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Nueva Orleans: Hispanics in New Orleans, the Catholic Church, and imagining the new Hispanic community

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NUEVA ORLEANS:
HISPANICS IN NEW ORLEANS, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, AND IMAGINING
THE NEW HISPANIC COMMUNITY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University
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In

The Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

by
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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.........................................................................................ii

List of Figures....................................................................................................v

Abstract.............................................................................................................vi

Chapter 1: Introduction....................................................................................1  
  Bienvenidos a Nueva Orleans.................................................................1  
  Review of the Literature............................................................................6

Chapter 2: Spaniards and Los Isleños.........................................................9  
  The Spanish Colony...................................................................................9  
  Los Isleños..................................................................................................28  
  Los Isleños Post-Hurricane Katrina.........................................................36  
  The Acadians: Exiles to Spanish Louisiana............................................37

Chapter 3: New Orleans as a U.S. City: Cubans, Hondurans, and  
  Continuing the Catholic Church’s Legacy of Ministering  
  To the Immigrants of New Orleans.....................................................41  
  New Orleans as a U.S. City and the Catholic Church  
  in the 1800s.............................................................................................41  
  New Orleans, Cuba, and Honduras.......................................................49  
  Cubans.......................................................................................................49  
  Hondurans................................................................................................54  
  Vietnamese Immigrants: Following the Cuban Model.......................63

Chapter 4: Post-Hurricane Katrina Hispanic Migration to  
  New Orleans...............................................................................................69  
  Three Faces of Post-Katrina Hispanic  
  Immigrants to New Orleans.................................................................69  
  Ricardo: Honduras to New Orleans via Florida.................................70  
  Arturo: Mexico into New Orleans..........................................................72  
  Miguel: Honduras to His Brother’s House in  
  New Orleans.............................................................................................74  
  Three Men with Similar yet Different Experiences...............................75  
  Changing the Landscape...........................................................................76  
  Imagining the Post-Hurricane Katrina  
  Hispanic Community...............................................................................79

Chapter 5: English, Spanish, Fútbol, Cuban Black Beans  
  and Taco Soup............................................................................................89  
  Imagining the Community through El Tiempo......................................89
Chapter 6: The Future of Catholicism and Hispanics in New Orleans.........................................................93

Works Cited...........................................................................................................................................99

Vita......................................................................................................................................................110
List of Figures

1. St. Patrick’s Catholic Church, 724 Camp Street, New Orleans, Louisiana…………………………………………………………42
2. St. Mary’s Assumption Catholic Church, 2030 Constance Street, New Orleans, Louisiana…………………………………………………………43
3. Sacred Heart Orphanage Building, Cabrini High School, 3400 Esplanade Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana……………….45
4. Jalisco Supermarket, 2139 Stumpf Blvd., Terrytown, Louisiana…………………………………………………………………………60
5. Union Supermarket and Charro’s Café, 445 H & I Stumpf Blvd., Terrytown, Louisiana………………………………………………61
6. Christ the King Catholic Church, 535 Deerfield Rd., Terrytown, Louisiana………………………………………………………………62
7. Iglesia Evangelica El Nuevo Pacto, 777 Behrman Hwy., Terrytown, Louisiana…………………………………………………………72
8. El Tapatio Mexican Restaurant, 402Wright Ave., Terrytown, Louisiana……………………………………………………………………77
9. El Potosí Mexican Restaurant, 445 H & I Terry Pkwy., Terrytown, Louisiana…………………………………………………………78
10. Dinero a México Check Cashing and Money Orders, 512 Terry Pkwy., Terrytown, Louisiana……………………………………78
11. Ana’s Groceries, 732 Behrman Highway, Terrytown, Louisiana………………………………………………………………………………79
12. Catholic Charities of New Orleans Hispanic Apostolate Office, 4309 Williams Boulevard, Kenner, Louisiana………………….80
13. Common Grounds Health Clinic, 1400 Teche Street, New Orleans, Louisiana…………………………………………………………….84
Abstract

New Orleans, Louisiana, is a city with a rich Hispanic history which is often overlooked. Likewise, the role the Catholic Church has played in assisting the immigrant groups that have settled in New Orleans in the building of their communities has also often been ignored. The first part of this work will seek to trace the different Hispanic groups that have come to the city, their often unacknowledged legacies, and examine what role the Catholic Church played in their communities and history.

During Spanish rule of colonial Louisiana from 1762 to 1803, Spanish colonists and recruits from the Canary Islands – or the Isleños – were the first Hispanic settlers in New Orleans. Both were exclusively Catholic. Nearly two centuries later, Cubans came to the city fleeing Castro’s regime and Hondurans came looking for more opportunities as economic and social conditions in their homeland declined. This work will examine how the Catholic Church responded to the needs of the new arrivals. Masses were offered in the Spanish language in the city’s Honduran neighborhood. The Church operated a center dedicated to helping Cubans transition in the city. It also offered and continues to offer English and citizenship classes, among other services, to Hispanics in the city.

In Post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans, a new group of Hispanic immigrants has arrived in the metropolitan area. This group, however, is not as homogeneous as its predecessors; they are from different countries, speak different dialects of Spanish, and are more diverse in their religious affiliations. This means that the Catholic Church, although it does offer services for the new Hispanic immigrants, will not necessarily be the building block around which the new Hispanic community in New Orleans will be
constructed. The second part of this work focuses on who these new Hispanic immigrants are and how they and Hispanics living in the city prior to Hurricane Katrina will “imagine” the new Hispanic community without shared national identities, languages and the central, and also without, necessarily, the constant element in the communities created by previous Hispanic immigrants and other immigrant groups in the city – the Catholic Church.
Chapter 1:

Introduction

Bienvenidos a Nueva Orleans

Many school children across the U.S. are taught in elementary school that the United States is a “melting pot” of peoples and cultures from all over the world. Similarly, many elementary school children in Louisiana are told that the city of New Orleans is a “gumbo,” a mix of many different cultures that has blended together to create a unique dish.

New Orleans, like the rest of the United States, has seen and continues to see the influx of immigrants. In New Orleans, as in other cities in the United States, the Catholic Church has had a tradition of working with immigrants. If New Orleans is the gumbo of a mix of cultures, the Catholic Church has long been the roux, or base, to that gumbo.

The Church has held a prominent role in the history of New Orleans from its discovery. Catholic missionaries accompanied French and Spanish explorers to the region to evangelize to the indigenous peoples. One of the first orders of business for both the French and Spanish colonizers was to request members of religious orders to come to their new lands. The Catholic Church held a place of importance under both the French and Spanish colonial powers, providing not only the sacraments, but also education, health and cultural services.
When Louisiana became the part of the territory of the United States, a country in which there is separation of church and state, the Catholic Church retained its cultural importance in the city as well as its importance as a social institution. As it had done for the people of colonial New Orleans, it provided religious and social services for the Irish, Sicilian, and German immigrants that flooded the city in the nineteenth century. The Church established churches which held masses in these peoples’ native tongues and around which these immigrants could socialize and build their own community in their new city. In the twentieth century, the Catholic Church responded to the needs of Honduran, Cuban, and Vietnamese immigrants in New Orleans in much the same way.

The Catholic Church in New Orleans has ministered throughout the city’s history to different Catholic immigrant groups as they arrived. This work will trace the different Hispanic immigrant waves to New Orleans, the impact each left on the city, and the role the Catholic Church played in the communities these groups formed in New Orleans and its surrounding metropolitan area.

New Orleans has long occupied a place in the national imagination of the United States and the world as a city whose French background influenced its unique culture that is therefore different from other cities in the U.S. This portrayal of New Orleans does not include other rich cultures that have impacted the city over time, such as the different Hispanic cultures to which the city has been home.
Prior to Hurricane Katrina, there were three major waves of Hispanics who relocated to what is today the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area. The first to come were Spanish settlers and government officials during New Orleans’s time as property of the Spanish crown. During this period, the Isleños - settlers from the Canary Islands – also came to New Orleans.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Cuban exiles came fleeing Castro’s Cuba and dispersed around the city. During the same time, Hondurans leaving weakening economic and social conditions and looking for more opportunities chose New Orleans as a relocation spot due to the city’s long-time connection to Honduras through fruit companies. The Hondurans settled in a specific area in the Lower Garden District and then, later, into suburban areas, while the Cubans dispersed around the city.

The aim of this work is two fold. The first part will first look at the different Hispanic groups who came to New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina, examine the legacy of each and illustrate the role the Catholic Church and its tradition of reaching out to immigrants in the city played for each group. The second part will focus on Hispanics who have come to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina to work jobs rebuilding the city after the storm’s devastation. It will examine the stories of three different men who came to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in an effort to show that these new Hispanic workers are not as homogenous of a group as the Hispanic groups before them. The Catholic
Church, which was long been a refuge for Hispanics arriving in New Orleans, now has competition from other churches courting Hispanics.

This thesis will rely heavily on Benedict Anderson’s theories as discussed in *Imagined Communities* (Anderson 1991: 5-12). This text about nationalism puts forth the idea that nations are not intrinsic to mankind. Anderson’s book looks at the constructed culture that forms nations. Anderson suggests that this constructed culture means that communities, nations, and states have to rely on having a shared past, language, and religion to go forward as a community, which ultimately have to be imagined due to the fact that everyone does not have the same experiences. Shared past, language and religion are aspects that a community can imagine as “shared” (Anderson 1991: 5-12). Anderson writes that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face to face contact are imagined” (Anderson 1991: 15).

*Imagined Communities* looks at the development of nationalism in Europe, as well as in former imperially ruled Asian nations. He argues that as monarchies and the importance of religion were replaced by nationalism through print capitalism and the widening of vernacular languages which helped create shared “imagined” culture and history (Anderson 1991: 5-15). Another scholar on nationalism, Ernest Gellner, agrees with Anderson that nationalism is not inborn in mankind but that “human beings must become assimilationists or nationalists” (Gellner 1994: 29-30). This is to say that to achieve this sense of belonging in a community, members of the community must assimilate into the cultural practices
and norms to fit in or consider the cultural practices part of who they are and a part of their own history. Nationalism is the feeling of belonging to a community based upon these “imagined” attachments. One of the elements of the imagining on a community is an imagined or shared culture (Sidway 2002: 5). This work will look at how Catholicism and Catholic culture played a role in the “imagining” of the Hispanic community in New Orleans.

Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* theory has been applied to communities smaller than nations before. Andrew Stables applied this theory to looking at U.S. schools as imagined communities in his 2003 article “Schools as Imagined Communities in Discursive Space.” He argues that schools are also imagined communities because the students, faculty, staff, and parents “imagine” schools to be “good” or “bad” and that a school is “the sum of its perceptions and the experiences of it” built through social networks (Stables 2003: 896).

The Catholic Church played a fundamental part in the imagining of these Hispanic communities prior to Hurricane Katrina, which will be illustrated in the first part of this work. Today, the Church is still noteworthy in the “imagining” of the new Hispanic community, even though the Post-Katrina Hispanic community is not as homogenous in religious affiliation – and in some cases, even language – as past Hispanic communities in New Orleans.

*El Tiempo*, a newspaper started by Hispanics after Hurricane Katrina in response to the new needs of the growing and changing community, will be used
in analyzing how the Hispanic community in New Orleans is “imagining” itself after the hurricane with the inclusion of new Hispanics to the area.

The legacy of Hispanics in New Orleans is often overshadowed and the role the Catholic Church played in their immigration experience - as well as the immigration experience of other groups - is likewise often overlooked. This work aims to serve as a reminder of the importance Hispanics and the Catholic Church have played in the history and culture of the city and to look at the current contributions being made by Hispanics in Post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans and the challenges they face in “imagining” their new Hispanic community.

**Review of the Literature**

Most of the literature pertaining to the Hispanic presence in New Orleans and Louisiana deals with the Spanish colonial period. Jack A. Holmes’s book *A Guide to Spanish Louisiana: 1762-1806* (Holmes 1970: 2-123), as well as articles and books by Gilbert C. Din, provide a plethora of information on this period. Several academics researching during the 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s contributed articles about Spanish Louisiana, including Raymond R. MacCurdy, Jr. (MacCurdy 1950: 3-32) and Arthur P. Whitaker (Whitaker 1934: 454-476), among others. Much of the literature about Spanish Louisiana published at this time was published in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*. The articles from these decades vary in topic from the diplomacy at work during the cession of Louisiana from the French to the Spanish to the histories of religious organizations in Spanish Louisiana.
Some of the literature about Spanish Louisiana deals with the Isleños migration from the Canary Islands to Southeast Louisiana and Isleños culture. The most notable Isleño literature is Sidney Villere’s *The Canary Islands Migration to Louisiana 1778-1783* (Villere 1971: xvii) and John M. Lipski’s research on Isleño linguistics (Lipski 1987: 320-33), which also provides information about Isleño history and culture. Gilbert C. Din’s *The Canary Islanders of Louisiana* (Din 1988: 1-61) also provides information on the story of Isleños and points out that some Isleños chose not to settle in the Isleño settlements that buffered New Orleans, but rather to stay in the city, where they eventually blended in.

In respect to Cuban and Hondurans, the next two major Hispanic immigrant groups to come to New Orleans, the literature is considerably lacking. There is very little literature specifically about Cuban refugees in New Orleans in the twentieth century; this includes two M.A. theses written by David Williamson (Williamson 1973: 54) and Salvador Alvarez Andres (Andres 1973: 1-45). The only academic literature about Hondurans in New Orleans in the twentieth century is a M.A. thesis by Samantha Euarque (Euarque 2004: 1-78). More research and new literature in both of these areas would greatly enhance the study of Hispanics in New Orleans.

In researching the Hispanics who have come to the city after Hurricane Katrina, the literature is limited primarily to newspaper and magazine articles. The Archdiocese of New Orleans’s monthly newspaper, *The Clarion Herald*, as
well as the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* have featured several articles about Hispanics in the city after the hurricane. A few other articles can be found in newspapers and magazines from across the nation. The newspaper which was started after Hurricane Katrina to cater to the changing Hispanic community in New Orleans, *El Tiempo*, also offers insight into this new community.

As far as linking the Catholic Church’s role throughout the Hispanic presences in New Orleans, there is no one complete work which includes different Hispanic groups from colonial times to present. This work aims to fill that void and provide a history of the Hispanic presences throughout the history of New Orleans, the role the Catholic Church played for each Hispanic group, and the legacy left behind on the city.
Chapter 2:

Spaniards and Los Isleños

The Spanish Colony

The story of Hispanics and that of the Catholic Church in Louisiana began over four hundred and fifty years ago. In 1541, Hernan De Soto, accompanied by Catholic missionaries, claimed the land that was to be known as Louisiana for Spain. Missionaries accompanied him and other Spanish explorers in the New World because the goals of the Spanish were twofold. They came seeking new wealth and also seeking indigenous souls to save by converting the peoples of the New World to Catholicism. Louisiana did not immediately become an important or valuable Spanish colony. It was not until 1682, when Sieur De La Salle, who was also traveling with Catholic missionaries, claimed the land for France and named it after King Louis XIV that it would become an important territory. It became and remained a significant French Catholic colony in the New World until 1762 (Holmes 1970: 1-6).

However, it was technically Spain that first claimed Louisiana, and this is evident, strangely enough, in the official state dog. De Soto brought along with him Catahoula dogs to herd hogs on his expedition, first introducing this breed of dog to Louisiana. The Catahoula is now the official state dog of Louisiana (Carruth 1990: 86).
The French, who likewise sought not only to profit from but also to evangelize in the New World, asked religious orders to come serve the people of Louisiana. All the major French explorers, such as Iberville, La Salle and Bienville, had missionary priests with them when they explored the New World (Roberstine: 1992: 195). The crown paid the clergy’s salary and could choose which bishops, priests and religious orders ministered in its lands. The French asked the Capuchin friars to come to New Orleans from France to serve the colonists. The first Catholic parish in New Orleans, St. Louis, was founded in the French Quarter. The Capuchins worked in this parish. The Jesuits soon also began working in New Orleans as well as with the indigenous peoples of Louisiana (Moody 1935: 161-170). Franciscans, Dominicans, and seminarians from Quebec also came to work with the indigenous peoples (Kniffen 1987: 63). In 1720, the Jesuits asked the Ursuline sisters to come to the city to start a school for girls and staff a hospital. In 1726, the Ursulines founded the first convent and school for girls in the present-day United States in the French Quarter, Ursuline Academy. This academy and convent are also the longest continuously operating institutes of their kind in the present-day U.S; the institution was not closed under the Spanish or American governments that later came to control the city (Moody 1935: 161-170). The Ursulines also ministered not only to the young French women and girls of New Orleans, but the order also undertook baptizing slave women and educating indigenous women and free black women of color who were living in the city (Moody 1935: 161). Female slaves were also sent to the
order by their owners. These women would board with the Ursulines for short
periods of time to receive religious instruction (Clark 2007: 82).

In the French colony of Louisiana, the Catholic Church was the primary – if
not the only - social institution, as it was in Catholic France. Louisiana again
became a Spanish colony in 1762 when Spain acquired Louisiana from France in
the Treaty of Fontainebleau. King Louis XV of France gave King Carlos III of
Spain ownership of Louisiana in the Treaty of Paris. In January of 1765, New
Orleanians sent a representative, John Milhet, to France to try to convince Louis
XV to allow Louisiana to remain a French colony, to no avail (Holmes 1970).

Although the French colonists were not delighted by Spain’s acquisition of
the colony, the Spanish were more enthusiastic. It was also seen as a gift of thanks
from Louis XV to his cousin Carlos III of Spain for his aide in defending French
interests from the British during the preceding years (Ation 1931: 717-718).
Louisiana was viewed as a valuable asset to the Spanish due to its location. It
would provide a buffer zone between existing Spanish colonies and the British
colonies located in what is now the present-day United States (Whitaker: 1934:
456).

A small group of wealthy, French businessmen living in New Orleans on
the eve of the formal Spanish acquisition of Louisiana approached the Spanish
crown with an idea they hoped would allow them to retain their business
operations and exert some French control over the city. They offered to form a
company which would be responsible for overseeing trade in the city for twenty
years. It would not be officially connected to the French crown and would collect and pay taxes to Spain. The Spanish Crown declined the offer, noting that although the company would not be formally connected with France, its leaders might always harbor loyalty to French crown and seek to restore French rule in the city (Christelow 1941: 608-610).

The change of power meant that Catholic Church in Louisiana would no longer be under the auspices of a French archbishop or bishop. The Catholic Church was the principal social institution in Spain and in the Spanish colonies, meaning that the Church would continue to be central to lives of New Orleanians (Din 1993: xiv). The Church in New Orleans was now under the control of the Bishop of Cuba, a Spaniard. The first Spanish clergy to come to Louisiana noted that Louisianans did not adhere to Catholic principles very strictly. Spanish Capuchin priests – a sect of the Franciscan order – soon arrived to try to remedy the situation. The Spanish Capuchins were scandalized by the behavior of New Orleanians. The Spanish clergy started to administer the sacrament of Confirmation, something that had not been done by the French clergy, believing this would strengthen the people in their religion (Holmes 1970: 2-3). The local Church was also able to raise more money under Spanish rule. In New Orleans, the Spanish crown allowed the priests themselves to oversee and collect money for the renting of seats at mass. The crown also gave the priests pensions (Baudier 1939: 183). By making these changes, the Spaniards strengthened the Catholic Church in New Orleans, planting the roots for a strong Catholic presence that
persists in the city and state today. As late as 1990, Catholicism was the most popular religion in the state with 1.3 million followers, due mostly to the large Catholic presence in New Orleans (Calhoun 2006: 693).

The Ursulines continued to educate the female population of New Orleans. The Spanish government did not request Spanish nuns to come to Louisiana in an act that would have been similar to what was done with the Capuchin brothers. Therefore, the nuns in the city remained French. In fact, the Ursulines would not admit Spanish women as novices into their New Orleans convent, suggesting that the French religious in the city were not pleased with the intrusion of Spanish members of religious orders in Louisiana (Dyer 1969: 120).

The Spaniards also continued to provide missionaries to spread the Catholic faith to the indigenous peoples of Louisiana as it did in all of its possessions. An interesting result of this is loan words that exist in the languages of the indigenous peoples of this area. Loan words are words borrowed from one language by speakers of another language. In a study published in the 1970s (Brown 1998: 149-150), the languages of the Chitimacha, Natchez, Tunica, and Choctaw Indians were found to contain at least one, if not more, loan words from Spanish (Brown 1998: 149).

Similarly, a common word in the New Orleans area vernacular used to mean “something extra” is “lagniappe.” The etymology of this word goes back to the Quechua word “la yapay,” which means “to give more.” It was brought to Louisiana by Spaniards who had previously undertaken missions to the Quechua-
speaking peoples of the Inca Empire in South America (Pickett 2000). These loan words are a small legacy of the missionary work the Spanish religious did with these peoples.

There are some points of interest throughout the Spanish period in New Orleans pertaining to the Catholic Church. At the beginning of Esteban Rodriquez Miró’s term as governor of Spanish Louisiana in 1791, he received correspondence from Spanish Capuchin friar Antonio de Sedella, known as “Pere Antoine” among French-speaking New Orleanians. Sedella informed him that his purpose in New Orleans was to bring the Inquisition to the city and that he might require soldiers from Miró for this task. Sedella’s intentions would surely disrupt New Orleans society. Therefore, Miró had Sedella taken from his home in the middle of the night and placed on a boat to leave the city (Lea 1908: 459).

Pere Antoine returned to Louisiana in 1795 and returned to working in New Orleans. He did not mention the Inquisition again and went to work among the poor of the city (Arthur 1936: 119-121). He approved the first publication in the city of the Catechism for the city’s Spanish and French speakers (Jumonville 1982: 37). He became very well-liked by New Orleanians, so much so that the fenced garden behind St. Louis Cathedral at the corner of Royal Street and Orleans Avenue became known popularly as “Pere Antoine’s Square” and a legend developed that while working with the city’s poor, Sedella lived in a hut in the garden. This is just local folklore, however, as the garden was not constructed
The Spanish Capuchin is buried in St. Louis Cathedral (Arthur 1936: 119-121).

Miró’s dislike for the Inquisition did not mean that religious tolerance was exercised in the city and surrounding areas during Spanish rule. It was only under the tenure of Governor Bernardo de Galvez from 1777-1779 that Anglo-Americans who settled on the fringes of the city were legally allowed to practice Protestant religions. Later governors saw this religious tolerance inexcusable as they constantly feared that the British would try to take over the colony (Din 1993: 208).

Although Galvez instituted a policy of tolerance towards these Anglo-American Protestants, he was not as lenient in regards to the morals of free people of color in New Orleans. Galvez, like many Spaniards, believed that the people of New Orleans suffered from the inadequate religious ministering done by the French. Therefore, he sought to clean up the moral degradation of some New Orleanians in particular. Free people of color often engaged in common law marriages in the city. During Galvez’s term, free women of color who would not marry in the Catholic Church were deported to Spanish colonies in the Caribbean (Din 1993: 77). The terms of both Miró and Galvez will be discussed more extensively later in this chapter. But these examples provide an idea of the ways in which the Catholic Church was strengthened in New Orleans during Spanish rule, although this was not done by instituting the Inquisition in Louisiana.
For the next forty years, the Spanish rule over Louisiana saw many ups and downs. A string of Spanish governors tried to manage restless citizens and problems caused by Spanish trade restrictions and taxes. The first Spanish governor, Antonio de Ulloa y de la Torre Gurai, was driven out of Louisiana by the people. Although he had been told by the Spanish crown not to alter any of the French customs of Louisiana, the people were no more pleased to see his arrival. The Spanish crown had slowly been making changes that were having ill effects on New Orleanians. In 1765, the Spanish declared that trade in the New World by Spanish colonists could only be done through Spanish ships with Spanish crews (Kendall 1922: 22).

Three years later, people living in Spanish Louisiana were targeted by a similar law which specified that all trade in Spanish Louisiana had to be done via Spanish ships and ports, which led to an increase in contraband trade with the British, who received land west of the Mississippi River in the Treaty of Paris. In the summer of 1768, New Orleans merchants and others who disliked the Spanish presence gathered to plot to oust Governor Ulloa. In October, New Orleanians pursued him and he boarded his ship to safely escape from them. On November 1st, Ulloa and his family fled Louisiana (Kendall 1922: 22).

King Carlos III of Spain recognized that he could not allow Louisiana to return to hands of his enemy, King Louis XV of France. Therefore, he sent a governor who would solidify Spanish power to replace Ulloa. This governor was Alejandro O’Reilly, who was not a Spaniard, but rather an Irishman who had spent
his life soldiering for different countries to quench his sense of adventure. He fought for the Spanish against Italy and Portugal. During a 1765 uprising in Madrid, O’Reilly had saved King Carlos III’s life, winning the king’s favor in the process. Alejandro O’Reilly, along with twenty-four war ships, arrived in New Orleans on August 18, 1769. O’Reilly immediately met acting French Governor Charles Aubry at the Plaza de Armas, or present-day Jackson Square. Here, with great ceremony Aubry handed the colony over to O’Reilly, who declared the people of Louisiana free of their oath of allegiance to France and declared them to be Spanish subjects. In his oath, O’Reilly also promised to maintain the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, or in short, to continue support for Catholicism as religion of the city. The newly arrived Spaniards and former French officials then headed to St. Louis Cathedral to attend a Catholic service together (Kendall 1922: 22-26). O’Reilly’s oath to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception and the Catholic services he and other officials attended after his arrival are demonstrative of the important role the Church held in colonial New Orleans society and its government. O’Reilly might have come to change things in Louisiana, but it was obvious one thing would not change – the Catholic religion.

O’Reilly ordered the arrest of twelve French colonists who were responsible for forcing Governor Ulloa to flee. He then granted a pardon to the rest of colonists concerning the incident. Six of the twelve leaders were shot for their crimes and the other six received jail sentences (Kendall 1922: 26). The
governor was obliged to issue such a stern response due to the fact that Spain did not intend on maintaining a large military force in Louisiana to deal with such rebellions (Gayarre 1965: 34). O’Reilly then dissolved the Superior Council of Louisiana and created a governing system based on Spanish law. This included a Cabildo, or governing council, and implementing Spanish laws. He also named several men, both French and Spanish, as lieutenant governors of different districts or posts in Louisiana (Kendall 1922: 26). He attempted to win the favor of the indigenous peoples of Louisiana with gifts such as shirts, blankets, knives and salt (McGinty 1951: 77). O’Reilly also levied taxes on taverns, hotels and alcohol. This brought a needed boost to the New Orleans economy. In just a year after arriving, O’Reilly had changed the area to look much more like a Spanish colony than a French colony (Kendall 1922: 26).

O’Reilly also established “pundonor” laws in Spanish Louisiana. Pundonor, a Spanish word which literally means “self-respect,” refers to defending honor of one or one’s family and is usually associated with Golden Age Spanish dramas whose story lines were built around this idea. O’Reilly instituted a law which stated that if an adulterous woman or man be killed for her or his crimes, the person with whom she or he committed the adulterous act must also be killed. This law probably reflects the importance of pundonor in Spanish culture, mainly in the popular Spanish teatro, than a large number of acts of vengeance or retribution for adultery in Spain or Spanish Louisiana (MacCurdy 1950: 31-32). However, the pundonor code could also have been issued as a reaction to the way
the Spanish viewed the French colonists as immoral and lacking in their Catholic values and religious fervor. Perhaps it was another attempt, even if it was not really enforced, to strengthen the Catholic Church and its values – especially that of following the seventh commandment - in Spanish Louisiana.

Though the pundonor code does not live on in Louisiana law today, there is evidence that some Spanish codes have lived on as laws or at least influenced some laws in the state. Louisiana still operates under Napoleonic Code, or the legal code the French used under Napoleon – an obvious French legacy. However, some law scholars believe that a few parts of Louisiana’s Napoleonic Code “appear to be direct translations of old Spanish codes,” suggesting that some Spanish laws survived both French and U.S. rule of Louisiana to still be laws in the state, providing another example of the Spanish legacy in Louisiana (Reynolds 1973: 1077).

Under O’Reilly, the Code Noir was put into practice in New Orleans for the first time (Kahn 2005: 7). The Code Noir was a set of laws decreed in the seventeenth century by King Louis XIV of France which dealt with religion and slavery in France and the French colonies, but were called the Code Noir, or “Black Codes,” because the majority of these laws dealt with slavery. The Code Noir decreed that slaves were to be baptized as Roman Catholics, slave masters must be Roman Catholic, slaves could not be sold on Catholic holidays, children of two married slaves were also slaves, and masters could not kill their slaves, among other laws (Riddel 1925: 321-329). Also under the Code Noir, religions
other than Catholicism were not allowed to be practiced. Although the Code Noir had technically been in effect under French rule, little was done to enforce it. O’Reilly, however, expelled the Monsantos, a Dutch Sephardic Jewish family from New Orleans in 1769 (Kahn 2005: 7).

Governor O’Reilly also divided Louisiana into twenty-one parishes. These parishes were ecclesiastical, but they set the framework for the political parishes that later developed in Louisiana instead of counties. Louisiana is the only state which does not have counties but parishes; this is another legacy of Spanish rule in the state (Taylor 1984: 23).

Another notable Spanish governor of Louisiana was Esteban Miró, who became governor in the 1780s. During his tenure, the many parts of the levees surrounding abandoned parts of the city and its outskirts were reinforced to prevent the Mississippi from flooding due to a levee breach, a problem which has threatened the city throughout its history (Clark 1970: 263).

However, the aspect that stands out of his governorship is the Great Fire of 1788 that devastated New Orleans. Over eight hundred houses and buildings in New Orleans burned to the ground, including St. Louis Cathedral, the city arsenal, and the prison (Kendall 1922: 32-33). Four-fifths of New Orleanians were left homeless (Conaster 2002: 13). The city was rebuilt in Spanish architectural style, including tile roofs (Cable 1984: 103), and soon the city outgrew its former boundaries (Kendall 1922: 32-33).
However, it is arguable that there was some presence of Spanish architecture in New Orleans and its surrounding areas prior to the Great Fire. Many homes in and around the city were built in a style reminiscent of homes in Santo Domingo which were built in Spanish cottage style with an encircling gallery outside of the home (Edwards 1997: 168). But after the fire, the Spanish architecture in New Orleans became much more conspicuous as Spaniards rebuilt the city.

The successful businessman Don Andres Almonaster, a Spaniard, rebuilt in Spanish architectural style the cathedral, Cabildo and other municipal buildings which had been destroyed. Special occasions and religious feast days were celebrated at the new Cabildo building. The exterior of the building was decorated and illuminated for events such as St. John’s Feast Day, the king’s birthday, and royal births (Wilson 1970: 16). The Louisiana Supreme Court operated in the Cabildo until 1910, at which time the building became the Louisiana State Museum, which it remains today (Guillet 1982: 22). Almonaster also built a chapel for the Ursuline Convent and paid for the complete rebuilding of St. Louis Cathedral in the Spanish architectural style (Kendall 1922: 32-33). St. Louis Cathedral was dedicated on Christmas Eve 1794 (Chamboh 1938: 27). Today, the cathedral he rebuilt has been named a minor basilica by the Catholic Church (Heck: 1995, 103). He paid for the construction of the first arcades of the city’s market, ironically called the French Market, which was built in Spanish architectural style and with a Spaniard’s money (Asbury 1938: 60).
He also financed the construction of the first public school in New Orleans.
The school was built with the primary purpose of teaching Spanish to the many
French-speakers of the city (King 1922: 131). Almonaster also financed the
reconstruction of municipal buildings and Saint Charles Charity Hospital (Kendall
1922: 32-33). Almonaster continued to give yearly funding to the hospital until
his death, at which time his daughter, the Baroness de Pontalba, took over this
responsibility. The baroness continued to fund the hospital until 1811, when she
handed it over to the government of the Territory of Orleans. Although the
hospital was originally founded by the French, it was rebuilt, funded by and grew
due to the Spanish New Orleanian Almonaster and his daughter. The hospital
evolved into what is known today as Charity Hospital. (Sr. Henrietta 1939: 250)
Charity Hospital served the uninsured and poor residents of New Orleans until
Hurricane Katrina. It may have been founded by the French, but it owes its
growth and endurance to the Spanish, making it another legacy of the Spanish rule
in New Orleans.

Almonaster gave seventy percent of the wealth he acquired during his
lifetime to the city of New Orleans (Begnaud 1992: 107). His daughter continued
the family tradition of helping the city. The Baroness de Pontalba also made
another notable contribution to the city in 1840. Thirty-seven years after Spanish
rule in Louisiana ceased, this Louisiana Spanish aristocrat commissioned the
building of two apartment buildings at the Plaza de Armas to sit on either side of
the Cabildo, St. Louis Cathedral, and Presbytere (Leavitt 1984: 27).
At this time, many Anglo-Americans were moving to uptown New Orleans. In fact, the median on Canal Street came to be known in the city as the “neutral ground” – a name which New Orleanians still use to refer to a median on any street – because it was the neutral area between the American uptown and Creole French Quarter (Branley 2004: 9). Many of the Americans uptown were building large, striking homes which rivaled the grandeur of the French Quarter. The Baroness de Pontalba wanted to construct buildings that would rival what was being built uptown by the new non-Creole settlers. These apartments, the Pontalba Buildings, still stand at Jackson Square. They were the first apartment buildings built in the Southern United States (Leavitt 1984: 27). The Plaza de Armas took on the Americanized name of Jackson Square in 1856 (Campanella 1999: 82), after a statue of Andrew Jackson was placed in the square by the efforts of the Baronnes de Pontalba (Wells 1990: 162).

Other Spanish governors made considerable contributions to the Hispanic and Catholic legacy of New Orleans, including Bernardo de Galvez and Francisco Luis Hector de Carondelet, who were governors before and after Miró, respectively. It was during Galvez’s tenure that the Isleños, who will be discussed later in this chapter, came to Louisiana. Galvez was also responsible for the building of five new Catholic churches for the people of New Orleans (Holmes 1970: 8-10). As the city grew in population and area, Galvez recognized the function the Church held in the city and the importance that there be ample
churches in which New Orleanians could attend mass and practice Catholic traditions.

Galvez also was the only Spanish governor to nearly eliminate illegal trade with the British by colonists in the lands to the north of New Orleans, a practice which New Orleanians had enjoyed since French rule but which inevitably hurt the profits the mother countries made off of their subjects in the city. Any contraband trading that still existed under Galvez was completely extinguished when Great Britain and Spain went to war in 1779 (Coughey 1932: 46). Governor Galvez also provided the Americans with arms during the American Revolution, hoping to see Spain’s longtime enemy, the British, defeated (Reeves 2004: 29).

Governor Francisco Luis Hector de Carondelet imposed a better police system, erected street lights, and was instrumental in the building of canals between New Orleans and Lake Pontchatrain as well as the city and Bayou St. John during his governance between 1792 and 1797 (Kendall 1922: 34). He also started the city’s first newspaper in 1794, of which he was the editor (Casso 1976: 24). Carondelet also established laws mandating more humane treatment of slaves. He outlined how much clothing slaves must be provided with annually and as well as the food rations each slave received. These laws regarding the treatment of slaves made by Carondelet account for much of the general conception that the slaves in Louisiana were treated better under Spanish rule than under that of the French (Din 1999: 135). It was also during Carondelet’s term that the colony discouraged indigo cultivation in Louisiana, an endeavor which
hurt New Orleans, as it was the port city through which Louisiana indigo would pass. But the Spanish government did so because indigo farming wreaked havoc on the land, making it unfit upon which to raise other crops and farm animals if the indigo farmers decided to pursue other agricultural endeavors. Indigo cultivation was dangerous work for slaves. Slaves who harvested indigo experienced more injuries and illnesses than those who harvested other crops (Coker 1972: 57-58). Perhaps Carondelet’s policy of better treatment towards slaves influenced the discouragement of the indigo farming; or perhaps a slave’s monetary value simply outweighed indigo profits. Indigo production at this time in the Spanish empire was also dominated by Guatemalan indigo, which was of better quality than Louisiana indigo (Floyd 1965: 471-476), and perhaps Carondelet knew Louisiana’s indigo could not compete with that of Guatemala.

One type of businessman who did not suffer under Spanish rule was the bar owner. A census taken in the city in 1791 showed that there were half as many tavern owners as any other business owners. In fact, visitors from the north were often shocked by the number of taverns in the city and that many of them remained open on Sundays during Spanish rule, features that still today separate New Orleans from many other American cities (Vella 1997: 29).

Small pox assailed New Orleanians with several outbreaks from 1778-1803. In 1802, the illness was such a serious public health threat the Cabildo voted to allow New Orleanians to inoculate themselves from the disease. This inoculation was an ancient procedure in which a small amount of pus was taken
from an infected person and injected into a well person. This would generally cause the well person to develop a less severe case of the illness and develop immunity to it. Prior to this, Spanish officials had called for infected citizens to be quarantined outside of the city. However, children had to be accompanied by parents, meaning many seemingly well parents unknowingly brought the disease back to the city after attending to their children (Duffy 1969: 88-91).

Conditions in New Orleans at the very end of that century became turbulent at best, and not just due to smallpox. New Orleanians constantly feared attacks by the British, French, or Americans. The Spanish implemented a policy of expectancy, which essentially meant they were waiting to see what would come out of on-going negotiations between the United States, France and Spain (Kendall 1922: 37-38). If the Spanish were distraught at all over the possibility of the loss of Louisiana, it was mainly because of its close proximity to Spain’s other colonies (Brooks 1940: 29). Louisiana was, after all, causing Spain to have an annual deficit of $337,000 (Stone 1970: 52).

Louisiana secretly went back under French control in 1800 in the Treaty of San Idelfonso, in which Napoleon traded Tuscany to the Spanish in exchange for Louisiana. Because of the concealment surrounding this treaty, Louisiana was not formally handed over to French until 1803. In 1803, the American government – noting the importance of New Orleans as a port – bought New Orleans and Louisiana from Napoleon for fifteen million dollars. In 1806, Spanish officials
were expelled from Louisiana. Louisiana became a U.S. state on April 30, 1812 (Holmes 1970: 31-35).

Several things changed under Spanish rule in the city, such as Spanish laws and architecture. The economy went through ups and down as the government experimented with different trade regulations, but over all Louisiana was not profitable to the Spanish. However, the importance of the Catholic Church in New Orleans’ culture had not changed. In fact, the Spaniards strengthened the Church in New Orleans.

The Spanish colonial legacy lives on through Charity Hospital, which grew and flourished under the Spaniards and continued to serve New Orleanians until it succumbed to the wrath of Hurricane Katrina in August of 2005. The Spanish colonial legacy also preserved by the influence of Spanish code in present-day Louisiana law, the choice of state’s official dog as one which brought to the land by a Spaniard, the many streets in central New Orleans named after the Spanish governors of Louisiana and the architecture of many structures in the French Quarter, which would more aptly be called the Spanish Quarter if one examined its architectural history and the fact that its central feature, Jackson Square or La Plaza de Armas, is surrounded by buildings built in the Spanish architectural style and financed by a prominent Spaniard. This area’s unique charm owes a great deal of its appeal to a past often forgotten by Louisiana’s present-day inclination to sell itself as an expressly French enclave in the United States, which is probably
due to the concept many Americans have of the French as indulging in vices and luxuries such as food, sex, and alcohol (Stانونis 2006: 3).

Los Isleños

In 1778, a group of settlers from the Canary Islands arrived in New Orleans. Prior to 1778, the Spanish crown had allowed Louisiana only to trade with Spanish vessels which sailed to the cities of Seville, Alicante, Malaga, Cartagena, and Barcelona. When these restrictions were lifted, many agriculturalists and soldiers from the Canary Islands made their way to New Orleans. The Spaniards recognized that the Canary Islanders – or Isleños - could set up settlements on the outskirts of New Orleans which could serve as buffers from attacks on the city as well as serve in the local militia. The Spanish crown recruited them to come to Louisiana, luring them with the promise that each volunteer from the Canary Islands would be given a home, tools and subsistence from the Spanish crown for four years. The crown also agreed to set up Catholic churches in central locations for the Isleño settlements, thus insuring that the Catholic traditions of the Isleños could be easily continued in their new homeland (Villere 1971: 3).

Between 1778 and 1783, Isleños sailed to Louisiana on ships from Spain which would make stops at the Canary Islands to pick them up to take them to the New World (Villere 1971: 8). The Canary Islanders that boarded these ships headed for Louisiana traced their ancestry back to Andalucía, Galicia, Asturias and Valencia (Lipski 1987: 320). Some of the ships would stop in Havana or
Veracruz for supplies and then make their way to New Orleans, where the Isleños were greeted by Spanish governor Bernardo de Galvez and Cabildo officials at La Plaza de Armas. Isleño soldiers were immediately sent to their new regiments, while agriculturalists, women, and children were sent to their new settlements (Villere 1971: 8-9). Isleño migration proved so successful that during this five year period, the islands of Tenerife and Gran Canaria lost two percent of their populations to the relocation (Parsons 1983: 463). Settlers from the Canaries specifically were being wooed by the Spanish government because trade restrictions had recently been lifted by the crown and Canary Islanders were now able to travel more easily to New Orleans, as well as Spanish-owned islands in Caribbean. Both sexes of Canary Islanders were also willing to come to the New World. At this time, Louisiana and many other Spanish colonies had far fewer female inhabitants than males and many women from mainland Spain were unwilling to move to the New World (Morner 1995: 254-255).

There were four Isleño settlements which surrounded the city. San Bernardo de Galvez, named after the Spanish governor, was the most successful and best known settlement on the shores of the Terre-Aux-Beouf, or cow land, in present day St. Bernard Parish, which is located next to Orleans Parish on the eastern side. The other three settlements were Galveztown, which was located on the shores of the Amite river near Manchac in Iberville Parish; Valenzuela, on the shores of Bayou Lafourche in Assumption Parish; and Nueva Iberia, on Bayou Teche in Iberia Parish. Nueva Iberia is now known as the city of New Iberia (Villere 8-10).
However, some Isleños who arrived in New Orleans never made it to any of these settlements, choosing instead to inhabit the city. Over time, the Isleños who settled in New Orleans blended into the Spanish speaking population of the city (Din 1968: 61).

It is in St. Bernard Parish where the legacy of the Isleños is felt most strongly today. In Catholic Spanish Louisiana, it was not uncommon to name a place after someone and declare that person a saint in the process. St. Bernard Parish is named for Governor Galvez. Similarly, St. Tammany Parish to the north of New Orleans takes it name from the Delaware Indian chief Tammanend; his name became “Saint Tammany” through mispronunciations and the unofficial sainthood bestowed on him by the people of Louisiana. Similarly, Governor Galvez became “Saint Bernard,” and the area where many Isleños successfully settled bears his “sainted” name (Leavitt 1984: 12).

Here, the Isleños cared for cattle, but most caught fish and trapped animals for fur. They would trade with New Orleanians. Many descendants of the Isleños still make their home in St. Bernard Parish (Villere 1971: XII). Four villages that can trace their history back to the Isleños - Shell Beach, Ycloskey, Delacroix, and Hopedale – are in the seventh ward of St. Bernard Parish (State of Louisiana Department of Public Works 1971: 133).

In his book, *The Canary Islands Migration to Louisiana 1778-1783* (Villere 1971: xii), author Sidney Louis Villere, an Isleño descendant himself, writes about his memories of the Isleño people and their religious practices:
“They were a devout and yet superstitious people. The writer recalls that many years ago he saw them affix large religious pictures to their modest doorways, this to dispel the fury of the annual hurricanes and high tides. In this land of vast marsh prairies found stoicism and humor where they lived and married as a sheltered clan among themselves (Villere 1971: xii).”

Today, the descendants of the Isleño settlers strive to keep alive their unique history and customs in spite of challenges that the centuries of post-Spanish rule in Louisiana brought to the area. Although many Isleño descendants left the traditional enclaves of Isleños that persisted over the years in St. Bernard in such as Ycloskey, Delacroix, Shell Beach and others in search of economic opportunities with the English-speaking population, many Isleño families remained in these towns and were isolated from the neighboring population and its culture. This enabled them to keep alive their dialect of eighteenth century Canary Islands Spanish and their culture. However, the last of the present-day Isleños, most of whom are presently in their seventies or older, were the final generation of Isleño descendants to learn Spanish as their first language (Lipski 1987: 321).

This generation of Isleños was the first in which a large number of Isleño children attended school with English speakers in the St. Bernard Public School System in the first half of the twentieth century. At school, they were compelled to learn and speak English and were exposed to the dominant culture surrounding them. Many of this generation did not see the need to speak their language or
engage in cultural practices with their children due to this experience. This led to

Though they lost much of their language throughout the twentieth century, the Isleños of St. Bernard Parish have been able to keep alive some of their
cultural and religious traditions. Each year, Isleño descendants in Delacroix
celebrate the Blessing of the Fleet, where their boats are blessed by a local priest
and dancing and eating follow. They also walk from Yscloskey and Delacroix to
San Pedro Church in Reggio on Good Friday carrying crosses made of two-by-
fours and praying (Din 1988: 201). Post-Hurricane Katrina, both the Blessing of
the Fleet and the Good Friday walk have occurred.

Before Hurricane Katrina, the Isleños’ towns suffered from destruction
cased by two hurricanes. In 1915, a hurricane forced the Isleños of Delacroix to
move into New Orleans while the area was reconstructed (Lipski 1987: 321).
Delacroix, or “Delacroix Island”, is a small Isleño town thirty-three miles south of
New Orleans in St. Bernard Parish. It is not actually an island, but is surrounded
by so much marshland that it has earned this nickname (Claudel 1945: 208).
Some of the Delacroix Isleños found better opportunities in the city and opted not
to return to Delacroix after the 1915 storm. In 1965, Hurricane Betsy severely
damaged much of St. Bernard Parish and again forced the Isleños to seek
temporary refuge in New Orleans and surrounding suburbs. Again, many Isleños
opted not to return to their homes. With both hurricanes, the Isleños of St.
Bernard Parish lost speakers of their language and those who engaged in their
cultural practices. The hurricanes also provided Isleños with an understanding of the state and area in which they lived – one in which perhaps they saw their language and customs had not fit for years (Lipski 1987: 321). One concrete example of the effect the encounter between this generation of Isleños and the dominant society is the inclusion of lexical anglicisms. The word “trolley” is used by this generation to mean “to trawl.” Isleños who fished and trawled for shrimp adapted the word “trawl” to create a verb in the grammatical Spanish verb form for the action of trawling (Lipski 1987: 322). The emergence of this verb among Isleños was due to their contact with the English word “trawl” and the absence of a word that meant this in their Spanish vocabulary.

The Isleños of St. Bernard Parish call an infamous twentieth-century Louisiana politician one of their own: Leander Perez, known to locals as “Judge Perez.” Although Perez classified his family as Creole, his mother, Gertrude Solis, was Spanish and from St. Bernard Parish, causing many residents of St. Bernard to believe he was of Isleño descent but that his family had left isolated Isleño settlements. His father – whom also has a Spanish surname - was from Plaquemines Parish, which borders St. Bernard Parish on the southwestern side; it was here that Leander was born. His family was devoutly Catholic (Conway 1973: 6-13). He attended Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge and received his law degree from Tulane University in New Orleans (Jeansone 1977: 9).

Perez became notorious when he eventually took political control or became the “boss” of both Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes. When the
Supreme Court ruled in favor of desegregating public schools, Perez closed the public schools in both parishes, an act for which he was excommunicated from the Catholic Church. Perez had attended mass every Sunday for all of his life, and he did not allow his excommunication to prevent him from continuing to attend mass (Conway 1973: 6). Although it appears highly possible, it is not certain that Perez was an Isleño descendant. He was, however, definitely of Spanish descent and was the “boss” of the area where many Isleño descendants live today – St. Bernard Parish.

The Isleño descendants of St. Bernard Parish presently endeavor to preserve their customs. One of these customs includes décimas, or ten line poems that are sung without accompanying music and a very distinct and colorful way of dressing for women. Unfortunately, it has not been until recently that the Isleños have tried to save or, more aptly said, relearn the Spanish language which many have lost as they assimilated into American life. The Isleños Society collects and preserves pieces of Isleño history. The organization operates a house museum which showcases Isleño clothing, music, and furniture to give visitors an idea of what life was like for an Isleño settler (“Los Isleños Society” 2007). Visitors to the museum are sometimes even treated to live demonstrations of how to skin a nutria rat (Martin 2007: 169). The society also hosts an Isleño Festival each year to celebrate and educate others about Isleño culture. At this festival, one can eat food made from Isleño recipes, listen to Isleño music and décimas as well as see descendants of the Isleños parade in traditional Isleño dress (“Los Isleños Society”
Folklore is an important part of the Isleño culture. Isleño narratives were passed down orally from generation to generation for centuries (Armistead 1992: 150). In the early 1940s, the Isleños of Delacroix recognized the need to have their folktales recorded in print. They recounted their tales to Calvin Claudel. One of these folktales is called “The Golden Star.” It tells the story of three princesses who wish to have beautiful, blonde children, which they do. A witch replaces these children with dogs. When the king sees that the princesses’ children are dogs, he punishes the princesses and decides to appeal to God for help by having the dogs brought to mass. At the mass, the priest informs the king that to him they do not look like dogs, but children, with the moral of the story being that everyone is a child of God (Claudel 1945: 208-209). This folktale also represents the importance of religion and the Catholic Church in Isleño culture. It is, after all, a story about God’s love. Also, the turning point of the story comes after the characters attend mass.

Governor Galvez saw to it that the Isleños had their own Catholic parishes in their settlements, meaning that they would be ministered to as an exclusive group instead of making the journey into New Orleans to attend mass with the colonists of French and Spanish descent. This also meant the Isleños had their own church around which to build their community and to continue to practice religious traditions unique to the Canary Islands.
Los Isleños Post-Hurricane Katrina

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina destroyed St. Bernard Parish and spread residents across the Greater Metropolitan New Orleans Area and the country. The Isleños of the parish once again had to seek temporary refuge just as their ancestors had done in 1915 and 1965 due to the destruction caused by hurricanes. It is yet to be seen if all of those residents of Isleño descent that have relocated from St. Bernard Parish will return or if they will decide to permanently reside where they have found a safe haven in neighboring parishes or even other states in a repeat of what happened after the 1915 hurricane and Hurricane Betsey. The effect Hurricane Katrina has had and continues to have on the Isleño community in St. Bernard and its quest to preserve its culture will not be known in the immediate future.

However, currently the Isleños Heritage Society continues it work to preserve Isleño culture even in the face of challenges posed by Hurricane Katrina. In March of 2007, the society hosted its annual festival. The festival is usually held at St. Bernard Village, which was destroyed by the hurricane and has not yet been rebuilt. Instead, it was held at the St. Bernard Government Complex (Bazile 2007). The venue might have been different, but the society still continued the festival tradition. The society has also continued to offer its annual scholarship for Isleño descendants in St. Bernard Parish in the years after Hurricane Katrina (No author, 2006), another example of the organization’s fight to continue to preserve and educate about the Isleño culture, even in the face of adversity, destruction, and
population loss due to Hurricane Katrina. These are positive signs for the continuation of the Isleño culture in Louisiana.

The Isleños are just another example of an aspect of Hispanic New Orleans which is often forgotten. The Isleños today make a point of educating and reminding people of their existence. But they, their museum and festival are not marketed to tourists and presented within the concept of New Orleans and Louisiana which is sold to tourists. This is disappointing, as their rich culture and traditions surely would attract visitors the same as the French legacy.

The Acadians: Exiles to Spanish Louisiana

The Acadians, or Cajuns, are a group of settlers who came to Louisiana mostly during Spanish rule and receive a great deal of attention in the state’s history as well as how it is marketed to tourists. The Acadians were French who settled Acadia, presently known as the New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island, from 1600-1754. Acadia, which had been a French colony, was taken over by the British in 1713, and at first acted with neutrality towards the French settlers. But in 1754, the Protestant British demanded the Acadians take an oath to the British crown which the Acadians believed also forced them to renounce Catholicism. The British did not consider the Acadians good colonists and religious tensions boiled. Therefore, later in 1754, the British began to expel the Acadians from their homeland in North America (Ancelet 1991: 3).

A small number of Acadians came to Louisiana to resettle while it was still a French colony. Others, however, tried first to relocate to France. When France
refused them, many Acadians joined family and friends in Louisiana. However, by the time many of them arrived in Louisiana, it was no longer a French colony and belonged to the Spanish crown (Faragher 2005: 430-431).

The Acadians who arrived in Louisiana after Governor Ulloa took office were met with apathy by the Cabildo. Ulloa was slow in dictating where the Acadians should settle in Louisiana, which frustrated many of the exiles. Therefore, some Acadians joined the rebellion which sent Ulloa fleeing the city. In 1785, a large number of Acadians arrived in New Orleans due to large-scale efforts by the Spanish to attract immigrants to populate Louisiana. Spain even subsidized many of the Acadians who came to Louisiana. The Cabildo recognized the need to help these new settlers. They had learned from Ulloa’s experience that it was best to try to stay in the Acadians’ good graces. The Cabildo provided the newly arrived Acadians with provisions as well as medical care (Faragher 2005: 435-436). The Spanish also tried unsuccessfully to get the Acadians in Louisiana to plant a variety of crops which would not depend heavily on slave labor for harvesting (Brasseaux 1992: 5).

Three-fourths of the Acadians who came to Louisiana during Spanish rule settled around Bayou Lafourche, while others settled in Attakapas in smaller numbers. Very few Acadians remained and settled in New Orleans, instead choosing to live to the west and south of the city (Faragher 2005: 435).

Although the vast majority of Acadians did not live in New Orleans, the Spanish government was still responsible for making sure they were served by the
Catholic Church. In 1772, a Spanish Capuchin known as Father Angel arrived in New Orleans and was sent to Lafourche to found a parish for the Acadians. This church was the Church of the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ of Lafourche and Chetimachas. The present-day civil parish of Ascension derives its name from this church. Assumption Parish can also trace its name to another church founded by Father Angel for the Acadians – Assumption of Our Lady of Lafourche, which was founded in Plattenville in 1793 (Uzee 1987). Our Lady of the Assumption was named the patron saint of the Acadians by the Vatican in the late twentieth century (Bernard 2003: 82).

The Spanish government in Louisiana recognized that the Acadians, who had been persecuted for the religion in Acadia, needed churches at their settlements. Spanish Capuchins were sent to serve in these church parishes. The Acadians today are still a predominantly culturally Catholic group. They still practice some forms of folk Catholicism, including lighting bonfires on the levees along the Mississippi River on Christmas Eve and the blessing of crops and boats by local priests (Ancelet 1991: 78). This may not have been the case had the Spanish not provided them with churches and priests. Had the Spanish not done so, areas where Acadians settled in South Louisiana might not have remained culturally Catholic, changing the surrounding areas of New Orleans. By ensuring that the Acadians who settled away from the city were able to remain Catholic, the Spanish created a situation in which New Orleans was surrounded to the south and east by a sort of Catholic buffer zone from neighboring Protestants.
Although most Acadians settled to the west of New Orleans, their religious practices easily fit into Spanish Catholic culture. For example, the Acadians built and continue to build bonfires on the levees of the Mississippi River on Christmas Eve (Bragg 1995). Similarly, bonfires have traditionally been lit for St. John’s Feast Day in Spain (Bakers 2007).

The Acadians, or Cajuns, are one of the most famous groups – if not the most famous – to settle in South Louisiana. The state capitalizes on their fame and uses it as further evidence of Louisiana’s French culture and history. It is important to note, however, that the majority of the Acadians came to Louisiana during Spanish rule and that many were recruited and subsidized by the Spanish government. The Spanish also provided Acadian settlements with the main social and cultural place in Catholic colonial culture – churches. Had it not been for the Spanish, perhaps many Acadians would have settled elsewhere or not have been provided Catholic churches where they could practice their religious culture.
Chapter 3:

New Orleans as U.S. City: Cubans, Hondurans, and Continuing the Catholic Church’s Legacy of Ministering to the Immigrants of New Orleans

New Orleans as a U.S. City and the Catholic Church in the 1800s

Prior to the Civil War, New Orleans was a popular point of entry for immigrants arriving in the United States. Most of the immigrants who came to the city during this time were from Germany and Ireland (Garvey 1997: 91-95). Later in the nineteenth century, they were followed by Sicilians (Garvey 1997: 190-191).

The Catholic Church quickly realized the great need of these immigrants. They needed and wanted masses said in their own language as well as social services such as education and orphanages. The Catholic Church was quick to respond to the needs of these immigrants. In the beginning to middle of the nineteenth century, Irish and German immigrants began to arrive in New Orleans in large numbers. The Church realized that the growing Irish community needed a church of its own where mass would be said in English. In 1833, the Catholic Church founded St. Patrick’s Catholic Church and Parish on Camp Street for the Irish community (Downs 1997: 89).

In 1843, seeing that the needs of the German and Irish immigrants were continuing to grow, Archbishop Blenk of New Orleans called upon the Redemptorists order to oversee the founding and operation of the new church
parish of St. Mary’s Assumption (Finney 2000). St. Mary’s Assumption Church is still located today on Constance Street in the Irish Channel neighborhood of New Orleans (Finney 2000). The church was badly damaged by Hurricane Betsey in 1965 and its restoration was not completed until 1975 (Malone 1998: 36).

The Redemptorists religious order had a history of doing religious work in Germany, making the order an obvious choice for ministering to the German community in New Orleans. Father Francis Xavier Seelos, a Redemptorist priest born in Bavaria, was sent by the Church to mission to the parishioners of St. Mary’s Assumption and the parish’s school and orphanage (Finney 2000).
Although Father Seelos spoke very little French and imperfect English, many of the French and Spanish speakers of the city came to St. Mary’s Assumption to receive the sacrament of confirmation from him, as he was renowned as a good confessor. Due to his popularity, the homily at his funeral, which was held in St. Mary’s Assumption, was given in English as many Catholics from outside of St. Mary’s Assumption parish attended (Curley 2002: 286). Many of the Catholics of New Orleans, regardless of ethnicity or language, considered Father Seelos a New Orleans priest rather than just a German priest. He belonged in this way, not just to the Germans and Irish Catholics in the parish he served, but to all New Orleans Catholics. His popularity among different ethnic groups in the city meant that many people who might never have interacted with the people of the Irish Channel or entered that neighborhood, perhaps
allowing New Orleanians to include people of different ethnic backgrounds into their concept of who a New Orleanian was.

Similarly, Sicilian immigrants also relocated to New Orleans after the unification of Italy in the late nineteenth century (*Italian New Orleans* 2007). A great number of the Sicilians worked at the French Market (Faragher 1999: 32). Therefore, they initially settled in and around the French Quarter (Arriago 2002: 87). Two Sicilian Parishes were established in the French Quarter: St. Francis of Assisi Parish on Ursuline Street and St. Anthony Parish on Rampart Street. The two parishes were eventually condensed into St. Mary’s Parish Church on Charters Street, commonly known as St. Mary’s Italian Church (Nolan 2000: 52). In the late 1800s, the Italian nun Frances Xavier Cabrini and the order she founded, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, opened a school, orphanage, and day care center for the Sicilian community (O’Grady 1959:408).

Presently, the Sacred Heart Orphan Asylum and Convent building is still in existence. It operated as an orphanage until 1959, when it became Cabrini High School, a girls’ secondary school overseen by the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. As a testament to the school’s roots in the Sicilian community, Cabrini High School annually hosts a St. Joseph’s Altar and mass on March 19, St. Joseph’s Feast Day. This feast day is traditionally celebrated by Sicilians and Italians, as St. Joseph is the patron saint of Italy. Large altars filled with food are created in his honor. (No author 2005).
Today in New Orleans, many Catholic parishes and schools have St. Joseph’s Altars. It is a tradition for many New Orleanians of Sicilian descent and other New Orleanians who are simply curious about the altars to call their local Catholic church and ask for a list of the schools, parishes, and sometimes even private homes which will have St. Joseph’s Altars and then spend March 19 traveling around the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area visiting all of the altars (No author 2005).

Descendants of the Spanish who came to Louisiana during colonial rule could probably identify with the offerings made on these altars. In Spain, as in many culturally Catholic countries and in Latin America, making offerings at graves of loved ones on All Saints’ Day was and is a tradition similar to the making of offerings at a St. Joseph’s altar (Bakers 2007).
When the immigration experience of Irish, Germans, and Sicilians to New Orleans is studied, it is impossible to ignore the role the Catholic Church played. By providing masses in the immigrants’ languages, it helped create a community. These churches served a social place for immigrants to interact with people from their homeland who shared a similar background as well as the same religion, culture, and language. This was the case when the St. Patrick’s Church was founded for the Irish. The Catholic Church also offered practical services such as education. The Catholic Church held an important place in the lives of Irish, Sicilian, and German immigrants in New Orleans in the nineteenth century as a social institution, providing practical services and a unifying place in the communities of each group. Catholic immigrants from Germany, Ireland, and Sicily helped New Orleans remain predominantly Catholic in spite of the influx of Anglo-American Protestants that settled uptown in the city at the same time, allowing New Orleans to remain a culturally Catholic city when the next large wave of Hispanic immigrants from Cuba and Honduras arrived. By providing services for these immigrants, the Church helped them to continue practicing Catholicism in their new, predominantly Catholic community.

The Catholic Germans, Irish, and Sicilians - as well the French and Spanish Catholics before them and the Hondurans and Cubans after them - helped New Orleans sustain its unique Catholic culture. This Catholic culture is very different from the rest of the United States as a whole as well as much of the state of Louisiana. Over the state’s history, the Protestant northern part of the state and
the Catholic southeastern area, including New Orleans, have clashed in the state political arena. Voters in the Protestant northern parishes have kept several Catholic gubernatorial candidates from winning the office, including Catholic Congressman Hale Boggs. Chep Morrison, the Catholic mayor of New Orleans who was kept out of the governor’s office three times by these voters (Deutsch 1969: 309).

Even today - over one hundred years after these immigrants arrived in New Orleans- the importance of the Catholic Church in these communities can still be witnessed. St. Joseph’s Altars are still constructed in Catholic churches and schools in the New Orleans area annually on St. Joseph’s feast day and people continue the tradition of visiting these altars, whether they are one-quarter, one-half or even no part Sicilian. The altars have become part of New Orleans culture.

Every year on the Saturday before St. Patrick’s Day, revelers begin their day of parading by attending a special noon time mass at St. Mary’s Assumption Church. Some of these revelers are of Irish descent; others are New Orleanians participating in an Irish tradition that has become a New Orleans tradition (Downs 1997: 55).

The Catholic Church provided much needed services and a sense of community for the German, Sicilian and Irish immigrants. Today, their descendants and New Orleanians with no blood ties to these groups continue to keep alive their traditions, which are heavily rooted in the traditions and practices of the Catholic Church. Without the Catholic Church ministering to these
immigrants in New Orleans, perhaps their history in the city would be different. Perhaps their adjustment and assimilation to their new city would have been harder without English classes, schools and a community center of their own, all of which were provided by the Church.

Perhaps there would be no St. Joseph’s Altars, mass before St. Patrick’s Day parades in the Irish Channel, or other traditions which many New Orleanians have come to label as New Orleans traditions rather than exclusively Irish or Sicilian traditions had the Catholic Church not held such an integral role in the lives of these immigrant groups.

In the “imagining” of New Orleans, New Orleanians have claimed these parts of the city’s rich culture as belonging to the city rather than to one ethnic group. The traditions and cultures of the Irish, Sicilian and German immigrants in the city have added spice to the gumbo that is New Orleans. Many of these traditions and cultures have their roux – or base – in Catholic cultural practices and owe their endurance to the role the Catholic Church played in strengthening the communities of these different immigrant groups and facilitiating the longevity of their religious and cultural traditions that still continue today as part of the broader culture of the city of New Orleans.

The Catholic Church would continue its legacy of aiding immigrants in New Orleans through religious, cultural and practical means for the next major immigrant groups to come to the city – Hondurans and Cubans. The Catholic Church in New Orleans has a strong tradition of ministering to immigrants. This
is evident in the histories of the Irish, Sicilian and German immigrants and it is a mission the Church continued and still continues in the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area, specifically in twentieth and twenty-first century ministering to the Hispanic population.

**New Orleans, Cuba, and Honduras**

In the 1950s and 1960s, political upheaval in Cuba and Honduras as well as general strikes among the fruit workers in Honduras sent many immigrants from both countries seeking refuge in the United States. Both countries had a historical connection with New Orleans through the fruit industry, making the city a likely choice for many Cubans and Hondurans.

**Cubans**

It was not until the 1950s that another major wave of Hispanics settled in New Orleans. These were Cubans and Hondurans. In 1959, Fidel Castro took control of the island of Cuba. At first, many middle and upper class Cubans were not sure how the Castro regime would affect them and decided to remain in Cuba. The implementation of Castro’s policies on the island as well as the Cuban Missile Crisis sent four thousand Cuban refugees to the United States per month during 1961-1962. Louisiana had a long history of connections between Latin American countries. In fact, in the late 1950s, there was not a single Latin American country which did not have a consular office in New Orleans, surely due to the city’s important status as a port which catered to imports from Latin America (Alvarez 1973: 42). Major Latin American products such as bananas, coffee, and sugar had
been top imports into the city’s port throughout its history (Warrington 1952: 15).

In 1965, New Orleans mayor Victor Schiro visited the heads of state of several Central American countries, including Guatemala and Honduras, seeking support for a common market between these countries and the United States. The same year, Mayor Schiro received the medal of the Order of Isabela la Catolica, Spain’s highest decoration for his efforts with Hispanic countries and his handling of Hurricane Betsy (Widmer 2000: 108).

By 1965, Louisiana was the seventh most popular state to settle in for Cuban refugees (Alvarez 1973: 42). The welcome mat the U.S. set out for Cubans fleeing Castro’s regime might have been due to the fact that many Americans believed Castro was like many other Latin American dictators and his time in power would not last long, meaning Cubans who sought refuge in the U.S. would return home (Thomas 1967: 48). This however, proved incorrect.

Cuban refugees might also have chosen New Orleans as their new home due to the city’s connection with the country through United Fruit Company. United Fruit used the Port of New Orleans to ship produce into the U.S. market, including bananas and other produce from Cuba (Adams 1941: 42-73).

Most of the Cubans who came to the United States and New Orleans, were professionals back in Cuba. However, in the United States they were forced to take any job they could get due to language barriers and the fact that many degrees and certifications granted in Cuba were not honored in the U.S. They were not eligible for welfare because they were given a special status – asylum – which did
not qualify them to receive public assistance (Alvarez 1973: 43). Just as Catholic missionaries had accompanied explorers, served the French and Spanish colonists in New Orleans, oversaw churches for the Isleño settlements, and provided services and mass in the vernacular to the Irish, German, and Sicilian immigrants to the city in the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church was again willing to step in to help these newcomers to New Orleans. For the prior Hispanic groups, the Church and government were intertwined. For these new Hispanic immigrants, the Catholic Church - although independent of the government of the United States - would step up to the call from the government to help the new Hispanics.

In 1962, at the United States Catholic Conference in Miami, it was decided that a Catholic Cuban Center would be opened in New Orleans. The center had a contract with the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare to provide health care and resettlement services (Alvarez 1973:50). Although Hispanics prior to this had relied on the Church for cultural and community affairs, the Church in New Orleans was now taking an active role in providing much needed services to Hispanics. Catholic churches in the city took up special collections at masses for the Cubans (Alvarez 1973:50).

By the end of 1971, the Catholic Cuban Center of New Orleans was handling more than eight thousand cases per month. Representatives from the center would meet Cubans at the airport. As Miami became overcrowded with Cuban refugees, the U.S. government started to deny financial help to Cubans in Miami if they would not move to other cities. One of the cities the government
encouraged as a relocation site was New Orleans. Government officials extolled the great Catholic Cuban Center in New Orleans and exaggerated how much and how well the center would be able to help Cubans once they moved to New Orleans. The center was overwhelmed by the huge number of Cubans it helped each month and many Cubans were disappointed in the services they received (Alvarez 1973: 52).

Of the Cuban refugees who came to New Orleans in the 1960s, it is estimated that 77.2% were married and had 3.3 children per household. Sixty-percent considered themselves middle class. The median income of the Catholic Cubans living and working in New Orleans in 1973 fell between the U.S. median income and the median income of Louisiana (Alvarez 1973: 50-60). However, it can be argued that level of education was perceived as a better class indicator among Cubans in New Orleans due to the fact that many accreditations and licenses earned in Cuba were not valid in the United States (Williamson 1973: 54).

Cuban refugees in New Orleans did not all settle in one neighborhood and since many were highly educated and either spoke English or learned English quickly, they did not stand out among New Orleanians and were not perceived as a threat to the American way of life or the loss of the English language the way many other immigrant groups have been throughout American history. They relied mostly on services from the Catholic Church when they arrived in New Orleans.
The story of one Cuban refugee tells of a typical situation of the Cuban refugee experience in New Orleans. This is the story of the late Father José Antonio Ladra, who passed away in 2006. Father Ladra was born in Cuba in the late 1930s. He was an only child and his dream was to become a priest. However, a few years after Castro took power, his parents sent the young man to the United States. He settled in New Orleans and began the process of building a new life and trying to secure one for his family back in Cuba. He took courses which allowed him to become a phlebotomist. He did this even though he hated to look at blood because the courses were very short and he could easily earn a living. While he worked as a phlebotomist, he attended Tulane University, where he majored in engineering. The Catholic Church had been important to him in Cuba, and it was also so in New Orleans. It provided him with services as well as served as his family when he was alone in the U.S. and gave him the opportunity to meet others from the Cuban community (Interview with Father Ladra 2004).

Although Father Ladra liked engineering much better than drawing blood, it was a far cry from the priesthood. He graduated from Tulane and went to work as an engineer, a job which allowed him to pay to bring his parents and his aunts to New Orleans. One aunt had to sneak in through Mexico and became lost along the way. Father Ladra finally found her in Mexico living with a family that had taken her in and was able to bring her to New Orleans. Once all of his family was in New Orleans, Father Ladra was finally able to become a priest. The only problem was that he was still the primary provider for his parents and aunts. He
wanted to join a religious order, which would require him to take a vow of poverty. Instead, he chose to become a priest in the Archdiocese of New Orleans. As an archdiocesan priest, he was allowed to have a bank account, which meant he would be able to support his family in some way as well as help pay for their burial expenses as they aged and passed away (Interview with Father Ladra 2004).

Father Ladra was assigned to Christ the King Parish, a parish in Terrytown, Louisiana, which is located on the Westbank of the Mississippi River and is about a five to ten minute drive from the New Orleans Central Business District. Later, when Hondurans and other Hispanic immigrants would settle on the Westbank, Father Ladra – or Padre Jose Antonio, as he was affectionately known by his Hispanic flock - became a central figure in the life of Hispanic Catholics in the area, which will be discussed later in this work (Interview with Father Ladra 2004).

Father Jose Antonio Ladra’s story illustrates the important role the Catholic Church played for Cuban refugees in New Orleans, particularly those who came to the city without family or friends. His story is also an example of the important role of education in the lives of the Cuban refugees in New Orleans and their willingness to often work at any job, regardless of the job they had or desired formerly in Cuba.

**Hondurans**

Hondurans are today widely considered the most prominent Hispanic group in the Greater New Orleans area. Honduras and New Orleans have enjoyed a
relationship built around the fruit industry ever since the early twentieth century. Companies such as United Fruit and Standard Fruit used New Orleans as a major port for sending fruit, such as bananas, from Honduras to the United States through the Port of New Orleans (Eraque 2004:2). Also, many children of upper class Hondurans attended Catholic boarding schools in New Orleans. Although Standard Fruit established a school for its employee’s children in Honduras, the school only served students up to the sixth grade. After that, many of these students were sent to New Orleans for education in the city’s numerous Catholic schools (Eraque 2004:8). This also strengthened ties between Honduras and New Orleans. As recent as 2001, students from Honduras have come to study in these schools; De La Salle High School, a co-educational secondary school located on St. Charles Avenue owned by the Christian Brothers, reported having students from Honduras enrolled (Perry 2001).

Although Hondurans trickled into New Orleans for educational pursuits, business purposes and small-scale immigration throughout the city’s history, it was in the 1950s, Honduran immigrants came to New Orleans in large numbers. In 1954, there was a general strike in Honduras in which the workers requested a fifty-percent pay increase. The fruit companies, who received little government support during the strike, were forced to give workers a five to ten percent raise as a compromise. But losses to the fruit companies and the Honduran government were extensive – estimated to be in the millions (MacCameron 1983:48). In 1959,
Standard Fruit experienced a similar situation as Hurricane Hattie wiped out much of its crops. Both companies were forced to lay off workers (Karnes 1978: 287).

It was at this time that many Hondurans decided to leave their country to escape the deteriorating economic and social situation. New Orleans was an obvious choice for relocation due to its similarities with Honduras. New Orleans was a culturally Catholic city, which meant that it already had a Catholic archdiocese, traditions and culture in which the Honduran Catholics could participate. Many of the Hondurans who came to New Orleans were from the north coast of Honduras, which has a humid climate that is similar to that of New Orleans, although the city does have colder winters. Therefore, many Hondurans were comfortable in the New Orleans climate (Eraque 2004: 7).

This large movement of Hondurans to New Orleans which began in the 1950s occurred in such numbers that “Hondurans would begin to represent themselves in New Orleans’s public space (Eraque 2000: 7).” In the 1960s, an even greater number of Hondurans came to New Orleans. This was largely due to the coup d’état staged by Ramon Villeda Morales in the early 1960s (Eraque 2004:9-10).

Unlike the Cubans who were coming at the same time, the Hondurans did not disperse themselves around the city. Instead, the majority of them settled in the Lower Garden District. The Lower Garden District is the area between Jackson Avenue and Howard Avenue in New Orleans. This area became known as “El Barrio Lempira;” it was named after the Lenca chief who was killed by the
Spaniards in the sixteenth century. Lempira became a national hero when the Honduran currency was renamed in his honor in 1926. The major street in El Barrio Lempira was St. Andrew Street. (Eraque 2004: 10). In naming their neighborhood El Barrio Lempira, the Honduran community in New Orleans was setting themselves apart as separate from the rest of the city and defining their community themselves.

The fact that Hondurans named their neighborhood El Barrio Lempira was meaningful in terms of race and Hondurans differentiating themselves from Americans. In Honduras, like many other Latin American countries, there exists a system of what may look to many Americans as racism based on complexion. People with lighter complexions are often considered to be and treated as if they are of higher social standing, while those with darker complexions find themselves at the bottom of the social ladder. El Barrio Lempira, a neighborhood with a Honduran name, allowed the Hondurans to separate themselves from New Orleanians. New Orleans has long operated on a similar system of assigning people positions on the social ladder according to skin color. This meant not just differentiating between black and white as in most places in the Southern United States, but in placing people such as quadroons, those of one fourth African blood, and octoroons, those of one-eighth African blood, in a higher social position than those who were of more African blood and below that of those with less African blood or whites. In El Barrio Lempira, Hondurans were allowed to adhere to their own system of valuing different complexions and did not have to be placed by
New Orleanians into the already existing complex system of determining one’s place on the social ladder due to differences in complexion (Eraque 2004:10).

The center of Honduran society in the 1960s was a Catholic church, again illustrating the importance Catholicism played in the culture of Hispanics in New Orleans. This church, St. Theresa’a Catholic Church on Erato Street, offered masses said in Spanish (Eraque 2004:11), which illustrates that the Catholic Church – particularly the Archdiocese of New Orleans – recognized again the need to provide worship for immigrants in their native tongue.

In El Barrio Lempira, there were several businesses which catered to and were run by Hondurans. Several of these were nightclubs and included El Chez Lounge on St. Charles Avenue, La Luna on Constance Street and La Boquita on Magazine Street. The local Lions Club on Magazine Street also hosted Honduran dances (Eraque 2004:12-13). Several other businesses, restaurants, and supermarkets that sold Hispanic foods sprang up in El Barrio Lempira and on bus routes that were easily accessible to Hondurans from their neighborhood, including downtown, Mid-City and Gentilly (Eraque 2004:13-16).

In the 1970s, many Hondurans began to move from El Barrio Lempira to the suburbs of New Orleans. These mainly included three communities in Jefferson Parish – Gretna, Terrytown, and Kenner. Gretna is a city located on the Westbank of the Mississippi River. Terrytown is an unincorporated community directly east of Gretna, also on the Westbank. Both are just a few minutes drive from El Barrio Lempira. The city of Kenner is located on the Eastbank of the
Mississippi River, to the west of the city of New Orleans after passing through Metairie (Eraque 2004:17-18).

Today, many Hondurans still live in these suburban areas. El Barrio Lempira no longer exists, and the Honduran community is not as easily recognizable in the suburbs. The movement away from El Barrio Lempira could be interpreted as a way Hondurans could integrate themselves into the larger New Orleans area culture. They were now just as much New Orleanians as Hondurans.

In Kenner, a large number of Hondurans lived in the Redwood Apartments on West Esplanade until Hurricane Katrina. The apartments were destroyed during the hurricane, leaving 1,800 people homeless (Scallan 2005). Much to the dismay of the Honduran community, the apartments have not yet been rebuilt. In June 2007, the University of New Orleans announced it will be conducting a study to research the best use and zoning for the land (Sparacello 2007).

St. Jerome Catholic Church, which is located directly behind the old apartment site, still provides Spanish masses. Williams Boulevard is home to two Hispanic supermarkets which serve the Honduran community. There is also a nearby grocery store called Kenner Supermarket which also houses Gigante Express, a company which enables people to wire money to Central American countries. (Eraque 2004:18-22).

In 2000, Father Campo, a priest assigned to a neighboring parish of St. Jerome Catholic Church in Kenner began the “Venga a Mi” program for Hispanic Catholics. The program encourages lapsed Catholics to return to the Church. Fr.
Campo is a descendant of the Isleños of St. Bernard Parish and therefore felt the need to be involved in the Hispanic community (Herman 2000).

When Hondurans moved into the communities on the Westbank, a large number of them moved into an apartment complex on Whitney Avenue. However, by 2004, the apartment complex no longer was home to many Hondurans. Most had moved on to other apartments or to buy homes in the area.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, there was one Hispanic supermarket on Terry Parkway, the major street which runs through Terrytown. This was Barreda’s Supermarket, which was located on the corner of Stumpf Boulevard and Terry Parkway. This grocery store became Union Supermarket and relocated one block down on Stumpf Boulevard in the late 1990s and opened a restaurant called Charro’s Cafe Restaurant in an adjacent rental space.

A few blocks down from Charro’s Café on Stumpf Boulevard there is another Hispanic grocery store, Jalisco Supermarket, which has been in operation
since before Hurricane Katrina. Other Hispanic businesses operating in Terrytown both before and after Hurricane Katrina are Taqueria Grocer Jalisco and Taqueria La Mexicana, both of which are restaurants located on Terry Parkway.

These businesses catered to the Honduran population of the Terrytown and Gretna area and provided places where they could buy typical Honduran food and products.

![Image](image_url)

**FIGURE 5. UNION SUPERMARKET & CHARROS’ CAFÉ**
445 H & I STUMPF BLVD, TERRYTOWN, LOUISIANA

Christ the King Catholic Church in Terrytown – or Cristo Rey - offered worship opportunities in Spanish, which were said for years by Cuban refugee Father Jose Antonio Ladra. Christ the King continues to hold Spanish language vigil masses at 6:30 pm each Saturday with confessions heard before mass.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, Christ the King offered Spanish prayer meetings every Wednesday night, where lay Spanish Catholics from all over the Westbank would meet to pray, as well as Hispanic Youth Group meetings. The church had prior to Hurricane Katrina - and still has today - a bilingual choir director, Roberto
Matthews, who directs both an English language and Spanish language choir to sing at masses.

FIGURE 6. CHRIST THE KING CATHOLIC CHURCH
555 DEERFIELD RD., TERRYTOWN, LOUISIANA

With Father Jose Ladra’s passing in the spring of 2006, Deacon Freddy Corral now oversees ministering to the Hispanic community of Christ the King. Deacon Corral holds office hours in the church office. He is available for consultation to the Spanish-speaking community a few hours per week in the evenings to give spiritual support and direct members of the Hispanic community towards programs the Catholic Church offers for them. Christ the King was severely damaged by Hurricane Katrina. Father Jose Ladra’s funeral had to be held at neighboring St. Joseph’s Church in Gretna as its restoration was not complete until February 2007.

The Honduran community had a strong presence in Kenner, Gretna and Terrytown, as well as in the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area as a whole. In the 2000 census, there were 64,340 Hispanics living in the area. Twenty-four
percent of these people were Hondurans. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the 
Honduran community was the largest and most recognizable Hispanic community 
in New Orleans and its history. It was also a community highly tied to the 
Catholic churches in their neighborhoods which offered worship services and 
other activities for Spanish-speakers. The Church continued its legacy of 
ministering to the immigrant groups of New Orleans by serving the Hondurans 
and Cubans in ways very similar to how it had ministered to immigrants of the 
previous century. This was the way relations between the Hispanic community 
and the Church were on August 28, 2005, the eve of Hurricane Katrina, which 
brought massive destruction to the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area. In 
the wake of this ruin, many new Hispanics came to the area to labor rebuilding the 
area. But where would these new Hispanics settle and where would they come 
from? Would the Catholic Church play an important role in their history?

Vietnamese Immigrants: Following the Cuban Model

When communists gained control of South Vietnam in 1975, many 
Vietnamese fled their homeland. Between 1975 and 1995, over 700,000 
Vietnamese refugees came to the United States. Most of these refugees came from 
South Vietnam. South Vietnam was home to Vietnamese whom had relocated 
there after the Indochina Truce Accords of 1954 in Geneva, Switzerland separated 
Vietnam into the communist North Vietnam and South Vietnam in 1954. Most of 
the Vietnamese who relocated to South Vietnam were loyal to the French, who 
had controlled Vietnam since the 1880s as the colony of French Indochina. They
were also mostly Catholic, having been converted by the French (Marino 1998: 90-91).

In a situation similar to that of the resettlement of Cuban refugees in the U.S., the federal government contracted the United States Catholic Conference as one of the major organizations that would help resettle the Vietnamese refugees. The U.S. Catholic Conference and Catholic Charities found sponsors for each refugee and his or her family. Sponsors could be businesses, families, or individuals that agreed to provide the refugee and his or her dependents with housing as well as provide for them financially until the refugee could do so (Kelly 1986: 143).

As it was during surge of Cuban refugees coming to the U.S., New Orleans was one of the U.S. cities chosen to be home to many of the Vietnamese refugees. This, however, was not started by the government as was the scenario with the Cuban refugees. In 1975, Archbishop of New Orleans Alfred Hannan visited a Vietnamese Refugee camp that had been set up at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas to minister to Vietnamese Catholics living at the camp. After this visit, Archbishop Hannan encouraged U.S. officials to send Vietnamese Catholics and their families to New Orleans (Finney 2003). It was the archbishop and not a government official who chose the city as a relocation spot for the Vietnamese Catholic refugees.

Catholic Charities of New Orleans relocated one thousand Vietnamese to an area on the outskirts of New Orleans East, a predominantly African-American
neighborhood which is situated across the Industrial Canal from and to the northeast of the French Quarter. This area is called Versailles, although it is often called “Little Saigon” as well as Versailles Gardens due to the many gardens the Vietnamese plant on their property. Word soon spread about Versailles among Vietnamese refugees across the U.S. Just one year later in 1976, two thousand more Vietnamese relocated to Versailles on their own. They could have been drawn to the area by its sub-tropical climate and convenience to waterways, two aspects similar to their homeland. However, it is likely that many relocated to Versailles after hearing about it from the Vietnamese that Catholic Charities had originally settled there. Many of the Vietnamese refugees who moved to Versailles in 1976 had previously been living in other states in the U.S. and had heard about the community in New Orleans from family and friends (Bankston 1994: 829).

As most of the Vietnamese who settled in Versailles were Catholic due to the invitation of Archbishop Hannan, the need for a church in this enclave which would provide services in Vietnamese was great. Mary, Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church opened its doors at 5069 Willowbrook Drive in Versailles to serve the Vietnamese Catholic population in 1983. It was the first Catholic church in the United States to offer masses in Vietnamese (Catania 2006).

The Vietnamese community in New Orleans continued to grow from 1975 into the 1990s. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the Versailles neighborhood was the largest concentration of Vietnamese in the U.S. Vietnamese had also moved in
smaller numbers into other parts of the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area over the years, including Terrytown, Gretna, and Algiers. None of these areas, however, had or has a large enough Vietnamese Catholic community to warrant Vietnamese masses being said at local churches (Airriess 1994: 16).

Mary, Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church remained and remains today the New Orleans Vietnamese community’s Catholic church as well as an important place for this community. A Vietnamese Apostolate, much like the Hispanic Apostolate, offered services at the church. The Vietnamese Apostolate helped the community in ways similar to the Hispanic Apostolate and the services it provided to Hispanics, such as English classes and citizenship information. Mary, Queen of Vietnam Church was not just a place where the community could receive these social services and worship in their native language; it was and continues to be the center of the Versailles Vietnamese community. The church and its grounds have often been used for secular purposes by the community. For over fifteen years prior to Hurricane Katrina, an open-air market where Vietnamese would sell produce and plants from their gardens was held each Saturday morning on church grounds. Secular community organizations, such as the Vietnamese-American Voters’ Association, held meetings in buildings on the property (Bankstin 1994: 834). The Church was and is not only a place where Vietnamese could and can worship in their own language and a social gathering place at religious events, but also held and continues to hold an important place in the secular activities of the
community by hosting such events and meetings. This demonstrates how integral this church was and is to this community.

The Vietnamese Apostolate of New Orleans no longer exists in a capacity similar to that of the Hispanic Apostolate. Today, Catholic Charities operates the Vietnamese Youth Services at Mary, Queen of Vietnam. This program provides recreation and tutoring to the young members of the Vietnamese community in Versailles (“Catholic Charities of New Orleans Pages” 2007).

In the days and weeks after Hurricane Katrina, Mary, Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church acted as the command center for Versailles residents returning to their homes. Several residents either never evacuated or snuck back to their homes before they were allowed to do so by local officials. The church provided these people with food and supplies as well as a place to congregate and exchange news as electricity, land telephone lines and many cell phones were not working in the days after the storm. Versailles was one of the areas that sustained comparably minimal damage in the storm, which surely, along with the role Mary, Queen of Vietnam Church played in aiding members of the community immediately after the hurricane, is one of the reasons why Versailles was one of spots in New Orleans where residents returned and repaired their homes and businesses relatively quickly. Also, Vietnamese Catholics from across the country came to Versailles through trips organized through Catholic organizations to help residents do such tasks as gutting homes (Shaftel 2006).
The story of Catholic Vietnamese immigrants in New Orleans is very similar to that of the Hispanic groups preceding them. Their resettlement process was very similar to that of the Cubans. The importance of the involvement of the Catholic Church in both cases cannot be denied. Like the Honduran community in New Orleans in the 1960s, the majority of Vietnamese immigrants moved into one enclave. Here, the Catholic Church provided them with masses in their native language and centered their community around their church, just as the Hondurans had done in El Barrio Lempira with St. Teresa of Avila Church. The Vietnamese were ministered to by Catholic Charities with English and citizenship classes, as was and is the Hispanic community.

The Vietnamese immigrants in New Orleans were aided in establishing their community in their new homeland by the Catholic Church, as were Hispanics and other immigrant groups in the city throughout its history.
Chapter 4:

Post-Hurricane Katrina Hispanic Migration to New Orleans

Three Faces of Post-Katrina Hispanic Immigrants in New Orleans

New Orleans is currently experiencing a phenomenon that many U.S. cities have experienced in the last two decades – a large influx of Hispanic immigrants seeking work and a new life in the city. The difference between New Orleans and most other cities, however, is that this occurrence seems to have happened overnight in New Orleans (Beslie 2006). Many Hispanics have come to help rebuild a city that was eighty-percent under water in the days after Katrina (Bologna 2005: 12) and suffered from wind damage and looting. Although many suburban areas did not flood, they did experience wind damage or looting.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Hispanic community in the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area has continued to grow while the African-American community has shrunk from thirty-seven percent of the population before the Hurricane to twenty-two percent in June of 2006. If Hispanics continue to come to New Orleans in great numbers, it is possible that they will eventually overtake the African-American community as the largest minority group in the metropolitan area (Ohlemacher 2006).

The first part of this chapter will examine the stories of three men who came from Latin American counties to New Orleans to fill jobs in an effort to shine a little light on who these new Hispanic immigrants are.
Ricardo: Honduras to New Orleans via Florida

Ricardo is a twenty-four year old Honduran living in Gretna, Louisiana. He first came to the Greater New Orleans Area two months after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in August of 2005. He is from northern Honduras. Although one side of his family is descended from the Chorti Indians of Honduras, he grew up speaking Spanish and does not speak an indigenous language. In Honduras, he attended school into high school, when he got married and went to work.

He heard friends tell of relatives who had relocated to the United States who were earning more than four times per day what he earned. As Ricardo’s family grew to include four children, he recognized what he could do for them by working in the United States. Families of others whom now worked in the United States did not struggle as his did. Therefore, he set off for the United States in 2004, without knowing the language or anyone in the U.S. and no guarantee of a job once he arrived.

Ricardo first arrived in Florida. Here, he worked mainly in dry wall and construction in Orlando. His “patron” or boss secured him a place to sleep in an apartment with other Hispanic dry wall workers. In the days after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, pictures of the devastation were splashed all over television and newspapers. Ricardo and other Hispanic workers realized that there

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1 Names have been changed at the request of the interviewee.
would be a plethora of jobs, especially in construction, in the Greater New Orleans Area.

Ricardo packed into a van owned by a brother of one his roommates and headed for New Orleans in October of 2005. Once here, he and his fellow travelers learned from other Hispanics of several parking lots and businesses where people would come in search of day laborers or even more desirable – offering some type of long-term employment. One such spot was on Edenborn Avenue in Metairie in the parking lot of a defunct business. Ricardo and other men would rush any car that came into the lot in order to be picked first.

Ricardo made it to the head of the pack when a truck pulled up. A man, from what Ricardo understood, offered three men jobs working with food. Rolando went on to work in a food service job until after Christmas to help with the holiday rush. It was not the dry wall job, Ricardo expected, but he was glad to be working in an air conditioned building. Ricardo’s employment in food service is an example of what happened to several Hispanic workers after Hurricane Katrina. Many of them were employed not necessarily in the physical rebuilding of the city, but they instead filled jobs left vacant by employees who had evacuated and had not yet returned to the city or planned to return.

Ricardo learned of the Hispanic Apostolate of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, which would help him learn English and explain to him how to start the process of becoming a citizen. However, its locations are in Kenner and Metairie,

2 The business’s name has been omitted.
and without transportation, Ricardo had no access to these areas. Ricardo, who was raised as a Protestant – more specifically a Neo-Pentecostal as a child in Honduras – longed for a church to attend in his new home. He started attending El Nuevo Pacto Evangelical Church on Behrman Highway, a small church that serves Hispanics – mostly Hondurans - and holds worship services only in Spanish. It is a Neo-Pentecostal Church. Unlike the Catholic Church, it does not offer English classes, health care or advice on citizenship issues. But nonetheless, Ricardo attends because of his faith and his desire to be around his own language and culture.

![Image of Iglesia Evangelica El Nuevo Pacto](image)

**FIGURE 7. IGLEESIA EVANGELICA EL NUEVO PACTO 777 BEHRMAN HWY, TERRYTOWN, LOUISIANA**

**Arturo: Mexico into New Orleans**

The story of Arturo\(^3\) presents a different experience of a Hispanic worker in Post-Katrina New Orleans. Arturo was an employee at the same food service business with Ricardo. Arturo, however, is forty-eight years old. He is the father

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\(^3\) First name has been changed at the request of the interviewee.
of five children and is from central Mexico, where his wife and children still live. Like Ricardo, he saw the images of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina on television and also saw the opportunity that was there for Hispanic workers. He had also seen several people around him go to the United States and be able to send money to their families. Arturo, though, was not in the United States when he saw the pictures of Hurricane Katrina’s wrath, but in Mexico. Arturo undertook a dangerous trip into the United States. At one point, the van in which he was riding was carjacked by thieves who took everyone’s money and beat those who resisted. Still, Arturo made it into Texas and then on into Louisiana, where he ended up at the same parking lot in Metairie where he was hired by the same man as Ricardo.

Arturo says that many of the Hispanic workers who came to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina had been working in other parts of the United States prior to moving to the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area or had relatives who already lived in or around New Orleans; he was somewhat of an anomaly. He says that all of the other men were from Mexico or Central American, and they were mostly Honduran, Guatemalan or Mexican. He also says that a few of the Guatemalans did not speak Spanish but an indigenous language instead. Although this is just one parking lot pick up spot of many, this does provide a picture of who these Hispanic workers are.

As for religious affiliation, Arturo says that he is Catholic. However, he also cannot take advantage of the Hispanic Apostolate’s program due to lack of
transportation. He also does not attend the Spanish language services at nearby Christ the King Church because it would be a twenty-minute walk. He says that is too far for him to walk after working all day and some Saturday evenings when the Spanish vigils are held he is working.

Miguel: Honduras to His Brother’s House in New Orleans

Another co-worker of Ricardo and Arturo is Miguel. Miguel is a twenty-six year old man from Honduras, where he has a wife and a son. Miguel’s older brother had come to New Orleans in the mid-1990s from Honduras. His brother was a success story by all accounts. He rented a nice apartment and had brought his wife and children to the United States by end of the century. After Hurricane Katrina, Miguel’s brother called the family to encourage his brothers to come to New Orleans in search of work. A few weeks later, Miguel’s brother paid for him to travel to New Orleans. He lived with his brother and went up every day to the parking lot where he was eventually offered the food service job. He moved into housing provided by his boss for him, Ricardo and Arturo. His younger brother, who is unmarried and has no children, eventually, came to the New Orleans area as well. Miguel helped him secure a job with his employer and he moved in with the three men.

Miguel was Protestant in Honduras, although he says he is not sure what specific Protestant group he belonged to because it was not an international or national church. Ricardo invited him to his church and Miguel attended a few

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4 First name has been changed at the request of the interviewee.
times but then decided it wasn’t for him as it was radically more conservative than his church in Honduras. His brother attends Ricardo’s church occasionally, but Miguel says he attends more for “la gente hondureña que Dios,” or more for the company of other Hondurans than for spiritual reasons (Interview December 2006).

Miguel is also not able to take advantage of the Archdiocese of New Orleans’s Hispanic Apostolate because of its distance from his home in Gretna. But his brother, nieces, and nephews are helping him to learn English and to be accustomed to the New Orleans culture. He has a great deal of contact with the Honduran community which existed before Hurricane Katrina through his brother. He meets them at dinners, get-togethers and restaurants to which his brother takes him.

His dream is to be like his brother and eventually bring his wife and children, as well as other relatives, to the United States. While he was in the United States, Miguel’s father passed away in Honduras. He would not be guaranteed safe passage back into the United States once he left for Honduras, so Miguel and his younger brother were not able to attend his father’s funeral services or be there to comfort their mother and family members. They were, however, able to contribute to pay for his father’s funeral service, something he says they never would have been able to do had they still been working in Honduras.

Three Men with Similar yet Different Experiences
These three men show that the faces of Hispanic workers whom came to the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area after Hurricane Katrina are not all alike. They are not all from one single country. Some were living in other parts of the United States when they saw the opportunity for employment rebuilding the city. Others were in their home country when they realized this prospect. Yet others came at the urging of relatives who had already moved to New Orleans who relayed the need for laborers. Some came to New Orleans already knowing a little about the culture from living elsewhere in the U.S. or through relatives who lived there. But some came with no idea of what to expect and no family or friends.

**Changing the Landscape**

The landscape of the Terrytown-Gretna area where Ricardo, Arturo and Miguel work and live has also been changed due to the influx of Hispanic workers who have come to rebuild the region. After Hurricane Katrina, four more Hispanic businesses opened in Terrytown. They include two restaurants. El Tapatio Mexican Restaurant is located on Wright Avenue and El Potosi Restaurant is located on Terry Parkway. Dinero a Mexico Check Cashing and Money Orders is also located on Terry Parkway and serves Hispanic clientele wishing to send money to Mexico, Central America or other places in Latin America. Ana’s Groceries sells Hispanic food products and is located on Behrman Highway.

In response to changes in the landscape made by taqueria trucks which park at spots where Hispanic workers congregate to be picked up for work and sell Hispanic foods, Jefferson Parish – which includes Terrytown, Kenner and Gretna
– outlawed such trucks, sighting that they were unpleasant to look at (Waller 6/2007). Some Jefferson Parish residents, such as Dr. Chris M. Arcement replied in a letter to the editor about an article covering this ban that the parish’s move reflected selfishness and ungratefulness on the part of the citizens of Jefferson Parish towards Hispanics who are rebuilding the area and filling the labor shortage (Arcement 2007).

FIGURE 8. EL TAPATIO MEXICAN RESTAURANT
402 WRIGHT AVE, TERRYTOWN, LOUISIANA
FIGURE 9. EL POTOSI MEXICAN RESTAURANT
445 H & I TERRY PARKWAY, TERRYTOWN, LOUISIANA

FIGURE 10. DINERO A MEXICO CHECK CASHING
AND MONEY ORDERS
512 TERRY PARKWAY, TERRYTOWN, LOUISIANA
Religion plays or has the opportunity to play an important role in the lives of these Hispanic workers. For some, such as Ricardo, finding a comfortable Hispanic church that is secluded from most Americans by the language spoken at services and belongs to the subaltern group helped ease their transition and give them a sense of belonging in the New Orleans area. It helped him find a Honduran community in the United States. For Ricardo, and at times for Miguel’s younger brother, the church served as both family and friend and a Honduran enclave in the middle of an American city, like El Barrio Lempira before it. For others, religious gatherings are replaced by gatherings with family members who have lived in New Orleans since before Hurricane Katrina and the community to which they have introduced to them.

For the many who are served by the Hispanic Apostolate, the Catholic Church provides not only a family environment and Hispanic enclave through
Spanish-language religious services, but also helps provide much needed services such as health care and English classes, among others. The Hispanic Apostolate of the Archdiocese of New Orleans is run by Catholic Charities. The Hispanic Apostolate’s main office is located on Williams Boulevard in Kenner. The Hispanic Apostolate estimates that before Hurricane Katrina, the organization provided services to 80,000 Hispanics, most of who lived in Jefferson Parish (“Church World Service News Release” 2006).

After Hurricane Katrina, thousands of Hispanics came to New Orleans and the surrounding areas to fill jobs left vacant after the hurricane or that were created to rebuild the city. Since Hurricane Katrina, the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area has experienced a labor shortage. In May of 2007, the available labor force was estimated to be at half of the levels seen in the area prior to Hurricane Katrina (Chang 2007). This makes the city and its surrounding areas very appealing to Hispanic workers looking for jobs. In 2007, the Times-
Picayune, the major newspaper in the New Orleans area, began to publish employment listings in Spanish as well as English (American Foreign Press 2007) in a testament of how crucial the Hispanic labor force had become. The boom of new Hispanics in New Orleans and its metropolitan area can also be seen at local hospitals. East Jefferson General Hospital in Metairie, Louisiana reported a thirty-five percent increase in babies born to Hispanic mothers at its hospital in 2006 (Waller 1/2007).

Many Hispanic workers in New Orleans do not have access to necessities such as showers, adequate food, shelter and health care and are often the victims of unfair employment practices. A study conducted by Tulane University and the University of California-Berkeley in 2006 found that twenty-five percent of Hispanic workers in the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area made less than $6.50 per hour (Eaton 2006). Often times, Hispanic workers are abandoned in parts of the metropolitan area in which they are unfamiliar without transportation and shelter by contractors who no longer need their services (Roig-Franzia 2006).

Recently, government agencies have shown interest in studying the needs of the new Hispanics in New Orleans. A $250,000 grant from the Office of Minority Health will be used to study the wants and needs of Hispanics living in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama in regards to health care (Pope 2007). Public and private funding provided English as a Second Language software in Jefferson Parish Public Schools through the Southern Institute for Education and Research. This school district has seen a large increase in the number of Hispanic students
who require English as a Second Language education after Hurricane Katrina (Gershanik 2007).

Continuing its tradition of aiding Hispanics in New Orleans, the Hispanic Apostolate offers assistance with the basic needs of Hispanic workers as well as providing job placement, immigration counseling, English as a Second Language classes and trauma counseling. The immigration counseling services offered, in particular, are extensive and include help filling out forms, green card renewals, employment authorization, and applications for visas for relatives, translation of legal and educational documents, among other services.

Every morning, volunteers from the Hispanic Apostolate hand out safety gear such as goggles and masks as well as brochures about programs and workers rights at places which have become popular spots for Hispanics to be picked up for work (Greear 2006). The Hispanic Apostolate of New Orleans also works with CLINIC, Loyola University New Orleans Law School’s free legal service and the Southern Poverty Law Clinic. The goal of this joint effort is to engage in community outreach pertaining to wage, labor and immigration issues in Post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans and the surrounding areas (“Catholic Charities of New Orleans – Immigration” 2007). Many Hispanic workers are facing not only intolerable living conditions, but also working conditions. There is no guarantee they will be paid a fair wage – or paid at all – if they are undocumented workers. They also may be required to work longer hours than labor laws allow and might
not be allowed to take breaks or lunch breaks (“Common Ground Health Clinic” 2007).

The Hispanic Apostolate also aids in contributing to the Latino Outreach Program at the Common Ground Health Clinic on Teche Street in Algiers, a neighborhood in the city New Orleans on the Westbank. The clinic provides health care, such as doctor’s visits and vaccinations, to those who cannot afford it. After Hurricane Katrina, Common Ground Health Clinic realized the need of Hispanic workers who were often living in deplorable conditions and worked dangerous jobs for adequate health care to ward off infection (“Common Ground Health Clinic” 2007).

Catholic Charities’ Hispanic Apostolate of the Archdiocese of New Orleans and all of its operations are essential in the lives of many Hispanics in the area. This organization continues the legacy of the Catholic Church aiding immigrants in New Orleans. Whether or not they are Catholic, Hispanics can receive services from the organization. When compared to the situations of other Hispanic workers, Ricardo, Arturo and Miguel are lucky to have a job working for a boss who they report pays them fairly and does not overwork them. They also have a clean place to call home. The reality is, however, that their situation is not representative of that of many of the Hispanic workers in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. While Ricardo, Arturo, and Miguel are unable to reach the ministries of the Hispanic Apostolate, where they could receive immigration counseling and attend English as a Second Language classes, many whom are in
worse situations cannot reach the ministries which could provide them with health care and other necessities due to transportation as well.

Anderson explains that an “imagined community” is built around the concept that those in the “imagined community” perceive that they all have many things in common with each other, when in reality, they probably do not due to the fact that any community, aside from a very small village, probably does not have that much in common. One of the things that members of the “imagined community” often envision that they have in common is religion (Anderson 1991:5-12).

When the new Hispanic community is examined through the stories of these three men, it is obvious that there is no one shared religion which unites them all. They are indeed all Christians, but Christians have long divided themselves and bickered among each other with each group claiming to be the “right” or “true” Christian Church. Beliefs among Protestants and Catholics
especially, are very different and Protestants have historically criticized many essential Catholic practices, such as intercession though the saints, art which they see as idolatry, confession, celibacy of priests and clergy members, baptism of infants, transubstantiation of the Eucharist and failure to be “born again” among many other issues. The beliefs of different Protestant groups are also often times not similar to one another. Therefore, it is easy to recognize that the Hispanics living in New Orleans now do not all share a common faith. The descendants of the Isleños, Cubans and Hondurans who came before Hurricane Katrina were predominantly Catholic, although some were Protestant. The Hispanic workers in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina appear to be much more diverse in their religious affiliations, which is largely due to the conversion of many Latin Americans over the last thirty years by Evangelical Protestant missionaries to Latin American countries. Many more Protestants, like Ricardo and Miguel, are coming from Latin America because the number of Protestants in Latin America has risen.

Also, many Catholic Latin Americans practice syncretic religions which mix Roman Catholic or Protestant Evangelical religious ideas and practices with indigenous ones. This is very prevalent, for example, among Guatemalan Catholics of Maya descent; they often practice a mix of Catholicism and Maya religious practices (Demerath 2003: 14). Adherents to these syncretic religions might find it difficult to practice Catholicism or Evangelical Protestantism minus
any indigenous influence in U.S. Catholic parishes and Evangelical Protestant churches.

Therefore, these churches such as St. Jerome or Christ the King will not be the only churches Hispanics use to worship and connect with other Hispanics and build their “imagined community.” Religion will either have to be left out of the equation when “imagining” the “imagined community” or small imagined communities which rely on membership at a certain church will create small “imagined communities.” The Catholic Church, which played an important role in the adjustment and culture of Hispanics and other immigrant groups coming to New Orleans in the past, now has some competition.

The Archdiocese of New Orleans is also facing internal challenges to expanding their ministry to immigrants. Forty-three percent of congregations in Orleans, Plaquemines, and St. Bernard Parishes have not yet returned. In fall 2007, the Archdiocese will reassess which church parishes it will close or combine. It faces the challenge of trying to help others – like the Hispanic immigrants – while it is still trying to help itself recover from Hurricane Katrina (Nolan 2007). Hurricane Katrina, the deadliest natural disaster to hit a major U.S. city since the hurricane which ravaged Galveston, Texas in 1900 (Bergal 2007: 3), is still posing new challenges to the people of New Orleans. The Archdiocese is not excluded from these challenges.

Hispanics in New Orleans will have to rely on creating their “imagined community” by focusing on other aspects that its citizens have in common. But
the Hispanics who compromise New Orleans’s Hispanic community post-
Hurricane Katrina are a diverse group. For example, unlike the previous waves of
Hispanic immigrants to New Orleans in the past, they do not all share one
nationality.

Without a shared religion and national history, Hispanics in New Orleans
have perhaps two things in common – the immigrant experience and their
language. These two aspects, however, are not even certain. Many of the
Hispanics in the Greater Metropolitan New Orleans Area are the children of
Hispanic immigrants and were born in the United States and therefore do not share
in the immigrant experience. Although many children of Hispanics in the New
Orleans area speak Spanish, a small minority of the new Hispanic workers from
Central America speak an indigenous dialect, which also calls into question
whether or not they are Hispanic or if they are in fact rather Maya or members of
another indigenous group and will be excluded from the imagined Hispanic
community. Hispanics from different countries and regions speak different
dialects of Spanish. Will a standard dialect be chosen? Will Honduran dialect be
 favored over Mexican?

Stuart Hall, in his book *Modernity and Its Futures* (Hall 1992: 596-533),
writes that many times hybrid communities among people who re-imagine their
past in order to construct a common past. These hybrid communities consist of
the blending of different cultural identities- whether they are Catholic, Protestant,
Honduran, Mexican, Guatemalan or other to create a hybrid culture. It will be up
to the members of the new Hispanic community in New Orleans to choose to create their own identity by participating in community and cultural practices as they desire but without rejecting their own cultural traditions and histories (Hall 1992: 596-533). Therefore, in order to create one new Hispanic community in New Orleans, Hispanics will have to find ways to imagine similarities in cultural practices, histories, languages and other aspects of their lives rather than based on a shared religion, which many Hispanics pre-Hurricane Katrina were able to do. Immigrants to New Orleans in the past –Isleños, Cubans, Hondurans, Irish, Sicilian, Vietnamese, Germans - often found the shared Catholic religion within their individual immigrant group as a cultural core around which they could “imagine” their community. The new Hispanics face the challenge of finding something else around which to center their “imagined community.”
Chapter 5:

English, Spanish, Fútbol, Cuban Black Beans, and Taco Soup

Imaging the Community through *El Tiempo*

One way an “imagined community” can create its identity is through the printing press. It was not until the advent of the printing press and rise of print journalism that nationalism began to take hold all over the world. Print language unites an “imagined community” by transmitting news and presenting the community through print in the vernacular (Anderson 1991:33-36).

A major Hispanic newspaper in Post-Katrina New Orleans is *El Tiempo*. *El Tiempo* is a monthly newspaper published by JC Media. The idea for *El Tiempo* was conceived after Hurricane Katrina when the need became obvious for another Hispanic newspaper in New Orleans to serve the growing Hispanic community and the different challenges they faced in the Post-Katrina world, including local issues and international issues, particularly international trade. It is a free newspaper which can also be read online. The first issue of *El Tiempo* was published in May 2006. It is printed in color and claims to be the leading Hispanic newspaper in the Greater New Orleans Area. The administrative offices of *El Tiempo* are located on Hancock Street in Gretna.

The newspaper features monthly columns about local and international news pertinent to the lives of Hispanics, health, sports, education, immigration, economy, and even recipes. *El Tiempo* started a partnership with WGNO News,
the news division of a local television channel and ABC affiliate, in which WGNO agreed to start to focus more stories on the Hispanic community.

*El Tiempo* is published in a format where the reader can choose to read each article in either English or Spanish. Every article is presented in both languages. This provides an alternative to simply choosing “whose Spanish” to use. While editors and writers can still choose which Spanish dialect in which to write, speakers of another dialect who may not understand certain words or phrases but who are proficient in English can turn to the accompanying English article for clarification. The English and Spanish articles also allow the children and grandchildren of Hispanics who may not be completely fluent or may not know Spanish at all to read the newspaper, as well as those who are not Hispanics or Spanish speakers but may be interested in reading the newspaper.

This is an example of reconciling the two cultures in which Hispanics in the United States live. It provides a way for the members of the Hispanic community, which is a hybrid community, to express themselves as English-speakers as well as Spanish-speakers. In “imagining” their community through *El Tiempo*, the Hispanic community is presenting themselves as a bilingual group which can operate as easily in Spanish and in English as easily as one can shift one’s eyes from the Spanish column to the English column in *El Tiempo*.

The use of both languages also allows the Hispanic community to be in a position where they do not have to deny either culture of which they are a part. The equal use of Spanish and English does not make one language preferential to
the other. Nor does it require, as do most public spaces in the larger Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Areas, that Spanish-speakers use English exclusively. This is just another example of how the new Hispanic community in New Orleans is creating a hybrid community and not relying on one same past, language and religion. Instead, the pasts, languages and religions they are “imagining” for themselves might be somewhat similar, but are accepting of diversity.

Another example of this is the recipe section of El Tiempo. Every month a different recipe is featured. The recipes vary as to which country or region’s cuisine they come from. For example, the May 2007 issue of El Tiempo provides a recipe for Cuban Black Beans (El Tiempo May 2007), while the March 2007 issue offers readers a recipe for Taco Soup (El Tiempo March 2007).

According to Anderson, a major player in the “imagining” of a community is the literature which provides a common canon as well as helps create a common imagined past or culture. Anderson refers to newspapers as “one day best-sellers” (Anderson 1991:35). They, like books, are printed on a large scale. Anderson also suggests that reading of newspapers has taken the place of ritualized morning prayer in most modern societies (Anderson 1991:37). Therefore, it is important to look at the “imagined community” being presented by New Orleans’s self-proclaimed leading Hispanic newspaper, a newspaper which is presenting a pluralistic “imagined community.”

El Tiempo was founded after Hurricane Katrina in response to the influx of the new Hispanic immigrants to the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area,
which means it is another competitor to the Catholic Church’s traditional role in New Orleans with immigrant groups. This publication is aimed at this new Hispanic group and does not deal with religious questions. Although it does not hold classes or provide medical care, it is a secular entity that provides much needed information about resources for Hispanics in the New Orleans area, thereby taking on one of the roles the Catholic Church formerly played and continues to play. This is not to suggest, however, that a periodical will take the place of religion or that Hispanic culture in New Orleans is going to become secular overnight. But *El Tiempo* is an element around which the new Hispanic community in New Orleans can learn about services, learn about the culture and adjust to the area and preserve their own cultural practices such as trading recipes and keeping up with soccer games back home. It can also be used as a tool around which to start “imagining” the new Hispanic community in New Orleans.

However, it is important to keep in mind the relationship between publisher and readers. Publishers and journalists produce for the public and are protected under the Constitution. However, publishers are also businessmen or businesswomen and may be pressured by advertisers to cover or refrain from covering certain stories. The relationship between reader and journalist should also not be misjudged as simply the reader agreeing with or buying into everything that is being “imagined” by the newspaper (Tebbel 1966: 79-85). However, examining such newspapers can provide an idea of the “imagining” process which is at work.
Chapter 6:
The Future of Catholicism and Hispanics in New Orleans

Throughout its history, New Orleans has seen periods of influx of immigrants arriving to start new lives during which the Catholic Church had significant religious, social and cultural functions for each immigrant group. Several of these immigrant groups were Hispanic. The first major Hispanic group was from Spain and came to govern the city during the Spanish colonial rule of Louisiana. Though the people of New Orleans remained decidedly French in their customs and little changed culturally in the city also due to the fact that both the French and Spanish were Catholic, the Spanish played a significant role in the history of the city. Spanish clergy strengthened the Catholic Church in New Orleans by printing and distributing catechisms and hearing confessions. The Spanish architectural style in which the city was rebuilt after the Great Fire and the streets named after the Spanish governors, are more tangible reminders of the legacy of Spanish rule. Today, as one strolls through the French Quarter, several corners have tile plaques with the name of the street in Spanish. For example, on the side of a building on the corner of Royal Street and Saint Ann, a tile naming one of the streets Calle Real is still present.

Another legacy of Spanish rule in Louisiana is the Isleños and their culture, which is still present in Southeast Louisiana. The group, although not very large
in numbers, has made a name for itself through its museum and annual festival. This also allows the Isleños to keep their customs alive and teach younger generations of Isleño descendants about their rich past. For the Spanish colonists, including the Isleños, the Catholic Church was a central part of their culture, just as the Church continues to be for many present day New Orleanians.

Today, New Orleans and Louisiana are marketed as tourist attractions based on their French history. When entering Louisiana from Mississippi on interstate ten, a sign in French welcomes visitors to Louisiana. French phrases such as “laissez les bon temps roulez” (“let the good times roll”) have become synonymous with New Orleans. The crown jewel of the French Quarter, the Plaza de Armas, or Jackson Square, is surrounded by buildings built by the Spanish. Yet the area is still called the French Quarter and not the “Spanish Quarter.” Louisiana, or perhaps more fittingly – those who market the state to tourists - have chose to believe that a French history will make New Orleans an easier sell to visitors than a Spanish history. This means that unless a tourist visits the Louisiana State Museum or stumbles upon one of the tile Spanish street signs in the French Quarter, he or she may never even know Louisiana was once a Spanish colony.

The Cuban exiles who came to New Orleans fleeing Fidel Castro’s regime also contributed to the Hispanic legacy of the city, albeit a discreet one. They spread out all over the city and did not inhabit one particular neighborhood. They relied heavily on the Catholic Church for support after relocating to New Orleans.
Most of them were well educated, although they often had to take any job they could find in their new country. They were a relatively quiet and inconspicuous group compared to the Honduran population that settled in El Barrio Lempira around the same time.

The larger Honduran community came to New Orleans because of the city’s long standing ties with two companies which operated in Honduras, United Fruit Company and Standard Fruit Company. Looking for better opportunities and leaving behind economic and social discord in their country, they saw the similarities between Honduras and New Orleans, which included the Catholic culture. They settled first in El Barrio Lempira, where many Honduran businesses and night spots opened. The local Catholic church which offered masses in Spanish, Saint Teresa, was an important cultural and religious place in the landscape. Years later, the Hondurans moved to Kenner, Terrytown, and Gretna, where more Honduran-owned shops opened and masses were said in Spanish at St. Jerome Catholic Church and Christ the King Catholic Church, two parishes that also became important culturally for Honduran Catholics in the Greater Metropolitan New Orleans Area.

Although it is unjust to paint these Hispanic groups as being exclusively Catholic, it is fair to suggest that many, if not the majority, of them were Catholic. Catholicism has long been a part of New Orleans’s cultural identity, from cleaning graves on All Souls’ Day to celebrating Mardi Gras before the Lenten season of fasting begins. Spanish, Cubans, and Hondurans, the majority of whom were
Catholic, easily fit in to the culturally Catholic New Orleans society and no doubt contributed to the longevity and endurance of the Catholic culture in the city.

The Catholic Church ministered to many different immigrant groups throughout the history of New Orleans. The Church played an essential role in colonial Louisiana, when the Church and government were not separated as they are in the United States and society was not as secular as modern society. Spanish colonists, including the Isleños, were able to practice their faith essentially the same way they did in their homeland.

After Louisiana became part of the United States and the Catholic Church became a part of a secular country which mandated separation of church and state, the Church nonetheless recognized the need of immigrants in New Orleans and continued those who poured into the city in the 1800s, providing Irish, German and Sicilian immigrants with masses in their native languages, schools, orphanages, and other services. The culture and traditions of these three groups, many of which have their roots in Catholicism, have been incorporated into the larger culture and traditions of the city. The tradition of the Catholic Church helping immigrants in New Orleans continued when Cubans, Vietnamese, and Hondurans came to the city in large numbers in the twentieth century and relied on the Church for many services.

A constant throughout the history of New Orleans has been the readiness of the Catholic Church to help immigrants in the city by providing masses in their languages as well as social services. The work of the Catholic Church aided these
immigrants in adjusting to their new home as well as keeping their unique culture alive.

As for the newest group of immigrants to the area, the Hispanics who have come to the Greater New Orleans Area after Hurricane Katrina to rebuild are a diverse group. It is no wonder that New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin asked businessmen in October of 2005 how he could “stop New Orleans from being overrun with Mexican workers” (Roig-Franzia 2005), a statement which illustrates the city’s worries that this new immigrant group will change New Orleans’ unique culture. Unlike the four waves of Hispanic immigrants before them, they do not come from one country or speak one dialect of Spanish. The newest wave of Hispanic immigrants is more diverse in their religiously affiliations than the Hispanic immigrants before them. This means although they are welcome to participate and benefit from any services offered by the Catholic Church, they may be less likely to do so if they are not Catholic. It also means that a traditional building block in the “imagining” of the immigrant New Orleans community – the Catholic Church - will not play such an important role in the “imagined community” this group is creating as it did for the immigrant groups in New Orleans before them.

How will a group of people from different countries, who have diversity in their religious affiliations, who speak slightly different types of Spanish and do not have shared experiences “imagine” their community? The community they imagine must be pluralistic and include everyone – the newcomers, the Hondurans
and Cubans who were in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina, and any descendants of other Hispanics who wish to be included.

As for their contribution to the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area, they have already changed the place of Greater New Orleans much like the Spanish changed the place of the Plaza de Armas by rebuilding the surrounding edifices in Spanish architectural style. There are more Hispanic restaurants and businesses in areas like Terrytown, Kenner and Gretna. Also, they are the people rebuilding homes and businesses destroyed by the hurricane. Although they may not be doing so in any architectural style which is representative of that of their homeland, they are making a huge contribution to New Orleans by doing this rebuilding work.

Not only does the Hispanic community in New Orleans have to “imagine” its new community, but the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area also has to “imagine” itself as a new community after Hurricane Katrina. One of the many challenges New Orleanians will face in “imagining” their new community will be to include these new Hispanics and their traditions, as New Orleanians have done for other immigrant groups by embracing their traditions as elements of the culture of the entire city. New Orleans will have to once again become a “hybrid community,” incorporating the different histories, religious affiliations, languages and cultures into one to imagine the Post-Katrina New Orleans. But after all, that just means adding some more ingredients to the gumbo that is New Orleans.
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Vita

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