles to gain access to public schools. Although the literature reviews the broader historical and social structures, it does not provide accounts of the Houmas daily experiences outside and inside such institutional structures. In this chapter, I specifically examine these six women's, as well as Whitney Dardar's, Cody Danos's, Corrine Paulk's, and Brenda Dardar Robichaux's life narratives, in order to contextualize their indigenous lived experiences of such social and cultural structures. In the distance, a lightening storm illuminates the darkness overhanging the township of

Raceland. Forewarned of what is to come, two mourning doves take cover in a nearby tree.

At Dorcas' Closet

I told them the old Indian is coming home to die. My kids said don't say that mamma! It is home here. I belong here.

(Helen Dardar Gindrat, 2005)

No matter what it was, you came up to the plate. If your husband was a trawler and he left to go on a boat, you were right there with him. And, if he was trapping, you were skinning nutrias or putting it on the mould or whatever. People stayed married then. Today, my husband trawls and I still go with him.

(Laura Billiot, 2005)

When I parked my car at the back of the old Galliano elementary school, Laura was already there with her mother Hilda. While we were waiting for the other women to arrive, Hilda browsed the racks of clothes in the small store. With all the clothing, shoes, and toys in the room, you could hardly tell the store was an old classroom. Only the remnants of a blackboard and an old crank pencil sharpener on the countertop at the front of the room gave away its former use. Shortly after my arrival, Helen pulled up to the driveway with her daughter Helen Anne in one car, and Enola with her sister Annette in another. After all the women arrived, there was barely enough space for all of us to sit together in the now crowded room. The six women seemed more excited about getting together and catching up with one another, rather than meeting with me for the interview.

While the women were waiting for me to set up my recording equipment, they chatted and browsed together around the store. Eventually, Hilda picked out a dress for herself. Laughter filled the room as the women shared recent gossip with one another. Except for Helen Anne, the youngest of the six women, the rest went back and forth between French and English. Hilda, born in 1914 and the oldest of the six women, spoke mostly in French. Amongst the Houma community the older generations tend to feel more comfortable expressing themselves in French. Most of the current generation of Houma children is unable to speak, or understand, the old dialect of French their great grandparents are able to speak.

Although many scholars continue to refer to Houma French as Cajun French, members of the community continue to argue that their dialect of the French language predates Cajun French. Nonetheless, many past and present scholars refuse to acknowledge the existence of a distinct Franco-Houma culture or dialect of Houma French (see Rottet, 2001, for example). In a recent book, Miller (2004) explains, “even with their financial travails United Houma people maintained a vibrant Cajun influenced culture, with many speaking French, performing traditional subsistence practices, and attempting to maintain their Indianness amid the growing boomtowns of their homeland” (p. 158). Even though Miller’s chapter takes great care to favorably depict the complexities of the United Houma Nation’s petition for Federal Recognition, like the BIA, he fails to acknowledge the uniqueness of their Franco-Houma culture.

Due to their historical and close geographical proximity to each other, I will not deny that Franco-Cajun culture influenced the Houma people. Yet how might university scholars and the Bureau of Indian Affairs researchers examine how the Franco-Houma

culture influenced the Acadian communities that immigrated to Louisiana sometime after 1755? In the same chapter, Miller (2004) suggests, that French adventurers Chevalier de Tonti, Pierre Lemoyne, and Sieur de La Salle, all established trade relationships with the Houma before 1699. Therefore, the Houmas' appropriation of French as a trade language arguably predates the Acadian arrival to Louisiana. The United Houma Nation current governing tribal council have expressed that no French-speaking researcher, from a French-speaking nation, has ever done research specifically on the Houma French language within their community. Although, Harrell (1997) suggests, there is "compelling evidence that Houma French is... a distinct variety, and it has linguistic features that seem to set it apart from other varieties, ...there is not enough data... to be conclusive" (p. 57). Until a French-speaking researcher decides to conduct research on the Houma French language, the data will probably remain inconclusive. Such research needs to be done soon, due the diminishing numbers of Franco-Houma speakers. After I finished setting up, the women sat in a circle on some metal chairs—the kind you might find in an old high school's auditorium. I began the interview by asking each woman to introduce who they were, what year they were born, and where.

Annette Collins started our conversation. She was born 1927 in Venice, a small village located at the southern tip of Plaquemines Parish. She described how trawling, fishing, and trapping industries supported her settlement's local economy. Currently, that entire Houma settlement, including the numerous orange orchards that line the highway south towards Venice, are underwater due to the tidal surge and failure of the levee system during hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Everything but memories are now lost to the inherent violence of this beautiful landscape. Enola told us how she was born November

1st 1922, on her family's kitchen floor. "My momma said I came out just like a jet plane and I haven't stopped yet!" Once again, the other women burst into laughter.

As mentioned before, Hilda, the eldest of the two sisters, was born in 1914 in Golden Meadow. She described how a midwife delivered her because there were no doctors available at the time. In fact, midwives delivered four of the six women. Before the 1950s, midwives and *traiteurs* (Houma healers) delivered most of the children in the various Houma settlements. "Me, I wasn't a midwife," Hilda said with a thick Franco-Houma accent, "but I went and catch some already!" Even after the 1950s, many of the Houma elders, whom I interviewed over the past four years, recalled how they did not have access to public hospitals because of the locally instituted policies of segregation. "Hospitals in Houma," Helen Anne explained, "had signs with No Indians Allowed." Her mother, now Helen Dardar Gindrat, was able to deliver her daughter in a hospital in 1950 because her husband's last name was Bouzigard. "If they would have known I was Indian and a Dardar," Helen continued, "they wouldn't have let me in." Many members of the nonindigenous population, especially in the Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes, used last names as racial markers to identify and segregate individuals who could not be clearly categorized visually as black, white, or Indian. The local colonial population then called those individuals who had a specific last name and lived primarily at the geographical edges of the southern limits of the Dulac and Golden Meadow townships, Sabines. Utilizing a geopolitical system of naming to psychosocially map out the indigenous inhabitation of certain public and private spaces, the local colonial population was able to institute racial segregation through the encoding of last names. If we recall chapter two, depending on what geographical area one happened to be from, names like Billiot,

Dardard, Dardar, Verdin, Parfait, and Verret marked one's cultural identity, and in turn, denied your access to public spaces which were coded by local government officials as white only.

Midwifery is now a dying, if not lost art amongst the women and men of the United Houma Nation. During an interview at the Tribal Center in Golden Meadow, Marina Serigney, one of the appointed tribal genealogists, shared stories about how her grandmother, Valentine Dardar Billiot, was a recognized midwife amongst her community. "I don't want to, but I guess I have to tell you when I was born," she reluctantly told me with a smile while working on a tribal member's genealogical history. Without looking up from her desk, "December 13th, 1944 in Pointes-Aux-Chenes at home," she said. "My grandmother delivered me. She was a midwife. And, she delivered maybe a 1000 kids, from Pointes-Aux-Chenes, Golden Meadow, Grand Caillou, St. Bernard, and Lafitte. She went all around the place." "My grandmother," Marina continued still yet to look up from her work, "was born in 1882...hmmm...or was it 1883?" Valentine received her training as a midwife from her mother and grandmother. Before the 1950s, the educational training for the art and science of midwifery was a core part of some Houma women's health curriculum at home.

In the 1950s, colonial doctors required Valentine Dardar Billiot to do some training in order to better assess women who were having difficulties with their deliveries at home. "She needed that training," Marina went on to say, "because she used to ride the ambulance with the women and she used to go in the delivery room with the doctors at the hospital in Houma." Marina's grandmother delivered 7 of the 12 children her mother, Georgina Billiot Verdin, had between 1939 and 1959. The other five were delivered at

the hospital due to the complications that arose during the delivery at home. Eventually, the increased number of colonial doctors who chose to practice in, or just outside, the Houmas' remote rural communities, diminished the cultural and social need for Houma midwives. After World War II, the building of roads and bridges to Houma communities also facilitated their travels to visit the nonindigenous doctors who were in larger neighboring towns. Nonetheless, the Houmas' accessibility to any local doctor was dictated by that individual's instituted policies of race. Back at Dorcas' Closet, Laura shared with us that she was born in Dr. Gravois office. He was the only doctor on that part of Bayou Lafourche at the time of her birth. All born before the 1950s, Hilda, Enola, Annette, and Helen expressed that they were welcomed into their families by midwives, and then, supported economically by trapping, hunting, and fishing.

When I first asked the women what their educational experiences were like in Louisiana, Hilda replied that she did not have any schooling. During this part of the interview, I neglected to stress to the women that I wanted to learn more about their educational experiences outside the formal walls of schooling. Therefore, I restructured my initial question by asking the women what their parents taught them at home. Still, Enola responded quite emphatically, that her parents "didn't show us anything!" Helen then chimed in, "they showed you how to keep house, how to cook." "Yes, well everybody does that!" Enola rebutted. In turn, I responded that maybe today not all parents teach their children how to keep house or the art and science of preparing home cooked meals. The curriculum which Enola, quite rightly, took for granted as part of her education at home, is no longer a core part of many Houma and non-Houma families' daily teachings. Once the women realized that I wanted them to share memories of life

outside the school, they began to share stories about the daily work their parents did and the chores they were required to do, as well as the knowledge needed to complete such tasks.

Hilda's entire family eventually migrated from Golden Meadow to Venice so that their father could have access to a part of the Louisiana landscape known for its bountiful trapping, hunting, and fishing resources. Still today, Venice is a revered place amongst local sportsmen. Leaning slightly forward in her chair, "they trapped!" Enola said. "In fact, we went trapping in the winter time to our camp in Pointe-Aux-Chenes. That is where I learned how to put the muskrat on the mold. We would put the molds out during the day to dry in the sun and bring them back in at night. Our parents showed us that because we had to help daddy!" With a grimace on her face, Laura asked, "in that same camp?" Again she repeated in disbelief, "Ya'll would have to bring in the fur, inside the camp!" "Yes," Hilda responded. "You would smell it all night and all day." Enola then added, "I would tell momma... I can't sleep! So, she would get a wet towel and I would put the towel on my face so I couldn't smell the muskrat. It was terrible!" Hilda, Enola, and Annette went on to describe how their father's trapping camp did not have any of the air-conditioning systems like you see today, or the screens on the windows to protect them from the pestering mosquitoes and gnats.

Annette, who was silent during most of the interview, explained that their house's walls in Venice were made of mud. "Mud and moss," Hilda added. "My mom used to put the newspaper on top of that, " Annette continued explaining. "That was our wallpaper." The term used by local elders to describe the process of making houses from a mixture of mud and Spanish moss is *bousillage*. "Just like they used to make a chimney in the old

days with moss and with the hay, you would put the mixture in the pit and you would jump all over it in there,” Enola said. “Then,” she went on, “they would take it and put it on the wall just like a block of concrete. Slap it in there and make a wall.” Some Houma families, especially those who were economically challenged, or simply chose to live a self-sustainable lifestyle, lived in such houses until the 1960s. If tin was not available, too expensive, or simply for health reasons, many families like their ancestors used the leaves from the palmetto plant to thatch their walls and to gable their roofs.

In order to survive a migratory lifestyle and harsh summer climate, the Houma people developed an intimate knowledge of the landscape and the material properties of its natural resources. The Houma communities involved with the seasonal industries of trapping, oystering, shrimping, fishing, and hunting needed to be able to build reliable shelters. According to Speck (1943), a Houma family could build a palmetto house in a day. The local palmetto plant provided the necessary resource to build adequate shelters, which, in turn, suited their migratory lifestyle and the subtropical climate. Furthermore, “dwelling structures, especially those with palmetto roofs,” Speck (1943) explains, “are healthier to live in than tightly enclosed buildings with corrugated tin roofs” (p. 145). Houses made with tin roofs, resulted in the baking of bodies and encouraged the onset of tuberculosis. British authorities, Speck (1940) notes, opposed the importation of tin to Fiji because tin roofs were destructive to the health conditions of the local indigenous populations. Houma elders understood that the ventilation and coolness palmetto provided in the heated seasons reduced the possibility of developing tuberculosis within their community. The palmetto plant was also (and still is) used to make baskets and dolls. The three sisters went on to describe how their house had a kitchen, dining room, a

storage room for groceries, and a big upstairs with bedrooms. For now let us briefly leave the daily lives of these women at Dorcas' Closet and come back to them later in this chapter.

Houma families, like the Naquins, who lived within such remote areas at the time, attuned their daily lives to the local pedagogy of the landscape. In the next two sections, let us take a look at some examples of daily labor within the Houma communities.

At Whitney Dardar's Oyster Shack

It was rough for our families to make a living. You had to work. My daddy worked as an oysterman. Back then you would always have someone else owning the oyster beds. He was paid fifty-cents an hour.

(Curtis Hendon, 2005)

Most of us lived as trappers, fisherman, and trawlers. And, freedom was part of that life style. You could make your living as a trawler and a trapper. And, support your family. And, not be caught up in the day-to-day activities of the country around you. You were not worried about the stock market, or the ups and downs of the economy. You made a decent living and you were able to maintain your life style. You were free from a lot of the entanglements of the surrounding society, which helped to maintain the community cohesiveness that we still have to a certain extent today. Today if you are a trawler, you have to deal with government regulations, wildlife agents, and the coastguard, and all of that. It is so much more complicated now than it ever was before.

(Michael Dardar, 2003)

My dad would be gone for two weeks and home for 3 days on and off, back and forth. We would go and get him on the boat. And, I was his baby so I would stay on the boat with him. We slept on the boat a couple of nights. I grew up

around the boat. Not little boats, large big boats that went offshore for two weeks at a time. Home for two or three days and that's about it. But we were so close.

(Jamie Billiot, 2002)

Earlier that year, in January to be exact, I visited with Whitney Dardar who had just returned from cultivating his oyster beds. Depending on the fruitfulness of the second trawling season for white shrimp, Whitney begins tending to his oyster beds as early as November, and continues through to the end of March. Louisiana produces more oysters than any other state in America (Tidwell, 2003). Like the women at Dorcas' Closet, Whitney grew up in a house made of mud and moss. As we recall from the introduction, his current two-bedroom shotgun house lies just below the corporate limits of Golden Meadow. With dark blue siding and various hanging plants adorning the front porch, it is the same house in which his father Ernest Dardar, a *traiteur*, once lived in and healed members of the Houma community.

As I arrive at his house, I know Whitney is at home because the Golden Eagle, his forty-foot trawling boat, is docked across the street on Bayou Lafourche. Usually, when he is back from trawling or oystering, his blue pickup truck is parked either at the dock or at home. Today the truck is parked at the front of his tin-roofed garage. I drive my car, slowly, along the makeshift driveway paved with discarded oyster shells. Meanwhile, Whitney is in the midst of transferring oysters from a wheelbarrow at the front of the garage to a small shucking room at the back. Inside, an old Evenrude outboard motor leans against the tin wall. Empty burlap sacks on top of a broken washing machine sit to the other side. Ice-chests with the leftover smell of dead shrimp sit in the corner. Shovels,

paddles, lifejackets, and some trawl netting hang on the walls. Baskets filled with empty pop cans line the back wall. Like the driveway, the garage floor is also covered with crushed oyster shells. An old vacant trailer home occupies the yard next to the garage. His other daughter, Samantha, once lived there with her husband and children before moving into their present house on the other side of Bayou Lafourche. Now vacant, the trailer suffocates under long thick vines and their foliage.

Always known for sporting a smile, Whitney greets me immediately with a huge hug. At seventy, Whitney's peach-stone colored face is weathered from his constant exposure to the Louisiana elements each trawling and oyster season. In a white shirt with red stripes, partially covered by his faithful yellow shucking apron, and wearing black rubber gloves and white shrimp boots, Whitney returns to collecting oysters from the wheelbarrow and places them into a red basket. Oystering is extremely hard labor and physically demanding on one's back. I follow him to the small shucking room at the back. Once there, he resumes shucking oysters. Wedging the shucking knife always at an angle, Whitney begins opening up the fresh oysters with relative ease. After opening up a rather large oyster, he offers it to me. Don't get me wrong: I love oysters! Yes, I love chilled oysters with lemon, horseradish, ketchup and Tabasco! But, I had yet to eat a raw oyster straight up, and served a little warmer than your average room temperature to boot. I put the oyster, rather reluctantly, into my mouth, chewed once or twice, and then swallowed. "Good," Whitney said once again with a smile, in a thick Franco-Houma accent. "Me myself," Whitney continued as he opened a smaller oyster with a smile, "I prefer de smaller ones." I thought to myself, I prefer the dressed-up chilled ones.

Whitney has faithful customers who eagerly wait for him to begin cultivating his oyster beds each season. In fact, he cannot keep up with their demand. For as little as thirty-five dollars, Whitney will sell you a gallon of shucked oysters. Or he charges you twenty-five dollars for a sack of about a hundred oysters not yet shucked. That same gallon costs at least twice that much at any restaurant in Baton Rouge. In order to be successful at farming oysters, Whitney must have an intimate knowledge of the Louisiana landscape. Each year, Whitney travels to the public waters of the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary in order to gather juvenile oysters, which he adds to his established beds. Oysters, always sensitive to the equilibrium of their environment, need just the right amount of salinity in the water, as well as sediment, in order to survive.

A few days earlier Curtis Hendon, a retired trawler and oysterman, was gracious enough to take me to see the coastal erosion currently taking place on and around Isle de Jean Charles. During our drive he shared the following,

I am not that old to see a big industry like trawling [he pauses]...in fact, it will probably go belly up because the government is really not helping the commercial industry and coastal erosion has taken over. It has eaten so much on the coast that the stuff the shrimp need to feed on is disappearing. The oysters also need a little bit brackish water to reproduce. That is not happening. There are a lot of big changes going on and the coast is washing away. The industry is going to wash away with it I believe.

Saltwater incursion and the resulting erosion of the marsh continue to threaten the survival of the shrimp's habitat, as well as the oyster beds. Houma elders, like Whitney and Curtis, are aware that the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary is a delicate ecosystem, which requires a proper ethic of stewardship in order to ensure the future economic

livelihood of their communities. Louisiana continues to lose twenty-five square miles of marsh a year.

After shucking a few more oysters, Whitney invited me into his house for lunch. As we walked through the front door, I immediately noticed the smell of fried food coming from the kitchen. Paintings of Mary and Jesus hung on one of the walls. Pictures of his old trawling boats and his two daughters and grandchildren were on another. The television was on. Material for powwow regalia lay strewn across the couch. In the corner, two cockatoos snuggled quietly beside each other in a wire cage. At the other end of the house, Deloris Dardar was in the midst of frying oysters at the stove. Propped on her knees in a wheelchair, she dunked the oyster meat into an egg-wash spiced up with Tony's seasoning, dipped it into a mixture of flour and cornmeal, and then placed each tasty morsel carefully into a pot of boiling oil. Periodically, Deloris, also known as "granny" within the Houma community, scooped up the oysters to check their color for a golden brown consistency.

At the age of five, Deloris lost both her legs from the knees down as a result of complications when she contracted chicken pox. Despite the partial physical loss, and the lack of modern prostheses, Deloris continues to live a self-sufficient life. She demands it. Over the past four years, on many occasions, I watched Deloris cuss out strangers who attempted to make a fuss over her situation. Since the 1970s, Deloris, who is often silent during public meetings has been a passionate political advocate for her community. When she is not behind the scenes researching genealogies, historical documents for Federal Recognition, or answering phone calls at the Tribal Center, which concern her community, Deloris works meticulously on her grandchildren's dance regalia for

upcoming Powwows. While Deloris finished up the oysters, Whitney and I sat at the kitchen table discussing his life history as a trapper and trawler in Golden Meadow. At one point during the interview, we all laughed at the two cockatoos making love and cooing loudly in the corner.

Like the women's father at Dorcas' Closet, Whitney trapped until the early 1970s. He stopped trapping muskrats, river otters, and minks, due to a crash in the fur market. The depression of the fur market, Whitney explained, was primarily due to the national and local advertising campaigns of animal rights activists. Furthermore, the continued deterioration of the fresh water marsh no longer provided sufficient habitat for any of these fur-bearing animals. Often, Deloris accompanied Whitney in his pirogue during the winter trapping season. Like Enola and Hilda, she helped him skin and put the muskrats onto the moulds. Utilizing a push-pole and his arms to power a cypress pirogue, Whitney sometimes traveled as much as 10 to 20 miles a day in order to check his trap-lines. Whitney's knowledge of the landscape was attuned to the changing seasons, cognizant of the landscape's dynamic pedagogy, as well as the evolving physical, social, and political climate.

Each year, once the brown shrimp are fully grown, and the seasonal tides are just right, these small crustaceans begin to make their way back out to the Gulf. During the month of May, before outboard motors were invented (and individuals within the Houma community could afford one), without a compass or a map, Whitney traveled 10 miles back and forth each day to Leeville, merely equipped with a cast net, to fish for these little brown crustaceans. Fifty years later, Whitney now mans his forty-foot diesel trawling boat solo along the inter-coastal tributaries of the Gulf. In order to live a

sustainable lifestyle as a trawler, or to even profit from it, you must become the knowledge that is the tides, the weather, the marsh, and the shrimp. As hunter or fisherman, the landscape becomes your library, and in reading it you become the landscape. “Everyone who lives by hunting or gathering,” Brodi (2000) writes, “must notice, read, interpret, and share the meanings of signs in the natural world.” In order to survive the harsh climate of these southern marshlands, you must understand the migratory curriculum of the Louisiana landscape. Whitney Dardar continues to profit and support his family with his intimate understandings of the land.

Trawling is, at times, also dangerous work. Many men accidentally injure themselves, and even die, when the boat’s equipment is toxically hazardous to one’s health. However, many men cannot afford to buy insurance or pay into a workman compensation plan. Cody Danos’s father died of pneumonia while working on one of the trawling boats. “They are suspecting that it was,” she explained, “something from the boat. The refrigeration gases or something like that caused it. It was never investigated or anything. He was ill with it.” At age 39, Oris Charles Dardar left a wife and seven children behind. He did not have any life insurance at the time of his death. Cody was twelve at the time. I will come back to Cody’s story a little later in this chapter.

Each year, after paying for Brenda and Samantha’s school supplies and clothes, Whitney and Deloris Dardar were able to set aside a little money to eventually buy a small boat equipped with an outboard motor. “I still remember my dad being a fisherman,” Brenda (2002) recalls.

And my parents were always able to provide me the things that we needed. You know, we didn’t have a big house. We did not have a big beautiful car, you know, not materialistic things. But yet, they always made sure that I was provided

with the things that I needed for school. That part was important to them. Like I said, I would have denied if you would have told me [she pauses], but when I look back I really did grow up poor, but I never would have considered myself that way.

On a modest income, every so many years, Whitney and Deloris were able to save enough money to buy a larger boat like the Golden Eagle he has now. According to Whitney, the zenith of his trawling days for shrimp were during the 1960s and early 1970s. “It is now 2004,” Whitney says with a thick Franco-Houma accent, “and with the increase of the diesel, I am still getting paid 1960s prices at the sheds for my shrimp.” Even if Whitney has a good year, the inflation of gas prices combined with a 30 year freeze on what he is receiving at the shrimp sheds, are taking their toll. Furthermore, for a Houma family who relies on trawling, one bad catch means one week, maybe two, or even three without an income. With the increases in the sizes of commercial trawling vessels and the number of trawlers, factored in with continued erosion of the marsh, the current shrimp population can no longer sustain the average Houma family economically, let alone allow them to make a profit from it.

This year, the tidal surge of hurricane Rita disrupted the fragile equilibrium of the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary, and in turn, the life cycle of the shrimps’ ecosystem. The surge also damaged, and in some instances, even carried away trawlers’ boats. As a result, profiting from trawling will be difficult for Houma families this year. Yet these families continue to endure the harsh realities of Louisiana’s beautiful landscape. Katrina and Rita are not the first, nor will they be the last, hurricanes to hit Louisiana. At age seventy, Whitney continues to trawl and make enough money to sustain modest lifestyle. For Whitney, trawling is more than an economic endeavor—it is a way of life.

At the Shrimp Sheds

My mom, as far as I can remember, worked for a while in a shrimp factory where she broke the heads off the shrimp or peeled shrimp where they sold them. In other words, where my dad would go sell the shrimp at the sheds and she would be there. They called it boxing the shrimp, where you take the heads off the shrimp or peel them. And then, box them to sell to different companies.

(Jamie Billiot, 2002)

Mother worked in houses. She was a housekeeper and she still does that today. That is how she raised us. That is how she made her money and going into the shrimp factory. She worked also at the oyster factory. She was an all around person. She was even a cook at a barroom. She worked as a waitress and doing everything to meet the needs of her children.

(Cody Danos, 2005)

I was born and raised with no money. It didn't bother me none. We had what we needed and not what we wanted. And, I raised my kids almost the same way. You had what you needed and not what you wanted. If we had money to buy them what they wanted and not what they needed, well we would buy it for them.

(Marina Serigney, 2005)

From the veranda at the house in Raceland, I watch the sugarcane dance back and forth in the southeastern breeze. The rain has stopped. At the edge of Bayou Lafourche, under the midday sun, the anhinga expands its wings, and indulges itself on a favorite sunning log. The invisible humidity, heavy and damp, still hovers over the landscape. Under the veranda, Snowball patiently feeds its young. It is Sunday afternoon. Brenda and Mike

have gone down the bayou to watch their daughter Félicite perform at a dance recital in Larose. Meanwhile, I wait at the house for Cody Danos to arrive for our interview. Sipping coffee, I daydream about a crawfish sitting on a rock.

Yesterday, as the sun set over the horizon, Jason, Joshua, Jamie, Jared, Ashley, and I played stickball out in the yard. In order to play stickball each person needs two sticks (called kabocca in the Choctaw language), which are about a third the size of a lacrosse stick. You also need a small leather ball (called a towa). Each indigenous nation has its interpretation of the game. Historically, stickball games were used to settle disputes between different indigenous communities. The nature of the playing field itself is not defined by any rigid boundaries. Usually, the game takes place between two poles. Depending on the nation and location of the game, the poles are arbitrarily put at distances varying from fifty to a thousand feet. Our game took place around a twenty-foot pole at the center of the yard. A green coffee can covers the top of the pole. About three feet down from the top, a red ribbon is tied around it. The only rule is that men are not allowed to touch the ball with their hands. When women are invited to play stickball they are allowed to use their hands. In order to score two points during our game at the house, a player must hit the pole between the ribbon and the can. If a player is able to hit the can, your team is then awarded four points. When I play with Brenda's two sons, Jason and Joshua, and their girlfriends, Jamie and Ashley, we usually end our games at twenty points. Currently, there are professional stickball leagues in which different indigenous communities compete against one another. Each league has different rules and regulations. As in many American sports, a certain amount of aggression is acceptable while playing the game.

From the veranda, I watch a white car drive slowly up the dusty gravel road to the back house. It is Cody. Once she arrives, we greet each other with a huge hug. Cody currently teaches grade 8 math at Raceland Junior High. Her route to becoming a professional educator has not been an easy one. Cody is also a representative for her parish on the tribal council. In fact, I met her for the first time at a council meeting. We have gotten to know each other better over the past four years because of the volunteer work we both do at the various community events like the elder's festival.

Her father died of pneumonia when she was twelve. Cody, a hard worker herself, had a hardworking mother as a role model. Margaret Dardar worked as a housekeeper, as a waitress, a cook at a barroom, and long days at the shrimp sheds. "Usually mother worked," Cody (2005) said, "from as early as five in the morning until seven at night, depending upon how much shrimp they had at the time. You would dehead the shrimp and we called it breaking heads."

I then asked Cody how much women were paid for this type of work. Cody (2005) replied,

By the bucket! They had to fill up the bucket. I am not certain how much it was before, but I want to say it was like 25 cents a bucket. When I started going with her, we would go and my brother would go too, and it went up to like a dollar a bucket. After my children were born, Ty must have been in like the first grade, she would call me and say, "they had shrimp and so let's go!" She'd say, "you come with me and we'll go half!" She was one of the fastest ones to break heads. My aunt was a little faster than her and it would take two people to keep up with one of them. And seldom, did you have two people that might beat them. At the end of the day, my mom and aunt had the most buckets. My aunt usually had a little more than mom. When she'd call and say we'd go half, that was a deal that I couldn't resist because half the time, I'd just be emptying the buckets while she was breaking the heads.

Cody described how her mother raised seven children, while also working every day at the shrimp sheds during the trawling seasons.

She worked every day, so you had to make sure the house was tended to. You had to make sure the house was clean. We washed clothes on the washboard. We just had to tend to the house while she worked and make sure that everything got done before she got back. We even had to have supper cooked before she got back!

Margaret Dardar had seven children to provide for after her husband passed away. “The year my dad died,” Cody (2005) continued, “we bought a new station wagon. My mom had to sell the station wagon and the boat that he had just gotten. For her to go to the grocery store, she would always go with Brenda’s mom Deloris.” Like Whitney, Cody grew up in a small two-bedroom shotgun house. Her mother closed in the front porch and converted it into a room for the girls. The boys were in one of the rooms in the main part of the house. And, her mother was in the other. When I think of the size of Whitney Dardar’s current house, it is hard to imagine that eight people were able to live in such small living quarters. “She always worked and improved on the house on her own—getting someone to repair it and enlarge it all on her own.” Many Houma families were (are still) in similar situations. Even though Margaret worked away from the home on a daily basis, she constantly stressed the importance of education to her children. All of Cody’s brothers and sisters graduated from school, which was hard to do during the 1960s and 1970s, as we shall see in the next chapter.

During another interview with Loretta Dardar Gilbert (2005) a week earlier at the Tribal Center in Golden Meadow, she described how her mother, Antoinette Dardar, had to raise nine of them basically alone, after her dad, Etienne Dardar, suffered a mysterious illness. Loretta’s dad went oystering and cooked on a supply boat before the onset of his

illness. Thereafter, he worked from time to time at the shrimp sheds. Loretta also described how she accompanied her father often to the shrimp sheds. “I didn’t like it!” Loretta exclaimed. Peeling shrimp, or breaking heads, is not glamorous work. In fact, it can be dangerous at times. A few years earlier, Jamie Billiot (2002) told me how her mother, Doris, contracted hepatitis while she was working at the shed. “You could always get something in your food or your drink from the raw shrimp,” Jamie went on to explain. As a result, her mother stopped working at the sheds. Instead, she cleaned houses in order to help Jamie pay for her college expenses at Louisiana State University.

That same morning at the Tribal Center, I also interviewed Marina Serigney (2005) about the work she did growing up. She was the third of the twelve children her mother had. If we recall, her grandmother delivered seven of them at home. Her family lived in Pointes-Aux-Chenes, a small community on the mainland, just across from Isle de Jean Charles. Before the 1950s, the only way to travel between the two communities was by boat. Soon after, in order to facilitate transportation between the two communities, the parish council approved the construction of a two-lane highway. “At a very early age,” Marina (2005) said, “I had to start helping my momma with the kids, with my brothers and my sisters.” When I asked her to describe her work, she responded, “I was cleaning dirty diapers, cleaning the floor, and doing housework.” In 1960, when her sisters were old enough to help her mother with the daily chores, Marina (2005) was sent, at age fifteen mind you, to work for Loretta’s mother in Golden Meadow.

I asked Marina if it was common for large families to send some of their children to help out other families. Marina (2005) answered,

Yeah when you are a big family like that, if one of the girls could go and work somewhere else, well that was money that she could use to buy her own stuff. Loretta's mom and dad wasn't people with money. But when I first went over there, they were giving me...maybe...like eight dollars a week, or something like that. After a while, whenever they would buy clothes for the kids, they would buy me clothes.

Five years after moving to Golden Meadow, Marina married her first husband. "During my first few years of marriage, I went trawling with my husband. We had a boat. Before that, I was working in the shrimp factory, popping heads. After 1970, I went back to that work." Marina brought her three children trawling with them during the summer months. Many parents took their children trawling or trapping even if school was in session.

When I asked Marina what she thought was the hardest part of trawling. She replied:

Waking up in the middle of the night to pick shrimp. My second husband had a shrimp boat and we used to trawl year round. And most of the time it was just my husband and I. I knew how to read all the equipment on the boat. I used to know how to work those big giant winches. But the worst part was to wake up in the middle of the night, cold, and pick out shrimp. We'd trawl night and day, twenty-four hours a day, and we used to stay fourteen or fifteen days offshore, sometimes longer, and then we'd come home and stay, maybe, five or six days, and then we would go back out there again. (Marina, 2005)

Many women, like Laura Billiot at Dorcas' Closet, continue to help their husbands trawl. Such work involves long days and nights, as well as extended periods away from family and the amenities of the mainland. Although consumers are paying anywhere between seven and ten dollars a pound for large shrimp at the grocery store, the Houma trawling families receive about one tenth of the total profits. The labor of the indigenous working class continues to be exploited by the owners of shrimp sheds and the CEOs of large retail corporations.

The majority of the Houma people continue to work on trawling or tug boats as captains, cooks, or deckhands, as oystermen and crabbers, breaking heads at the shrimp sheds, as roustabouts on the oil platforms, and as bartenders and waitresses, sales clerks, and domestic laborers on the mainland. I do not intend to demean such occupations. However, few Houmas have had the opportunity to become doctors, lawyers, dentists, teachers, and professors within colonial institutions. The governing body of the Houmas does not necessarily want its people to learn such professions in order to profit economically, but rather to benefit from the essential services such professions would provide their communities. In fact, before colonization the United Houma Nation had their doctors (*traiteurs*), teachers (*elders*), and professors (*tribally appointed oral historians*).

Historically, Houma men and women worked in order to provide and sustain the essentials—food, shelter, and clothing—for their families. Many families continue to live self-sustainable lives. Nonetheless, more and more elders are encouraging their youth to pursue a college education in order to help their community benefit from the technological advancements that have taken place over the last century.

After the introduction of the colonizers' industrial technology, as well as the judicial systems that supported a capitalistic trade economy, many Houma families appropriated colonialism's technologies, cultures, and social institutions. Technological innovations, such as new modes of motorized transportation, gas stoves, and washing machines, for example, emerged during World War I and World War II. The new technologies helped change the dynamics and the duration of daily domestic labor necessary to sustain a Houma family's essential needs. The acquisition of gas stoves and

washing machines provided more “free” time, certainly a relative term, within each Houma family. Although many women, like Margaret Dardar, used such “free” time to work at a second or third job, other families enjoyed the additional capital and leisure time by going to movies, the dance halls, and eating at restaurants. Let us now return to the women at Dorcas’ Closet in order to examine how colonialism’s curriculum reproduced social infrastructures that implemented policies of segregation to constrain the Houmas’ capacity to appropriate and benefit leisurely from economic, social, and cultural capital.

Banana Bread Back At Dorcas’ Closet

Sabines.... That is the word they had for our people.

(Hilda Naquin, 2005)

And we would have to get on a bus and we'd have to sit in the back, of course. You had your place, and you knew your place, and you better stick to it. And, when we would go to the theatre the whites would sit downstairs. The blacks would sit downstairs behind the whites. We had to go up in the balcony. You know, we just couldn't go into a lot of the restaurants or dance halls. There were separate dance halls. This was a three-race parish for so many years.

(Corrine Paulk, 2005)

I knew that I couldn't go up the bayou. We had one of our friends' relatives, her name was not Naquin, Dardar, or Billiot, and so she was allowed to go to the school up the bayou. I think that is when you noticed the differences. Because her name was different from ours, she was allowed to go up the bayou and she let you know it too.

(Cody Danos, 2005)

It has taken a lot to change my mindset because I remember incidences happening all along the way. Once I got older, let's say junior high, if there was a certain guy, maybe who wanted to date me, or something like that...[she pauses] Well if there was interest shown, the parents would put a stop to it, because she is a Sabine from down the bayou, and you can't date her. So I remember that.

(Brenda Dardar Robichaux, 2002)

That morning at Dorcas' Closet in Galliano, the women were able to help one another remember their childhood experiences in Venice, Golden Meadow, Point-Aux-Chenes, and New Orleans. And, in turn, the women weaved their life narratives into and from one another's. My questions soon shifted from what life was like at home to life outside the home. More specifically, I wanted the women to teach me more about their life experiences with the systems of segregation outside the home in Louisiana.

Helen Anne, the youngest of the six women, responded to my questions about segregation first. "I had Indian on my birth certificate and Indian but was considered just as white as anybody else," Helen Anne explained. "In New Orleans, they only had two classes of people...black and white," she continued. "In New Orleans," I repeated. "Yes, in New Orleans there was strictly just black or white. I didn't have any problems at 9 years old." Unlike the other women, Helen Anne grew up in New Orleans and not "down" the bayou. Helene Anne went on to explain that because of the autonomy a big city provides, her father's nonindigenous last name, and her fair skin color, she was able to attend the white schooling system. "I just went right into the schooling system without any problem," she said.

"Now, if you were Houma Indian, and you were dark, and if you would go into the city," she continued, "you were considered black! You were not considered Indian

and you were not considered white. If you fit in with the blacks, you could not go into the picture shows.” Helen Anne then described how her cousins were not able to go to the movies because of the color of their skin. “Aunt Virginia’s son...he had to carry his birth certificate with him to show that he was Philippine and Houma Indian. He was dark, but had no features of an African American. We would go to the picture show on Canal Street. They would let me in but would not let him in unless he showed his birth certificate saying he was Philippine and Indian. He had to carry that with him when he went into the city.” Many families moved from small rural towns down the bayous to New Orleans not only to find work and fulfill their dreams, but also to escape the instituted policies of racial segregation, which specifically targeted their indigenous community.

As mentioned in the first chapter, depending on an individual’s specific physical attributes, that person in turn was able to blend, or not, into the white colonial culture in New Orleans. Due to the effects of global migration after the colonization of the North American continent, the reality of identities within the United Houma Nation are multiple, complex—French, Houmas, Choctaw, Acadian, Spanish, Filipino, English, African American, etc.—and exist within the liminal spaces of racial and cultural hybridity (see Bhabha 1994; and Loomba, 1998). Therefore, what defines their cultural and national identity is still a contested domain between the Houma, the colonial culture that surrounds them, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Her mother, Helen Dardar Gindrat, then shared a story about segregation. “My cousin Leo went with Danny, my husband, one time to a restaurant,” she said.

They went sit at the table and the man came up to him and said this man doesn't belong in here! Well, Danny stood up and said this man has the right to be in here. Give him your birth certificate. If he leaves, everybody has to leave. He showed them his birth certificate and they left him. Then they came to the table and told him that they would not wait on him. (Helen, 2005)

"A lot of people are like that," Enola (2005) added. "But, I never had any trouble. I could go anywhere I wanted to go and sit anywhere I wanted. I didn't have any problems." "Yes, but at the Golden Meadow movie theater," Annette clarified, "the Indians had to go upstairs to sit. You couldn't sit downstairs."

"At that time," Enola went on to say, "we used to go to the movies and the road wasn't even paved. I used to bring me two pairs of shoes—one to walk in the mud and one to walk in the movie house. The pictures that were shown were Roy Rogers and Gene Audrey. We would never miss a Roy Rogers show!" The six women once again laughed. "We were always right there. I never had any problems going in! A lot of them did, but I didn't," Enola said.

"They had this place in Golden Meadow," Annette (2005) then recalled, "where they sell hamburgers." "I remember we used to stay in the truck and one of them used to pass and go get us our hamburger because we couldn't get in," she said. "So somebody else would have to go get it," I asked again. Helen Anne asked again in disbelief, "The hamburgers and bring it out to them in the car?" Annette nodded her head in agreement. "Well," Helen Anne said, "that was the first car delivery!" The women all laughed again. This time looking at me Helen Anne said nodding, "Yes car service, that is where it came from!" "We used to go a bunch of us get hamburgers because they would make good hamburgers there, but we couldn't go in," Annette emphasized one more time. "And they were cheap!" Enola added. In Lafourche and Terrebonne parish many Houma families

were barred from sitting inside restaurants to eat. A family could order at the back window, but they were not allowed to enter and sit in many of the restaurants in Golden Meadow, Houma, and Dulac. At some places, Houma families had to ask white customers to buy their food.

During our drive to Isle de Jean Charles a few months earlier, Curtis (2005) told me how he was happy that his son is never going to go through what he went through.

Discrimination back then was huge... I can remember a lot of times sitting in a restaurant, ordering my food and when it was brought to me, the owner came there and said, "We don't want no Indians over here! This is strictly for White people and we don't want no Indians here!" Today, for my boys, things have changed. They can go in a restaurant. They can sit down and eat. Martin Luther King, when he fought for his people and got the doors open for his people, that was a channel that opened for all people. Martin Luther King didn't just fight for his people. He fought for all minorities. He had a tough fight on his hands, but he opened the door for everybody. It is like a dam that was busted. When the water started coming in, everybody went in. Today it has changed. The young white people today don't see things like their moms and dads have. The young people today see everything different. Now, don't get me wrong, I still believe they have a lot of discrimination in the government. I believe there is a lot of discrimination that sits in the council of our government. (Curtis, 2005)

Curtis went on to reminisce how they hardly had any places in the city of Houma that wanted the Houmas. "Guys like me are probably going to die with some anger," he said. "When the Indian went to Houma," he continued, "the people played us really dirty. It's a shame to say, but we were stepped on."

Segregation was not limited to the local restaurants. As we saw in chapter one, the governmental, judicial, and educational institutions in Louisiana also implemented racialized policies, supported statewide by the white colonial culture, in order to deny the

African American population access to public spaces. However, the local Acadian population located in the southern rural areas of the Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes appropriated these policies in order to segregate the Houma, as well as, African Americans. Depending on what part of the parish a Houma family lived in, their last name, and the color of their skin, the types of segregation varied from situation to situation. The physical and psychological violence of segregation also found its way into the private religious institutions, as well as the social recreational and public schooling systems. Sure enough, such violence bled into the hearts and collective memories of Houma families.

The day before I met up with the women at Dorcas' Closet, I drove to Corrine Paulk's house in Houma in order to conduct an interview with her. She had recently retired from her position as a cultural resource specialist at the Terrebonne American Indian Education program in Houma. Like the women at Dorcas' Closet, a midwife delivered Corrine at her home across from the coast guard station in Dulac. Corrine had banana bread waiting for me when I arrived. Like the other women, I asked her to describe her life experiences outside the school. "I remember," she started, "that we moved on a shrimp boat. We put all of our few pieces of furniture with the chickens and everything on this shrimp boat and moved down to lower Dulac." Later, her family moved into what she called, "a little three room shotgun house." Like the other women, Corrine also experienced the psychological violence of segregation.

"Indian people were living predominantly in the lower Dulac community," Corrine said. She then went on to describe how the dance halls were segregated. "Cajuns had their own dance hall, and the blacks had their own, and the Indians had theirs," she

told me. “I remember that. And Lord be... Holy! If you happened to go into, and maybe had a white boyfriend that wanted to take you to his dance hall, there was trouble all the time.” Corrine laughed. “But, you knew your place and that's the way it was,” she then said with a sigh.

I remember back then I was a teenager and we could go places, you know? We wanted to go to the dance. I went with a couple of other people. Several of us went to a place here in Houma. We were excited about going to dance. Well we went in, sat down, and waited for someone to come and take our order. And the waiter or waitress came and said, “I'm sorry, but we can't serve you.” It was needless to say why, cause we knew, you know. Still, we waited still and sat there a moment longer. I'll never forget it was such a terrible feeling. And then you just, walked out, you know. (Corrine, 2005)

Corrine then asked me if I wanted some coffee and banana bread. Corrine grew up thinking that the rest of Louisiana, and the United States for that matter, had one establishment for whites, one for blacks, and another for “Indian” people.

As we recall chapter one, many Houma children did not have access to public schooling until the 1940s and 1950s depending in what parish you lived. And if one did, such schooling ended by the seventh or eighth grade. In 1954, the same year as *Brown v. Board of Education*, Corrine left for Thomasville, Georgia to attend Vashti High, a private Methodist school. She recalls her experiences with segregation outside her parish:

When I left from home, and for the very first time got out of this parish, it was like, I was scared to say anything because it was like I was thinking maybe I ought to tell them that I shouldn't go here because you're not supposed to go with the whites, but then the other place was the blacks. And I remember going, getting off a Greyhound on my way to school, and I looked at that sign and it said white only and I thought, maybe I shouldn't go there. So, I started to go into the café where the blacks were being served. And I went in

there and then they moved me and brought me to the white,
into the white. (Corrine, 2005)

Houma families who could afford to send their children away to schools outside their parishes did so. The Methodist Church in Dulac helped out promising students, like Corrine, who could not afford to go away to private schools. Mr. and Mrs. Brunson, who ran the community center in Dulac, helped arrange for Corrine to attend the school in Thomasville, Georgia.

Corrine (2005) explains:

But my parents had no money ... So, the Methodist church, the people there, the director and his wife they were kind of like missionaries, and they got to talking to me about a school in Thomasville, Georgia—an all girls' boarding school. It was kind of a scary idea. But then they kind of built me up, and I got excited about it, and they talked to my mom and dad. And they finally considered it, and so that's when I went to Thomasville, Georgia to Vashti High School ... for the next four years... I was lonesome at times.

Corrine expressed that she could have gone on to college. But at that time her mother was ill with cancer. Corrine's graduation ceremony at Vashti was the last time she saw her mother walk. Shortly after the graduation, Corrine returned to Dulac in order to take care of her ailing mother. While she was in Dulac, the community center offered her a job to teach kindergarten. Corrine spent the rest of her career promoting the potential values of appropriating the colonial curriculum to the Houma youth in Terrebonne Parish. Before I left her house for Raceland, Corrine wrapped up the rest of the banana loaf and asked me to bring it to the women at Dorcas' Closet.

Sometimes, parents sent their children away for one year to private high school and then brought them back to be enrolled in a local public high school. Back at Dorcas' Closet, Hilda explained her strategy for “unofficially” desegregating the school system in

Golden Meadow before the opening of the Indian Settlement School. Hilda sent two of her children, Delores and Earl, to the Baptist Academy over in Eunice, Louisiana. She then had them transferred from the Academy back to the junior high school in Golden Meadow. “Yes Golden Meadow Junior High School couldn’t refuse them,” Hilda explained, “because they had went over there.” She then described how the principal at the Academy sent all their official school records to the school in Golden Meadow. The principal could not refuse them, Hilda added, because they had already attended a school with white children. Enola then said proudly, “He is a preacher. He has a beautiful church over there. He is the one that went.”

Although these elders shared stories of survival, exploited labor, relative poverty, stolen dreams, and of living a landscape of experiences deeply segregated by race, laughter often filled the rooms. Perhaps humor is the only sane psychological defense one has against the violent grip of instituted racial segregation. “This haunted childhood,” Smith (1961) reminds us, “belongs to every southerner of my age” (p. 25). Collective memories of experiencing colonial violence persist amongst the Houma community. The trauma of such violence continues to bleed its tears through time. Brenda (2002) remembers:

It was probably the Golden Meadow ladies club, or Lafourche ladies club. I am not sure exactly what it was called. And they asked me to be a guest speaker. And, I am sure it was for Native American Week. I remember before it was time, being in a total panic... [She pauses]... I remember crying to my husband, it was like I reverted back to being five years old again. And all those emotions that I buried all those years and I had learned to deal with, came back all at one time. Because it was like, ‘oh my god’ you know I actually need to speak before these people. And I remember my prayer being, please let me represent our people to change whatever prejudices they had. For

whatever reasons, I saw this club as being all the powers that be in the town... It was more your affluent people, if you will, and ...those were some who held us down more than others. So I remember just being extremely nervous about having to go out there. There were still some faces. You could read an audience when you are out there. You can still tell who is not a fan of yours. But it went extremely well, and so I was pleased with that.

Like some of the women at the ladies club, Brenda's mindset has changed. Now she, other women and men within the community have future dreams for their families, as well as their nation. And yes, laughter still fills the rooms.

The women expressed that they were hungry and wanted to get a bite to eat somewhere. Helen Dardar Gindrat suggested Rosie's Kitchen. "They have great crabmeat sandwiches there," she said. And so, off we went.

Unsettling Houma Settlements

When we accepted gunpowder and whisky, we more or less, wrote our death warrant. We sealed ourselves into this system of barter and exchange with the Europeans and all of the problems that came about because of that. Especially in Eastern tribes, because in the beginning we wholeheartedly moved ourselves into this frontier exchange economy with the deerskins and trading for European goods. And over the years this built into a dependence on European goods. And, because of that dependence it allowed the Europeans to come in, and gradually work their way into blending our economy with their economy. And we became more depended on the deerskin trade and this fostered conflict between tribes over hunting grounds. And I mean that is a Houma experience, but it is also an Eastern Native American experience. And, that common historical experience goes back for all of us and we share those things.

(Micheal Dardar, 2003)

Once again from the veranda in Raceland, I watch the thick clusters of bluish clouds float over this southern landscape. It is a late Sunday afternoon in June. The elderberries along the Bayou Lafourche are in full bloom. Snowball's kittens play cautiously under the staircase. The cattle egrets have returned to graze. The Anhinga is no longer to be found on its favorite log. Soon, I will make my way back to Baton Rouge to study, read, write, and teach at Louisiana State University.

Meanwhile, I reflect on the lives of Hilda Naquin, Annette Collins, Enola Hanson, Helen Gindrat Dardar, Helen Anne Bouzigard, Laura Billiot, as well as, Whitney Dardar, Curtis Hendon, Marina Serigney, Loretta Gilbert, Cody Danos, Corrine Paulk, and Michael Dardar. What can their collective voices teach us about the psychosocial and economic effects of colonization on indigenous settlements in Louisiana?

As mentioned in the introduction, the Houma lived a seasonal migratory lifestyle. Many Houma families, since time immemorial, migrated back and forth between their larger summer agricultural villages and winter hunting, fishing, and trapping camps (see Kniffen, Gregory, & Stokes, 1987). Before contact with various European empires, the Houma's migrations across the Louisiana landscape coincided with the annual hurricane seasons. However with the ensuing colonial settlement, the violent implementation of the Indian Removal Act, and the United States' continued failure to recognize international treaties established before the Louisiana Purchase, the Houma eventually took refuge within the southeastern Louisiana swamplands.

Members of the Houma communities lived in relative isolation during the 1800s, but by the early 1900s they witnessed another influx of Europeans to the lower bayou regions of Louisiana. Instead of bringing overt war or covert diseases, using Westernized

forms of educational and judicial systems, the industrialized newcomers established oil, gas, mineral, and lumber corporations, in order to support their continued endeavors of extracting the land and subduing local indigenous populations (Deloria Jr. & Wildcat, 2001). Such colonial endeavors were, and still are, supported by the colonial military and state police.

After the Louisiana Purchase, the newly formed Republican State instituted colonial policies which attempted to force various Houma communities to dissolve their existing socioeconomic infrastructures, and in turn discontinue the their communal use of the landscape's natural resources (Dardar, 2002). "Sometime after the American takeover in 1803," Dardar (2002) explains, "the Houma tribe filed a claim to twelve sections of land, 7680 acres, on Bayou Black/Boeuf." Here we have an "indigenous" nation, who by definition are "the original inhabitants of the land," petitioning an occupying government to recognize their international treaty rights to traditional land (Alfred, 1999, p. 58). Stating that they were not in the habit of donating land, the American government refused the Houma petition (Dardar, 2002). Colonial judicial systems in conjunction with the military were often utilized to maintain colonial objectives relative to indigenous peoples (Alfred, 1999). "It would seem ridiculous," as Alfred (1999) makes clear, "that the original inhabitants of a place should be forced to justify their existence to a crude horde of refugees from another continent" (p. 58). Nonetheless colonial institutions have written such indigenous historical realities out of their national history textbooks, and thus out of our collective colonized memories, which in turn is an essential requirement for creating our sense of complacency with current colonial realities (Alfred, 1999).

During the 1800s colonial governments began to institute policies, which demanded indigenous communities to evolve their communal use of land towards private ownership. This specific colonial strategy then allowed State governments to tax individuals who now privately owned parcels of land. The federal government no longer had to deal with challenges to land claims within an international context. “International law has made colonialism illegal” (Alfred, 1999). By no longer recognizing indigenous communities as nations, and their rights to traditional lands, the various indigenous communities across Louisiana were now forced to deal with the occupying government as individuals, and thus supporting the colonizer’s strategy for dividing and conquering indigenous nations.

The taxation system also in turn worked to transform the various indigenous systems of labor. Instead of working to produce the sufficient needs for their families and communities to survive, their daily labor now had to produce profits to pay taxes to the occupying colonial governments in order to maintain an access to, and management of the natural resources on their lands. Although many individual Houmas were able successfully negotiate this new capitalistic economic system of labor, those who refused to negotiate trade relationships with colonial businessmen, or pay taxes to local government officials were not able to maintain access to the resources on their traditional lands. Even those who were able to successfully negotiate this newly established capitalistic economy, lost land as a result of the colonizer’s institutional policies of segregation.

“Around the turn of the century up until the 1920s,” Micheal Dardar (2002) reminds us, “large land owning companies came in and began stealing land from tribal

members under different pretexts.” “And I mean you see that in all oral histories,” he continues, “that they come in with quick claims, or non payment of taxes, all sort of stuff, methods to take land.” Michael (2002) explains:

That went on to some extent through until the 1930s, when the oil companies came down, and that just magnified everything to the nth degree. And we began to lose land on a wholesale scale. More land speculators came in, and oil companies, and used these same techniques, but much more effectively and extensively in taking it [the land] away from tribal members. To where we are the point today, we still as individuals own little pieces of land here and there. But nowhere the amount of land we used to own over the turn of the century.

The continued arrival of new immigrants and the wholesale loss of land diminished the Houma’s capacity to seasonally migrate between northern and southern settlements. As a result, the Houma established permanent settlements across the following southern rural fingertips of Louisiana: St. Mary’s, Terrebonne, Lafourche, Jefferson, Plaquemines, and St. Bernard Parishes (see appendix B). Perhaps more importantly, each year these communities suffer the direct economic effects of the hurricane season.

In order to clearly demarcate its territorial boundaries, the colonial government needed to terminate the Houmas practices of migratory land use. The colonial state implemented the power of their institutional discourse to create labels like “nomadic” in order to define indigenous land use and justify colonial policies for appropriating “unused” land. Brody (1999) explains,

Supporters of the colonial process have cited the apparent “nomadism” of native populations to justify advances of the settlement frontier. They have made much of the fact that hunter-gatherers lack year-round permanent settlements. They insist that these are peoples without the institutional life of the village; they equate a relative indifference to possessions and an absence of manmade monuments with a

low level of human evolution. Colonial occupation of tribal lands has also relied on a broad theory of manifest destiny that says that the taking of “nomadic” peoples’ lands by civilized farmers is ordained by fate or God. (p. 152)

Historically, the Houmas migrated seasonally from smaller hunting and fishing villages in the south to larger agricultural villages in the north. Rather than recognizing such migratory land use as legitimate, and the capacity for indigenous communities to maintain a certain form of “institutional life” during such migrations, the colonial government created a discourse, which in turn negated the socioeconomic legitimacy of nomadic cultures. As a result, various indigenous nations now categorized historically as “nomads,” continue to be denied the rights of access to the resources on their traditional lands.

Today, many Canadians seasonally migrate to Florida and back while maintaining their respective homelands and institutional ties to Canada. Therefore migratory or nomadic lifestyles are only problematic when their respective socioeconomic practices interfere with the colonial State’s appropriation and exploitation of the natural resources, which are within the territorial boundaries of what was, and still is according to the Houma, indigenous traditional lands.

The elders’ voices, which are shared near the end of this chapter, remind us that the colonial government located in Louisiana instituted racialized policies of segregation in order justify its appropriation of land and exploitation of indigenous labor. Furthermore, survival of the colonial government’s capitalistic economy depended on its institution of racial hierarchies. In order to maintain labour divisions, “certain sections of the people were racially identified as the natural working class” (Loomba, 1999, p. 126). Therefore, processes of class formation in Louisiana were shaped by racialization

(Loomba, 1999). Such divisions continue to persist. Individuals working for the colonial government agencies, like Bourgeois, supported ideologies of racial superiority. Recategorizing the Houma people as Sabines, a nonindigenous identity, facilitated the colonial State's rights to extract natural resources on what was once indigenous land within the context of international law. If the Houma people no longer exist as an indigenous people, then the United State's no longer has to recognize their international rights of access as the United Houma Nation to what was once their traditional land.

Like other council members, Micheal Dardar is acutely aware of the historical evolution of his nation's trade relationships with colonialism's cultures. Since contact, the Houma's with such colonial states have steadily moved from relations of economic interdependency toward relationships of economic dependency. For Micheal Dardar and Brenda Dardar Robichaux such relationships have developed willingly and unwillingly in order to ensure the future survival of their people. The United Houma Nation government is currently strategizing ways to reclaim land illegally appropriated and reestablishing access to, and control of the natural resources. The current government continues to work toward developing and implementing the social infrastructure needed to ensure the self-sufficiency of its national economy.

However self-sufficiency remains almost impossible without a resource base and adequate lands to build such an economy. For over one hundred years, the United Houma Nation has been involved in an ongoing process of petitioning different colonial—French, Spanish, British, and now American—governments to recognize their international rights as an indigenous nation. Yet the current American government

refuses to acknowledge the United Houma Nation's rights of access to traditional territories, as well as its inherent rights to govern its people as it deems fit.

During the early 1900s many Houma elders realized that their very survival as a nation depended on their capacity to negotiate in the judicial language of the colonial government. As a result, Houma elders like Henry Billiot began to petition school officials to grant their children access to local public schools. Citing policies of institutional segregation, local school board officials like Bourgeois, refused to grant the Houma people access to the very educational system they were paying taxes for. Local colonial gatekeepers eventually capitulated after the federal government mandated that they do so. Yet rather than allowing "Indian" students access to "white" public schools, colonialism's culture opened up Indian Settlement Schools. Houma students did not gain access to equitably funded schools until the 1960s. As we shall see in the next chapter, gaining access to the gates of colonial schools came with devastating a psychological cost for many Houma students.

Endnotes

¹ Cody Danos was interviewed at Brenda Dardar Robichaux's house in Raceland, Louisiana during the year of 2005.

² A few months before meeting up with Cody at Brenda Dardar Robichaux's house, I interviewed Helen Gindrat Dardar, Helen Anne Bouzigard, Laura Billiot, Enola Hanson, Annette Collins, and Hilda Naquin at Dorcas' Closet in Galliano.

Chapter 4: Surviving a Curriculum Inside Louisiana's Colonial Schools

It was a tragedy. They opened the school because they had to. The law probably made them.... The whole system didn't care for Indian children. ...They didn't want to educate us, because they stole everything from the Indians. That was the whole plan... not educating them.

(Helen Gindrat Dardar, 2005)

My grandmother sold the property to the School Board for \$400.

(Laura Billiot, 2005)

The magnolias and crepe myrtles are in full bloom across Baton Rouge at this time of year. It is the first Sunday of August 2005. Today, there is no escape from this southern landscape's unbearable heat and heavy humidity. To make matters worse the air conditioning unit in my Subaru is on the fritz. Under the midday sun, with the car windows wide open, I start the long drive down to Raceland to visit with Brenda's family one more time before leaving for Canada. Usually I take advantage of the long drives by listening to old interviews on my car stereo. On this occasion, I listen to an interview conducted with Laura Billiot in March of 2002.

On that day, Laura Billiot had agreed to meet me at the Tribal Center in Golden Meadow to conduct an interview about her educational experiences at the Settlement School during the 1950s. After two and a half hours of driving, I reached the Tribal Center located just outside the southern corporate limits of Golden Meadow. After I parked in the driveway, I immediately noticed the old rusted flagless flagpole standing tall in the front yard. To one side of the former school some rusted swings and seesaws

sat idly. The center itself, an old yellow wooden building, rests above the ground on three-foot brick stilts. As usual, granny's gray van was parked in front, close to the wheelchair ramp. Meanwhile, employees at the shipyard across the street were in the midst of painting the hull of a tugboat propped up on a dry dock. Bayou Lafourche meandered just behind.

Before its closure in 1965, the Settlement School consisted of the main building that still stands now, as well as a larger building at the back and two outhouses to the side, one for the boys and one for the girls. The teaching staff and students used the big building as a cafeteria, and sometimes as auditorium for school plays on special occasions. Three teachers, a principal, a janitor and a cook comprised the entire staff at the school. After the school closed down, the cafeteria and outhouses were torn down. Now only the former schoolhouse stands. While waiting for Laura Billiot, I had time to walk around inside. The building, which is now leased from the parish school board, currently serves as the tribal headquarters for the United Houma Nation. In fact, Laura Billiot's grandmother sold the piece of land to the school board. The political body of the Houma is currently trying to buy back the building and the land for its original sale price of four hundred dollars. However, the school board has yet to accept their proposed sale price.

I entered the front door to a hallway, which eventually made its way back to a small room, to what was once the school's kitchen. The room still houses the small kitchen with an adjoining bathroom, added sometime after the school closed down. Before the building was converted into the current political staging center for the United Houma Nation, two large classrooms flanked the main hallway. Now the hallway is

partitioned in two by a makeshift wall. Down the right side of the newly divided hall, the walls are decorated with palmetto baskets, moss dolls, carvings, blowguns, castnets, crab traps, writings of their history, and historical photos of various tribal members in front of the school. Two doorways on the right wall of the hall lead into a large room, where Deloris Dardar was at her desk meticulously sewing together a youth's dance regalia. "Mais, hi there," she said. I walked over and gave her a hug and a kiss on the cheek. The wall behind her desk has three large windows, which overlook the Houmas' community cemetery, next door. Only a few feet over at another desk, Marina worked hard organizing genealogical files later to be placed in the newly acquired fireproof filing cabinets.

The cabinets, which are utilized to store each tribal member's genealogical history, lined the wall adjacent to the windows at the back of the room. The tribe was able to purchase the cabinets with the money they raised selling fry bread at the New Orleans Jazz Festival earlier that year. The old blackboard, in turn, was partially covered up by these filing cabinets. In the middle of the room was a large table with another sewing machine on it. At that table, Loretta weaved palmetto in order to make traditional baskets to sell at an upcoming powwow in Grand Bois. Further down the main hall another doorway led into the room. In between these two doors was an old IBM computer stationed against the wall. Deloris, Marina, and Loretta can be found at the Tribal Center on almost any given day of the week.

Back at the entrance there was another doorway to the left that led down the other side of the partitioned hall. Fireproof filing cabinets also lined this side of the makeshift wall. Above them were shelves with more files. Before the hallway was partitioned, this

entire side was the other classroom. Now the room has been converted into three small offices. Only the blackboard at the end of the hall, with an old crank pencil sharpener on the wall to the right of it, gave away the room's former use. While I waited for Laura Billiot I walked around trying to imagine the Houma students' lives within this former school.

As noted in chapter one, Houma children did not receive any formal public schooling until the 1940s and 1950s depending on what parish they lived in due to the instituted policies of racial segregation. In this chapter, I report the memories of Houma students' and teachers' experiences inside the Golden Meadow Settlement School before and after its closure. In the first section, I examine the Houmas' difficulties in learning the colonizers' curriculum utilizing a second language. In section two, with the help of Laura Billiot, I describe how some colonial teachers punished Houma students for speaking French, another colonial language. In section three, I seek to understand the complexities of a colonial teachers' curriculum at the settlement school. Drawing on the voices of Cody Danos and Brenda Dardar Robichaux in section four, I illustrate the psychological violence which took place during integration. In section five, I discuss how Helen Gindrat secured a grant to start a much-needed Adult Education in her community for students who were pushed out of the educational system during integration. In the last section, I conclude with how the leadership of the United Houma Nation is moving towards developing and implementing a self-determined Houma curriculum. Let us now turn towards understanding the difficulties of appropriating a colonial curriculum while utilizing a second language.

Qu'est-ce Que Tu Dis?

Tante Tin, she could read French, she would read them the Bible in French.

(Hilda Naquin, 2005)

That is how we knew how to talk. Let me tell you something else about that school. When they opened that school, there were only three of us that knew how to speak English—my sister, myself, and Henrietta. All the kids spoke French. They had to teach them how to talk English before they could learn anything out of the book. We were allowed to help them and give them a few words, but we couldn't help them that much. All the rest of them just spoke French. They didn't speak English.

(Helen Dardar Gindrat, 2005)

In the fall of 1937, the Lafourche Parish School Board opened up the school for the Houma settlement just outside the southern corporate limits of Golden Meadow. The two-room school was brought down from Thibodeaux by barge on Bayou Lafourche. During an interview at Dorcas' Closet two years after my first visit with Laura at the old Settlement School, Helen Gindrat Dardar (2004) described the pedagogical set up of the classrooms. "It was originally a two-room schoolhouse," Helen said, "with first, second, third in one room, and fourth, fifth, and sixth in the other. There were six grades and so there were three grades per room." Meanwhile, Laura browsed through old black and white pictures of the former teachers and students who attended the school. "And the kids who attended school there," Helen continued, "were fourteen and fifteen years old. They had never attended school before, you know! And the majority of them spoke French and

did not speak English. And many of the teachers who taught there did not speak French they spoke English.” If we recall, many Houma families spoke French at home because of their historical appropriation of French, as a trade language, after France’s colonization of Louisiana.

During a truck ride between Dulac and Raceland, Michael Dardar (2002) explained that the Houma chose to adopt the French language into their culture because of close trade relations with France. He highlighted the fact that there were no schools that forced them to assimilate back then. Knowing the French language provided the Houma nation an opportunity to develop and maintain its international relations with a foreign occupying nation, as well as the capacity to negotiate future political, economic, social, and cultural capital. Helen also expressed that her community had a choice in adopting the French language, whereas at the Settlement School they were forced to learn English. The appropriation of the French language eventually worked in ways that expropriated traditional forms of the Houma language. Although members of the tribe, like Michael Dardar, provide evidence to support remnants of Houma words that still exist, the Houma language before pre-European contact is no longer widely used on a daily basis within the community. As a result, Brenda Dardar Robichaux and Micheal Dardar are working to reintroduce the Houma language to their youth at the summer cultural enrichment camps. Nonetheless, Houma elders identify French as part of their cultural heritage and identity. Soon the Houmas’ appropriation of the English language will also work to expropriate their historical appropriation of the French language.

Mrs. Powell was one of the first teachers to work at the settlement school. She picked up Helen each day on her way to school. Her husband worked for one of the oil

companies. “The other children” Helen said, “had to walk. And, you got there the best way you knew how! If you did not have shoes, you came bare feet, whatever it was.” Some students walked as far as five miles a day to get to the school. Others traveled to the school by pirogue or boat. Helen, one of the first students to attend the Indian Settlement School in Golden Meadow, explained that the first teachers were Anglo, white, and apathetic towards the Houma students. “They were not certified teachers,” Helen (2004) added. “They were people that knew how to read and write.”

I then asked Helen what a typical day at school was like. She responded:

The first thing you did when you first got in was...the boys were all half freezing because they were walking bare feet, and it was cold, and so she had a wooden stove that she had to light to warm up the room. We would say the pledge of allegiance and a prayer. Then, we would go into whatever lesson in different parts for the four grades. (Helen, 2004)

“The kids had to learn how to speak English,” Helen (2004) continued, “before they could learn school.” Laura then handed a picture of Mrs. Powell to Helen. “That’s Miss Powell,” Helen said now looking at the picture. Both women then looked at each and started to laugh. Helen returned to describing the difficulty other students had with learning how to read and write for the first time using a second language. “At that time there was only three of us,” Helen said counting on her fingers, “who knew how to speak English at the school—my sister Rita, Henrietta Naquin, and myself.” “Rita was at a school in New Orleans, but when they opened the school down here my mamma brought her home,” she added. “So the three of us,” Helen (2004) continued, “interpreted what the teachers were saying to the other students. And when the students said something in French we said it to the teacher. And then the teacher would say it in English and then

make the students say it in English.” Helen closed her eyes and laughed, shaking her head from side to side. “It is a shame what they [the teachers] did,” she then said.

During our conversation at the house in Raceland a year later, Cody (2005) shared the following story about a typical day at the school:

A typical day would be reading, spelling, math, and recess, where you would go play in the backyard and play baseball, football, and tag games. It seems like the building was so much higher back then because we used to hide underneath the building.

Cody started attending the school in 1960 at age six until its closure in 1965. “Who were your teachers and what grade did they place you in,” I then asked Cody. She replied:

I want to say I started at grade 1. I don’t believe we had kindergarten at that time. My first teacher was Ms. Doucet, Pat Doucet’s mom, and her sister, Priscilla Leonard. I am not sure if Ms. Leonard was married at the time, and I don’t remember what her maiden name was. Those were the first two teachers that I remember having in the first and second grades. I went there until the end of my fifth grade year. I want to say Mr. Pierce, our principal, was also our teacher. No, I think Ms. Martin was our teacher, but I don’t think she was ever a certified teacher. I think Ms. Doucet and Ms. Leonard were certified teachers, but that was their first assignments from college. Ms. Patsy Martin, I don’t think she was certified. Ms. Barbara Lee taught there also and I believe that she was certified or working on her certification. (Cody, 2005)

“My favorite teachers,” Cody (2005) continued, “were Ms. Leonard, Ms. Doucet, and the principal Mr. Pierce. There was another Mr. Pierce, but he didn’t stay. That is when the oilfield started booming and he took an oilfield job. We liked him too.” Yet, the Houma students did not like all the teachers who taught at the school. Cody also expressed that there was one teacher, Ms. Barbara Lee, whom she did not like. “Why?” I asked. Cody (2005) replied, “I don’t know, she is just mean. I think it was just the

attitude and the way she spoke to us, not in a kind manner.” Cody was not the only student to whom Ms. Barbara Lee was unkind, as we shall see later in this chapter.

Back at Dorcas’ Closet, I asked Helen how she learned how to speak English. She responded that members in her mother’s family spoke English and she was able to pick it up. Her aunt Elizabeth taught her how to read and write in English. “My aunt Elizabeth showed me how to read the first grade book,” Helen (2004) said. “Clippity clap, clippity clap, Bob and Nancy can ride,” she recited as if the book were right in front of her. All three of us then laughed together. “My aunt made me read the book over and over, from five until I was six years old. I memorized that entire book.” Helen explained that her aunt was more fluent with the English language because she lived in Madisonville located on the north side of lake Pontchartrain. In the 1940s, French was the predominant language spoken in many southern rural parishes of Louisiana, including Lafourche and Terrebonne. Some families who had disposable income hired tutors to teach their children how to read, write, and speak English. However, most children living within these parishes were not able to afford a tutor, or “fortunate” enough to have family members who spoke English.

Learning how to read and write in a second language was not the only factor, which impeded students’ learning at the colonial school. “We had trapping season and the kids had to go with their parents. So they were out of school during the season, for however long it lasted,” Helen added. “My dad had a store,” she continued, “so I was fine.” “But a lot of them never really got to practice their English. By the time they picked up the little English they had, they were gone again.” Helen then commented that if the school officials had adopted the same model as the town of Ponchatoola, where

they shut down the schools during strawberry season so the children could work in the fields, maybe students would have attended the Settlement School on a more consistent basis. During the trawling, oystering, and crabbing seasons, many parents also took their children out of school. Later, as a mother, Helen raised the issue of closing the schools during the winter trapping months at a school board meeting, but to no avail. “It was the only way parents could make a living,” Helen added, “and it was not like they could leave them with anyone at home like nowadays. They did not have a lot of oilfields is those days like they do now.” For the third time during the interview, Helen repeated, “the children got a sad education.” It is towards such sadness that this chapter turns next.

A Kitchen Filled with Rice

She had us punished. She would put us kneeling down on rice. She would make us put our fingers like this and hit us with rulers. She would go get rice out of the kitchen and practically the whole class was in the hall on the rice.

(Laura Billiot, 2005)

The fourth grade teacher had punished a boy by putting him to kneel on rice for quite a while. She had no way of knowing that he had a cut on his knee. The cut opened wide and began to bleed.

(Elda Doucet Boutte, 2005)

“It was sad what they did to our Indian people.”

(Helen Dardar Gindrat, 2004)

Eventually, Laura Billiot arrived at the Tribal Center. Upon entering the room Laura (2002) asked, “Are you ready?” Laura led me to two of the pictures that were hanging on

the right wall at the end of the hallway near the kitchen entrance. The black and white photographs depicted students in front of the former Indian Settlement School. After looking for something familiar in one of the photos, she pointed herself out amongst the other twenty children and teacher in the photo. "That was me in the fourth grade." I asked her what year it was. "1954," she replied. "Why are the boys not wearing shoes in the photographs?" I asked. She answered, "I don't know." I noticed that all the girls had shoes but none of the boys. Everyone in the photos was smiling and seemed to be happy. At that time, Mr. Pierce was the principal of the school. Many of the students liked him for his sense of compassion; specifically, they remembered his wooden leg. Laura then told me that Barbara Lee was her teacher. "Barbara Lee," Laura explained, "ended up marrying my husband's uncle. She shared some stories about how she got the job with me later on." Laura described how some school board officials went into Barbara's high school class and asked if anyone was "brave enough to go teach down the bayou." Extending her arm and then waving her hand slowly with its palm faced towards me, Laura repeated, "Who is brave enough to go down the bayou?" "Who is brave enough to go!" she said one more time. "She had just finished high school." I asked Laura if there were other teachers at the school. "I don't remember," she replied. "But, I remember her."

After showing me the pictures, Laura moved into the kitchen at the back of the hallway. "And this is where the teacher used to get the rice from the kitchen," Laura (2002) began. "She would get handfuls of rice," Laura said, as she mimicked the placing of the rice in her hands. She then walked by me at the entrance to the kitchen and made her way down the hallway. Lucas, Loretta's twelve-year-old son, in the kitchen at the

time, also mimicked Laura during her description. “And, the teacher would make her way down the hall,” she continued to say while walking towards the left corner of the main entrance. I followed and filmed Laura’s story with the video camera as she made her way down the hall. Pointing with the palm of her hand face down at the wall, and walking along the hall, Laura said, “and then she spread the rice along the hall from one end to the other, on both sides.” “And then she would put us down kneeling on rice,” Laura added. I asked Laura if her and the other students kneeled in one spot. I am not sure why. But she responded, “Yes we kneeled in one spot, because we were right next to someone else. Sometimes the whole class was out here kneeeling on rice.” I asked Laura what they had done. She replied, “We spoke French!” We both giggled.

“They had two classrooms,” Laura (2002) continued, “and it was not partitioned the way it is now.” We walked in to the side of the partitioned hall, which now has the three small offices. Laura pointed out the blackboard at the end of the hall. Laura described how she had classes in both rooms and that there were about thirty-five students in each class at the time. “That means there were approximately seventy,” Lucas added, who was now following us during the interview. “I attended the school until the seventh grade,” Laura said. We then went outside to look around the school grounds. Laura pointed out the fact that the school still had the original porch. “I think the building sank a lot, because I remember running around underneath the building. Or maybe, I just grew a lot” she added. “I think the building did sink a lot,” she repeated. Laura walked up to the Tribal Center and said, “We used to play under there.” The building itself rests on twenty three-foot brick stilts.

“What about the cemetery over there?” I asked as we looked over at the old swing set. “That is the Dardar Cemetery,” Laura replied. We proceeded to walk over to the cemetery. “Watch your head,” Lucas said as we walked under the big oak tree in front of the old Settlement School. Meanwhile, I wondered what it might have been like to learn beside the dead each day. “People still get buried here today,” Laura said. Three years later, I stood in the same cemetery while the community buried Arizona Williams, Deloris Dardar’s brother. “If a tribal member does not have money to be buried somewhere else, they are buried here,” she continued. Laura’s grandmother, along with Deloris’s uncle, once owned the property. They eventually gave the property to the community. In the cemetery, the dead are buried in tombs above the ground. “As you can see,” Lucas pointed out, “they have little graves for the stillborns.” Laura then pointed to a grave that had eight crosses on it. “You might of heard,” she said, “a big hurricane hit Grand Isle and a tidal wave swept a whole family up into a tree. And the whole family drowned. So my mother had this grave made for them.” Lucas repeated, “They have little graves for the stillborns.”

Before we left the cemetery, Laura brought me to a grave, which had the following inscription on the tombstone:

ELIZABETH DARDAR

BORN OCTOBER 12 1880

DIED OCTOBER 12 1958

AGE 78

“This is the woman who sold the piece of property to the school board,” Laura said.

“Born on October 12th and died on October 12th,” Lucas read out loud. “She died on her

birthday,” he then remarked. “Seventy-eight full years, that is rare for someone to die on their birthday,” he added. “Yes on their birthday,” Laura repeated in agreement. She then pointed to another tombstone next to her grandmother’s. A cross inside a circle was at the top of it. The following inscription was underneath the cross:

EDDIE
DARDAR
LOUSIANA
PVT GO B 312 INF
78 DIVISION
WORLD WAR I
JANUARY 4 1892
OCTOBER 1 1968

Eddie Dardar was the community barber during the era of segregation. “Her told stories about the war,” Laura recalled, “and he charged a nickel for haircuts.” “We could not go to the barbers up the bayou,” Laura clarified. She then took me to see Eddie’s old house, which was just two doors down from the school. Meanwhile, Laura continued to share stories. She described how Houma people once owned the land across the highway where the shipyard is now. And how families also owned land on the other side of Bayou Lafourche. “Over the years,” Laura explained, “the land was taken away from many of those families.” Slowly, we walked and talked. Lucas followed, adding his comments from time to time, all the while learning beside the dead.

Back inside the Tribal Center, Laura explained that sometimes as a form of resistance and unity against the Anglo teacher, she and other classmates would purposefully speak French. “And then again, there were students who could not speak any English at all,” she added. “Those children, would often find themselves kneeling on rice,” Laura continued. “And, other times we would experience the brunt of a ruler on our

fingers tips.” Closing her fingers together, Laura illustrated how the teacher would hit her fingertips with a ruler. “What was bad was that if you got it good, or if you didn’t, or if you raised your hand, or asked a question, God forbid. That is when you would get punished,” Laura added. When students were being punished for speaking French, other students, who could speak English, would also speak French in resistance. The punishment for such unified resistance was to make all the students kneel on rice along the hallway. Education, in this instance, Smith (1999) stresses, was “designed to destroy every last remnant of alternative ways of knowing and living, to obliterate collective identities and memories and to impose a new order” (p. 69). Again, most families during the early 1900s spoke solely French at home.

Laura’s story illustrates that the violent power of colonial wars bleeds through time. Furthermore, her story demonstrates how an indigenous culture is punished by one colonial power (the English) for appropriating the cultural and social capital associated to another colonial power (the French). As a result of the systems of discipline at school, some parents stopped speaking French to their children at home. However, not all teachers at the Settlement School were like Ms. Lee, as we shall see in the next section.

An Understanding of Colonial Teachers at the Settlement School

The teacher I had, had just graduated high school. She told me before she died, because I did her hair, “They came up to me and said well we are looking for somebody to go teach down the bayou and who is going to be brave enough to go?”

(Laura Billiot, 2005)

It was a tragedy. They opened the school because they had to. The law probably made them. Then, they sent 2 uncertified teachers who don't speak French to a bunch of kids that were 15 and 16 years old just starting 1st grade.

(Helen Dardar Gindrat, 2005)

They may have been working on some type of degree or they never finished. We never had the caliber of teachers that they had in the public schools. But, they did concentrate on the drilling and the learning and mastery.

(Cody Danos, 2005)

When our students finished at the Settlement School, there were no graduations. I am so sorry that didn't happen. It should have come to my attention. Of course, in those days, without a teaching degree, one's voice would not have been heard.

(Elda Doucet Boutte, 2005)

After two years of trying to find a former Settlement School teacher who had the time to speak with me, I finally tracked down Elda Doucet Boutte on her cell phone. She was on her way to her son's birthday in Lockport. Elda taught at the Settlement from 1958 until it closed in 1965. Elda and I were never able to personally meet in order to conduct a formal interview. Nonetheless, she graciously offered to write down her experiences at the Settlement School in a letter and mail it to me. Elda gave the letter to her daughter who, in turn, gave it to Brenda Dardar Robichaux. Before I left for Canada to be with my wife and unborn son, Brenda gave me the letter during a baby shower she held for me at the house in Raceland. The following stories are based on what Elda shared in her letter and from the follow-up phone conversations we had during the months of October and November 2005.

In 1958, Elda's husband became ill and she decided to apply for work. "My husband was against my working because it gave him a sense of not being able to fulfill his obligations," she said. "But after many convincing conversations, I assured him that everything would be alright." "So I decided," Elda (2005) continued, "to apply for a teaching position." The superintendent knew her husband's family well, and therefore, Elda at age twenty-seven, was granted a position at the Settlement School. Teachers were badly needed throughout Lafourche Parish, and so the school board allowed her to teach while working toward an educational degree. Elda described how at that time many women went into teaching, like she did.

The school board assigned Elda to the Settlement School during the 1958-1959 school session. "The Settlement School was a testing place for beginning teachers," Elda recalled. At the time, if one had the potential of becoming a teacher, one was placed anywhere in Lafourche Parish, depending on which schools had the most urgent needs. Elda worked at the school until it closed in 1965. "The transferring of teachers at the Settlement School on a yearly basis," Elda (2005) noted, "was not a good thing for the students nor the parents because neither had a chance to relate." Nonetheless, the school had the same principal, Irving Pierce, for a number of years. "He was a compassionate, gentle person," Elda explained, "so the community relied on his judgment and understanding when it concerned education." Each day, Elda traveled on a bus for ten miles, and then transferred on to another bus, which drove another ten miles, until she finally arrived at Dufrene's Bakery beside the high school in Golden Meadow. "That is where I ate my morning apple pie," she said. Once there, she, along with two other teachers, waited for the boat to arrive with the students from Fa-La, a small Houma

settlement out in the marsh. The man paddling the flat boat then brought the women and children down Bayou Lafourche to the Settlement School below the corporate limits of Golden Meadow. At that time the Bayou was half the width it is now. Once the man dropped them off, he then crossed the bayou to pick up more students who attended the school.

Elda described the daily routines of the school. The schooling began between eight and eight-thirty, weather permitting, except if there was a party for Christmas. “We had more time,” Elda (2005) explained, “if we needed to pick up things for the party.” Recesses took place in the morning, right after lunch, and in the afternoon. “The faculty did recess duty all together and because the children got along, we could have our faculty meetings everyday.” The noon meals were served to the entire school staff and students in the cafeteria. “This was like a big family eating together,” Elda said. “Our cook,” she continued, “was excellent and cooked for about one hundred to one hundred and ten people. Mrs. Soileau was able to work at her own pace with her husband helping her whenever she needed. She knew what the children liked and knew how to cook.” Before the kitchen was added to the school Helen’s father used to deliver sandwiches to the kids at lunchtime. “When they first opened the school,” Helen (2005) said, “my daddy used to make sandwiches in the store and deliver it to school at 12 o’clock. We would eat at our desk because they didn’t have a kitchen when they first built it. Later on, they added a kitchen onto it.” Elda explained that the students in the cafeteria did not see the faculty as a threat, but just people enjoying Mrs. Soileau’s home cooked meals.

The classes extended from first grade through seventh grade. “First grade,” Elda (2005) said, “was the only grade not combined because it was a crucial grade for small

children.” Elda taught the second, third, fourth, fifth grades in a combined class. Sixth and seventh comprised the other class. “To my knowledge,” Elda added, “there were no combined classes at the surrounding white schools—that in itself was discrimination. The books and teaching materials were leftovers from those other schools.” As a result, Elda wanted to expose the students at the Settlement School to what was being offered at the other surrounding white schools. “I wanted to remain at the school,” Elda said, “and expose students to what I knew and what I was learning as I took the educational courses at Nicholls Jr. University.”

Elda described the discrimination the students faced outside their community below the corporate limits of Golden Meadow. “You have to realize,” Elda (2005) stressed, “to the white people they were an outcast class of people. To the white people they were not high on the social scale. So whatever they were given, especially in education, was more than fair.” Such resentful sentiments from the local nonindigenous community, and their respective detrimental psychological effects on her students, intensified Elda’s desire to stay on at the school. “At that time no one wanted to be of Indian heritage.” “Thank God,” Elda continued, “that these proud people took it upon themselves to get their just deserved recognition because today their place in society has improved tremendously.” Elda believed that the Settlement School was the best thing for the children. “They had their own school,” she remarked, “and their heritage remained intact. They were able to live without ridicule at the school and could handle the situation when they went somewhere else.”

Elda returned to describing her pedagogy and classroom management strategies. Elda encouraged older students to help out the younger ones. Brothers and sisters were

often in the same class. “It reinforced their abilities,” Elda (2005) said. However, “the older ones,” Elda continued, “sometimes take a, ‘you better do this or else attitude,’ thus preventing the younger ones the freedom of expressing themselves. So on the principal’s insistence we went back to the same arrangements as before.” Elda taught the fourth graders first. “Because, they were the most rambunctious,” she said. While she taught the fourth graders, the second graders completed math or coloring worksheets. “I did not believe in giving them a lot of homework,” she continued. Elda explained that she enjoyed teaching the second and fourth graders together in the same class because siblings were able to help out one another.

Elda duplicated her work on an old ditto machine, discarded by another school. “It worked manually,” she said, “and I convinced the principal to allow me to keep it in my room because we had the first, second, and third grade students. At the time it was a pretty handy teaching tool. But nowadays, it is an heirloom.” Elda (2005) described how she did not have a bulletin board to write on for the students. She made one using a big cardboard box. The school where she worked after integration, Elda recalled, had an entire wall with a blackboard she could use. “It was the same case for our textbooks,” she added. “They were” she continued, “discards from other schools.” The schools were equally separate, but unequally supplied.

The discipline was left up to the teacher. Elda described the principal as a softhearted, cordial, sympathetic person, who got angry once a year for something the boys did. Elda (2005) recalled:

He would take out his belt and whack a string of boys. He would make them all line up. Some of the boys would say they hadn’t done anything, but he’d say that it was for the things they had done and not been punished for yet. It

wasn't a hard whack, but the boys pretended it was bad and then when the principal wasn't looking they would laugh. It was really hilarious.

She continued:

The last time there was a line up, the priest got at the end of the line believing that the students were just in line going in to class. The priest was not very tall, and so when the principal raised his arm to strike, he realized before the actual blow that it was the priest. I can't remember the principal ever doing his whacking after that.

"I believe," Elda (2005) said, "I must have laughed for months and tease him." Most of the boys were at the school because Louisiana law stated that everyone had to attend school until their sixteenth birthday. Elda explained that her male students wanted to learn the skills of trawling, trapping, or fishing instead of learning how to read or write. Most of them had no intension of continuing their education past the age of sixteen. At Dorcas' Closet, Laura (2004) explained, "it was just as important for the boys to learn how to trawl and trap because they had to make money for their families. It was a matter of survival." However even if a student chose not to do so, no high schools were available for Houma students to continue their education in the Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes. Due to the racialized segregation of public schooling, students like Corrine Paulk, had to leave their parish in order to attend high school.

Elda also remembered an incident where one of the other teachers made a boy kneel on rice. "The fourth grade teacher had punished a boy by putting him kneeling on rice for quite a while. She had no way of knowing that he had a cut on his knee. The cut opened wider and began to bleed." Her principal was so upset that he reprimanded her and told her in the future that she had to send students to him for disciplining. "First aid

was administered,” Elda (2005) continued, “and the boy was sent home with a note.” “That teacher was often mean to the students and she wasn’t liked by the parents,” Elda remarked. The next week at the monthly parent teacher meeting, a lady who was known as the governing head of the Houma settlement attended. “I had never seen her in attendance before,” Elda commented. The woman voiced her concerns to the principal and asked him to reprimand the teacher in question. The principal assured the parents that the teacher had been reprimanded, he would look for instances of discrimination, and that he would take care of any future disciplinary issues. “Thank God they accepted,” Elda said, “because it could have been a sad day for that teacher.” “I forgot to mention,” Elda added, “that the building in which I taught and the community cemetery were separated by a fence.” “Since there were so many related,” she continued, “when the burial took place we raised the shades and were able to attend the burial from our classroom.” Yes, the students learned beside the dead.

In 1964, a Supreme Court decision forced the public schooling system in Lafourche to integrate. The 1964-1965 school year was a transition phase for the Houma students. During that year students who wanted to attend the Golden Meadow public school system could do so. Students also had the option to stay at the Settlement School. At the end of the 1965 schooling year, the school board shut down the Settlement School. The following year all the Houma students were forced to attend the Golden Meadow Elementary School. The school board transferred Elda and the students to the school. However the move towards integrating with the colonial community was not an easy transition for students, as we shall see in the next section.

Many former Houma students at the Golden Settlement School, like Cody, described Elda as a kind and compassionate teacher. Elda, who was of Acadian descent, also spoke French. It was the first language she learned how to use at home as a child. Therefore, she was able to communicate with students who did not speak English. Elda continued to teach for thirty-five more years. She was transferred from school to school across Louisiana. In fact, she taught at the Galliano Elementary School before it closed down, and one of its former classroom, later became Dorcas' Closet. In 1970, she received her official teaching diploma from Nicholls State University. Now retired at age seventy-five, Elda helps out the families in her community who were affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Let us attune ourselves now to the psychological violence many Houma students experienced during the era of desegregation.

A Curriculum of Psychological Violence During Desegregation

When I started public school that was the first year that Indian children were allowed into the public school system. Up until that time, if you lived in the lower area of Lafourche Parish, you attended a separate school that was called the Old Settlement School, which housed first through seventh grade with non-certified teachers.

(Brenda Dardar Robichaux, 2002)

But, they went through hell. The teachers were mean to them. They would raise their hand when they had an answer and the teacher would ignore them. They had to fight everyday, so a lot of them just dropped out of school.

(Helen Dardar Gindrat, 2005)

We were outside for recess and she called me a Sabine.

(Loretta Dardar Gilbert, 2005)

The summer heat and humidity was relentless on the drive to Raceland. By the time I reached the Pontchartrain Causeway, the longest bridge in the world, Laura's interview finished playing. Lake Pontchartrain, itself, is named after the Count de Pontchartrain, who served as minister of finance during the reign of France's "Sun King," Louis XIV, for whom Louisiana is named. There was still another hour to go before reaching Raceland. I decided to play an interview conducted with Brenda Dardar Robichaux, a few months after meeting with Laura Billiot.

Back in November 15th of 2002, I met Brenda at the Media Center in Lockport to conduct our interview. Her office is in a cubicle at the back of the main building. Brenda works, as a cultural resource specialist, for the Lafourche American Indian Education Program. When I entered the cubicle, Brenda was in the midst of preparing a presentation with Joyce Crosby for one of the local schools. "O.K., I think first it is important to note," Brenda (2002) said, "that we are doing this interview over lunch. So if there is crunching on the microphone, it is just food." We were both eating plate lunch specials—white beans and rice, shrimp jambalaya, and fried catfish—from Joey's Restaurant, just up the road. At age five, Brenda started school at Golden Meadow Elementary in 1964, the first year of integration. "For the older kids, it was a hard transition," Brenda recalled, "because you had gone from a school that only had Houma children to a school that had everybody." The Golden Meadow School was unique in a sense, Brenda explained, because the Houmas were the only minority. Further up the Bayou Lafourche, African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asians comprised the minority populations at those schools.

Brenda explained that the most difficult part of the transition to public schools in Golden Meadow was the constant teasing. “I remember being called names on the bus,” Brenda (2002) said. “And the name they called us, was Sabine,” she added. Brenda remembered:

I have no clue as to how they got the name, or where it comes from. People have speculated different things. When you look at the meaning there is nothing that ties it to anything that should be Native American. There is a Sabine River and that has nothing to do with us as well. But it was very derogatory word. There are still people who refer to us that way. And so you were considered a lower class citizen.

I asked Brenda, “which people?” “Just the non-Indian people,” she replied. “You still have people say,” Brenda (2002) continued, “I did not know we had Indians there. I knew we had Sabines. But I didn’t know we had Indians.” Within the community no one quite knows where the word Sabine comes from. Nonetheless the word worked and works to dehumanize the Houmas’ indigenous identity.

Brenda returned to describing how difficult the transition was for certain students during integration. “Some of the older kids I was referring to,” Brenda (2002) noted, “ended up dropping out of school at a very young age. And it was not uncommon for them to drop out and work on the trawl boats and that kind of thing.” Although she was teased throughout her elementary and secondary education, Brenda was the first of her family to graduate from high school. Her mother often visited with the teachers and principals to see if they could do something about all the teasing. Brenda (2002) recalled the following story:

I vividly remember, even though I was very young, being teased on the bus. My mom went to the school and had a conference with the principal to ask if there was a way that we could do something to address it. You know he

humored and told her all the things she wanted to hear. Once she was gone, he called us [the student who teased and her] into his office. “Mrs. Dardar was ranting and raving that you girls are having a problem,” he said. And then he proceeded to get right in my face, and as a five or six year old, it is very intimidating to have your principal get in you face and say, “you are not having any problems are you.” And of course, my response was, “no sir, there are no problems here.” And so you were taught at a very young age that this was just going to be a part of the way it was going to be—that nobody was going to try to change anything. Or even educate the other children to let them know that these students have been at another school and they are part of us now. There was never that transition.

“So you just learned very early on,” Brenda (2002) concluded, “to deal with it yourself, and not say anything, because nothing was going to be done about it.” I then asked Brenda how she personally dealt with the teasing. “I would just go home and cry, or keep my feelings inside,” she answered. “But they had other students who rebelled and wanted to fight. And they would get in trouble just for defending who they were. And so it was a difficult time.” After the story, we both took a break from the interview to eat a spoonful of white beans and rice.

Three years later, at the house in Raceland, Cody Danos shared stories about her difficult transition during integration. Unlike Brenda, Cody started her education at the Settlement School. Mrs. Doucet was her teacher before and after she and other students transferred to Golden Meadow Elementary School. “What was that transition like?” I asked. “Horrible!” Cody (2005) replied. “I didn’t like it,” she continued. “I would have rather been back at the Settlement School.” “You would have rather been back at the Settlement School?” I repeated. “Oh, yes. The children were mean.” Like Brenda, colonial children also teased Cody on the bus. “You don’t have to answer this,” I said, “but what kind of teasing?” “Derogative teasing, calling us Sabines, that kind of stuff,”

Cody answered. I then asked Cody if her mother went into the school. “No. We just handled it ourselves, by either staying away, or fighting through it.” The students constantly teased Cody at her elementary school. The teasing continued when she transitioned to Golden Meadow Junior High.

“Were the experiences the same at Junior High?” I asked Cody. “The hardest thing,” Cody said, pausing briefly, with tears in her eyes. “Was,” she continued, “to do PE and dress with the other girls in the locker room. They would call you dirty and just be mean.” Cody then began to cry at the table. “Was this the same for all the girls who were in your community?” Now sobbing, Cody replied, “Yes.” Wiping the tears from her eyes Cody then said, “You either fought back with them or just told them off, like what they told you.” Cody went on to explain that these incidences of teasing took place mostly in grades seven and eight. “In grade nine, the teasing kind of settled down,” she said. Laura Billiot was one of the students who eventually dropped out, to become a hairdresser, because of the constant teasing at school.

I asked Cody, if there was a support system put in place for the Houma students at the school. “Not really,” Cody (2005) replied. “The only support system we had was Mr. Pierce in the 6th grade, when we would go into his classroom instead of going to recess. We would clean his board or straighten up for him.” At that point of the interview, I remembered the students, whom we called dirty, whom we teased, who also stayed in class during recess because we bullied them in the schoolyard. Despite these incidences of teasing, Cody graduated from high school in 1972. At first she worked with her mom cleaning houses and breaking heads at the shrimp factory. Then in 1988, Brenda asked her to volunteer at Holy Rosary, the school her children went to. “I volunteered there,”

Cody said, “and worked with teachers in the classroom.” That same year Cody worked part-time with the Lafourche Indian Education program, tutoring students.

“In 1992,” Cody (2005) continued, “my husband was hurt. I told him that if he collected social security, I was going to go to school and work on a degree in education.” While attending Nicholls University’s satellite Teacher Education Program, Cody continued to work with the Indian Education program during the day, at a convenient store at night, as well as raise her three children. Cody graduated in 1998 and soon after began teaching grade two at Lafourche Lower Elementary School. I asked Cody, if there was any discrimination against the minority students she taught. Cody (2005) responded:

Parents accuse you of not liking their child because they are Black. It’s like...you’re talking to the wrong person here. Number one, I have two grandchildren who are Black and I am Indian, so it’s like don’t even go there. But no, I don’t see it. I think that is the one thing I stress in my classroom. In this classroom, this year, we are a family. You might not like me, but you have to help me. We are all a family in here. If you didn’t like me before you walked in this classroom, I’m not saying you are going to love me when you leave, but you are going to know that we need to work together. We don’t see color in here. We are all human beings and we are all people. We want to learn and do the best that we can. In doing that, we need to help each other.

Cody is currently working to finish up her masters of education at Nicholls University. “I still like teaching in the classroom,” Cody (2005) said, “even though they push onto us paperwork and accountability.” “I know we need to be accountable and we need staff development. I just think that they are kind of overloading us with all of the testing and all of the other stuff that they want us to do,” she continued. Cody explained that she did not have enough time in the day to teach what the curriculum asks her to teach. “With

that No Child Left Behind,” Cody concluded, “We are going to leave more children behind than anything.”

The students who chose to stay in school during integration had to persevere not only to graduate, but also to survive mentally. Later on as adults, Brenda and Cody’s traumatic childhood experiences resurfaced—Brenda crying the night before her speech at the ladies club for example, and Cody during the interview. Despite the childhood incidences of teasing, both were able to go on and build successful careers. Brenda is the current Principal Chief of the United Houma Nation and Cody serves on its governing council. Both women are respected inside and outside the Houma community. However, many women and men dropped out before graduating from high school. As we shall see in the next section, in order to meet the educational needs of these students who were violently pushed out during their transitions into the integrated public schooling system, Helen Dardar Gindrat established an Adult Education program.

Uncle Sam Grant Us Adult Education

My dad has a seventh grade education and that is because he graduated, as he called it, from the Settlement School and that was all that was offered.

(Brenda Dardar Robichaux, 2002)

I graduated through the Adult Education Program.

(Laura Billiot, 2005)

She [Margaret Dardar] had gone back and graduated through night school at the Settlement School when they offered adult education.

(Cody Danos, 2005)

The tables were already set up at the back of the house in Raceland, with various decorations, for Joshua's birthday party and the baby shower. Various tribal members, with whom I developed close relationships over the four years arrived. Helen Dardar Gindrat was one of the first to arrive. Before leaving Baton Rouge that Sunday morning, I packed some clothes for the second hand store in Galliano.¹ Back at the store a year earlier, Helen and Laura described how and why they secured a grant from Washington to establish an Adult Education Program.

During the 1960s various minority communities, like the Houmas, challenged institutional segregation across the United States. The civil rights movement and the pan-Indian activism across America provided the Houma an opportunity to press local officials and the American government to recognize their rights as an indigenous nation. However, the newly acquired "equality," which desegregation provided, came at a violent psychological cost. Many Houma students were pushed out of high school due to the constant teasing that took place on the bus, in PE classes, and out on the schoolyard. "A lot of the girls that were in school," Helen said, "quit school because they could not take the strain. "And the students," she continued, "would raise their hand, but the teacher would always call somebody else. You had to study and fight everyday." "Everyday," Laura repeated. "So a lot of them dropped out of school," Helen concluded.

In 1961, with the help of Frank Naquin (Laura Billiot's father), Helen Gindrat and Delores Terrebonne traveled to the American Indian Chicago Conference. "Frank Naquin," Helen (2004) said, "came to me and said that there was going to be a gathering of Indians at the University of Chicago." Frank Naquin, a Houma leader at the time, heard about a conference being organized by Sol Tax and the National Congress of

Indian Affairs (Miller, 2004). “Frank said you and Delo, my sister, can go,” Helen (2004) continued. “At the time, neither of us knew anything about anything. We met people from other tribes up there, and they told us to come back down and get our people together,” Helen said. “Delo and I stayed up there for two weeks and almost cried every night because we were so lonesome,” Helen added as she laughed. The Houmas had to establish a government structure, which the United States government recognized, if they were to successfully assert their national indigenous identity, and in turn, “take advantage of the growing list of anti-poverty programs emanating from the Kennedy and later Johnson administrations” (Miller, 2004, pp. 188-189). Adult Education was one of those programs.

In 1969, a pan-Indian group seized Alcatraz. “Their purpose,” Venables (2004) explains, “was to use Alcatraz as an American Indian cultural center and school, and to gain non-Indian support in such issues as treaty rights” (p. 334). The seizure lasted nineteen months ending on June 11th, 1971. At that time, Helen Gindrat belonged to the Indian Angels, an organization based in Louisiana, which mobilized to send food and clothing to the group who seized Alcatraz. On November 2, 1972, government officials permitted Indian demonstrators to assemble inside the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington. When the new guards came onto their shift they were not aware of the situation and tried to evict the Indians. Instead, the demonstrators evicted the guards and occupied the Bureau for six days (Venables, 2004). That same year, the Houma in Lafourche Parish established a political body called the Houma Tribe, while President Nixon signed into law The Indian Education Act, also known as Title IV. “Part C, which amended the Adult Education Act,” Szasz (1999) explains, “provided grants for adult-

education, with preference to be given to Indian tribes, institutions, and organizations” (p. 198). During that time, Helen, Deloris, Frank, Hilda, and Laura went house-to-house collecting the genealogical records in preparation for their Federal Recognition petition. “We went around collecting” Laura (2004) said, “birth and death certificates.” “I was fourteen at the time and just got my driver’s license,” she added. “They gave driver’s licenses out at that age back then?” I asked. “Yes,” Laura said, laughing. The women then continued to describe the initial grant application for the Adult Education Program.

“I went to Washington,” Helen (2004) said, “and was able to secure a grant for 43,000 or 45,000 dollars.” In 1972, Helen also became involved with the Coalition of Eastern Native Americans (CENA), “an organization that was instrumental in pressing for recognition of the forgotten Indian enclaves outside the American West” (Miller, 2004, p. 189). In Washington, she often met with W.J. Strickland, a member of the Lumbee Tribe, who started up CENA. He in turn, helped Helen to properly fill out all the grant applications. “If God would not have helped me, I never would have made it,” Helen (2004) said. “God has always taken care of me,” she continued. “We bought a van with the money, because we did not have access at that time to the Old Settlement School in Golden Meadow,” Laura (2004) added. “The program started in Galliano,” she continued, “and I was a teacher’s aid, because you see, our people would not be comfortable learning from strangers.” Helen then described how Paul Ranson, a man from Baton Rouge, who had his masters in education, initially helped them out. “And we had Lloyd Guidry, from here,” Helen (2004) added. “He was a teacher and principal. He is retired now. He was a very nice person. He is Cajun, but understood the Indian people.” Helen, her daughter Helen Anne, and Laura traveled with Lloyd once a week to

Marrero, Jefferson Parish, and Houma to teach Houma elders how to read and write. The other days they taught in Galliano. Like Laura, Helen also explained, “It was important to have members of our community teach the program. Because of their experiences at school, our adults did not want to be taught by strangers.” “It is a hurt,” Helen continued, “that they had in their hearts all their lives.”

I asked Helen and Laura about the main focus of the program. “About 15 or 20 adults and a lot of them that didn’t know how to write, even checks” Helen (2004) said. “It was teaching them the most important thing,” she continued,

for them to be able to function. So they could go in the grocery store and look at a can and read what was on it or read the price of it. That is the most important thing that we wanted to do for them so that they didn’t have to go ask somebody.

The first students of the Lafourche Program graduated in April of 1976. Margaret Dardar and Laura Billiot were among them. The program lasted thirteen years ending in 1985. That year Brenda Dardar Robichaux graduated from high school and started to work as a paraprofessional in the Indian Education program. Let us end this chapter in the next section, by recapping the Houmas historical appropriation of the colonial educational.

Moving Toward Self-Determination

We walk in two worlds in a sense. You have to walk in the normal white man’s world of getting an education. Going to school, going to work and doing all those things. But at the same time our culture is a strong part of who we are. So you have to honor that, and... educate yourself about it.

(Brenda Dardar Robichaux, 2002)

Cognitive imperialism denies people their language and cultural integrity by maintaining the legitimacy of only one language, one culture, and one frame of reference.

(Battiste, 2000, p. 198)

As we saw in chapter three, the United States used the judicial language of its imperial system, to exploit and limit the United Houma Nation's traditional migratory inhabitation of the Louisiana landscape. As a result, the Houma nation realized that they had to appropriate the colonialism's cultural, judicial, and economic languages in order to challenge the institutional systems, which supported the continued exploitation of their land. Therefore, the Houma continuously petitioned local officials to grant access to the public schooling system. However, instituting policies of racial segregation ensured the colonizers' maintenance of the status quo. Despite instituted segregation, learning how to read and write for the first time in a second language, some members of the community, like Helen Gindrat and Laura Billiot, were able to appropriate, negotiate, and challenge colonialism's institutional systems of exploitation. However, appropriation of the colonizers' imperial systems came at various physical and psychological costs.

In 1974, Helen Gindrat Dardar's, as well as others' efforts allowed her and other tribal members to establish one of the first Indian Education programs in Louisiana. Initially, the tribe used the funding to provide health services, school supplies, and to create an adult education program within the community. Ten years earlier, just after the Civil Rights Act was passed, many of the Houma students, who had been allowed access to "white" public education after desegregation, endured the violent physical and psychological harassment of non-Indian students. As a result, many Houma students were forced to quit high school and dropout. The adult education program provided these

forced high school dropouts a place where they could obtain their Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED). More importantly, the program also provided non-literate tribal members—in the Eurocentric tradition—cultural capital and literary skills.

In the 1960s, before the Lafourche and Terrebonne Indian Education Programs were put into place, many Indian students had to forego or hide their Indian identity once they were allowed to go to public schools. Presently, Indian students still feel that they must at times hide their identity. Jamie Billiot offers the following story of her elementary and high school educational experiences in the 1980s and 1990s:

But, even in 7th and 8th grade I did not like to say, my last name is Billiot. I still remember that I did not like to say that my last name was Billiot. Cause they knew I lived on the bayou, that I was probably poor, and that I was definitely Indian, and everything like that. Then when I got to high school, it was really, ‘oh you are from Dulac, you are a Billiot, and you are Indian.’ It was either your family is bad or you are poor!

Parents who feared that their children would suffer the same racial discrimination as they had either stopped sending their children to school, or in some cases, stopped teaching traditional ways of knowing to their children. In order to protect their children from discrimination, or religious conversion, some parents home schooled their children. For those who did remain in the public schools, these children were taught to abandon their national indigenous identity.

One night while having dinner with Josh Pitre and Jamie Billiot (presently two graduate students), they explained that the younger generations are lost—“they do not know who they are!” Josh, the present principal chief’s son, commented on how Houma students in the schools refer to others, “As them whites. But, they do not know how to

refer to themselves.” Many of the younger generation have lost touch with their elders¹ oral histories, and in turn, the knowledge to understand their histories and identities.

Conceivably, the trade off for those Houma students, who have appropriated the cultural, social, and economic capital of the colonial institutions, has been the abandonment of their Houma identity. As a result, many Houma students have become un-homed within the landscapes of their historical and cultural identities. Tyson (1999) explains,

Being un-homed is not the same as being homeless. To be un-homed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee, so to speak. (p. 366)

Brenda Dardar Robichaux, elders, and other tribal members realize the crisis that exists among youths within their community. For the past fifteen years, with the help of Indian Education funding and plenty of volunteers, Brenda has organized weekend cultural workshops and summer camps, where local Indian youth learn their tribal history, politics, culture, and traditional ecological knowledge. However, without federal recognition, the funding and available resources are limited.

The political body of the Houma continues to create and implement Indian Education programs in order to ensure the survival of their culture and traditional forms knowledge. The capacity to define and teach their culture, to maintain control over who names and legitimizes their national indigenous identity, remains important to Houma elders, and the community at large, as we shall see in the last chapter.

Endnotes

¹ That Sunday was the last time I went down to visit with Brenda Dardar Robichaux and her family before heading back to Canada. At the house in Raceland, various members of

the tribe helped to throw a surprise baby shower for me. We also celebrated Joshua's birthday. I would not visit Dardar Robichaux family again until November 24th 2005 to celebrate the successful defense of my dissertation examination.

Chapter 5: Toward Understanding an Indigenous Curriculum of Place

And it was not that our parents were not proud of our heritage, it is not that they did not want us to pass it on, but they were trying to fit us into mainstream white society.

(Brenda Dardar Robichaux, 2002)

The only emotions felt by Native people in the present educational system, which does not respect our cultural ways, is that of pain. The pain is about how we are still seen as savages, inferior to people from the dominant culture, and it is about the lack of cultural teaching. Our Elders warn that we will lose our children and with them our future if we do not teach our children our ways.

(Hookimaw-Witt, 1998, p. 164)

Here in the South, the suspense of an autumn harvest shortens, as the southeastern sugarcane fields reach up towards the bluish sky. A live oak tree, leaning from the levee, shed this season's greenery into the depths of Bayou Lafourche's murky meanderings. The grayness of Spanish moss still dangles from its nakedness. Behind Whitney Dardar's property, a flock of double-crested cormorants now huddle together on the old dying cypress tree. Two blue-winged teals take refuge in the receding shadows of the marsh.

Before heading back to Raceland last November, Joshua and I stopped at his grandparents' house for lunch. After parking in the driveway, we made our way over to the tin roof garage. Whitney was in the midst of shucking oysters in the back room. As usual, he greeted us both with a hug and a smile. Joshua and I watched Whitney shuck a few more oysters, and then the three of us make our way inside for lunch. Once again, the smell of a home cooked meal greeted us as we walk through the front door. A large pot of chicken and sausage gumbo sat on the kitchen stove. Using the ladle, I smothered a large

scoop over white rice, and then sprinkled a little sassafras for spice. While eating, Joshua and I recounted that morning's fishing tales to Whitney, who in turn proceeded to tease me about the many redfish I missed. Deloris has already left for Raceland, in order to help Brenda get ready for next weekend's Elders Festival.

Each year, during the month of November, the community gives thanks to its elders at the community center in Dulac. During the day, eighty elders, or so, play different games in which they are each guaranteed of winning much needed groceries and household supplies. The elders are then provided a turkey dinner with all the trimmings—gumbo, sweet potatoes covered with brown sugar and marshmallows, green beans, and potato salad. The elders then play bingo for more prizes after lunch. Brenda then hands out certificates, and a group photo taken early that day, to each elder.

After lunch, Whitney took us for a walk to see the different plants and trees on his property. While walking around the house, and examining the different plants, Whitney taught us about the various medicinal properties of each tree, vine, and plant. Historically, the teachings of traditional ecological knowledge were embedded into the daily curriculum of most Houma families. Survival depended on an intimate knowledge of the landscape. Elders within the community were, and still are, responsible for teaching traditional ecological knowledge. As Whitney introduces different plants, he shares stories of his father, Ernest Dardar's role as a *traiteur* (healer) in the community. His memories of his father's treating are cherished as sources of traditional knowledge by his extended family. Brenda (2002) remembered:

My grandfather was a "traiteur." He was what other tribes might call an Indian medicine man. He had a special gift of healing, and people would go to him. He knew prayers, and he knew what leaves and roots to use, whether it was to

make a *salve* to rub on your skin, or boil to drink, or whatever to heal people.

Although Whitney did not receive any formal education from his father in the traditions of healing, he does have an extensive knowledge of the local plants and their respective curative properties. There are three specific sources, Castellano (2000) explains, for knowledge acquisition amongst indigenous communities: traditional knowledge (from generation to generation), empirical knowledge (gained from observation), and revealed knowledge (acquired through spiritual origins and recognized as a gift). As a child, Whitney was able to learn such knowledge about the Louisiana landscape through observing and listening to his father on many occasions, trawling, trapping, hunting, and while healing others, including him.

We made our way down the driveway to a ditch that ran along the highway. Once there, Whitney pointed to a green plant with a segmented stalk, which he called *prêle*. It looked like a horsetail. Whitney described how he boils the *prêle* in water and drinks it like a tea in order to prevent bladder infections. He picked some and gave it to me. As we walked back up to the front of the house, he pointed to another plant called *citronnelle*, which is sometimes used to help cure colds. Again he picked some and then asked me to smell it. “Umm, lemony,” I said. At the front of the house Whitney has different local herbs in various pots near a large oak tree. And, to the side of his house there is a wild garden with more medicinal plants. Each plant and tree bark has a specific method of preparation in order to encourage its respective medicinal property.

Although I have recorded the identification of certain plants, as well as, their medical properties, Joshua has asked me not to share all of his grandfather’s teachings. Many scholars, representing pharmaceutical companies’ interests, have exploited the

Houmas' traditional ecological knowledge. However, the Houma community has yet to share in the economic profits of such corporate interests. Despite the continued colonial exploitation, Joshua and others within the community recognize the importance of previous anthropologists, like Diane Austin, who has archived, using oral history methods, a lot of their traditional ecological knowledge. Meanwhile, youth like Joshua Pitre, Nicole Crosby, and Jamie Billiot, continue to actively engage in learning the traditional ecological knowledge of the landscape from their elders. Jamie (2002) recalls,

My mom would go and make teas out in the yard. My grandpa would do the same things. Until I was fifteen, sixteen, and grandpa died. I remember my mum, we would go sit down outside and she would pick plants. And I was like, "mom what are you doing?" She would go pick plants out of the yard. She would boil it, and we would drink that. And well of course I would not want to do that when we were little. But then as I got older I would. And you know... papa always said that everything that came out of the ground was there for a reason.

Although gaining access to the colonial education system during the 1940s helped the United Houma Nation integrate into colonialism's culture, many youth have lost, and are losing touch with the traditional—historical, ecological, and cultural—knowledge of elders, like Whitney Dardar. As a result, the current tribal leadership is working hard to decolonize, as well as prevent the continued colonial assimilation of their youth. In this final chapter, I examine the various ways in which the Indian Education Act, also known as Title IV, has helped the current Houma leadership appropriate a colonial academic education, while also resisting its systemic cultural assimilation. In the first section, I examine the Lafourche Indian Education Program and how Brenda Dardar Robichaux has used it to support Indian students inside the public schooling system. In section two, I describe how the program's annual summer enrichment camp, teaches Houma students to

negotiate the academic expectations of the colonial public school, while also allowing students to validate the traditional knowledge of their elders. In the last section, I seek to understand how the current leadership of the United Houma Nation continues to negotiate the self-determination of its national curriculum, alongside an appropriation of the colonizers' academic curriculum, while also resisting the power of colonial assimilation. For now, let us attune ourselves to the voices of an educational stepchild.

An Educational Stepchild: The Lafourche American Indian Education Program

In a sense, the Indian Education program has always been a stepchild in the public school system. As long as we get our reports out, and do not make any waves, nobody has really shown a major interest in this program. Therefore we sometimes feel like the stepchild, but at the same time it has allowed us to form and gear this program, the way we feel best serves our children. Where if we did have a supervisor, or director, ... it would hinder us in what we are trying to accomplish. Getting our reports out, and writing our grants as we are supposed to, ...has allowed us to be free in some of the things that we wanted to do.

(Brenda Dardar Robichaux 2002)

You start to lose touch with your reality of being Indian once you get to high school.

(Jaime Billiot, 2002)

On a Friday morning, I made my way down from Baton Rouge to interview Brenda Dardar Robichaux about the Lafourche American Indian Program. When I entered the cubicle at the back of Media Center in Lockport, Brenda was looking through t-shirts the tribe was going to sell at an upcoming Powwow in Robert, Louisiana. That morning,

Brenda recounted how she first started working for the Lafourche Indian Education Program.

In 1974, Helen Gindrat Dardar asked Brenda to serve as the program's student representative, which lasted until she graduated. "After I graduated from high school, which was in May," Brenda (2002) explained, "I started working in September of 1976, as paraprofessional [in the program] for maybe two or three years." When the program first started it had a nurse, a social worker, and a paraprofessional. "And then," she added, "I worked as a secretary." "Now the title of that position is called Cultural Resource Specialist. I sometimes think that they changed my job title," Brenda continued, "because it did not look good when your secretary writes the grant, does the evaluations, and all those others things." Initially the program provided health services for local indigenous students. However, the policies driving the grant application criteria soon changed due to the federal amendments made to the Indian Education Act, also known as Title IV.

In the early 1970s, changes in the Lafourche Indian Education program coincided with the Federal government's amendments to Part B of Title IV. The new bill "encouraged the establishment of community-run schools," which in turn, stressed "culturally relevant and bilingual curriculum materials" (Szasz, 1999, p. 198). As a result, the Lafourche Indian Education program shifted its initial focus from providing dental and eye care services towards meeting the local indigenous students' cultural and academic needs.

Brenda (2002) remembered:

But in the beginning the programs had a social worker and a health program in which we offered dental and vision

services. If you had a native student who qualified for reduced lunch, they could have dental work done. We had a contract with a couple local dentists, and they could have their teeth fixed, any kind of dental work done. And then we also had eye doctors. If there were students who had vision problems, we would take them and get glasses for them. Some of the guidelines for our programs changed where we could not offer the health services. They wanted us to have a direct correlation that said once their teeth are fixed, and that their eyes are better, their grades will improve. And it was hard for us to make that correlation. ...[Outside of this program,] our people were not getting dental work done, it just was not happening. If you had a toothache, you did not get it filled, you just got it pulled. Indian Education was one of the only programs out there where we could receive free health services. So it was great at that time and really served a need in the community. But we had to do away with that part of the program.

Many Houma families could not afford basic school supplies, let alone health care. “You know the dad would have to make the first trawl of the season,” Brenda (2002) said, “before they had enough funds to buy them.” During the 1970s, ninety-five percent of the Houma families still relied on trawling and trapping as their main source of income. Brenda stressed that implementing the newly mandated federal policies was a difficult transition because her people relied heavily on those health services.

For the most part, the Indian Education Act was well received locally and nationally by Indian people (Szasz, 1999). Title IV set a precedent for Indian control over how the grants were used by local school boards. “Under Part A, which amended Public Law 874,” Szasz (1999) explains, “parental and community participation in the establishment and direction of impact-aid programs was made mandatory” (pp. 197-198). However there is an important difference between Indian control of education and tribal control. “The most significant difference,” Tippeconnic (1999) writes, “is between tribal control and local or community control, with tribal control meaning that the actual tribal

government is in control and local or community control usually meaning that school boards comprise community members” (p. 39). Parents are invited each year to a public meeting in order to listen, suggest amendments, and then sign off on the Lafourche Indian Education program’s budget and its proposed annual agenda.

One year the community had a problem with a colonial director who wanted to implement his vision for the program. Brenda (2002) recalled:

At one time we had someone who came in as director and wanted to change the whole aspect of our program. He did not want to offer health services, and he did not want to give out school supplies. He strictly wanted tutoring and academics. And, we had other cultural programs going on at the time. So we had our parent committee, who met with the superintendent, who was a friend. We said, “look we don’t need our grant changed, this is the way it has been, it is working, and why fix it if it is not broken.” So he [the superintendent] called and said “look whatever they want, you [director] give it to them. This program has been a success and we are not changing it.” So it is great that we had the parent committee in place, because that way you don’t have a [colonial] school system, which can just take the curriculum, and run with it, and do as they please.

“It is probably one of the only grants in the entire school system that is this way,” Brenda (2002) then said. “It has to be a partnership,” she continued, “between the tribe, parents, and the school system, where both parties have to sign off on the grant.” “Under Title IV, urban, state-recognized [such as the Houma], and terminated Indians would begin to have a voice in their children’s education” (Szasz, 1999, p. 198). During the 1970s, tribal leaders, like Helen Gindrat Dardar, continued to petition and challenge non-Indian control of federal funds allocated specifically for local Indian Education programs. In fact, not until May of 1973, after a federal court order, Szasz (1999) maintains, did the Bureau of Indian Affairs release the \$18 million dollars allocated by congress to the

newly established Indian educational agencies across the country. The partnership between the parents, students, teachers, and the board of education prevents the school system from dictating the Indian Education curriculum.

In 2003, thirty years later, a total of 640 Indian students were enrolled in schools that came under the purview of the Lafourche Parish School Board. Of those, 33 belonged to federally recognized tribes, 586 to state recognize tribes like the Houma, and 21 to an organized Indian group meeting the colonial definition ascribed to the term “Indian.” The program must cater to the specific cultural and academic needs of each indigenous community represented on the parent committee. The federal grant provides \$198.00 per student, totaling \$126,720, which in turn must cover the annual expenditures of the entire program. Brenda manages, with what little money the program gets, to pay personnel salaries, as well as cover the fringe benefits, travel expenses, curricular resources, school supplies, conduct cultural workshops, continue professional development, hire cultural and linguistic consultants, contract certified teachers, and hold two one week summer enrichment camps for elementary and secondary students during the summer. In fact, only half the money goes to pay her salary (\$18,000), a data resources specialist (\$12,000), and the three paraprofessionals (\$37,000), who work out of a cubicle at the back of the Media Center in Lockport. And yet, Brenda and her staff work countless hours, in order to ensure that students receive both the academic and the cultural content provided by the program’s curriculum.

Brenda’s educational philosophy for the program stresses the importance of a cross-cultural curriculum. “We walk in two worlds in a sense,” Brenda (2002) stressed. “You have to walk,” she continued, “in the normal white man’s world of getting an

education. Going to school, going to work and doing all those things.” “But at the same time,” Brenda added, “Our culture is a strong part of who we are. So you have to honor that, and you have to learn about it. And educate yourself about it.” As a result, the program aims to help students, on the one hand negotiate the curricular “expectations” of the colonial education system, and on the other validate their local indigenous cultures.

“All the programs that gear towards the cultural side, are during the summer time,” Brenda (2002) explained. “And I don’t get paid extra for that.” “But to me,” Brenda continued,

it is a labor of love, and not of money. Because, when I see the progress in the kids, and what they are learning, and how much we have grown and evolved, that is my payment. You know what I mean, you could not pay enough money...for what that means to me.

Brenda’s curricular passions involve teaching Houma history and culture. “I think that is why,” Brenda (2002) stressed, “the program has evolved in that direction.” Nonetheless, Brenda worries that the cross-cultural aspect of the program will end once she retires. “I worry about whoever is going to take this place. Will they have that passion? Will they want to continue this side of it?” “Because I know,” Brenda continued, “a normal person in the system will do the academics. Because that is the everyday routine in the system.” During the school year, the program’s paraprofessionals travel to the various schools in order to help students who are struggling academically. Many students appreciate seeing their elders within the school system. During November, now designated as Native American month, Brenda also conducts anti-racist workshops for principals, teachers, and students so that they may become more aware of the historical discrimination against local indigenous cultures, and thus, perhaps more empathetic towards the ongoing

struggles of Houma students. However, the amount of curriculum that Houma students receive, which is relevant to their history, culture, ecological knowledge, and artistic traditions, remains marginalized within the colonial education system. Even more so under the No Child Left Behind Act, which demands a standardization of each state's elementary and secondary curricula. An in-depth study of the psychosocial and economic effects of colonization in relationship to the United Houma Nation is certainly not part of such curricular standards.

Nonetheless, Brenda is pleased with what the Indian Education program has accomplished over the years. Every year she tries to do something different with the program depending on the local community and student needs. She stressed that just because the curriculum for the program works one year, does not mean that it is going to work the next year. Brenda (2002) explained:

I don't like to do the same thing. After I have exposed them to a part of their culture heritage, I like to try something else. I think that when you keep changing, you allow the program to keep growing. When we first started our program was a grant. And in the grant application you had to write objectives and there was certain guidelines that we had to follow. A lot of the curriculum has changed because of the guidelines of Indian Education in the grant writing process. I enjoy the challenge of trying new things with the kids. And more importantly, Indian Education has helped students, as well as, the tribe. There is not a distinct line between the two.

In the past, the cultural programs were more or less limited to the formal spaces of public schools. For example, the last Friday of September is considered Native American day. Usually on this day, the Indian Education program sent out bookmarks or pencils to all the students.

As the program evolved, Brenda, along with the paraprofessionals, took the children at recess and taught them different traditional Pan-Indian dances.

We would help to put them together a little regalia, nothing fancy or very traditional but just something that made them feel good about themselves. And so with that we would...I would take them at recess, because we were not housed at the media center at the time but in one of the local elementary schools, that had the largest population of Indian students. (Brenda, 2002)

The Indian Education program sent a note home that said, “If you are interested in being part of this Native American program we will practice at recess.” Brenda taught them sign language, dancing, and practiced skits based on local Indian legends. Interested students came at recess and worked with one another to present their skits. On the last Friday of September, the student body was asked to go outside and made a big circle for the Indian children to dance in the center. “After a couple of years,” Brenda (2002) noted, “the Friday event shifted to where we had non-Indian students coming at recess.” Brenda stressed that the Indian Education program has caused a shift in the community pride that indigenous students now have, and the colonizers’ understandings of the local indigenous communities. Brenda (2002) recalled:

I had to tell them [nonindigenous students], look, this is just for Indian students to dance and it is part of our Indian Education program. And so, they would be disappointed and say but Ms. Brenda, I want to be Indian. So that was a total shift of what had taken place prior, to where I could hardly get some of our own students to come because they were shy, embarrassed, or afraid to be teased.

Brenda continues to teach traditional indigenous cultures and values, while subverting discriminatory images of the Houmas, within the Lafourche Parish schooling system. Although her influence on the content of the colonizers’ national curriculum is marginal,

she is the pedagogical guardian who watches over her community inside. Let us turn, to what Brenda Dardar Robichaux is able to do outside.

“Don’t Preserve Houma Heritage, Live It!”

We have lots of unique challenges that we are facing. Preservation of our culture and maintaining our traditional values is very important to us. ...We are still struggling with education. We are making progress but we are still struggling. So, we as Houma people, and as leaders of our tribe, are addressing the ways in which these issues are affecting our communities.¹

(Brenda Dardar Robichaux, 2005)

So we are presented with two paths. We go out into the world and we have to make a decision. Who are we and what do we value? What is our value system? I am not saying that we are better than anybody else. Or, that our way is the right way. It is the right way for us. So we are presented with a path. We are either Saktce'-Ogla (people of the crawfish). We are either Houma. Or, we can follow the path of a'tak na'holo (the white man). You are presented with that path. You have an opportunity to make that choice.²

(Micheal Dardar, 2005)

Each June, the Lafourche Indian Education provides a cultural enrichment program for its registered students. Brenda Dardar Robichaux and her staff spend the entire month of May preparing a curriculum, which works to help students meet their academic needs, as well as validate the multicultural dynamics of the local indigenous communities. Over the last three years, anywhere from 80 to 100 elementary students attended a one-week camp, which takes place at the Larose Civic Center. “Each community, school, and tribe,”

Yazzie (1999) explains, “needs to establish its own definition and direction for how culture will play a role in the education of its youth” (p. 98). Houma students experience a daily curriculum at the camp, which meets the local school board’s curricular “expectations,” by emphasizing literacy and numeracy skills in most of its planned activities. Instructors at the camp, who are university undergraduate and graduate students, certified teachers and elders, curricular, linguistic, cultural, and motivational consultants, utilize pedagogical strategies, such as storytelling and creative writing, to teach colonial and Houma literacy.

The content of the various teaching activities revolves around Houma history, traditional language, ecological knowledge, and values, as well as indigenous cultures, and the politics of nation building. The camp also teaches numeracy through traditional basket weaving, beading, music, dancing, and art. Most of the instructors, like Jamie Billiot, Nicole Crosby, Jason and Joshua Pitre, who were past students of the program, have been selected to teach at the camps due to their foundational understandings of the history, culture, and traditional values. During the last day of the first camp, students organize a powwow at the Larose Civic Center, where they dance and sing in front of their parents, as well as, honor their elders.

The second program, for students between grades six and twelve, takes place the following week at Bayou Blue State Park, located just outside the city of New Orleans. Each summer, thirty to forty students spend three nights and four days away from their families engaged in various academic, cultural, and leadership activities at the camp. The teacher to student ratio, including the elders who attend, is one to two respectively. The camps embody an indigenous holistic child-centered curriculum (see fig. 5.1).

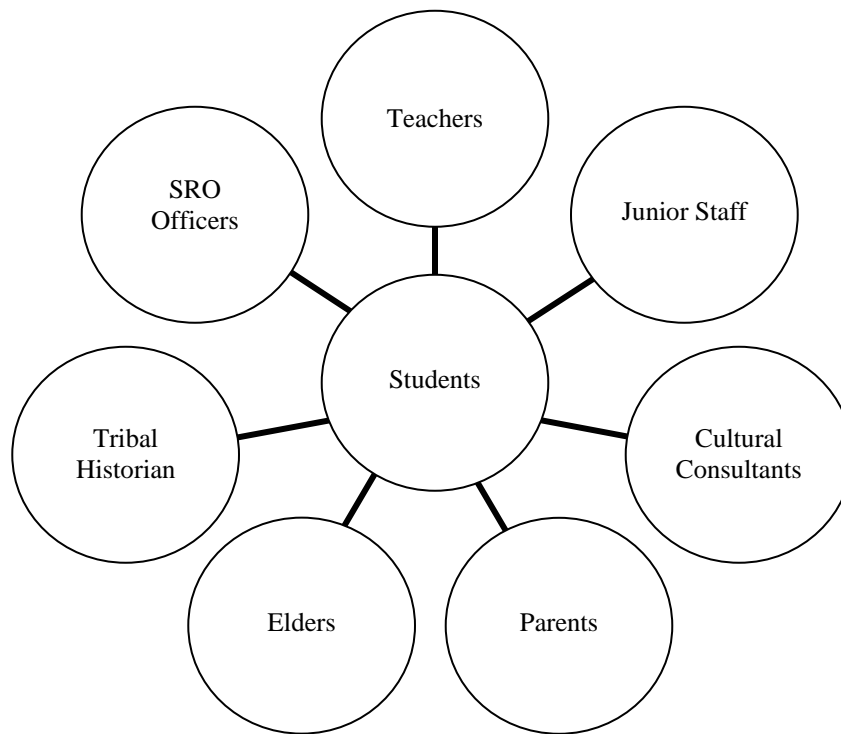


Fig. 5.1 An Indigenous Holistic Child-Centered Curriculum

The curriculum at this camp also attempts to meet the students' academic needs while teaching Houma culture and traditional values, by incorporating literacy, numeracy, and computer technology into the daily delivery of the program. Brenda collaborates with the Lafourche Migrant Education program in order to provide each student with an IBM laptop, which is assigned on the first day of camp. In groups of four or five, students must prepare a power-point presentation, which teaches the elders what they learned during the camp. Each member of the group is responsible for constructing one slide for their group's final presentation. Brenda then uses the presentations to evaluate what the students learned during the camp.

The camp offers a variety of exciting community workshops where students learn how to record their elders' oral history, identify the medicinal properties of local plants during nature hikes, build traditional palmetto huts, storytelling with the tribal historian, learn to speak the Houma language, develop leadership skills, as well as, practicing the different Pan-Indian powwow dances. Breakout sessions are interspersed throughout the day, where students can choose to engage in the art of making traditional palmetto baskets, blow guns, beadwork, or appliquéeing their dance regalia.

In 2002, I began attending the camps, which usually take place during the first two weeks of June. As a curriculum theorist, my initial aim was to conduct ethnographic research on the curricular landscape of the camps. I was interested in how the curriculum was planned, implemented, and lived (Aoki, 1993/2004). My research agenda, at that time was (and still is), focused on understanding the ways in which the curriculum taught at the camp resisted, subverted, and/or integrated the mainstream colonial curriculum reproduced in public schools. I saw the curricular landscape of the camp as a "rich" source of data necessary to further understand such curricular questions. However, during the first camp, Brenda realized that I had specific curricular, pedagogical, and technological skills that could be beneficial to the students at the camp. Curriculum scholars, Yazzie (1999) reminds us, "must encourage indigenous communities to use the school and university as a resource ["rich" source], not the other way around" (p. 93). Eventually, I was asked to take on four main curricular responsibilities at the camp.

My first responsibility involved taking as many pictures as possible of the students engaged in the various learning activities provided at the camp. In turn, during the last night, students, instructors, the cooks, and elders, watched a power-point

presentation of all the pictures taken during the camp. For three years, I have taken over 3000 digital pictures at the different camps. The second, with the help of some of the students, was to barbeque chicken, hot dogs, and hamburgers, usually on the third night, for the entire camp. A third was teaching the senior students methods of recording their elders' oral history. My last responsibility involved writing and editing the daily newsletter for the camp.

The curricular objectives behind the newsletter aimed at helping students work on both colonial and Houma literacy skills. Using Microsoft Publisher, I put the newsletter together at the end of each day with the help of senior students and members of the junior and senior teaching staff. During each breakfast, everyone read what he or she learned the previous day. Initially, I wrote and published the newsletter by myself due to the shortage of instructors at the camp. However, the following year Brenda wrote the additional staffing necessary for the newsletter, into the Indian Education grant. Paula, a certified teacher, and Ashley, a junior instructor, edited and published the newsletter during the last camp (see <http://unitedhoumanation.org/crawfishtales.htm>, 2005). Senior students and instructors also helped write most of the articles. The newsletters now serve as an archive, which reflects what values have remained part of the curriculum, as well as how the curricula taught at previous camps have evolved.

Each year, the curriculum embodies a different theme depending on the needs of the community and the students. Last year, the title and theme of the curriculum was, "*Don't Preserve Houma Heritage, Live it!*" "It is our hope," Brenda (2005) wrote in the newsletter, "that you will take all of the things you learn and incorporate it into your everyday lives" (see <http://unitedhoumanation.org/crawfishtales.htm>, 2005, volume 3,

Issue I, p. 1). Stressing the tribe's history, traditional values, and reviving the Houma language have been foundational components of the cross-cultural curriculum (see figure 5.2). Last summer, Brenda invited Cedric Sunray, a member of the Mowa Band of Choctaw, to help revive and teach Houma literacy to the students. Historically, the Houmas spoke a dialect of the Muskogean language, which was commonly used as a trade language, by many southeastern tribes (Kniffen, Gregory, & Stokes, 1987). Therefore, the Choctaw language is closely related to the Houma language. As a result, Cedric is currently helping Brenda revive and incorporate the Houma language into the camp's daily curriculum.

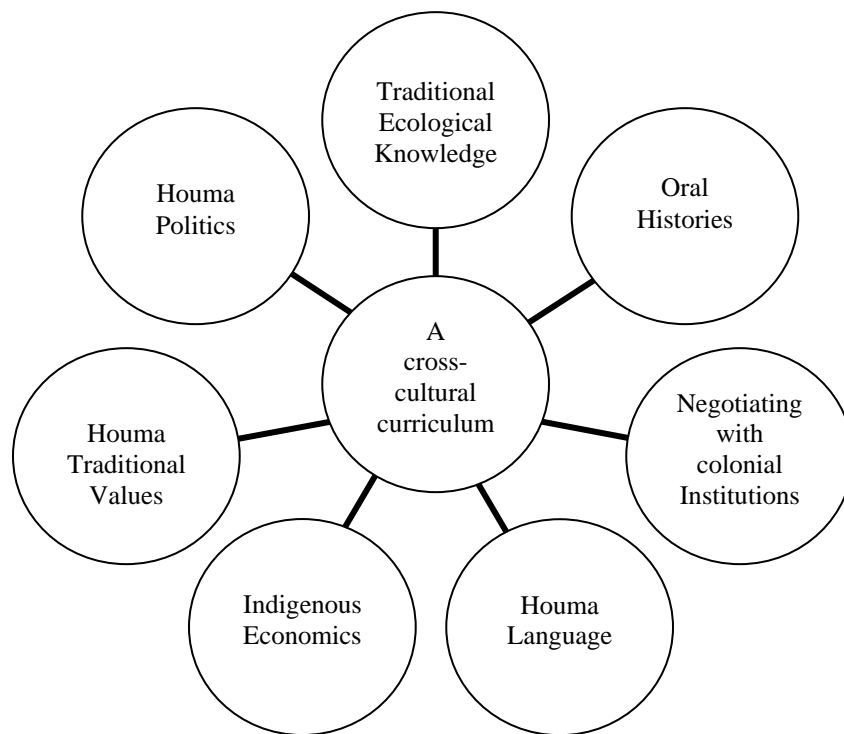


Fig. 5.2 A Cross-Cultural Curriculum

When the students arrive at camp they are immediately divided into teams called clans. Each team's was then given a Houma name, which represents an important animal to the community. For example, one clan was named *Sakchay* (crawfish), which is the tribe's national symbol. Cedric also encouraged students to practice using the Houma language during breakfast, lunch, and dinner in the following ways. Using the Houma language, students had to ask the camp cooks for the specific foods they wanted, in order to receive their food. Students said, "*Pa ki teh lo* (chicken) *sa bana* (I want)," before receiving their barbeque chicken. A variety of teaching techniques, (including formal instruction, and other teaching activities, which promote experiential learning by doing), are used at the camp (Cajete, 1999). Curriculum scholars who review the historical contents of the newsletters will notice an increase in the curricular integration of the Houma language during the last three years of the summer cultural enrichment program. At last year's camp, for example, the title of the newsletter changed from *Crawfish Tales* on day one, to *Sakchay Tales* on day two, to finally *Sakchay Anumpa* by the third day.

Brenda also invited Chance Rush, a motivation consultant, to teach students traditional indigenous values, as well as, leadership skills at a workshop he called *Rezology*. "Go someplace you've never been," Chance (2005) stressed, "and leave respected." The four parts to the *Rezology* curriculum are inner development, knowledge, action, and evaluation. The variations of traditional values within Native American communities depends on the levels of cultural assimilation, as well as the cultural differences among the various indigenous communities across North America (Cajete, 1999). Mutual respect for one another was one of the main values stressed at the camp. Students, who refuse to incorporate this one value into their daily engagement with the

curriculum at camp, and encounters with others, were sometimes sent home. Each morning, Chance asked students to think about their development as indigenous youth, to learn the foundations of their tribal knowledge and values, to take appropriation action to learn such foundations, and to evaluate their inner awareness of future possibilities. During the workshops with Chance, students also discussed the institutional racism that takes place within their schools.

At the camp, students have the opportunity to strategize different ways of coping with, as well as challenging the continued racism that takes place inside the schools. “An easily observed and tangible characteristic of institutional racism,” Clearly and Peacock (1998) write, “is the conscious and unconscious exclusion from the curriculum of American Indian history, culture, languages, literature, and other instructions relevant to these students’ lives” (p. 69). Many students expressed their frustrations with the lack of indigenous culture taught within the public school curriculum. Students also vented their dissatisfaction with the ways in which their teachers reinscribed colonial stereotypes of indigenous communities when teaching the American History curriculum. Each year, Brenda teaches an anti-racist workshop at the camp, where students are encouraged to act out various forms of discrimination in skits. During the skits students draw on their collective experiences to illustrate the various types of racial violence that take place inside their schools. After the skits are over, students and elders then discuss how to negotiate and teach others an anti-racist curriculum, which challenges the continued racial violence perpetuated against Indian students within the colonial schooling system.

Finally, the Houmas have recently appropriated aspects of other Indian cultures into their community. After the Pan-Indian movement in the 1970s, such as the American

Indian Movement (AIM), many Indian tribes in America have influenced one another's cultures (Crow Dog, 1991). Although the Powwow itself is not traditional to the Houma community, they have imported and appropriated their own versions of the northern tribes' Powwows and continue to do so. Just as other local communities around the world are changing in order to accommodate the effects of globalization, the Houma culture is a dynamic entity continually shifting and reinventing itself to do the same.

Part of the Houma curriculum at their summer youth camps is to teach those Houma students who are willing to learn how to dance the various Indian dances of North America. Many of the youth are now participating in professional dance competitions at the various Powwows around America. Brenda Dardar Robichaux and other Houma tribal leaders continue to develop what they consider culturally relevant curricula within their Indian Education programs in order to ensure Houma heritage is practiced within future generations. Their vision of Indian Education not only teaches the history of the Houma community, but also teaches the youth to take pride in their identity as Houma Indians. Although big business, education, the church, and colonial governments have historically implemented overtly and covertly systems of cultural genocide, tribal leaders have created internal systems, like the Indian Education Program, which continue to appropriate, as well as, resist the violent epistemic effects of the colonial curriculum taught in public schools. Let us turn towards such historical resistance.

An Indigenous History of Resisting Colonial Education

Through the first half of this century, the ideology of assimilation guided curriculum development for American Indian education.

(Yazzie, 1999, p. 85)

Even if it is not possible to change the system form within, an individual's actions within the system do matter.

(Alfred, 1999, p. 74)

Once the Houmas had access to the gates of the colonial educational systems, they were also able to develop programs inside and outside the schools walls that resisted cultural assimilation. The United Houma Nation created and implemented Indian Education programs as a necessary means to ensure a continued survival and self-determination of their traditional knowledge and values. Having said that, this is not to say that the Houmas' traditional knowledge and values have not changed overtime. Nevertheless, there are some symbolic markers of Houma culture that the community has determined to be strategically essential and authentic. The Houmas have fought relentlessly for their capacity to determine their national curriculum, and thus, for the power to define and legitimize their national indigenous identity.

Historically, global empires, such as Spain, France, Britain, and the United States utilized institutions—such as schools, universities, military, government, courts—to systemically legitimize an appropriation of traditional indigenous lands, and in turn, exploit the natural resources of the landscape. The colonizing projects in the South were split between assimilation and segregationist ways of dealing with indigenous peoples. Initially, school officials, colonial gatekeepers like Bourgeois, denied the Houmas access to learning the institutional languages of the colonizers. In order to survive the ongoing colonization of their land, community leaders, like Henry Billiot and Frank Naquin, realized that their people needed to learn how to negotiate with the gatekeepers of colonial institutions. To successfully do so meant learning the colonizers' institutional

languages. Therefore, elders within the community petitioned the federal government relentlessly in order to grant them access to the gates of public education. As a result, Houma students were “physically” granted access to colonial institutions of segregated public schooling in the 1940s. Even then, students were restricted to a grade seven education at the Golden Meadow Settlement School. Many working class students dropped out of public schooling in order to support their families economically. Others, like Laura Billiot, were violently pushed out, due to psychological experiences of alienation, and physical abuse while learning inside a colonial institution.

During the 1960s, after Louisiana was ordered by the federal government to desegregate, Houma students gained access, for the first time, to the public gates of a secondary education. Again students, like Cody Danos and Brenda Dardar, faced the colonizing violence of institutional discrimination—harassment on the bus, teasing in the schoolyard, and violent psychological destruction of self-esteem behind the locker room doors—during the initial transitional period of integration. As a result, many Houma students were pushed out of the public education system in the Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes. Nonetheless, students like Cody and Brenda persevered and were some of the first Houma students to graduate from high school. In order to protect the future generations from such discrimination, many parents stopped speaking French and teaching traditional knowledge to their children at home. Also the increased amount of time one spent away from elders during the day also proportionately decreased one’s exposure to the traditional Houma knowledge taught by elders at home.

A Houma student can be simultaneously on one or both sides of the colonial institutional gates: A side that resists identity erasure, displacement and the violence of

resource depletion, or a side which advertently and inadvertently wishes to assimilate an individual's Houma identity. Duran and Duran (1995) explain in *Native American Postcolonial Psychology*:

As we move into the next millennium, we should not be tolerant of the neocolonialism that runs unchecked through our knowledge generating systems. We must ensure that the dissemination of thought [culture] through journals, media, and other avenues have "gatekeepers" who understand the effects of colonialism and are committed to fighting any perceived act of hegemony on our communities. Postcolonial thinkers should be placed in the positions that act as gatekeepers of knowledge in order to ensure that western European thought be kept in its appropriate place. (p. 7)

One of the ways indigenous social groups such as the Houma might overcome the forces to resist displacement, segregation, and assimilation, is to use systems similar to those of the dominant culture, albeit, with decolonizing curricular policies. For example, Brenda Dardar Robichaux explains that the Indian Education workshops and summer camps accommodate the Western need for meeting so-called academic standards while also accommodating Houma cultural needs. Unfortunately, rhetoric for meeting academic standards, the corporate machine, of "no child left behind" is pervasive throughout America's entire educational system (Kincheloe, Slattery, Steinberg, 2001). Therefore, instead of a curriculum that supports local diversity, the present education plan continues to promote a standardization and conservation of Euro-centered hegemonic policies (see Pinar, 2004; Sefa Dei, et al., 2000).

Brenda Dardar Robichaux maintains that the Indian Education system presently put in place is a gatekeeper that provides the tribe with measures to resist the hegemonic systems that are involved in manipulating and making public education an oppressive

one-directional assimilating machine. She realizes that her people are caught between two worlds, perhaps one could say, on either side of the system's gates. On the one hand, the Houma youth must learn the academic ways of the Ameri-corporate-man, if they wish to acquire some of the benefits of the colonialism's cultural and economic capital. However, on the other hand, Brenda stresses that the Houma youth must also learn to continue the ways of their elders—perhaps a double consciousness, so to speak.

Cultural groups, Bodley (2002) argues, such as the United Houma Nation must have the right to choose, and self-determine their national and cultural identities. Bodley (2002) explains that individuals need at least the five following aspects to meet their human needs:

- Symbolization (producing, abstract concepts)
- Materialization (giving physical form to concepts)
- Verbalization (producing human speech)
- Socialization (producing permanent human societies)
- Enculturation (reproducing culture) (p. 139)

Therefore part of a social group's autonomy is the capacity to control the manipulation of different reproducing technologies, such as education, that help appropriate and maintain control—self-determination—over the available representations of multiple and complex Indian identities. How might the Houmas ensure the self-determination of their culture and their multiple identities, when the BIA, who controls public discourse on federal indigenous identities, or the social and psychological systems that reproduce national identities, such as public education, denies them an institutional position of power to the self-determination and legitimize their cultural identity?

A possible solution is to join the dominant group, which means to pass through the cultural gate via one direction. Along this possible one-way route, to ensure

psychological and social survival, one is asked or required to negate, or perhaps at best to forget one's own identity in order to join a colonizing society. However, the psychological costs are conceivably too great. What psychological costs must a Houma youth endure while crossing the school's doors in order to learn from, or join, the dominant colonizing social group? Pinar (2000) suggests that "to get them to desire to be like someone else, children must learn to be dissatisfied with themselves. Dissatisfaction with oneself is almost always the introjected nonacceptance by a significant other" (p. 363). Such "introjection is violent" and "is the internalization of external condemnation" that "represents a violation of self" (p. 364). In this instance, our subjectivities, our "self," our ego, turns upon itself, or divides itself, or in a worst-case scenario according to Pinar (2000), we lose our "self" to others. In this instance, the educational system reproduces a curriculum of madness and insanity.

Once an indigenous student decides to cross through the colonial gates he or she might sacrifice certain identities that are essential to her or his understanding of his or her Houma subjectivity. How might Houmas, however, enter the colonial doors without leaving their customs behind, without forcefully exchanging their subjectivity, or at the extreme lose their national identity? There is danger of simplifying power relations when one assumes that Houma students necessarily lack agency and/or the capacity to learn ways of appropriating a dominant social group's culture capital, while maintaining national identities. Although schools work as systems of internal oppression within indigenous communities, there are multiple ways in which Indian students can negotiate their agency.

Before starting my research within the community, I assumed that the system of education in itself reinscribed and supported discourses and practices of colonization. I assumed that the Houma resisted such systems with confrontational strategies. However, conversations with tribal members have complicated my continued partial, limited, and situated interpretations of indigenous resistance within and against internal systems of colonization, as a non-Indigenous researcher (see Ellsworth 1992; Haraway 1991; Munro, 1998; and Smith 1999). “Based in a materialist analysis,” Haig-Brown (2001) maintains, “resistance has currency in a world dominated by capitalism” (p. 28). Furthermore, Haig-Brown (2001) explains that western notions of resistance focus on:

The antagonistic relations between a subordinate and a dominant, it refers specifically to the ability of oppressed groups to refuse to comply with over or covert agenda of an oppressor and to maintain separation, often an identifying one, between themselves and the one who would absorb or change them in ways that they find unacceptable. (p. 28)

Haig-Brown (2001) warns that such Westernized concepts of resistance have the dangers of re-inscribing “imperialism and domination even as it names and critiques it” (p. 28). There are three main reasons behind Haig-Brown’s (2001) situated argument. First, by constructing the context of resistance as either/or binary boundaries, a researcher is in danger of reducing the complexities of power relations. Secondly, Haig-Brown (2001) asserts that “resistance immediately assumes a hierarchy in which one group supposedly dominates while the other is dominated,” and hence erases (or at least reduces) the possibility of another’s agency (p. 29). And, finally, by focusing one’s work on resistance, a researcher can “detract from the work that people want to do within their communities as their gaze is drawn away from home to refocus on a so-called dominant

power” (Haig-Brown, 2001, p. 29). As a result, in the field I have tried not to limit or focus my questions solely around the concept of Houma resistance and internal colonization. Perhaps what is forgotten when using resistance as an analytical tool, Haig-Brown (2001) stresses, are relations of cooperation and reciprocity. Stories of survival, resistance, and oppression are not the only historical narratives that exist within the Houma communities.

Keeping the Curricular Drumbeat Alive

It is at the local level that indigenous cultures and the cultures of resistance have been born and nurtured over generations.

(Smith, 1999, p. 110)

I have come to realize that through programs such as Indian Education, members of the United Houma Nation, are trying to write, rewrite, and reeducate the public at large about the historical representations of their past. In fact, within the larger global context, Indigenous people across the world have “...mounted a critique of the way history is told [taught] from the perspective of the colonizers” (Smith, 1999, p. 29). Until the 1970s and the appropriation of Indian Education into tribal politics, the Houma educational narrative was one of denial, delay, and segregation. Although Indian Education historically had limited funding and teaching resources, it has functioned and functions within Lafourche parish as a gatekeeper that continues to work cooperatively and subversively to educate Indian students and the non-indigenous public.

Indian students must continue to mediate their cultural experiences between their community’s needs and the “Euro-centered” systems of public education. Brenda Dardar

Robichaux along with other tribal members utilizes the Indian Education Program as a system to teach Houma youth how to mediate between an ever-changing Houma culture and institutional gates—schools and churches—that are controlled by the hegemony of non-indigenous peoples. Drawing upon Smith’s (1999) words, the Houmas’ story has been one of “contact and invasion, genocide and destruction, resistance and survival, [and] recovery as indigenous people” (p. 88). And while the United Houma Nation has fought hard to put in place a program and curriculum that ensures the future survival of Houma culture, the ongoing negation of their federal recognition by the BIA promises a continued denial of their historical rights to land currently in the hands of big oil corporations, like Texaco.

Finally, when I asked Helen Dardar Gindrat, a current elder and former principal chief, if she had any words of advice to leave to the younger generation, she replied:

To never lose their culture. To hang in there, and to not care about what other people are saying. You never let go of your culture...that is your heritage. That is who you are. I have a sign on my front door that says, ‘I am Indian and I will be Indian until I die.’

The Houma community continues to work inside and outside the walls of public education in order to teach younger generations to be, like Helen Dardar Gindrat has stated, proud of their cultural heritage and to remember their Houma identity.

Endnotes

¹ Videotaped during an American Indian Education Workshop at LSU on March 4, 2005.

² Recorded digitally during the cultural enrichment camp at Bayou Blue State Park on June 7, 2005.

Epilogue

Bridges on the Pacific Rim are not mere paths for human transit; nor are they mere routes for commerce and trade. They are dwelling places for people.

(Aoki, 1991/2004, p. 438)

If, however, anthropologists and other social scientists begin to speak critically to the shortcomings of their own society using the knowledge which they claim to have derived from observation of the tribal peoples, that will be signal that something of real value is contained within the tribal context.

(Deloria, 1997b, p. 221)

Many scholars are attempting to write the “New Indian History” or “New Western History.” However, as Mihesuah (1998) makes clear, such historical endeavors “are doing nothing new and different” (p. 1). Traditional western methods of historical documentation, Mihesuah (1998) stresses, do not take account of indigenous voices, or indigenous views of history. There is a limited amount of educational research (which is recognized by the colonial State’s institutions as legitimate research), if not any, conducted by indigenous scholars from the various southern tribes that live in Louisiana. With the cooperation of the Lafourche Indian Education Program, the Houma community, and members of the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History, this dissertation attempted to develop a research agenda that satisfied both the Houma community and the Louisiana State University criteria for completing a doctorate in the field of Curriculum and Instruction. Conducting an ethnographic/oral history project with the United Houma Nation over the last four years provided me with a specific curriculum

of place, and perhaps more importantly, a pedagogical opportunity to learn about the broader social, psychological, historical and political context of the Houma's present situation in Louisiana (Pinar, 1991).

During the early 1900s Houma communities were dispersed within the different parishes of southern Louisiana and struggled to obtain any access to the systems of public education. According to current elders, many parents wanted their children to learn how to read and write in English in order to survive, as well as benefit from colonialism's cultural and economic capital. However, many parents also refused to participate in any educational systems that attempted to reproduce ideologies of the dominant colonizing culture.

In this dissertation, many parents spoke of how they had to fight the education and court systems, not only for equitable access to the public education system, but also for the federal judicial recognition of their people as a nation. Not until the federal government mandated desegregation in the 1960s, were Houma students given open access to white public high schools (Duncan, 1998). Many students, however, dropped out of high school because of the institutional racism they experienced at white public schools, and the curriculum's continued negation of their indigenous culture. Many Houma elders, understand public schooling as a colonial space designed to destroy every last remnant of their ways of knowing and living, as an educational instrument used to obliterate their collective identities and memories, as an institutional technology with the sole purpose of imposing a new order (Smith, 1999). And yet the Houma communities spread across the southern parishes of Louisiana continue to devise strategic ways to

subvert and resist the erasing effects of the American educational system—such as the cultural summer enrichment camps.

Houma students had to forgo or hide their Indian identity once they were allowed to go to public schools. Parents who feared that their children would suffer the same racial and cultural discrimination as they did, either stopped sending their children to school or in some cases stopped teaching their cultural ways of engaging and understanding the world and each other to their children (Duncan, 1998). Some parents home schooled their children in order to protect their children from the traumatic effects of institutional discrimination and cultural assimilation. Often those who did remain in the public education system, were taught, and still are, that in order to succeed, even survive the colonial curriculum reproduced in the occupier's school, one must abandon their Houma cultural identity. As a result, younger generations of Houma students have lost touch with the oral and cultural history of who they are as indigenous people.

The Houma community's cultural identity, as a distinct indigenous nation, continues to be disputed and denied by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The Department claims that the Houma, as indigenous people, original inhabitants of this land, have failed to provide the necessary documented evidence of their historical Houma ancestry, as well as a centralized form of government. As a result, the Houma nation continued to be denied the federal funding necessary for educational and culturally relevant programs that other federally recognized tribes currently profit from. And yet even without federal aid, the United Houma Nation mobilized, is mobilizing, its non-centralized government in order to provide aid for its rural communities after the devastating effects of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Meanwhile, the colonial State's social

infrastructure in New Orleans failed many of its tax paying citizens. Nonetheless, the United Houma Nation is entitled to the economic profits of those who profited from their displacements.

Brenda Dardar Robichaux, Michael Dardar, Cody Danos, Nicole Crosby, Jamie Billiot, Joshua Pitre, and many other tribal members continue to archive their oral histories and develop culturally appropriate curricula for future generations. Their national indigenous vision of education not only teaches the oral history of their community, but also asks the youth to take pride in their cultural and national heritage as the United Houma Nation. Engaging in future oral history projects provides a possible institutional space, a bridging, where the Houma community can construct local histories, which challenge a “field [traditionally] dominated by white, male historians who rarely ask or care what the Indians they study have to say about their work” (Wilson, 1998, p. 23). Furthermore, “it is from within these spaces that increasing numbers of indigenous academics and researchers have begun to address social issues within the wider framework of self-determination, decolonization and social justice” (Smith, 1999, p. 4). Until the United Houma Nation is able to open up its own research institutions, and self-determine its curricular agendas, as a curriculum scholar I will continue toward bridging inter-national relationships between the universities they work at and indigenous communities which surround them.

The United States, albeit not globally alone, continues to invest in a cultural, linguistic and economic capital which attempts to reproduce a common (colonial) subject, with a common curriculum, and thus disseminates its empire through ideological apparatuses—juridical, educational, medical, religious, media, etc.—which makes the

subject of decolonization, and the decolonization of “the subject” all the more pressing today. Working with the United Houma Nation over the last four years has provided me a reflective window, one that allowed me to situate my participation and complacency with the different colonial institutions in Canada and the United States. For me, reflecting critically on my participation with such systems of colonization continues to be a recursive educational process.

Although institutions of schooling house an ensemble of knowledges and practices that reproduce and inscribe colonialism’s culture, they also provide spaces to teach alternative histories, to learn about the different indigenous nations who continue to challenge the colonization of their traditional lands. “What is needed in countries like Canada and the United States,” Alfred (1998) reminds us,

Is the kind of education that would force the general population to engage with realities other than their own—increasing their capacity to empathize with others—to see other points of view and to understand other people’s motivations and desires. (p. 132)

Therefore as a first generation immigrant to Canada, I continue to engage autobiographically with processes of decolonization, which work toward deconstructing my assumptions and understandings of the historical circumstances of the indigenous people, whose traditional land I now stand on. How does “the subject” of colonization negotiate his or her (human) rights to name, of naming, his or her rights of otherness, his or her citizenship in the language of a colonizing other? How do the institutions of schooling and their languages work in the configurations of such entitlements? What knowledges are privileged and presupposed in (colonizing) educational institutions?

Writing towards the impossible terrain of “properly” understanding the answers to such questions is where my future work heads next.

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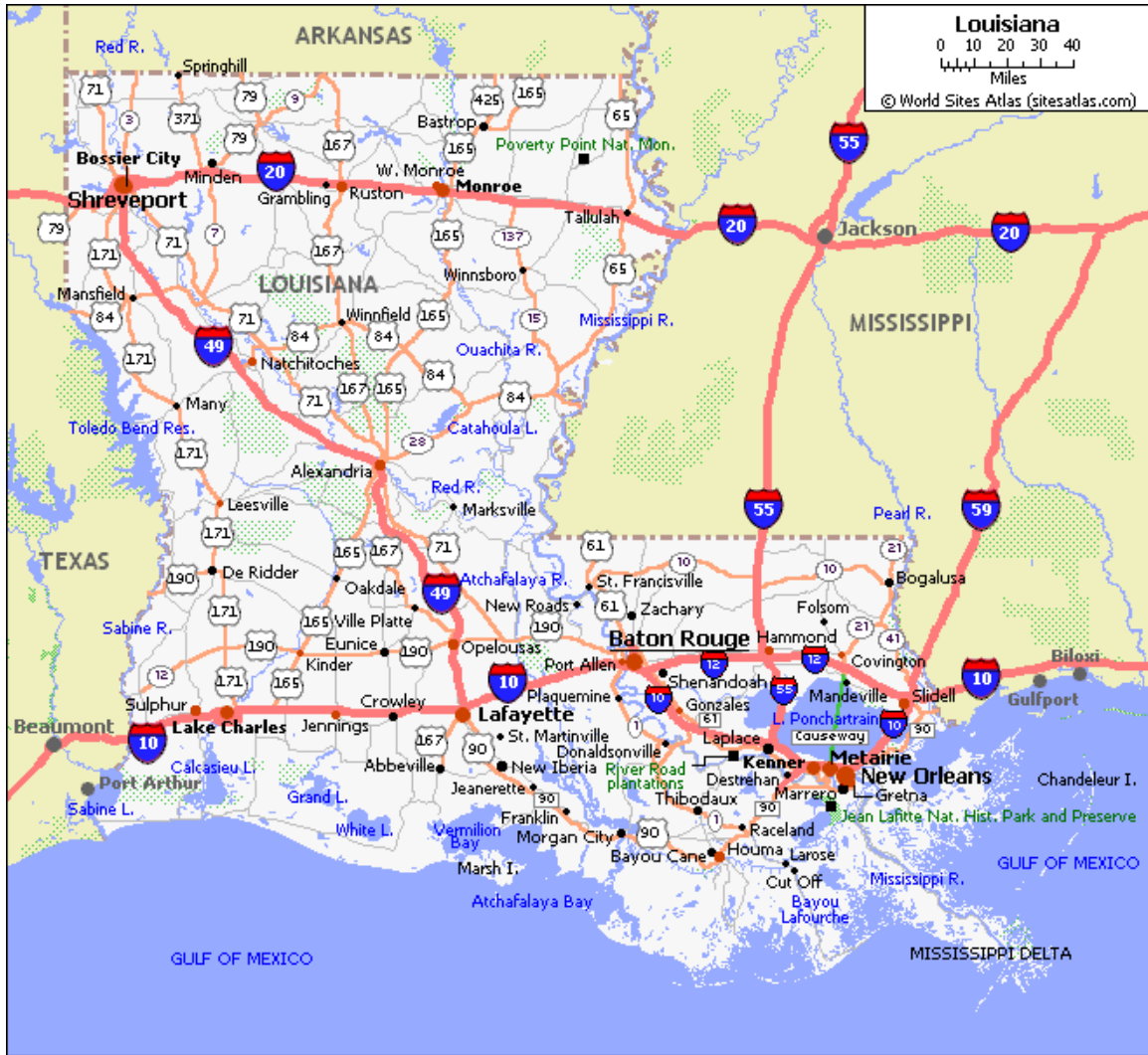
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Appendix A: Road Map of Louisiana



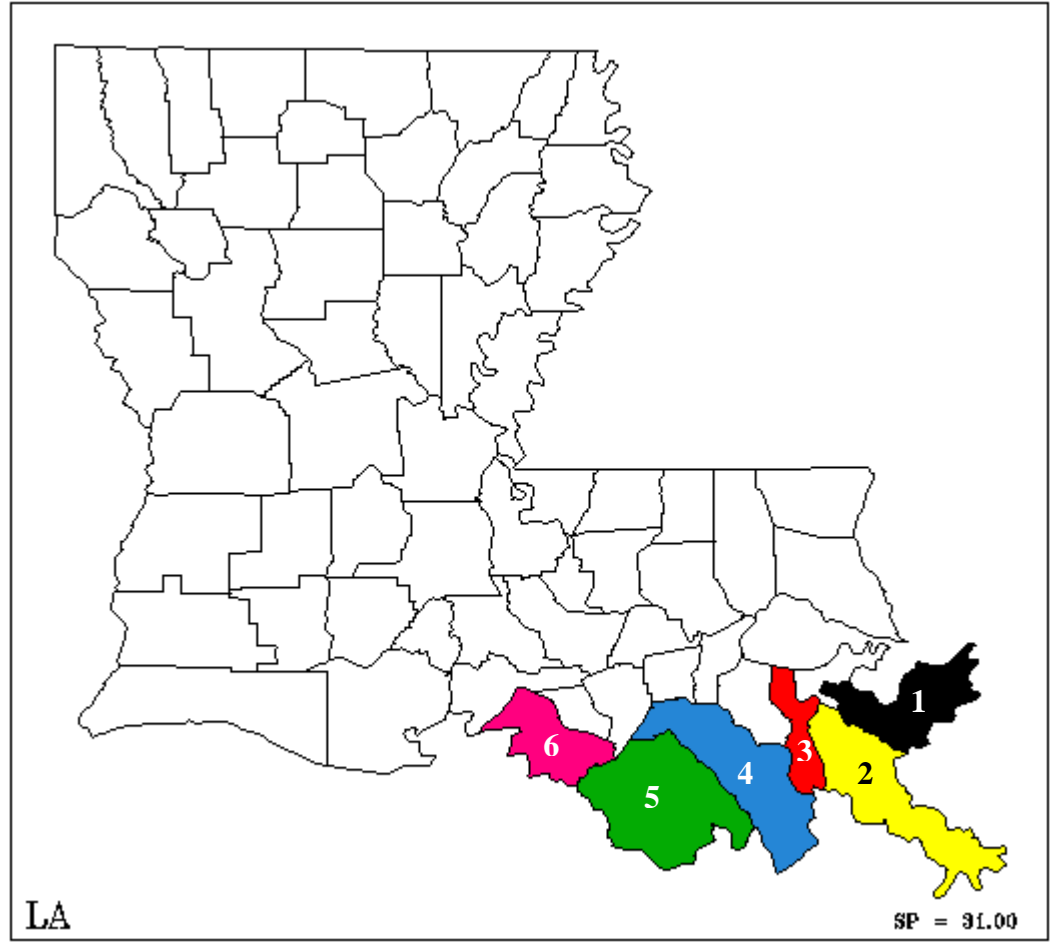
(World Sites Atlas, 2005)

Appendix B: Map of Louisiana Parishes





(US Census Bureau, 2000)

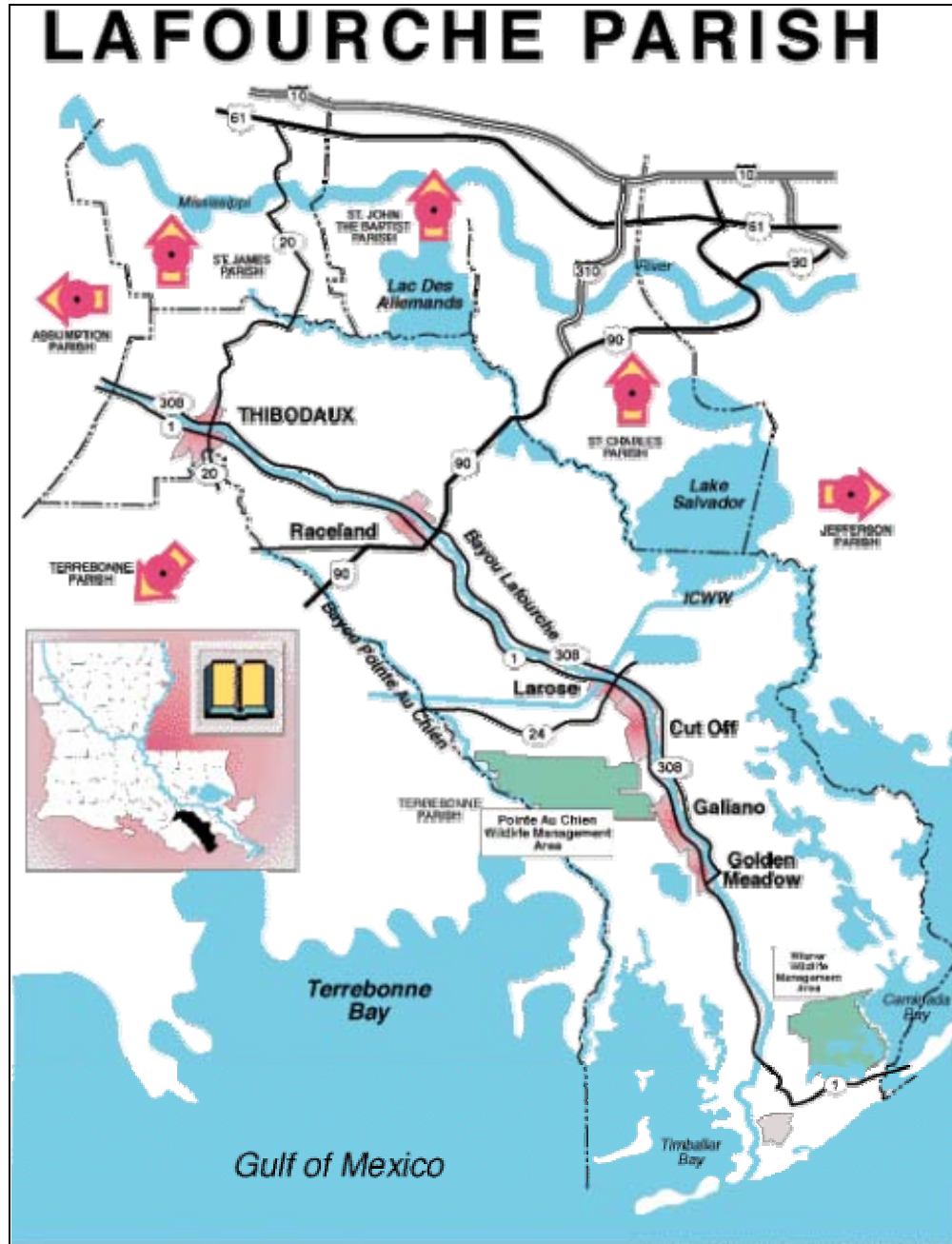
Appendix C: Parishes Inhabited by Houma Settlements



(Indiana University, 2005)

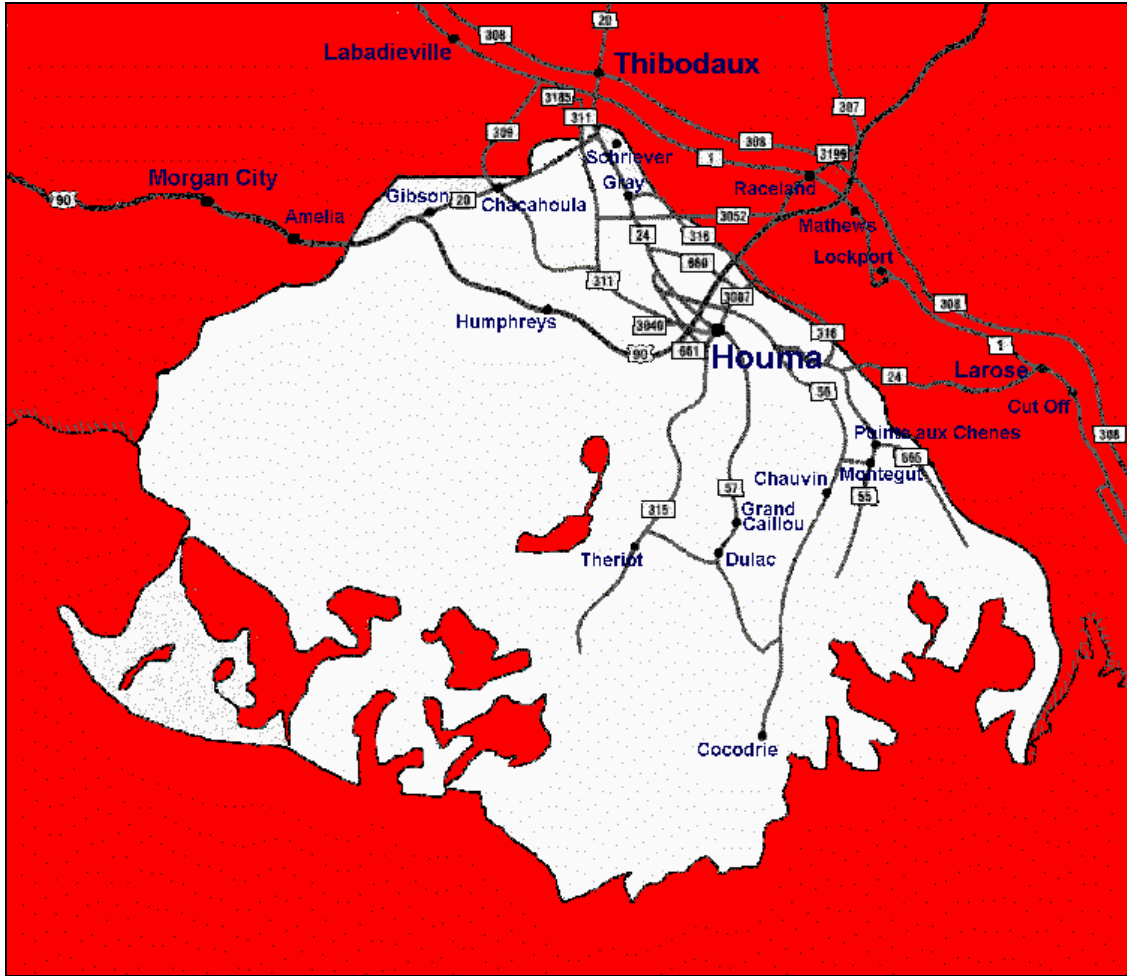
- | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|---|----------------------|
|  | 1) St. Bernard Parish |  | 4) Lafourche Parish |
|  | 2) Plaquemines Parish |  | 5) Terrebonne Parish |
|  | 3) Jefferson Parish |  | 6) St. Mary's Parish |

Appendix D: Map of Lafourche Parish



(Encyclopedia Louisiana, 2001)

Appendix E: Map of Terrebonne Parish



(Encyclopedia Louisiana, 2001)

Appendix F: Map of Plaquemines Parish



(Encyclopedia Louisiana, 2001)

Appendix G: A United Houma Nation Historical Timeline

The Lafourche Indian Education Program distributed the following historical timeline of the United Houma Nation at a cultural workshop conducted at Louisiana State University, on March 4th 2005, for pre-service elementary and secondary teachers.

- 1682 LaSalle notes existence of Houma tribe at intersection of Mississippi River and Red River.
- 1686 Tonti records first European-Houma contact.
- 1699 Houma tribe visited by Iberville.
- 1706 Large numbers of Houmas perish in Tunica massacre. Segment of Houma tribe moves south from Angola area.
- 1718 Houmas negotiate peace between Chitimacha and the French.
- 1723 Tunica and Natchez tribes seek peace with the Houmas.
- 1763 Peace Treaty of Parish places Houmas hunting grounds under control of the English and Villages in Spanish Territory.
- 1766 Houma tribe moves south from Donaldsonville
- 1774 Mississippi east bank Houmas village is sold to Conway and Latil.
- 1800s Houmas begin to move to present location in Terrebonne and Lafourche Parish.
- 1803 U.S. buys large tract of land from France: the Louisiana Purchase. Daniel Clark reports only 60 Houmas remaining above New Orleans.
- 1806 John Sibley reports to the U.S. Secretary of State that Houmas “scarcely exist as a nation.”
- 1811 Author H.M. Brackenbridge writes that Houmas are “extinct.”
- 1814 Houma tribe files land claim with U.S. government.
- 1821 John J Audubon mentions presence of Houmas in Southern Louisiana.
- 1840 The Houmas southern migration was at an end.
- 1859 Rosalie Courteaux purchases “large amount” of land for Houma tribe.

- 1870-1880's Houma spread west from Lafourche Parish and Terrebonne Parish to St. Mary Parish
- 1907 John Swanton "re-discovers" the Houmas.
- 1920 Houma tribe begins to seek federal recognition
- 1931-1940 Houma tribe contacted and "studied" by Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) officials and anthropologists Nash, Underhill, Meyer, and Speck.
- 1932 Protestant education mission schools open for Indian students in Terrebonne Parish at Dulac, Dularge, and Pointe-Aux-Chenes.
- 1940-1948 Parochial and public elementary schools open for Indian students in Terrebonne Parish.
- Late 1950s Houmas are allowed to attend Indian Schools up to the seventh grade.
- 1960 Stoutenburgh lists Houmas as "extinct."
- 1963 Houma children admitted to public schools.
- 1972 Houma Tribes, Inc. is established at Golden Meadow in Lafourche Parish.
- 1974 Houma Alliance, Inc. is established at Dulac in Terrebonne Parish. First Title IV Indian Education program is funded in Lafourche & Terrebonne Parish.
- 1975 Houma tribe joins with other Indian tribes of Louisiana to form the Inter-tribal council.
- 1975-05 United Houma Nation administers grants & job training programs in association with Inter-tribal council.
- 1979 Houma Tribe and Houma Alliance merge to form the United Houma Nation.
- 1985 United Houma Nation files petition for federal recognition
- 1986 United Houma Nation under the leadership of Chairman Kirby Verret and Vice-Chairwoman Helen Dardar Gindrat
- 1990 Tribal roll books closed. Only newborns can be registered.
- 1991 BIA places United Houma Nation on active status.

- 1992 Laura Billiot is elected as Chairwoman of United Houma Nation.
- 1993 Tribal enrollment numbers 17,000.
- 1994 United Houma Nation receives negative proposed findings from the BIA.
- 1995 United Houma Nation files rebuttal to negative proposed findings.
- 1997-05 United Houma Nation under the leadership of Brenda Dardar Robichaux, Principal Chief, and Michael Dardar, Vice Principal Chief.

Appendix H: List of Recorded Interviews

The following interviews have either been videotaped or tape-recorded.

Michael Dardar was interviewed on tape during a truck ride from Dulac to Raceland on March 13th, 2002.

Michael Dardar was interviewed on tape at his home in Boothville Louisiana on March 22nd, 2003.

Laura Billiot was interviewed on videotape at the Tribal Center in Golden Meadow on March 22, 2002.

Jamie Billiot was interviewed on tape at her apartment in Baton Rouge on November 7th, 2002.

Brenda Dardar Robichaux was interviewed on tape at the Lafourche Media Center in Lockport on November 15, 2002.

Helen Gindrat Dardar and Laura Billiot were interviewed together on videotape at Dorcas' Closet in Galliano on April 7th 2004.

Corrine Paulk was interviewed at her house in Houma, Louisiana on February 15th, 2005.

Curtis Hendon was interview during a truck ride to see Isle de Jean Charles, on February 15th, 2005.

Cody Danos was interviewed at Brenda Dardar Robichaux's house in Raceland, Louisiana during the year of 2005.

Helen Gindrat Dardar, Helen Anne Bouzigard, Laura Billiot, Enola Hanson, Annette Collins, and Hilda Naquin were interviewed at Dorcas' Closet in Galliano on February 16th, 2005.

Marina Serigney was interviewed at the United Houma Nation Tribal Center in Golden Meadow, on June 18, 2005.

Loretta Gilbert was interviewed at the United Houma Nation Tribal Center in Golden Meadow, on June 18, 2005.

Elda Doucet Boutte sent personal letter describing her experiences at the school. I received the letter sometime during the first week of August 2005. We also had correspondence over the phone during the months of October and November 2005.

Appendix I: Description of Study

This study focuses on the United Houma Nation, a southeastern indigenous community. The study consists of tape-recording and videotaping the oral history of certain community member's experiences with the Louisiana educational systems in the Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes. The interview questions will focus primarily on the recollection of community members' experiences with the Louisiana educational system. Subjects must be 18 or older and willing to volunteer life histories about their educational experiences here in Louisiana. All subjects must be approved by the United Houma Nation government in order for the subjects to be included in the study. Subjects that are not approved by the United Houma Nation government council will not be included.

In order to study the oral history of the United Houma Nation's educational experiences in Louisiana the investigator must interview community members. The specific sites of data collection will be at the American Indian Education offices in Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes, the United Houma Nation Tribal Center in Golden Meadow, the United Houma Nation community centre in Dulac, and when permitted, in private residences.

Some indigenous interviewees may experience psychological discomfort when sharing possible traumatic memories of their educational past in the Louisiana schooling system. All interviewees will be explained before the interview that they have the right not to answer any of the questions asked. Before the interview begins, the investigator will explain to interviewees that they can also request that specific questions not be asked during the interview. Interviewees will also be able to address any concerns about the interview process before it begins. After each interview the investigator will debrief the interviewee about the interview process. Interviewees will also be able to read over the final draft of the dissertation and determine whether or not the excerpts chosen from their interviews may be included or not. Illiterate subjects who are not able to read the consent form are considered vulnerable subjects. At that time, a participant who is unable to read the consent form will be appointed a reader by the United Houma Nation governing council.

The investigator will first seek permission from the United Houma Nation's governing council before interviewing any subjects. Thereafter, each subject will be explained, orally, the nature of the project. At that time the investigator will explain to the subject that they have the opportunity to ask any follow-up questions and discuss any concerns about the interview process, the nature of the questions, the content addressed, and the final destination of the shared historical data. The investigator will explain that the shared historical data will be stored in a secured location. The subject will also be explained that they can remove themselves from the study at any time during data collection or in its writing up. Once all of that has been explained, the interviewee will be asked to sign the consent form.

The investigator will explain that the identities of the interviewees will not remain anonymous. The participants' identities will not remain anonymous unless requested during the discussion of the consent form. However at any point during the interview, the subject will have the option to request that their identity remain confidential, as well as, any of the content shared. Subjects who wish to remain anonymous will be permitted to do so. The investigator will use a pseudonym rather the subject's real name and take efforts not to link the historical data shared with the subject's identity. Each subject's historical data will be kept in a locked and secured location.

Appendix J: Consent Form

Understanding An Indigenous Curriculum of Place in Louisiana Through Listening to Houma Oral Histories

Performance Sites:

Interviews for the study will be conducted with members of the United Houma Nation at the community center in Dulac, at the tribal office in Golden Meadow, at the American Indian offices in Lockport and Houma Louisiana. Interviews for the study will also be conducted, if willing, at private residences.

Contact:

The name of the primary investigator is Nicholas Ng-A-Fook and he can be contacted at 225-338-9842 or nngafo1@lsu.edu.

Purpose:

The purpose of the study is to investigate and record the various historical relationships that United Houma Nation community members have had with the education system during segregation and after segregation in Louisiana.

Subjects:

Inclusion Criteria:

Participants interviewed are United Houma Nation women and men between the ages of 18 and 100.

Exclusion Criteria:

Participants who do not wish to participate shall be excluded, or are not approved by the United Houma Nation government.

Maximum number of subjects:

Due to time constraints a maximum of 20 possible participants will be interviewed.

Study Procedures:

If willing, each subject will be interviewed between 2 to 5 times. Each interview will be recorded with a video and tape recorder. Each session will last approximately one hour. The video and sound recordings will be stored in the Curriculum and Instruction's Oral History Centre. Copies of the interviews will be provided to the United Houma Nation governing council. The historical information collected will be analyzed by the investigator and written up in his dissertation. The public will have access to the dissertation at the LSU library and the Curriculum and Instruction department. The United Houma Nation government will also be provided with a copy of the final written project.

Benefits:

The data collected from the interviews will provide a historical record and an educational archive that will socially benefit the United Houma Nation and its community members. Future generations will be able to utilize the interviews as historical data.

Risks/Discomforts:

Due to the segregation of Indian children from white public schools in Louisiana before 1964, there is the possibility of some psychological discomfort through the sharing of some participants' memories of their local educational experiences.

Measures Taken to Reduce Risk:

The investigators will present his research proposal to the United Houma Nation government. The investigator will also contact all research participants via the tribal government. The UHN government will have the final say on who and who cannot participate in the study. Participants will be advised that they need not answer any questions that cause them psychological discomfort before or during the interview. Interviewees will be explained before the interview that they have the right not to answer any of the questions asked. Before the interview begins, the investigator will explain to interviewees that they can also request that specific questions not be asked during the interview. Interviewees will also be able to address any concerns about the interview process before it begins. After each interview the investigator will debrief the interviewee about the interview process. Interviewees will also be able to read over the final draft of the dissertation and determine whether or not the excerpts chosen from their interviews may be included or not.

Rights to Refuse:

Participation in this study is voluntary and subjects may refuse to participate at any given time before, during, and after the collection of an interview without penalty or loss of any benefits.

Privacy:

Unless participants clearly express that they want to remain anonymous in the writing up of the dissertation, their names will be used. However, the subject's identity will remain anonymous or confidential upon the participant's request. At that time, if such a request is made, the historical data will be stored in a secured location and the identity of the participants shall remain anonymous. During the interview an interviewee may request that certain information remain confidential. The confidential material will not be part of the writing up of the dissertation upon such a request. All future investigators must get permission from the subjects involved in this study and the United Houma Nation governing council in order to access the oral history data located in the Curriculum and Instruction Oral History project. If an individual should die during and after the writing up of the dissertation, all future investigators must request permission from the United Houma Nation governing council in order to gain access to that individual's oral history data.

Financial Information:

There is no financial compensation for any of the participants.

Withdrawal:

There are no consequences for a subject's unilateral decision to withdraw from the research. The subject need only contact and notify the primary investigator or co-investigator of their withdrawal. A subject may withdraw at anytime during the study or the writing up of its results.

Removal:

Any subjects that requested by the United Houma Nation government to be excluded shall be removed.

Consent Signatures

“The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects’ rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews Chairman, LSU Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the researchers’ obligation to provide me with a copy of this consent form if signed by me.”

Subject’s Signature: _____

Date: _____

“The study subject has indicated to me that he/she is unable to read. I certify that I have read this consent form to the subject and explained that by completing the signature line above, the subject had agreed to participate.”

Signature of reader: _____

Date: _____

Vita

Nicholas Ng-A-Fook was born in Glasgow, Scotland. In 1975, two years after his birth, he and his family emigrated from Britain to Canada. Later that year his father started a family practice in a small rural logging town in northern Ontario called Kapuskasing. Both parents thought it was important that he learn how to speak Canada's two official languages (French and English), and therefore enrolled him in the French Catholic schooling system. In 1992, he graduated from Cité Des Jeunes. He then attended the University of Ottawa located in Canada's capital city. Four years later he graduated Bachelor of Arts majoring in Classical Studies. After his graduation, Nicholas took some time off in order to travel around Europe and visit the Roman and Greek historical sites he had studied as an undergraduate student. Upon his return he applied and was then accepted into the Graduate Diploma of Education program at the University of Western Sydney in Penrith, Australia. After Nicholas's graduation, and with his new qualifications as a secondary science and history teacher, he remained in Penrith for one year to teach science and history at various high schools located in Penrith. In 1999, Nicholas returned to Canada and briefly taught special education at Barrie Central High School. In 2000, he started his Master of Education at York University. After graduating in 2001, he began his doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction at Louisiana State University. In May 2006, Nicholas will graduate with a Doctor of Philosophy degree in curriculum and instruction. He is currently working as a visiting professor at the University of Ottawa.