"Can You Tell Me Who My People Are?" Ethnic Identity Among the Hispanic-Indian People of Sabine Parish, Louisiana

Mary B. Van Rheenen

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"CAN YOU TELL ME WHO MY PEOPLE ARE?"
ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG THE HISPANIC-INDIAN PEOPLE
OF SABINE PARISH, LOUISIANA

A Thesis

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Louisiana State University and
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Master of Arts

in

The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by
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B.A., Northwestern College
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MANUSCRIPT THESSES

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements  ii
Abstract  iv

## Introduction

1. The People of Zwolle-Ebarb: A Historical Description  4
   - Colonial Period, 1700-1800  5
   - Border Unrest, 1800-1850  10
   - Indian Connection and Community Consolidation  15
   - The Zwolle-Ebarb Community Today  22

2. Identity and American Isolates  39
   - Ethnic Identity  40
   - Identity Among American Isolates  44
   - Ebarb Ethnic Identity  55
   - Fieldwork on Ebarb Ethnicity  58

3. The People's Perceptions of Themselves  61
   - Definition of the Group  61
   - The Group's Image  67
   - Terms for Their Ethnicity  71
   - Summary: Ebarb Identity Designations  83

4. The People Present Themselves  86
   - Among Outsiders  86
   - Outsiders Among Them  93
   - Blacks, the Permanent Outsiders  100
   - Summary: Group Members and Others  104

5. Community Identity and Ethnic Identification  107
   - Tamale Fiesta: Ethnic Celebration or Charicature?  108
   - Ebarb Ethnic Identity and Identifiers Reviewed  117

Bibliography  123
Appendix  133
Vita  137

Maps
   - Texas-Louisiana Region (1700-1800)  6
   - The Community Before the Lake  29
   - The Community After the Lake  31
ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the puzzle of ethnic identity for the Hispanic-Indian people of Sabine Parish. Because their unique history precludes the clear-cut ethnic identification available to immigrant American groups, the community shares the awkward social position of both the remnant Native American groups and mixed-blood communities collectively known as American Isolates. The issue of group identity for members of the Zwolle-Ebarb community has been further confounded by the internal and external stigmas attached to aspects of the group's origins as well as the negative image associated with the group's home territory.

After the people have been identified historically and genealogically, their experience is placed in the context of other American Isolates. Their ethnic identity is examined as one of the identities used in social interaction for the presentation of the self. Both insiders' and outsiders' definitions and perceptions of the group are described from this theoretical perspective. The different formal identity choices used by group members are then reviewed both for their local connotations and for the internal community divisions marked by their use.

This basic understanding of the Ebarb-Zwolle community's sense of peoplehood informs the investigation into the ways group identity manifests itself in community members' interactions with various outsiders. The inquiry into Ebarb
ethnic identity concludes by considering the annual Zwolle Tamale Fiesta. This tourist attraction advertised as an ethnic celebration seems to encapsulate the confusion about community heritage, current interethnic accommodations, and in-group differences. In conclusion, the people of the Zwolle-Ebarb community continue to interact on the basis of a unique group identity, but a tidy form of ethnic designation remains elusive.
"Can you tell me who my people are?"

The wooded hills of northwestern and west-central Louisiana conceal an unexpectedly rich cultural diversity. Half-a-day's drive from the metropolitan seaport of New Orleans or the flat fields and swamps of Cajun-French Louisiana, the land rises into hills cloaked in vast stretches of pine. Communities of half-hidden, half-forgotten people lie tucked down obscure roads or along unimpressive streams: Clifton Choctaw, Cane River Creoles of Color, Redbones, and even Chinese next to the colonial French of Natchitoches.

Immediately west of Natchitoches the community of Spanish Lake preserves a Hispanic settlement dating from the eighteenth-century capital of Texas. Further west on the very edge of Louisiana lies the related community of Ebarb --only half the length of the state, but nearly half a world away from the more celebrated centers of Louisiana.

The Ebarb-Zwolle community, located along the western border of Sabine Parish, has been traditionally Spanish-speaking and Catholic in a state where Catholics spoke French and in a portion of the state dominated by Anglo-Protestants. Community members have long been labeled Mexican with the implication that this group of 3,000 or more people represent an immigration at least as recent as
the town of Zwolle itself (1896), although the graveyard south of town dates back about a hundred years earlier. Contrary to popular belief, not only are the people not Mexican, but a substantial number associate themselves with the Apache-Chocotaw tribe. The annual Tamale Fiesta in Zwolle with its Spanish adjectives and Mexican costumes further confounds the puzzling picture of this unique group of people.

The people themselves struggle with the issue of their distinctive identity. They have lived under two highly stratified racial/ethnic systems: Spanish colonial society and the American South. In either situation, to be dark skinned and of less than absolutely white descent bound one's identity with a social stigma. Community members have faced the difficulty of wedging a third option into the present white-or-black social classifications and of projecting this identity when their complex heritage offered them no ready definition of themselves.

The tensions created by the anomalous position of being not quite Anglo-white and aggressively non-black contributed to the violent reputation associated with the Hispanic-Indian people and the territory they inhabited. Because the community falls within a region first known to American whites as the lawless No Man's Land (1809-1821), and later subjected to all the irregularities of lumber, railroad, and finally oilfield booms, outsiders have been quick to
identify community members according to the area's notorious reputation.

These factors have contributed to the people's defensive attitudes and apparent lack of consensus about their ethnicity. Beneath this surface confusion, people do possess a clear sense of who is and who is not a member of this distinctive community. An appropriate way to identify themselves, however, and the connection between community membership and ethnicity remain open to a variety of interpretations. "Can you tell me who my people are?" as more than one community member has asked a sympathetic researcher, probes for yet another perspective on this perplexing situation. Their inquiry contains echoes familiar to all who have pondered the broader issue of human identity itself. Rather than presuming to offer either universal or specific answers, the following pages explore the people's compelling question.
CHAPTER 1

THE PEOPLE OF ZWOLLE-EBARB: A HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION

"Why wouldn't they tell us? Here we are like lost chickens, and not knowing where the egg hatched" (Fieldnotes 1985-87, 295).¹

People from the Zwolle-Ebarb community sense their distinctness, but unlike immigrant ethnic groups they cannot trace a clear path back to one point of origin. Their ethnic identity remains a sensitive issue partly because the people do not know enough about their own roots to articulate what they are or refute what they know they are not (Mexicans from Mexico). As more than one person recalled: "Everybody just felt like, you know, today's today and yesterday's gone" (Interview #2, 34).² The "old heads" did not allow children to listen in on their conversations and rarely discussed their origins on any occasion—for reasons which become clearer as one examines their complex past.

¹Two series of fieldnotes will be referred to throughout: those from my own master's fieldwork (1985-87) and those collected with J. S. Shoemaker while working for the Apache-Choctaw Community of Ebarb (1982-84). Pages of these typed fieldnotes have been numbered consecutively.

²Interviews referenced simply by interview number come from my own identity research.
Colonial Period, 1700-1800

"People used to move around--like deer" (Oral history interview #26, 2).

The roots of this community stretch at least as far back as the first European settlements in east Texas and western Louisiana. After the French established a fort at Natchitoches in 1714, Spanish officials deemed it prudent to establish missions to the Caddoans in East Texas, including one to the Adaes just west of Natchitoches and one at the future site of Nacogdoches in what is now the state of Texas (Celiz 1935, 13-14; Morfi 1932, 67-68). After initial abandonment, the mission at Los Adaes was reestablished in 1721 along with a presidio or fort. This fort served as the capital of Texas for the next four decades (Bolton 1921, 225-228). Muster lists from Los Adaes (R. B. Blake Collection), early records from Natchitoches (Melrose Collection vol. 1, 260, 312, 121; D'Antoni 1970), and population reconstructions from later Spanish censuses (Shoemaker and Van Rheenen 1986) document the genealogical link between these first European settlements and current communities at Ebarb-Zwolle and Spanish Lake (Ebarb ancestry files; Gregory 1973; Pleasant, n.d.; Shoemaker and Van Rheenen 1986).

During the same period, a number of Lipan Apaches entered the Spanish and French colonial settlements. In the early 1700s the Lipans of central and south Texas found
themselves caught between the Wichita who were encroaching on Lipan Apache territory from the north and east and the Comanches who began sweeping into Lipan territories in central and south Texas from the north and west (Paulk 1964, 57; Bolton 1914 [II], 153). This population pressure forced the Lipans south of the Red River into territory the Spanish were settling and also brought them into sharper conflict with the Caddoans to the east (Moorhead 1968, 8, 203). Raids and counter-raids escalated on all sides (John 1975, 265-267; Secoy 1953, 83).

Spanish colonials recognized their vulnerability in this volatile situation and adopted a policy of playing the Native American groups against each other—or, more precisely, against the Lipans. Comanches, Caddoans, or Wichitas often joined the Spanish on raids initially intended to deter the Lipan, but then increasingly waged to take and sell Lipan captives (Dunn 1911; Bolton 1914, 185-195; Reeve 1946).

The economy along the Spanish-French frontier thrived on such illegal trade. A Comanche-Wichita alliance arranged by the French in 1747 opened channels for a three-way exchange of French weapons from Louisiana, Wichita or Caddoan produce, and Comanche booty in the form of horses, mules, and Indian captives taken in Texas (Newcomb 1961, 249-250; Bolton 1914, 65). Other Indian groups, including the Caddo and the Pawnee, also trafficked in Lipan Apache
captives (Secoy 1953, 80).

A sizable Apachean population accumulated among the Ebarb community's Hispanic ancestors. As late as 1806, the U.S. Indian agent in Natchitoches referred to the Cances, former slaves of the area who had married respectably and begun raising families (Sibley 1806, 723). French terms for the Lipan included Caney, Chanchy, Canecy, Cantcy (John 1975, 269), very possibly the source of chonchi, a term still used in western Louisiana to refer to the people of Ebarb-Zwolle and Spanish Lake (Shoemaker and Van Rheenen 1986; Gregory 1986, 19).¹

After the changing fortunes of European power brought Louisiana under Spanish control in 1763, Spanish colonial officials concluded that Spanish presence at Los Adaes was no longer necessary. In 1773 the entire Hispanic population of East Texas (about 500 by that time) was forced to relocate at the new Texas capital of San Antonio de Bexar. The East Texans remained dissatisfied with their new home. Antonio Gil Ybarbo, kinsman to the Ybarbos/Ebarbs found in the community today, was instrumental in resettling the people closer to their eastern homeland—first on the Trinity River and finally near the old mission site of Los Ais at Nacogdoches (Gregory 1973, 57, 71-72).

¹The etymology of chonchi or chonche has not been definitely established. The word may also derive from chionche, a Choctaw word for the Bee Martin (Gregory 1986, 19; Emmanuel Dreschel 1982, personal communication).
Yearly censuses first recorded in 1792 illustrate the settlers' ties with Native American populations. Over 20 people were initially censused as Indios (unbaptized Indians), some with a specific tribal designation, and at least 40 per cent of the population consistently appeared as color quebrado (broken color), mestizo (mixed), or some other term indicating Indian admixture (Blake, vol. 18, 1-184). To judge from the colonial records—including the smuggling charges eventually brought against Antonio Gil—the East Texans maintained their not-quite-legal connections with the neighboring colony of Louisiana and Indian groups throughout the region (Bolton 1905, 136; Gregory 1979).

During the late 1700s and early 1800s, additional Native Americans moved from Anglo-controlled territory east of the Mississippi into the Louisiana-Texas area. The Spanish invited Choctaws as well as others to settle in their territory, particularly in border areas where the Indians could serve as a buffer against the Anglos. After Louisiana came under American control in 1803, at least four Choctaw chiefs chose to shift closer to the more sympathetic Hispanics in East Texas (Castaneda 1950, 294, 321; Gregory 1977, 2, 5) where they settled between the Trinity and Sabine Rivers (Castaneda 1950, 225, 294, 321; U.S. Indian Affairs Bureau, roll 3, 116). Families consistently identified by oral history as Choctaw appear in records
alongside other community members during this time.

**Border Unrest: 1800-1850**

"They come over here when they were having the wars. They were fighting one with another."

After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, a dispute over the boundary between Spanish and U.S. territory resulted in the creation of a neutral zone in the people's old homeland. This neutral strip ran the length of the present Texas-Louisiana border from the Sabine River to the Arroyo Hondo just east of Natchitoches (Haggard 1945, 1047). Although a number of Ebarb ancestors held land grants in this area, no settlers except those in the northern Spanish outpost on Bayou Pierre were allowed in the region. On several occasions Spanish and American troops swept through the Strip to force unauthorized persons to move (Haggard 1945, 1063).

Community members continued in the area, however. The 1805 Spanish census from Nacogdoches lists 28 families living east of the Sabine (Blake, vol. 28, 224), and in 1805 when the Bishop of New Leon visited Los Adaes he baptized 200 children (Claireborne 1880, 264). Dr. John Sibley, U.S. Indian agent in Natchitoches, also noted a number of Indian villages in the area, and even helped one group of Choctaw locate inside the Neutral Strip somewhere west of the Adaes (Sibley 1807, 16-17). According to oral history accounts,
intermarriage between Spanish-speakers and the Choctaws in the area later strengthened community members' land claims in Louisiana (Oral history interview #17, 4).

The Neutral Strip also became a haven for outlaws, revolutionaries, and others actively indifferent to governmental control. A succession of filibuster expeditions from the Neutral Strip into Texas further disrupted settlers in the area. Beginning with an expedition in 1812 prompted by Hidalgo's revolt in Mexico, American adventurers, Hispanic freedom fighters, and allied Native Americans united in invasions and wholesale retreats that destabilized the entire East Texas region for nearly a decade (for detailed accounts see, Warren 1943). Three subsequent filibuster attempts followed the same pattern. The last one joined disappointed revolutionaries with Americans disgruntled by the 1819 treaty between the United States and Spain which settled the disputed boundary at the Sabine (Haggard 1945, 1051).

Through the course of these repeated revolutionary attempts, both Hispanic and tribal Indian people throughout the Nacogdoches district fled across the Sabine to escape Spanish troops' scorched-earth retaliation (Garrett 1939, 228). Land records from 1824 indicate that a number of these people sought permanent sanctuary on land near the former village of the Adaes (U.S. Congress, 1826, H.Doc. 50). The refugees around Natchitoches were invited to
return to Texas after Mexican independence in 1821 (Haggard 1945, 1100). Although many did, others elected to stay on the Louisiana side of the Sabine.

Hispanic settlements at Bayou Pierre, Bayou Scie or Vallecillo (present Zwolle area), and the Adaes had all been re-established by 1819 (U.S. Congress, 1826, H.Doc. 50). Individuals connected with these settlements, as well as Las Ormegas and the Three Prairies (areas slightly north of Ebarb still known by these names), provide a direct genealogical tie to current community members (Ebarb ancestry files; Pleasant n.d.). Other Ebarb ancestors remained in Mexican territory in Texas.

Unrest continued to trouble people in the Texas-Louisiana border region. In 1822, the alcalde of Nacogdoches complained to the governor about Americans settling between Nacogdoches and the Sabine (Blake vol. 10, 257). A report on the protection of Texas filed a year later further accused these settlers of stirring up the Indians to depopulate Texas and then take it over for themselves (Blake vol. 10, 296). Hayden Edwards made such an attempt to overthrow older Hispanic and Anglo settlers in 1827 after his plans to develop an empressario grant like Austin's in the Nacogdoches district had been thwarted (Warren 1943).

Tensions continued through the Texas Revolution in 1836. Despite the fact that the original residents of
Nacogdoches came to be outnumbered and pushed to the bottom of the social scale, most of the Spanish-surnamed men from the Nacogdoches area apparently either supported the Texas revolution or remained neutral. Their names appear on loyalty oaths that granted them title to land in the new Republic of Texas (Texas, General Land Office).

Indian groups north of Nacogdoches, however, became increasingly uneasy about their settlements' status. Vincente Cordova, a native of the region and former alcalde of Nacogdoches, plotted with a Mexican general in Matamoras to capitalize on both the Indians' discontent and the growing tensions between Hispanic- and Anglo-Texans. The Mexican government also commissioned Manuel Flores from the Los Adaes/Spanish Lake area to enlist the cooperation of the Cherokees and others in a reconquest of Texas.¹

Although expected aid from Mexican troops and Indian tribes like the Cherokee failed to materialize, Vicente Cordova headed north from Matamoras in May of 1838 with a force of about 60 (Nance 1963, 114). A large number of men from Nacogdoches joined them when they reached the Angelina River in July. After a minor horse-stealing incident brought this mass of men to the attention of Major-General Rusk in Nacogdoches, a militia reconnaissance reported the group numbered 120 "Mexicans" and 25 Indians. On the tenth

¹The following account owes much to J. Shoemaker's section on the Cordova Rebellion in Shoemaker and Van Rheenen 1986.
of August, Flores arrived with an additional force of 300 Indians (Nance 1963, 120).

The entire group moved toward the upper Trinity and then, for reasons which the records do not reveal, dispersed. After un successfully searching for the insurgents among the Cherokee and Kickapoo villages, Rusk's forces returned home. As an armed force, Cordova's Rebellion seems to have simply dissolved.

The repercussions of the rebellion may have included more action than the revolt itself. As one Anglo-Texan reported to President Lamar: "It is over now and we are daily catching the poor devils and I suppose we shall have a fine hanging frolic shortly . . ." (Lamar 1922 vol. 2, 208). Officials took a more tolerant stance:

"The Mexicans of Nacogdoches, it seems have never been contented . . . nor where there gross instances of wrong wanting to induce them to discontent . . . ." (Lamar 1922 vol. 2, 219).

In the end, 33 men were captured, tried for treason in January of 1839, declared not guilty, and dismissed. Of the additional 97 men who were to be brought to trial during the next court term in April, only 6 could be found; these were also released. A murder charge in connection with the horse-stealing incident listed another 20 men; only 2--still being held for the first indictment--could be located (Blake vol. 53, 329-338).

Where the rest of these men went remains unclear. Most sources claim the rebels fled to Mexico or Louisiana. By
1840 six men who had been indicted appear in census records for the Zwolle-Ebarb area (U.S. Census returns, Louisiana, 1840). The Texas Congress had ordered the sale of all property confiscated from the rebels. Additional pressures brought to bear against the likes of the Cordova rebels might be mirrored in the decision of the new city fathers of Nacogdoches to build a courthouse over the site of the old Hispanic graveyard. Anti-Hispanic feeling did not decrease during the annexation of Texas and the resulting Mexican-American war in the 1840s.

Although community founders who do not appear in Louisiana by 1840 may have remained in Texas, in all probability they simply eluded census takers in 1840 or sought temporary refuge with their Indian allies. By 1850 all major families presently associated with the community appear in the Sabine Parish area.

The Indian Connection and Community Consolidation: 1850-1900

"I believe everyone in Sabine Parish is a little kin to the Indians" (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 404).

Numerous oral history accounts speak of family heads coming to the Ebarb area "when the war ended." Whether or not these vague accounts refer to the Cordova Rebellion or one of the many other conflicts the people suffered remains a matter of speculation. A number of community founders also reputedly came from Oklahoma (meaning a region to the
north "where all the Indians are").

Oral history accounts refer to two types of Native Americans: "regular wild Indians" (mecos or chichimecos in the local dialect, Gregory 1986, 17) and certain community ancestors. Community founders consistently identified as full-blood Indians appear in records like land grants that did not ordinarily include tribal Indians (Texas, General land office; Shoemaker and Van Rheenen 1986, sect. 5, 4). This suggests that although outsiders may have seen these Spanish-speakers simply as "Mexicans," differentiation within the group was more refined.

Such a distinction between Indians who were a part of the community (i.e. Spanish-speaking, Roman Catholic, non-tribal) and Indians who were not remained an important one throughout Spanish America (Gonzalez 1967, 75). The Spanish colonial censuses for this area ranked people according to degree of pure European (preferably Spanish) ancestry. Once Indians became baptized Spanish citizens, they would often appear on record as mestizo (here referring to Spanish rather than any other European-native admixture) or some other term which implied European ancestry.

Available Spanish census records (1792-1806) provide ample evidence of this whitening effect. Of the 200 Adaesanos and Ebarb ancestors appearing in these records, over three-fifths were censused at one time or another with some degree of Indian blood, and over a quarter of the total
sample (53) became "whiter" (Shoemaker and Van Rheenen 1986, 10, appendix B; based on censuses for the Nacogdoches District in Texas, Blake vol. 23). Indians gradually came to be considered *mestizo* or some other mixed-blood term while *mestizos* shifted to being Spanish.

Despite community founders' earlier determination to be whiter than Indians, numerous oral history accounts reflect continuing ties with Native Americans. Community members hunted with Indians, conversed with Indians, learned cures from the Indians, and shared food with Indians traveling to a stick-ball playing field within sight of the present Ebarb Road (Louisiana 482). During the allotment of Indian land in Oklahoma (beginning with the Dawes Commission in the 1890s and concluding sometime in the 1930s) several community members were considered Indian enough to be approached with promises of land (Oral history interview #149, 2-3).

Two Choctaw settlements lay on the edges of the more Hispanic settlement. Some of the surnames connected with these villages initially appeared in Nacogdoches along with other community members; other families have a detailed oral tradition of coming back from Oklahoma. In addition to speaking Choctaw or perhaps Mobilian, these families also spoke Spanish, went to dances with Ebarbers, attended Catholic mass, and intermarried.

Yet perhaps because they held on to a tribal
affiliation and retained some Choctaw customs (Shoemaker and Van Rheenen 1986, sect. 5, 4), members of these families were distinguished from the larger Ebarb-Zwolle community. One man, born before 1910, recalls being labelled a meco or chichimeco (regular wild Indian) by other Spanish-speakers (Gregory 1986, 17). Another man, now in his fifties, had been called a "dirty Indian" by his classmates in the Many school system (Oral history interview #149, 3).

Community members closely associated with other Indians hiding from the Civil War. Although a number of community members enlisted for the duration of the war, these came largely from the settlements oriented to the north towards Mansfield where the Southern Anglo world had already been established. Many more graphic stories survive of men who hid out in the river bottom, cleverly escaped from recruiting officers, or were forcibly carried off to war--never to be seen again. The number and detail of these accounts points to the lack of investment these people had in the Southern cause or Southern society.

Perhaps through no coincidence, individuals accredited with special powers--midwives, herbal doctors, malojos1--all came from families considered least "white." Conversely, past community leaders appear to have been more acculturated

1According to community lore, malojos have the power of the evil eye which causes sickness or even death. Although the last midwife died over 10 years ago, a few malojos are still known. Sepulvado 1977 gives more details on community sickness and curing.
and perceived as descending more directly from Europeans. Emmanuel Martinez, for instance, owned farms rented to other community members, served as deputy sheriff, participated in the local militia during the Civil War, and prevented the total extermination of the Choctaw village on his land during some dimly remembered incident of genocide. His son S. S. Martinez (1875-1944) owned a store in Zwolle, became a justice of the peace, and also served as a person to turn to in lean times for credit or extra work.

These prominent community members—or those with similar aspirations—were most likely to actively discourage or even forbid their children from speaking Spanish. As the community interacted more and more with the white Southern world, Spanishness (let alone Indianness) became an increasing social handicap.

Around the turn of the century a number of important changes pointed in this direction. In 1896 the Kansas City Southern line came through a mile or so north of Vallecillo/Bayou Scie. This earlier Spanish settlement center was relocated and renamed on the whim of a Dutch railroad investor after his hometown of Zwolle in the Netherlands (Sabine Index Sept. 9, 1979, 9D).

Family surnames were also subjected to foreign influence. The gradual transformation from Bermea to Malmay can be traced through decades of census records; the switch from Ybarbo or Ebarbo to E Barb, Garcia to Garcie, del Rio to
Rivers, or Parrilla to Parrie followed more quickly on the heels of formal education. Sharnaca, for instance, seems to have been changed into the Ezernack of today on the insistence of a school teacher. In some cases, however, people anglicized their own names as a conscious effort to blend in better. The increase in formal schooling also hastened the switch to the English language. As one older woman recalled, they didn't speak Spanish around schoolaged children for fear it would "mess up their little minds."

During this same period lumbering became important (Burns 1978, 79). Since land along the hills and the river bottom had seemed plentiful, the people were careless about exact titles or paying back taxes. In a number of instances, lumber companies paid up taxes or connived the backwoodsmen into signing away their squatters' rights (Oral history interviews #29, 3; #38, 2; #68, 2). The sawmills also brought black workers into Zwolle who settled in two sections of town known as the Quarters. Community members came to work in the mills as well. Some followed sawmill and timber work into Texas and as far south as Lake Charles. At times Ebarb men were given positions of some authority because of their ability to translate to Mexican workers (Oral history interview #115, 5).

The virgin stands of timber in Louisiana and East Texas had been cut over by the early 1900s (Burns 1979, 16D). Previously, most community members subsisted by hunting,
raising their own staples and vegetables, keeping cattle and hogs on the open range in the woods, and growing a bit of cotton for cash (Ebarb ancestry files). Agricultural censuses show a decrease in acres of cotton harvested in Sabine Parish from 1925 on (U.S. Agricultural Censuses 1900-1950). Many older community men speak of earning cash by cutting ties, poles or pilings—easily enough done with the volunteer timber remaining on their own lands. The number of farms and farmers fell after 1935, reflecting perhaps the greater variety of job opportunities brought on by the discovery of the Zwolle oilfields in the 1930s (U.S. Agricultural Censuses 1900-1950; Sabine Index Sept. 6, 1979, 1-2B).

As the changes mentioned above indicate, the Zwolle oilfields, the lumbering boom, and the building of the railroad increased contact and conflict with the outside world. The community's unrecognized system of maintaining social order (which included family retribution for offenders), coupled with different standards of appropriate male behavior, a low tolerance for alcohol, and the addition of the rougher elements associated with transient work like the oil fields gave Zwolle and Ebarb a reputation for violence that persists in exaggerated form even today. Older residents recall a time when Zwolle was known as the roughest town on the Kansas City Southern line.

Shortly after the town of Zwolle had been founded, a
shoot-out between the first town marshall and a member of the Hispanic-Indian community left both men dead. Accounts of who fired first and who acted in self-defense vary in official white (Sabine News June 6, 1973; Sabine Index Sept. 9, 1979, 6B) and oral community versions. Such a highly publicized incident contributed to the area's negative image—and the local stereotype of the Spanish-speaking population.

The complex strands which twist into the present fiber of the community combine the outside stigma of being from Zwolle or Ebarb, the local stigma of being non-Anglo, the inner stigma of being less-than-totally Spanish, as well as the veiled recollection of threatened death and forced flight associated with an unwanted ethnicity. Although the scraps of remaining oral history show the old heads must have remembered the remnant Choctaw, the captive Lipans, the frontier French and Hispanic settlers, perhaps they had ample cause to forget.

The Ebarb-Zwolle Community Today

"I see nothing wrong with continuing the old culture and incorporating new ideas. That seems to me an excellent way to progress" (Interview #3, 1).

This former tribal council member's ideal has met with limited success. Aspects of the old ways have been retained: as late as 1970 over 200 people in Sabine Parish
still claimed Spanish as their mother tongue (U.S. Census 1970, General population characteristics, 316). Progress, as defined in standard American terms, has been attained: according to a needs assessment survey conducted in 1985,1 one person out of every six community households had at least entered college (Faine 1986, 68). Yet as a reading of the people's history indicates, those most likely to retain the old ways were least likely to progress. The present has brought the community in Sabine Parish a number of mixed blessings as well as several paradoxical attempts to recapture the group's heritage.

In the 1980 United States Census, 2,028 people out of a total parish population of 25,280 claimed Spanish origin (U.S. Census 1980, General population characteristics, 136). Additionally, close to 800 (774) identified themselves as Native American (U.S. Census 1980, 15). This number falls between an estimate of Indians done in the 1970s (700) and house-by-house survey of the "Apache-Choctaw Community" (895) done in 1980 (Roche 1982, 65, 69).

Based on the 1980 Spanish-origin data--which designates location and could include people who consider themselves Native or European Americans--over half of the community

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1The Institute for Indian Development, a private, non-profit organization, surveyed all nine federally and state recognized Louisiana tribes about their perceived needs in six areas: housing, employment and income, education, transportation, health care, crime. J. Shoemaker conducted the survey for the Ebarb community during the summer of 1985.
members centered in the Ebarb area (ward 5), nearly one
fifth clustered around Zwolle (ward 8), with additional
concentrations in the parish seat of Many (ward 4) and the
The map on page 31 details these areas. Those familiar with
this larger community estimate that 1,000-2,000 members also
live in the Shreveport-Bossier City area (Gregory 1983,
personal communication).

Since the turn of the century, the majority of
community men have been employed in the lumber industry.
According to the 1985 community survey, 61 per cent of the
men work in manufacturing, primarily wood products
associated with the sawmill in Zwolle and the plywood mill
in Florien, and an additional 22 per cent "work in the
woods" logging. The remainder of the male work force holds
various professional and semi-professional jobs or, prior to
recent problems in the Louisiana oil industry, worked
off-shore (Faine 1986, 6, 48, 52).

Nearly half of the women employed outside the home hold
clerical or service positions, the others in the public work
force being about equally divided between professional or
semi-professional, sales, and manufacturing jobs (Faine
1986, 6). Those in the private work force are usually
employed in the tasks of raising and preserving food,
tending children or elderly parents, and sometimes making
tamales or--less frequently--quilts for sale.
Employment ranked as a top concern in this needs assessment survey. Being tied directly to the national economy through the timber and oil industries has left the people vulnerable to the ups and downs of distant markets (Faine 1986, 6-7, 58). The people's preference for maintaining strong community and family ties place additional pressure on the local employment market. The generations that came of age in the 1950s and 1960s found it impossible to remain in the Ebarb-Zwolle area and regularly left for Shreveport, Houston, or Port Arthur in search of work. A small colony went to Las Vegas, initially to work in mines in that region (Interview #2). People forced to search for employment elsewhere usually continue close contact with the community and often return to Sabine Parish to retire.

Community members commonly perceive everyone below the highest social strata as "just poor people," even though the community boasts a host of public servants (including chief of police, police juryman, schoolboard member, and town councilmen), has produced at least one PhD and a Catholic monsigneur, and contains several successful entrepreneurs. Nearly a third of the families surveyed do fall below the poverty line, compared to less than a fifth of the total parish population (Faine 1986, 66).

Close family and community ties may affect the leveling community members speak of. Families tend to settle in clusters that include three and four generations, and a high
value is placed on the image of mutual assistance. For instance, a man advised his elderly sister who was struggling to make it in Shreveport to move back down to Zwolle: "You got enough kinpeople here for them to feed you" (Interview #20, 16).

The Catholic church has also served as a focal point for community life. The landscaped grounds, well-tended cemetery, impressive sanctuary and rectory buildings, and often-used gymnasium at St. Joseph's in Zwolle provide an important visible image of the people's pride and distinction. The daughter church of St. Anne's in Ebarb sits next to the schoolgrounds, right in the center of community activity.

People take their Catholicism seriously. One woman with a heart condition nearly had an attack when she dreamed her daughter was about to enter a Baptist church. Church workers have remarked on the high proportion of men who regularly participate, a pattern atypical of other Latin communities where such matters are often left to the women (Sr. Kate Regan, pastoral assistant St. Joseph's, 1984, personal communication). A similar source described the people as "Catholic to the bone" (Interview #15).

If religion goes to the bone, family ties sink through to the marrow. After an initial introduction, community members even attempt to identify newcomers according to their family connections—"Are your parents still living?"
"Are you married?" "How many brothers and sisters do you have?"—rather than the more standard inquiries into occupation and geographical origin. Newlyweds frequently locate on or near their family's plot. This pattern has considerable time-depth, creating settlements named by family nickname or surname (see Roche 1982, 77, for similar observations).

Individuals invariably laugh about these family nicknames as if they had been caught in some private, community joke. The nicknames' use and etymologies imply special insider's knowledge. The nicknames serve on one level to distinguish the many sets of people who share the same last name, yet appropriate use of them is limited to reference. Although community members or other intimates may use them in joking or in anger, to address someone by family nickname in public (as uninitiates like outside spouses and new priests have had the misfortune of doing) constitutes a serious social blunder (see Hoyer 1976 for similar phenomena in the villages of northern Spain).

Family nicknames derive from non-English words (Ho minty or minty—Choctaw or Mobilian, Ho ming—possibly Choctaw, Sap[po]—Spanish, Chey—Spanish, Pilau—unknown), Anglicized versions of an ancestor's name (Taylor for Telesforo, J. O. for Jose, Billy for Herculano), or animals linked to a particular patriarch (Bear, Hawk, Sap[po]—frog, Goat). This last category, in particular, led early
researchers to hypothesize that the nicknames represented the vestiges of an Indian clan system (Donald Lester Sepulvado and H. F. Gregory 1982, personal communication).

While the clan hypothesis has yet to be substantiated or disproven, the pattern of nicknaming clearly reflects inner community structure. When I innocently asked a woman whether her husband belonged to a particular nicknamed family, she exclaimed, "No, thank God, or I wouldn't have married him!" (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 2-3). Such strong reactions hint at some stigma connected with the nicknamed groups.

Those extended families without nicknames rarely or only grudgingly acknowledge kinship with nicknamed groups (Ebarb ancestry files demonstrate genealogical connections between nearly all individuals with the same surname). Branches of families without nicknames tend to be more acculturated and traditionally claimed more direct European descent. Like the Martinezes mentioned above, these "whiter" community members often served as community leaders who brokered for their people with an outside world where they moved with greater ease.

Nicknamed branches of families, in contrast, tend to look darker, frequently retained their Spanish dialect longer, and continued to follow a backwoods lifestyle. Individuals from these families generally acknowledge a stronger Indian connection. In short, nicknaming seems to
THE HISPANIC-INDIAN COMMUNITY OF SABINE PARISH BEFORE THE LAKE
echo the colonial social distinctions based on degree of Native American ancestry, and to reinforce the stigma of Indian identity.

As the map indicates, a number of family settlements are known by these nicknames. The distribution of Hispanic-Indian people in the parish falls into four broad areas, roughly marked by the San Patricio and San Miguel Creeks1:

- **Between the creeks**
  - Ebarb Road, Ebarb
  - Beartown (Ebarb)
  - Sepulvado (Minty) Loop
  - Billy (Sepulvado) Settlement
  - Garcie Loop

- **Across the creek, north**
  - Procell (Chey) and Paddie Settlements
  - Sulfur Springs/The Ormegas
  - Round Lakes

- **Across the creek, south**
  - Grady Hill/Coon Ridge
  - Loring
  - Hurricane or Choctaw Creek

- **Zwolle, periphery**
  - Laroux Settlement
  - St. Joseph's Church area.

Kin ties reinforced deeply rooted settlement attachments. People relied on these immediate neighbors for assistance, called them together for country dances, and looked for trouble when residents from other locales arrived at these functions uninvited. Some of these settlements developed reputations (as did the entire Ebarb-Zwolle-Noble area to

1In English, community members call these streams creeks; official parish maps label them bayous.
THE HISPANIC-INDIAN COMMUNITY OF SABINE PARISH TODAY
some extent) not unlike urban defended neighborhoods (see Suttles 1972).

This strong identification with specific areas suffered a severe jolt in the mid-1960s when the bottomlands along Sabine River were flooded to create the Toledo Bend Reservoir. The project would provide power and water control; as a side benefit recreation and employment would also increase. Construction was well underway by 1963; by 1966 the dam was in place (Sabine Index Jan. 4, 1963, 1).

The reservoir inundated major portions of the community, wiping out all of the Blue Lake Community, Beartown, and Sulfur Springs. Water backed up the two major creeks, cutting the wider Ebarb community off from the two sections directly north and south. The priest at St. Ann's pushed, unsuccessfully, to have the bridge across San Patricio replaced. For a time children from the Paddie and Procell settlements ferried across to school; eventually they were forced to bus all the way up to Converse.

The lake severely reduced enrollment at the Ebarb School, a situation which recently threatened its existence (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 48). According to one informant, Ebarb was to be cut off from direct access to Zwolle, too, until Paul Ebarb, community leader and founder of the general store in Zwolle, insisted that a bridge be put over San Miguel (Oral history interview #37, 7).

Family settlements scattered as people scrambled to buy
land and relocate wherever they could. The money they received for their home places could not begin to replace what they had lost. In the words of one widow who left her farmstead in Sulfur Springs for a low-rent duplex in Zwolle: "That lake messed up so many people, and I never have got a dime's worth out of it." She had been living in Zwolle for twenty years, but she emphatically concluded, "I haven't gotten used to it yet" (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 391).

Even those who merely moved from Beartown to the Sepulvado Loop felt dislocated; others were forced to move towards Converse, Many, or further south along the newly-formed lake. People living away from the community had difficulty reconnecting with friends and extended family. One young man who had been in combat in Vietnam at the time returned to find everything he had known gone. He has yet to recover from the psychic shock.

In the eyes of many local people, their desires had been deliberately brushed aside. Local voters originally rejected the proposal, but were overridden in a state-wide referrendum. "They said there's nothing along that lake anyway but swampland and trashy people," one former resident bitterly recalled (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 317). In actual fact, the state-wide referrendum passed in every Louisiana parish except three, and none of them were in the local area (Ammon 1979). The affected people's sense of injustice has caused them to exaggerate this as well as other points: one
adamant lake-hater even claims the whole nation voted on the issue.

People have blamed the lake for everything from a shift in weather patterns and the arrival of fire ants to moral decay and the rapid death of the old heads—brought on by their forced removal to the unfamiliar confines of town. Traditionalists as well as those nostalgic for the things they might have already left keenly felt that their homes and their former way of life had been wrenched away from them. Loss of major stretches of timber spelled the end of open range. People who had relied on this free fodder for cattle and hogs could no longer afford to raise their own meat.

The number of outsiders moving into the area hastened these developments. Many traditionalists resented this invasion of strangers. People more detached from the traditional concerns of the people or those dedicated to community progress saw the influx of newcomers as a positive change. The exposure to people from different backgrounds broadened community members' world view; the newcomers' ready acceptance of them helped them to accept themselves. Community members who take this perspective also point out that the lake moved many families out of shacks and into better situations as well as increasing employment opportunities. In the words of a businesswoman from Many, "There was nothing here before" (Fieldnotes 1982-84,
The lake initially stimulated a flurry of economic activity: cafes, marinas, and bait shops sprang up to support the fishermen who crowded the landings. As fishing slowed and gas prices rose, the boom dwindled away. The ones who had lost the most with the closing of open range and former hunting tracts usually also lacked the capital to cash in on the first bonanza. They still conclude that "the lake didn't do poor people any good" (Interview #22, 4).

While the lake may have hastened the passing of traditional community ways, it also fostered a postive self-awareness. The excavation of Indian graves near Sulfur Springs just before flooding validated oral accounts of a significant Indian presence in the eyes of community members. Dr. Hiram F. Gregory, anthropology professor from Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, participated in the dig. He had begun to make contact with the community prior to this, and he and students of his from the community became instrumental in organizing the Indian Program. In addition, a number of local festivals sprang up to cater to tourists, including the Zwolle Tamale Fiesta which glorified a culinary ethnic marker and proported to celebrate the people's Spanish heritage.

Shortly after Gregory began teaching at Northwestern, his search for Spanish speakers coincided with questions from two local anthropology students, Danny Ebarb and Lester
Sepulvado, about their Indianness. With Gregory's encouragement, Sepulvado worked with established local leaders to organize a community council at Ebarb. The group was first acknowledged by other Indian leaders in the state, then legally recognized by the state legislature (Gregory 1986, 21). The Apache-Chocotaw Community of Ebarb, formally incorporated in 1977, focused on economic development programs aimed at the population concentration in Ebarb (Papers of incorporation, tribal files).

Part of the organization's program included the preparation of a petition for federal recognition. Native American groups which have been ignored or overlooked by the Bureau of Indian Affairs may petition the federal government to be recognized as an Indian tribe. The petition must document the group's origins from historic Indian tribes and their continuous corporate existence as a distinct group.

The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) had placed volunteers with several other Louisiana communities including the Tunica-Biloxi, Houma, and Clifton Choctaw. This voluntary service organization, somewhat similar to the U.S. Peace Corps which was modeled after it, unites branches of the Mennonite and Brethren churches throughout the United States and Canada to act on the message of Christ in deed as well as word. In North America MCC volunteers become involved on request in peace and justice concerns like soup kitchens, adult literacy programs, the death penalty,
low-income health clinics, and Native American issues.

Ebarb tribal leaders contacted MCC and arranged to have two volunteers begin the genealogical and historical background required for a petition. I and my co-worker, Janet Shoemaker, served in that capacity from 1982-1984; we have completed detailed community genealogy files and an ethnohistory of the group.

The Apache-Choctaw organization's local name--the Indian Program--points out a surface similarity between it and the Fiesta. Both have been seen first as a source of material benefit and secondarily as a vehicle for defining and projecting a positive image of the people.

Just precisely how the people ought to be presented, as these two options indicate, remains an open question. Community members cannot point back to some recognized homeland for a ready-made ethnic identity. As a reconstruction of their history reveals, the people represent a blend of Native American and colonial European populations unique to the Louisiana-Texas borderland. Because of the stigma of slavery, the threat of genocide or removal, and the internalization of the colonial caste system, within the community Indianness had become devalued almost to the point of being lost to conscious memory. Outside the community, Spanishness in the form of non-Anglo language, non-Anglo last names, or non-Anglo social control met with equally negative reactions. Community members have
been reluctant to draw attention to the differences between themselves and the dominant, whiter or more European groups.

Community members who have recently begun to claim those differences as part of a distinctive identity lacked a ready means of answering questions about their ethnicity. Past associations have stigmatized possible answers whether they be Spanish, Indian, or simply Zwolleite. The people of the Zwolle-Ebarb area face a problem similar to other American Isolate groups whose anomalous roots preclude simple answers to questions of group identity.

The ambiguities of falling between white and black, of having uncertain answers about past origins, of being both European and Native but perhaps perceived as neither, increase the difficulties of establishing an identity acceptable to the people themselves and validated by others. The Zwolle-Ebarb people, like members of other American Isolate groups, confront uncomfortable social options which may have caused the old heads to willfully forget what the inquiries of current generations attempt to recover.
"What they want to be is white, but there's no way they can" (Fieldnotes 1984-86, 43).

"We was equalized like niggers, a Negro. That's what we was. They called us 'Mexicans,' and we wasn't" (Oral history interview #5, 1).

"We consider ourselves a different group, I call it, from the white people" (Interview #20, 21).

The community members quoted above illustrate how their ethnicity, like other identities, becomes socially defined through contacts and perceived contrasts with others. A people often have no name for themselves, other than simply 'the people,' until their interaction with others makes them aware of their distinctiveness. Conversely, a people's image of themselves may not correspond to the way others insist on reacting to them, as the first and second speakers' remarks indicate. Along with members of other American Isolates, people from the Zwolle-Ebarb community have often faced this latter situation in part because of the awkward fit between their group and readily defined social categories. These three opening excerpts reflect the socially negotiated, sometimes painful interpretations of Ebarb identity and point to the fundamental process of situating others before meaningful social discourse can proceed.
Ethnic Identity

The theoretical idea that ethnicity, like any other social identity, acquires meaning through social interaction rests on the concept of the self. An individual's sense of self develops through the process of becoming a social actor. To function as a human, social being, I must be aware of my actions, of how others might respond to those actions, and how those potential reactions should guide my subsequent behavior (Stone 1962, 117; Blumer 1969, 12). I must be able to see my own person as an object or a "me," (James 1892 [1970], 373), before I can project how others view and respond to my actions. As Hewitt neatly summed it up, the sense of self involves "the individual becom(ing) part of their own experience" (1979, 69).

Once I develop the ability to view myself from the outside, I can react on the basis of this essential insight into how others interpret my behavior (McCall and Simmons 1981, 83; Stryker 1980, 59). These actions can then acquire social meaning; they can become symbols used to construct a mutual system of interpretations (Blumer 1969, 11-12). A circular relationship exists between the self which develops through social discourse (Stone 1962, 113) and human social life which rests on the actors' awareness of themselves as social actors (their selfhood) (Goffman 1955, 247-248).

A social actor has at his or her disposal a number of identities to assume for the performance of any given social
scene. While these identities represent significant aspects of the individual's self, the significance of a given identity varies with the situation (McCall and Simmons 1978, xii, 80). Depending on who he is doing business with, for example, an Ebarb elder may choose to present himself as a grateful elderly American dependent on a fixed income, a competent white retiree from the work force, or a genial Ebarb community member and kinsman.

Identity involves a two-way process, however. At the same time that an individual presents his or her chosen identities, the other interactants are also assigning identities to him or her (McCall and Simmons 1978, 82-83). For example, a former Ebarb resident attempted to establish himself as a leader in the community where he had married and become a prosperous agri-businessman. This identity was not validated by his neighbors who continued to see him as an outsider and an Ebarber (Interview #2).

This illustration summarizes the major points of the concept of identity: Individuals announce their identity, others place the individual, the meaning of that identity develops in the process of social interaction, and when that identity is consistently validated (or stubbornly nurtured) it becomes a meaning of the self (Stone 1962, 103).

The case of the would-be leader also points out the distinction I see between two basic kinds of identity: ascribed and projected. Ascribed identities—age, sex,
nativity, race—are arbitrarily assigned. Projected identities—avocation, religious commitment, degree of sophistication—are chosen by the individual. The potential to exercise choice distinguishes these two categories. Race, for instance, may become a projected identity among groups like the Houma or even the Ebarb who have more than one option available.

Ascribed and projected identities resemble Stone's situational and circumstantial statuses to some degree. According to Stone, circumstantial statuses cannot be manipulated while situational ones offer possibilities for maneuvering (Stone 1970, 250-259). If identity is seen as social currency, however, status might be considered the current market value. Status places one in some structured hierarchy which identity, in any given situation, may or may not reflect.

Ethnicity often forms an essential basis of an individual's social status (Barth 1969a, 30), and ethnic identity often serves as one of the basic categories for patterning interactions (Barth 1969b, 132; Hannerz 1976, 432). The following definition of an ethnic group taken from an exhaustive work on the subject reflects the influence interaction and ethnic identity have on each other:

a reference invoked by people who share a common historical style (which may only be assumed), based on overt features and values, and who, through the process of interaction with others, identify themselves as sharing that style (Royce 1982, 18).
Overt features such as cultural, linguistic, and racial differences often become associated with membership in an ethnic group, but as the quote implies the boundaries of ethnicity are really determined through "sociocultural interaction" (Lawless 1982, 113). Persons who identify with an ethnic group often include these differences (Barth 1969b) or set themselves apart despite apparent similarities (Blom 1969, 74-85).

Ethnic identity, like the other identities an individual has at his or her disposal, forms through the interplay between an internal perception of the self (I am or am not part of "them") and external social reaction (you are not "us") (Epstein 1978, xii-xiii; Barth 1969a, 24). It follows that an individual has some leeway in choosing whether or not to acquire or project an ethnic identity (Epstein 1978, xiv, 13). For example, a young man from Ebarb went off in search of himself and returned from a sojourn with some Sioux in the Dakotas with plaited hair, tepee, medicine bag of peculiar herbs, Lakota religious doctrine, and—in short—a "bona fide" Indian identity. In more reoccurring manner, Pathan tribesmen in Afghanistan would associate with another ethnic group if they could no longer live up to the requirements of a respectable Pathan identity (Barth 1969b, 125, 131).

In these instances ethnic identity represents a conscious choice. In other cases, ethnic identity is
ascribed by the other interactants. Lapps, particularly in the past, would prefer to present themselves as full Norwegians, although sometimes—like the gentleman farmer from Ebarb—their ascribed ethnic identity comes to the forefront (Eidheim 1969, 39-57). Such stigmatized identities can negatively affect the individual's self-concept (Faubin 1970, 15-16), since others continue to ascribe the negative characteristics of the group to the individual (Suttles 1972, 35; this also occurs with territorial identities, an important factor in the Ebarb-Zwolle area).

Since the perception of any identity is open to some negotiation, however, the members of a group may mobilize to change the meaning of their membership. In recent years, Lapps have viewed their identity with pride and used this common identity to unite as a political interest group.¹

Identity among American Isolates

Indian identity in Louisiana may parallel the fortunes of being Lappish. During the 1970s when public programs and public awareness peaked, Indian groups in the state came out of hiding to reassert their unique identity (see Booker 1973). Attempts to promote an identity for a group's or

¹Some scholars take this further to interpret ethnicity as part of large-scale interaction involving competition for scarce natural resources (Lawless 1982, 112). That may link at some level with the symbolic interactionist approach followed here, but is beyond the scope of this study.
individual's benefit generally draw on positive, recognized identity symbols (Royce 1982, 221). These ethnic markers also serve to signal identity to in-group members, providing affirmation and access to a less stressful backstage interaction space (Royce 1982, 187). Usually, these symbols have some historical roots, although they may shift as circumstances change. For instance, huipils have come to signal pre-Columbian Mayan Indian identity among the Lowland Maya of the Yucatan even though evidence suggests the aboriginal dress differed considerably (Salisbury 1986, 41). In a parody of this situation, isolated eastern Native American communities often resort to generic Indian symbols like the bead-work and war bonnets of Plains groups which are readily recognized by other members of society (Lerch 1985).

The difficulty of establishing a safe or acceptable identity created a problem for these pockets of people who managed to escape the Indian removals of the nineteenth century or made their own peace with surrounding whites. Various mixed-blood communities throughout the eastern United States faced similar difficulties. In the past, when the official identity options were limited to white or non-white (generally meaning black), many of these people chose to keep a low profile and hopefully pass unnoticed, suffering at the least from benign neglect.

Physically, this often included a retreat to less accessible, least desirable areas in swamps (the Houma),
unproductive hills (Ebarb), or deep timber (Clifton Choctaw). Although arguments have been made for viewing such groups within the context of their surroundings (Peterson 1971, 121-122), that context usually involved social as well as physical isolation. For the convenience of discussion, I have grouped these American Isolates into three categories: remnant Indians, mixed-race communities, and miscellaneous anomalies (like Spanish-speakers in Louisiana).

A surprising number of Native Americans remained scattered throughout the Southeast. It took an act of courage for many of these groups to step out from the shadows and show themselves, especially given the risks of exposing oneself as non-white in the more overtly racist sections of the country. Virginia Indians recognized that danger when they began to organize in the early 1900s (Roundtree 1979, 40). The Alabama Creek also made a conscious decision to come out of the woods, so to speak, and project a distinct group identity (Paredes 1979, 131).

The Catawba Indians, on the other hand, had maintained a separate, acknowledged presence dating from their initial contact with European and Afro-Americans (Hudson 1970, 52). The content of that distinction has disappeared, however, through the generations until the Catawba remain "Indian in the social sense but less so in a genetic sense, and even less so in a cultural sense" (Hudson 1970, 118). The Jena
Choctaw and Tunica-Biloxi in Louisiana had also continued as
dim third parties in the local black/white racial scheme,
but in contrast to the Catawba these two groups have been
actively pursuing their distinct identity (Downs 1979; Faine
1985b, 23, 34).

The situation of racially-mixed groups with a strong
Native American component presents added identity diffi-
culties. Among the Houma of south Louisiana, it was not
unheard of for a family to have two children censused as
white, two as Indian, and two as black (Helen Gindrat,
governor's commissioner on Indian affairs, 1982, personal
communication). Though many of the people have relatively
little black admixture, establishing a locally recognized
Indian identity has been a major undertaking (Stanton 1971,
85; see also Bowman and Curry-Roper 1982).

The Lumbees, who have been established in North
Carolina since the early 1800s, have faced an inverse swing
in fortune. When a post-Civil War group of Lumbees called
Lowry's Bandits kept the white law-and-order forces at bay
for close to ten years, local whites found it more
comfortable to emphasize the Indian component in the people
who had defied them for so long (Evans 1979, 50-53). The
Clifton Choctaw of Louisiana, who may have some Lumbee
antecedents, promoted their Indian identity partly to parry
the greater discrimination of being labelled black (see
Other tri-racial groups in the state do not seem to emphasize their Native American ancestors. Little information exists on the people outsiders have labeled Redbones, perhaps because these people prefer to remain in the relative safety of obscurity (Beale 1972, 706; Bertrand 1955). A group called Freejacks by their neighbors (but identified ethnographically by the psuedonym of the Fifth Ward Settlement) also continue in isolated "social limbo" (Posey 1975, viii). Creoles of Color, including the people on Cane River, have a similar French-Spanish and Afro-American origin. They appear to maintain an identity as colorful although perhaps not quite as socially sanctioned as other French-speaking Louisianians (Woods 1972, 8).

Clusters of Spanish-speaking Louisianians have been marginally more acceptable to their whiter neighbors. In the past, the people of Spanish Lake, a community between Ebarb and Natchitoches, have found it convenient to attempt to pass as French (Interview #22; see also Pleasant 1986).

Some individuals in Ebarb have used a similar ploy; many more simply became hostile at any attempts to determine their ethnicity. Today, segments of the group have become members of the Apache-Choctaw Community of Ebarb; some of these people are also instrumental in the Zwolle Tamale Fiesta which celebrates the group's Hispanic roots.

Unlike these other two traditionally Spanish-speaking groups, the Islenos of St. Bernard Parish more closely
conform to the common American immigrant pattern. They have a clear point of European origin to serve as a reliable reference for their unique identity (MacCurdy 1952; Spitzer 1985, 80).

These American Isolates share the problem of not matching generally recognized social categories. They do not quite fit the standard American mold, as defined by local whites, and some of these darker people appear close to being almost black. This dilemma suggests a juxtaposition (see chart on following page) between American Isolates' socially ascribed identities and the alternate identities the groups officially attempt, with varying success, to project.

The typology in the chart represents some of the choices and hints at some of the strategies open to these groups in establishing a socially creditable identity. In some manner the groups all contrast with local standards of whiteness—whether that standard be defined by French-speaking Catholics in South Louisiana or Anglo-Protestants from the Upland South. (Note that in other social settings these local measures of standard Americanness would be definitely nonstandard.) The degree to which these groups fail to meet this standard determines whether local whites view them as almost black or somehow a little less than absolutely white.
IDENTITY STRATEGIES OF AMERICAN ISOLATE GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDENTITY PROJECTED BY ISOLATES</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Distinctive Group</th>
<th>Immigrant American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>[Lumbee]</td>
<td>(Lumbee)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctive Group</td>
<td>Clifton</td>
<td>Creoles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant American</td>
<td>Houma</td>
<td>Redbones</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>Fifth Ward</td>
<td>Settlement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Indians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDENTITY ASCRIBED BY OTHERS</th>
<th>Not Quite Standard American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Almost Black</td>
<td>(Catawba)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jena</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tunica</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ebarb</td>
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<td></td>
<td>[Catawba]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Islenos</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Spanish</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lake</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(past identity choice)        [present identity choice]
Of the possible alternative identity options, Native or Immigrant American are the most readily recognized. Understandably enough, these choices account for all Isolate groups discussed except for the Fifth Ward Settlement, the Redbones, Creoles of Color, and perhaps the Catawba and Lumbee.

Since the termination of their legal status as a tribe, the Catawba seem to be progressing towards a standard American identity, a trend represented by past [ ] and present [ ] categories (Hudson 1970, 121). The Lumbees, who are currently pursuing tribal federal recognition, represent a reversed situation. The other three groups mentioned face the added disadvantage of not having a third at least marginally acknowledged identity option at their disposal.

The uncertain success of projecting a validated, distinctive, and relatively unknown identity may be reflected in the fact that few of the mixed groups who could appropriately make that choice (Clifton, Ebarb, Lumbee, Creole, Fifth Ward Settlement or Freejack, Redbones) attempt it. Those groups who cannot reasonably claim some sort of Indian or immigrant-derived identity have generally not risked the venture and chosen instead to remain in isolation.

The people of the Fifth Ward Settlement and Redbones communities maintain a local boundary between themselves and neighboring black populations, but otherwise fall between
black/white categories into social limbo (Posey 1975, 78). The Creoles of Color faced a similar lack of options, although their situation was buffered somewhat by their known immigrant American connection and the exceptional nature of French Louisiana (see, for instance, Woods 1972).

Before integration, these groups signalled their distinction by refusing to attend black schools and, when possible, maintaining separate schools (Beale 1972, 707; Posey 1975, 46; Woods 1972, 369). Marriage patterns also underscored the separation, with a social premium on marrying light. At least among the Fifth Ward Settlement, when group members move away they readily discard their distinct identity to blend in with standard American whites when possible (Posey 1975, 40). In the past Cane River Creoles have attempted to retain their unique sense of peoplehood (Woods 1972); again, their immigrant American connection makes this more feasible.

Lumbees face similar choices. Although they have a very positive group image—due in part to their documented resistance—in order to climb the outside American success ladder, individuals must abandon this locally reputable but not widely known identity (Evans 1979, 64). The Clifton Choctaw and the Houma Indians increase their social standing on all stages—legal, public, and personal—by assuming an Indian identity.

Legal status as a tribe provides such groups with a
governmental stamp of approval as well as making them eligible for certain material benefits and strengthening the black/Isolate boundary. The mechanics of projecting an Indian identity often climax in this bid for federal, legal recognition. Groups may petition the federal government for status as a tribe by proving that the people derived from established or historically known Native American groups and that the community has continued to function as a cohesive, distinctive tribe. The Jena, Tunica, and Houma have all submitted petitions for recognition; the Lumbee and Clifton Choctaw are laboring to prepare theirs; my work partner and I were initially asked into the Ebarb Community to begin one (Faine 1985b, 34; Evans 1979).

While the mountain of evidence required for a federal recognition petition provides ample documentary ammunition for legitimizing an Indian identity, more visible, public symbols like separate Indian schools or churches serve as more useful references.

The Houma took special pride in their own school (see special section in Bowman and Curry-Roper 1982), and the Alabama Creek also used their school as well as land claims as public statements (Paredes 1979, 138). The Baptist church in Clifton seems to have functioned in a similar manner: The building was used as both school and church (Faine 1985a, 20).

To my knowledge, members of the Hispanic-Indian
community in Sabine Parish were never denied admission to white public schools, although they may initially have felt uncomfortable there (Oral history interview #79, 2). The local Catholic churches did provide a focal point for community activity and pride, as did the Catholic school, K-6, until it closed in the late 1970s. A seemingly excessive dedication centers on the Ebarb School, K-12, today; a grant channeled through the Choctaws in Oklahoma which provides schoolchildren's supplies does vaguely connect this school with official Indianness. While none of these institutions are expressly Indian (or Spanish), they have all been distinctively associated with the group.

Public celebrations offer other means of pushing the desired collective identity before the public eye. The Alabama Creek, for instance, use an annual pow-wow as a focus of community interest and Indian identity (Paredes 1979, 138). Adopting a similar strategy, the Lumbee discovered Franklin D. Roosevelt had proclaimed September 4 National Indian Day and used the occasion to create an annual Indian celebration (Dan and Griessman 1972, 702). Other Native American groups are often invited to perform dances at these affairs and Plains Indians styles predominate throughout (Lerch 1985).

Although the Virginia Indians did not resort to this incongruity, they also wrestled with the difficulty of measuring up to public expectations of "real Indians,"
images often colored by Western movies and mythic misconceptions about the timeless, almost fossilized nature of the Noble Savage (Roundtree 1979, 29). The inaccuracies of popularly recognized ethnic symbols also plague the Zwolle Tamale Fiesta, a subject which will be taken up in greater detail in chapter 5.

Some markers of distinctive identity like the Houma's family connections are already locally recognized (Stanton 1971, 86). Individuals who consider an Indian identity a significant aspect of their selfhood may also practice specific behaviors. Ebarbers and Clifton Choctaw with a strong sense of their Indian identity have renewed interest in traditional crafts like basketmaking (see, for instance, Miller and Rich 1983; T. Sepulvado 1987); several members of the Louisiana Band of Choctaw create Indian beadwork and other jewelry; Jena Choctaw continue to pass on Choctaw animal folktales (Faine 1985b, 33). Participation in all these overt activities provides a personal marker and an individual investment in an Indian identity.

Ebarb Ethnic Identity

The question of ethnic identity among the people of Ebarb shares many points in common with other American Isolates. Strategies for promoting a definite identity—pursuing legal recognition, manipulating public symbols, choosing personal markers—follow a well-marked pattern. Resolving the issue in Ebarb, however, does not merely rest
in establishing a viable Indian identity.

When asked whether his people considered themselves Indian, a community member with an educated commitment to an Ebarb Indian identity replied: "What they want to be is white. But there's no way they can" (Fieldnotes 1985-87, 43). He did not need to add that what they don't want to be is Mexican. Given the inherent difficulties of establishing another, unique identity, an Indian identity may be considered a stable alternative.

Since the days of Los Adaes, however, the people have had an ingrained preference for emphasizing their European heritage--French, like the rest of Catholic Louisiana or, failing that, Spanish. Some enterprising community leaders have attempted to reap community advantages from both possibilities. A former tribal chairman "hustled," in his terms, for every grant and program open to the people as a state-recognized Indian tribe and initiated federal recognition activity. He was also instrumental in founding the Hot Tamale Fiesta, a celebration which contains no hint of a formal Indian identity other than, perhaps, crediting Native Americans rather than Mexicans with the creation of the tamale. Before he resigned, this community leader dedicated himself to promoting his people, regardless of any ethnic labels (see Interview #13; it is doubtful, however, whether any program could have tempted him to proclaim they were all Mexicans).
Several community families do have a long-standing, unquestioned Indian identity. Individuals from these families--the "real Indians"--often seem amused that all those people in Ebarb have decided to join them. Attempts at establishing an Indian identity are viewed with humorous absurdity by some outsiders, as well.

One young man, an elite Zwolleite whose mother came from the highest of the inner Hispanic-Indian social strata, never tired of asking whether Ms. Shoemaker and I had "found any Indians out there yet." His own joke finally collapsed when he was told that some people--doubtless his own distant kin--were on the books with as high as a 50 per cent Indian blood quantum.

While this young man obviously had some problems with the identity issue, the would-be leader mentioned at the beginning of this discussion feels "more satisfied" since this Indian business because it has given him something concrete to say about his ethnicity (Interview #2); he no longer falls between the cracks past not-quite-white.

Other community members' private remarks mirror the muddle the former tribal chairperson manipulated. The group is called Indian and then referred to as Spanish practically in the same breath (see Interviews #1; #8). As the quotes which introduced this section indicate, the people consider themselves somehow distinct--definitely not black, yet not like Anglo-Protestants, either. How they referred to this
group identity and the way it affected community members' interactions formed the focus of my fieldwork.

Fieldwork on Ebarb Ethnicity

"You are my daughters. I know you have your parents, but you are my daughters."

My work partner Janet Shoemaker (also currently conducting thesis research at Louisiana State) and I began a two-year voluntary service term for the Apache-Choctaw Community of Ebarb in 1982. Our goal was to present the people with a documented record of their origins so that they could determine whether they should seriously pursue federal recognition. A draft of that history has now been completed (Shoemaker and Van Rheenen 1986).

During these first two years, we immersed ourselves in two sources of data: (1) printed records in university libraries and public archives and (2) lived reality in the people's porches, kitchens, and community gatherings. In part because we were seen as defenseless girls far from our mamas and daddies, almost everyone received us with remarkable warmth and generosity. Although we were not trained fieldworkers, the field taught us more than we will ever realize.

Following the completion of our service terms in 1984, I began the master's program at Louisiana State with the intent of continuing our work in Ebarb. Fieldwork for this
thesis was primarily conducted from May-August 1986. Ms. Shoemaker was also involved in her own work on the area's vanishing Spanish dialect during this time.

We had previously lived in one of the trailer camps on the lake operated by a community family but catering to visiting fishermen and retired Yankees. For the summer's fieldwork, we rented a house on the Little Sepulvado Loop (see map p. 31). Our new neighbors introduced us to different networks of interaction and, unbeknownst to them, provided opportunities to observe the regular, daily exchange between households of the same extended family.

I focused my investigations on Ebarb, the region between the creeks, partly because of my greater familiarity with the people there. Ebarb also seems to be a center of population concentration and traditional identity. I counterbalanced this Ebarb-emphasis with information from the other community regions.

As a partial community member, I attended mass regularly, maintained a network of prior friendships, participated in fund-raisers and funerals, was invited to showers and weddings, avoided bingos, but became entangled in other obligations. Part way through the summer, an elderly friend on the Blue Lake Road died; we offered to stay with his childless widow on occasion and found ourselves spending nearly every weekend with this wonderful, witty woman. Although this frustrated our ideal work
schedule, it also opened doors we would have otherwise unknowingly passed. For instance, I was able to accompany this woman when she did her monthly business, a regular activity for many of the community's elderly precipitated by the arrival of social security or SSI (senior supplemental income) checks.

In addition to the information gleaned in the course of my participation in community life, I staked out several spots where identification and inter-group interaction seemed likely to occur. Among these, the most fruitful turned out to be a cafe on the northern edge of Zwolle, the Paul Ebarb General Store, several teen dances, and--of course--the Tamale Fiesta.

I also conducted interviews oriented toward people's sense of belonging to the Ebarb-Zwolle community, their system of placing people, and chosen ethnic identification. A sample of topics covered appears in the appendix. Because I aimed for open, guided conversations, I generally approached individuals I already knew well. I attempted to include a cross-section of community age, orientation, and experience; a list including this information (but deleting interviewees' personal names) also appears in the appendix. I began to understand the meaning the people's distinct identity holds for them first by listening to the way they talked about themselves.
"That's another world . . . Even Many, that's a different group of people all together--different ethnic group, different religion, different ideals, different--it's just another world" (Interview #13, 3).

Both outsiders and group members form a fairly stable consensus on the territory, genealogical connections, language, religion, and traditions that mark the parameters of the community. The ethnic labels ascribed to or projected by the members of the group, however, continue to be negotiated and redefined. Both of these points—the signified group and the signifiers group members choose—will be considered initially from the people's point of view.

Definition of the Group

"You can't deny what you are."

As the previous sections discussing the location and organization of the group indicate, people have had a strong attachment to their home territory. Prior to the flooding of the lake and subsequent dispersion, that territory fell within a rough arc from the edge of Zwolle north to Round Lakes and south to Bayou La Nan (map p. 29). When the image of a circle is used, most people place Ebarb in the center, although the larger community is just as frequently referred
to as the Zwolle-Ebarb or Zwolle-Ebarb-Noble area.

People still specify their home territory as beginning in Zwolle across the railroad tracks (on the south side of mainstreet where Paul Ebarb's Store is located) and west from the region around St. Joseph's Catholic church. A young woman who grew up a few blocks north and east of this region felt initially unaccepted by the whites around her and also awkwardly distanced from the rest of her people. Conversely, a school principal's decision to build his new home on the "Mexican" side of the tracks was considered highly irregular by other community elite.

Most members of the group consider themselves essentially country people, a perception borne out by a young man's description of "white people" as "the store owners, the people lived in town, mostly" (Interview #20, 6) and by an eighteen-year-old's statement that most of his people were farmers (Interview #1, 12)—although today commercial agriculture in the community is limited to one or two broiler houses and a few individuals with land enough for beef cattle. As the 1980 census indicates, whenever possible the people do continue to cluster in their rural family settlements.

Kinship, often associated with particular settlement areas, also inscribes group boundaries. When asked to define criteria for inclusion within the group, most people began by listing surnames and stressing the necessity of
linking people genealogically. The people place an extraordinary emphasis on blood ties. According to group mores, unwanted children should be given to other family members rather than placed for adoption. Step-children are not expected to warrant the same involvement or accord the same respect as blood kin. Adults, upon discovering a question about their own or their forefather's paternity, will take pains to reassert the "right" name.

The list of right names for the community mainly derives from early Hispanic settlers. Procell, Ebarb, Sepulvado, and similarly Anglicized names predominate. These names are associated with a certain genetic component that gives the people, as a whole, a characteristic look. Although physical appearance varies as much as it does within any human group, the following Ebarber's description of a neighbor's boyfriend sums up typical features: "He's short, dark complected, has dark eyes, black hair--you know, he looks like a Zwolle person."

The correspondence between appearance and kinship can be illustrated in the remarks of a community member who is not ashamed of the dark looks associated with his Indian identity: "Now, my wife, she's fair complected, but everybody knows her, everybody knows her daddy, everybody knows her people" (Interview #16, 8). Locals who identify other locals in strange settings (shopping malls, out-of-town hospitals) often pin features down to specific family
groups.

Another distinguishing mark people has been the people's Catholicism. The church served as a center of community activity, a source of group solidarity, and a symbol of pride. Participating in the powerful universal church and the potent sacraments may have constructively counterbalanced the negative social barrier their Catholicism placed between them and the Protestant-dominated mainstream (Interview #15, 2).

Speech patterns also set the people apart. Past generations consciously abandoned the Spanish language for that very reason. To quote one community member whose father spoke it fluently, "If you spoke Spanish, hey, wait a minute. You know, you 'sposed to be back yonder with the niggers" (Interview #13, 14-15). Many people now say they wished they had learned to talk Spanish and link the language with a heritage they want to preserve.

Unique speech patterns continue to distinguish the people. The elders, even those who no longer speak Spanish, have a definite "whang," as an outsider who had settled in the community described it (Interview #9). An older community member applied the same term to her own speech; one of the nuns who taught her had noticed this "whang" and wanted to teach her Spanish, but her father forbade it (Oral history interview #79, 5). While some community members are conscious of this accent, others hear themselves as just
country and perceive the older people as talking "deep" country (Interview #12). In addition to an accent with a slightly different flavor, community members have remarked on certain "slang" words--usually from their Spanish dialect--that makes their speech unique.

Those who mention a difference in speech often imply an equally different style of interaction. An aspect of this is "talking crazy"--a good-natured exchange of wit and nonsense which would stop or alter at the approach of outsiders. For example, an established practitioner of crazy talk sent this advice to my co-worker: "Tell her to forget those bones (a human osteology course). Come back here and farm--raise pepper. She can marry some man and get a bunch of pepperbellies to help her eat it."

The reference to pepper points up another community distinction: foodways. Along with the usual Southern fare of fieldpeas and various greens, locals invariably plant at least a row of peppers (jalepinos) and frequently set out garlic. People tend to complain about the way food is seasoned elsewhere, and no tamale beats the ones that mama made. (One woman had a native Mexican offer to pay her way down to his home in order to teach his people how to make tamales.) Other traditional foods include a type of fried bread frequently served at the old-time country dances. Locals have two names for the treat--crepies and churrasquetis, the former showing French influence and the
latter, associated with the same half-embarrassed humor as family nicknames, seems to be of Spanish derivation.

Most community members also have a taste for turtle, fish, squirrel, deer, and other wild game. Superior woodsmanship, whether hunting or working in the timber industry, is perceived to be a community trait. A number of people directly link their ability to hunt and fish to their Indianness. One man credits the survival of himself and his buddies during combat in Vietnam to this innate and learned lore; others have said his comrades opted to follow him through danger rather than the official military leader (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 374).

Other aspects of traditional culture associated with growing up in the woods included a more self-reliant, rough-and-tumble existence which many of the older people claim to prefer to the bondage of a moneyed economy. Lack of financial and physical access to standard medical care probably contributed to the persistence of local midwives and herbal doctors, a distinctive tradition mentioned by community members almost as frequently as their Spanish language and unique foodways (Sepulvado 1977).

The extraordinary power required to cure often seems linked with the curer's Indian ancestry, and at least one individual also connects the old people's power with the now-lost river bottom (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 257). This trafficking in the unexplainable ties into a wealth of local
lore that includes *malojos*, the Crying Woman (*La Llorona*), and mysterious Indian gold (Van Rheenen 1987).

Community members distinguish themselves from other groups by their language, unique traditions, religion, family connections, and geographic origin. Their descriptions of the nature their group draw on these factors.

**The Group's Image**

"We just one big family here. We don't have nothing, but we have each other."

The fundamental importance of kinship and the people's primordial ties to their rural settlements feed into their prevailing image of themselves as a close-knit community of "just poor people." Although the people consider themselves hard-workers, those who prosper from their industry and still want to retain solidarity with the rest of the common country people try not to put themselves forward. To do so would invite sharp criticism.

In the past, this attitude has tended to make children "'shamed" to speak out or shine in school, and has not encouraged people to strive for achievement—as that is popularly defined. The people are known to be proud, yet reluctant to push themselves forward in what mainstream society considers a self-confident manner.

Within the community, people see themselves as exceptionally caring and neighborly, dedicated to helping
one another and sharing whatever they have. This helpful attitude figures into an implicit system of mutual obligations which sometimes convinces outsiders—like non-local spouses—that either the people do not care about their material possessions at all or that they never act generously without some ulterior motive.

The mirror of surrounding society often seems to reflect the people's image of themselves in reverse. The combination of a tight community emphasizing group solidarity at the expense of individual progress has given outsiders the impression that the people tend to be clannish and backward. The group's history of regulating themselves internally ("The Laws wouldn't come down here; vengeance was our law"), contributes to an impression of ignorant violence. Catholicism, a community rallying point, has been disparaged by the evangelical denominations which dominate the area.

Other community marks of distinction have also been used as points of discrimination. As a man in his fifties explained, "When my generation came it was a no-no to teach the kids Spanish because everybody wanted to be white. I mean, you can't be white and speak Spanish" (Interview #13, 14; for a fuller treatment see J. S. Shoemaker's thesis, in progress). The well-known reputation of the people's home territory tempts those who moved away—even to Many—to claim some other point of origin. The "pepperbelly" slurs
and backwoods associations of traditional cuisine causes those with social pretentions to exclaim, "Uoh, I don't eat that stuff no more!" (Interview #20, 20).

More clearly ascribed marks of identity, however, are not as easily disclaimed. Darker coloring has been an internal as well as an external stigma. Even though this perception has been partially inverted, the people's appearance remains a mark of questionable status. A young woman was initially sensitive to inquiries into her nationality until she learned people were simply curious about the uniquely attractive look of Zwolleites. Additional corroboration comes from an impartial anthropological observer (male) who exclaimed, "Does Ebarb ever produce an ugly girl?" (Fieldnotes 1985-87, 369), a truck driver who hoped his sons would marry some of those pretty girls in Zwolle (Interview #11, 13), and--as we will see below--a public figure who is noted for his keen interest in comely constituents.

Yet the young woman mentioned above used to think "it was just the horriblest thing to be dark complected" and still finds it "hard to take" that her current boyfriend considers women like her incredibly attractive (Interview #11, 16). Many, many individuals have referred to themselves or other community members as "dark and ugly" (see Fieldnotes 1982-84, 308, for just two examples); people with blond-headed, part-Anglo grandchildren, in
contrast "have got some pretty nice-looking kids" (Interview #18, 9). Although the town of Zwolle now boasts several tanning salons, the elderly woman who had insisted that her daughters wear long sleeves and hats when working in the sun--and urged her grandchildren to marry light-skinned people--illustrates a much more pervasive mind set. The comments of two sisters on their German grandmother's remarriage reflects a similar attitude:

"She sure must not've had too high ambitions for herself to marry one of those (community surname) and then to turn around and marry another one!" (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 103).

These two remarks on preferred marriage partners link the ascribed, often stigmatized community characteristics of name and appearance. The weight of these two features differs sharply, depending on the situation. An older man who reared his family in the Many area mourns the fact that his red-headed grandbabies will face the prejudice brought on by their prevalent community surname (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 315). A dark, strikingly attractive young woman with the same last name claims that "it's not really your last name, it's the way you look" (Interview #11, 10). In either case--a woman who may give up her name but not her looks or a man who does not fit the look but still bears the name--permanent distinguishing features announce an identity which has proved to be a social liability. The people may have a positive image of their internal community spirit and the solidarity of their people, but they have been a great deal
more uneasy about the socially negotiated value of their ethnic identity.

Terms for Their Identity

"They tell me I'm part French, part Spanish, part Indian--and I got a Dago name. I'm just a hell of a mess" (Fieldnotes 1985-87, 75).

The people from the Zwolle-Ebarb-Noble area do form a distinct group geographically, linguistically, genetically, and culturally, but an awareness of this entity does not answer the opening question—who these people are—in a convenient, one-word label. The ethnic designations chosen by the people and the ones arbitrarily imposed on them carry different meanings and applications based in part on distinctions within the group that stemmed from the closeness of a family's Indian connection. All of these factors come to bear on the identity labels people prefer to project and the ones others ascribe to them.

Ethnic or racial designations used in the area include white, black, French, Spanish, Mexican, or Indian, each with connotations peculiar to this social scene. The meanings and uses of each term will be considered; since black is never actually chosen or applied to group members, this category will not be explicitly addressed.

White first of all means non-black, especially given the overriding black/white distinction. When choices on
census forms and the like were limited to white or black (sometimes called colored), community members definitely put white; a very few sometimes put "other." To be considered non-white in any manner carried offensive, negative social implications. As a community man recalls, people might say:

"'This white man and this Spanish man come up here.' . . . He was just trying to put an identity on you, see . . . and naturally, we resented that. You know, we felt like we was as white as anybody else" (Interview #2, 28).

The association of the Indian Program with Ebarb may have intensified a Zwolle-Ebarb tension that casts Zwollians as more sophisticated--and more white. As one man remarked, "They're white 'cause they live in Zwolle cross the other side of the track. Even though they are my cousins" (Interview #13, 12). This bitter overstatement points out that people who have disassociated themselves from the Hispanic-Indian community either by distance or acculturation tend to identify themselves as white.

Although people have preferred to class themselves in this privileged category, social discourse reveals a clear distinction between themselves and other non-blacks in the area. When asked whether the woman passing his house was white or black a community elder replied, "I know her--that's a Spanish girl" (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 350). Older people speak of when the "Americans come in and made us speak American" (Interview #11, 26). During Many-Zwolle basketball games Hispanic-Indian players are urged, "Don't
let that whiteface from Many beat you!" (Interview #20, 14), and at least one woman who married out bleached her dark hair because her husband "wanted me to look like one of those whitefaces" (Interview #15, 11).

The terms American, whiteface, or (more rarely) bolio refer to light-skinned non-natives, both those like myself who have moved into the area from up North and long-standing area residents like the famous lawman Quinton Brandon. These people are separated from community members by color, language, point of origin, and religion. Significantly enough, in speaking of the "Baptist" girl his brother had married, one man clearly associated her religion with her blondness (Interview #20, 12). The term whiteface appears to be used primarily in reference--frequently an uncomplimentary one.

Another subset of non-black people, the French, intersect the community's social world in a much more limited extent. People do acknowledge French ancestry, especially those from Cross the Creek to the north. This subgroup has closer historical and genealogical ties with the predominantly French settlement along Bayou Pierre. The connection here lies with French colonials in the area rather than the Cajuns or those Frenchmen from South Louisiana.

To be French did imply a link with the more established identity of the rest of Catholic Louisiana as well as a
distance from the Hispanics who had been usurped in Texas or who more recently drifted up from the Southwest. In the past, people have preferred to claim their French ancestry whenever possible. One elderly woman who was unmistakably of Indian descent and had spoken Spanish as her first language adamantly insisted she was French, to the amusement of a community genealogist who exclaimed, "If that old lady isn't Indian, none of us are" (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 78). A new priest at St. Anne's in Ebarb thoroughly offended the congregation by telling them how pleased he was to work in this Spanish community; he was promptly informed that the people were French.

An alternate version of the story, however, has the priest being indignantly informed that the people are Spanish rather than Mexican (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 363-364). In the hierarchy of ethnic terms, Spanish has implied less-than-white, but not as non-white as Mexican. The man quoted above (Interview #2, 28) illustrates how people resented this distinction between themselves and the dominant Anglos. This attitude is largely responsible for the conscious destruction of their Spanish dialect. A woman summed up the negative attitude she had picked up from her Spanish-speaking mother:

Spanish people always thought if they were called Spanish, that was degrade on them . . . . kinda like the colored with the white—that they were just someway not as good as the white (Shoemaker 1986, #13, 9).

Another woman, one of increasingly fewer fluent Spanish
speakers, makes no pretense or apology for her language or her identity. "I'm not a 'Merican," she stated plainly. She "could go all way across the world--people look at me, they'd know what I am ... Spanish" (Fieldnotes 1985-87, 107).

Spanish remains a much more familiar term than Hispanic, although it may be taken to mean Spanish heritage rather than a direct tie with Spain. The relatively few people who choose to call themselves Hispanic usually express a literate interest in their heritage and possess some degree of sophistication, often as a result of post-secondary education.

Neither term implies kinship with other Hispanics beyond the historically related communities near Nacogdoches and in Spanish Lake. A man exceptionally articulate about his ethnicity never identified himself as Hispanic because "that'd be Latin, ... Mexicans and Puerto Ricans" (Interview #20, 21). Even a woman who called herself Mexican on the most recent census would not associate her people with the Hispanic populations in Texas or Mexico (Interview #17, 4).

Part of the reason for this distinction (aside from historical common-sense) lies in the internal community connotation of Spanish. Applied from the outside, the term may mean not-as-white-as-we-are; viewed from the inside, the term lays claim to not-non-white, European ancestry. The
group's upper strata has tended to claim pure Spanish background. This mark of status, important since the colonial period, partially explains the people's violent insistence that they are not Mexicans from Mexico.

In the eyes of community members Mexicans are people from Mexico who speak a different language ("Mexican" rather than their own "Spanish"), come from a different location, have a different history, and, in short, are not them. Being Mexican also implies being dark. When an exceptionally dark elder claimed to have come from Spain, a community wit replied, "You might-a come from Spain, but you spent a hundred years in Mexico before you got here." The man who related this story explained, "Your Mexicans, most of the time they dark, dark people. So that's where a lot of them defined the difference" (Interview #2, 38). In addition, Mexicans are seen as "low-class," backward, transient people. Community members know that they are, in many essential ways, different from Mexicans; they also know they want to retain that sense of difference.

Mexican, because of its use by outsiders, has become a cuss word for community members. As one man noted, "It's the same difference as a Negro being called a nigger" (Interview #13, 6). A woman from the nearby town of Pleasant Hill always heard the people from the area were Mexicans, "very bad, mean people," and consequently she was "taught against this town (Zwolle) from day one" (Interview
The image locally conjured up by the label can be summed up in one young man's response, "'That fool there, Mexican from Zwolle, he don't know nothing!'" (Interview #20, 19), and by a community leader's offense when one of the genteel members of the Sabine Parish Genealogical Society earnestly asked (after we had related the community's origins) why the people didn't want to be called Mexican (Interview #2, 21).

The fact that the genealogist lady may have inquired without any malicious intent points up puzzlement on this score. A number of outsiders who move into the community--including spouses and long-term residents--continue to wonder what the fuss over the term is all about. One such woman made the error of telling a co-worker from Zwolle how proud she must be to know about her Mexican heritage:

"She got, like real cold and just turned her back. It was a mistake, a social mistake, and I never made it again" (Interview #10, 8-9).

Another responded, "We felt like if they didn't want to be called Mexicans we'd better not call them anything" (Interview #9, 7). At least one community member voices strong indignation over the Mexican symbols at the Hot Tamale Fiesta; others whitewash things like costumes bought in Mexico by calling them Spanish (Interview #7; #15; #20).

The strength of the people's adversion to the label may be gauged by the fact that not even the governor of the state can acceptably use it. At a meeting in Baton Rouge
with representatives from all the Louisiana Indian tribes, the governor remarked, "There sure are some pretty Mexican women in Zwolle." The Ebarb tribal chairperson set him straight in no uncertain terms: "There may be some pretty women around Zwolle, but there aren't any Mexican women there!" (Fieldnotes 1985-87, 340).

As the chairperson retold this story, a young relative of hers muttered, "They're not?" Although I have only ever heard three people identify themselves as Mexican (two for shock affect, one as an alternate term for Spanish-Indian), some younger people have come to share the doubts expressed by outsiders.

Some individuals, like the man who moved to Shreveport in the early 1950s, do temporarily adopt the term simply to humor others (see quote on p. 82). For him his true identity was Spanish-Indian. This, however, is an awkward category that would have to be repeatedly presented and defined.

The term chonchi or choncha, although not as widely known, can be as offensive as Mexican. The word's exact definition has been lost; now it usually implies darker coloring (Interview #5, 6), deviant or ignorant behavior (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 317), and Mexicanness (Interview #2, 38; #3, 18). "Chonchi's kind of a low-class Mexican," one man explained, then added with a grin, "That's a pet name for the town of Zwolle" (Interview #18, 12). As such, the
term is used by insiders in good-natured picking (joking)—or as a reminder that puts a person in their place (Interview #1, 12; #20, 6; Fieldnotes 1985-87, 106). Use of the word may be fading along with the sharpness of its sting. Newcomers to the community have rarely heard it, and some younger community members define it simply as Spanish-Indian (Interview #20, 13; #10, 17).

If the term did not have such a history of derogative connotations it might be an appropriate choice for it applies to no one but these people on the Louisiana-Texas border. A woman who had grown up in Many, married out of the community, and now lives in another state was sunning herself at a friend's pool when the friend commented on her dark tan and asked about her nationality. "Well," she drawled, "you wouldn't know, but I'm what you would call a chonchi." The man burst out laughing; he did know—because he had been in service with someone from Zwolle during World War II (Interview #17, 5).

Several years ago when Ebarb's basketball team won the state title, they played French Settlement in a tournament and were told, "You don't know anything until those Cajuns get out there." The star player replied, "You don't know anything 'til us chonchis get out there" (Interview #9, 8-9). For most people, however, the term does not convey group distinction but a collective put-down; a community elder probably accurately believes that those who use the
term intend to imply inferior status to dominant whites (Interview #5, 6).

While chonchi remains an ethnic slur for most, being called Indian has become relatively acceptable. Indian, without a French or Spanish qualifier, initially refers to the old-time people. "The Indian in them" prompted older or old-time people to acts of traditional generosity like sharing food or taking in orphans (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 266, 274); the more traditional, backwoods family settlements are also considered more Indian.

People still make implicit reference to a stigma associated with Indianness. These same family settlements rank lower on the in-group social scale. Those same old-time people known to have been nearly full-bloods were "branded" Indian (Interview #2, 33) or goaded from time to time by being called a "damn Indian" (Fieldnotes 1985-87, 14). Like other pejorative terms, Indian has been associated with being dark and mean (mean denoting a certain feisty attitude as well as general meanness). One community elder told us she was nearly three-quarters Indian, "but when I get mad I'm full-blood" (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 41). Another woman who now openly acknowledges both her Spanish and Indian heritage admitted that until recently her family had viewed the Indian part as "kind of a disgrace" (Fieldnotes 1985-87, 150).

Some people have always been known as Indian, perhaps
because the identity was inescapable. This segment of the community includes families who retained some tribal connections as well as individuals whose appearance has always announced their Indian ancestry. For example, in the early 1930s a community member chose to call his country-western band "The Choctaws" to place some of the very dark players in a more socially acceptable category when they played out of town (Interview #17, 4).

Those who have always been pegged as Indian frequently express amusement that a greater segment of the community has chosen to join them in what used to be, at best, a marginal social identity. As an old man who even spoke an Indian language (Choctaw or Mobilian) in his childhood drily observed, "All those people out in Ebarb decided they were going to be Indian," to which his wife from Spanish Lake responded, "Next thing you know they'll be Irish" (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 384).

In contrast to the family stigma or the old-time connotations of the past, being Indian in the present often refers to being part of the tribal organization centered out in the community of Ebarb. Children who attend school there or people who have been involved in programs implanted by the tribal organization more readily speak of themselves as Indian. Older people who had always been aware of the Indian component of their heritage became more likely to acknowledge it after the initiation of the Indian Program.
Since the Indian Program began, in part, as a community development project focusing in Ebarb, cynics maintain that all these Indians appeared after the material benefits of the program appeared—and that the Indians in the 1980 census will disappear after the grants have dwindled. There are individuals who selectively employ an Indian identity. A businessman from Shreveport, for instance, suddenly wanted to prove his Indian ancestry for some minority loan; young people reluctant to acknowledge their heritage in public were eager to sign up as Indians for higher education funds.

Aside from these opportunists and the people who have traditionally been considered Indian, individuals in need of a place to fit have been drawn to this unambiguous option. Its recent redefinition without the old outside stigma of being less-than-native American (i.e. English-speaking Anglos) or the inside stigma of being dark and ugly has made an Indian identity even more attractive.

The would-be leader referred to in chapter 2, for instance, did not look especially Indian or Hispanic, but his name and his point of origin always placed him in that category of otherness. He was finally able to gain recognition through a leadership role on the tribal council. He expressed his sentiments on being Indian as follows:

I'm more satisfied now that I know more or less what I am . . . . This has put an identity where people can at least say, "Well, at least I'm Indian, you know." Before you didn't know what you are (Interview #2, 41-42).
A younger man, now in his early 40s, returned from Vietnam to find the bottomland where he had hunted and fished, the woods where cattle and hogs had fattened themselves, completely inundated by the reservior. Being Indian links him with the oldest of the old-time people and places him alongside a larger group of ennobled refugees from the American system who, like he himself, have been summarily deprived of their way of life. In his words, "I didn't have to have anybody tell me I was Indian. If I wasn't Indian, well, I felt Indian" (Interview #16, 12).

Both the would-be leader and the frustrated woodsman found themselves uncomfortably marginal in the new situations forced on them. The rediscovered option of an Indian identity provided an alternative way to place themselves.

Summary: Ebarb Identity Designations

"For a while, I tried to tell 'em the truth, and then finally I just started telling them I'm from Mexicans. That's what they wanted to believe anyhow" (Interview #18, 4).

Ebarb community members may vary in naming who they are, but they all recognize the criteria that determines what they are. Members of the group are distinguished from others by ancestry, color, locality, language, religion, and a common heritage which includes distinctive foods, folk beliefs, and styles of interaction. All of these set the people apart as non-standard Americans and, by implication,
less white than the local Anglo-Protestants who control definitions of the standard.

Local perceptions of ethnic designations could be plotted on a scale from white to non-white as follows:

WHITE------------------------------------------------NON-WHITE
American/Whiteface French Spanish Indian Mexican Black.

The terms Indian and Mexican seem to connote about the same degree of non-whiteness. Indian has been placed above Mexican—but not closer to white—because that designation currently enjoys more favor. (In the past attitudes may have reversed the position of these categories.)

Most outsiders erroneously persist in calling all group members Mexican. Group members themselves have preferred to be considered as white as possible. People with a plausible excuse to call themselves French have done so; community elite who could not claimed pure Spanish ancestry. The country folks use Spanish to refer generally to their heritage while those with some educated sophistication have begun to substitute Hispanic. Like groups in similarly anomalous situations, group members usually do not attempt to assert their unique and therefore unnamed ethnicity (Spanish-Indian; chonchi purged of intended slights).

Within the group, projection or ascription of an ethnic
designation reflects an internal social structure based on locale, degree of acculturation, and, ultimately, Indian as opposed to pure European ancestry. Indian, traditionally reserved for those who could not avoid it, has been recast as a more viable option for those in search of a readily recognizable identity.

Different ethnic designations may reflect different personal strategies, different social positions within the community, and outside ascription. Viewed from within as well as without, the people form a cohesive group. The next section examines how this group identity manifests itself in the people's interactions with others.
CHAPTER 4

THE PEOPLE PRESENT THEMSELVES

"Most of your Spanish people do, you know. They get along, they try to get along. Some of 'em, like anything, you got your hotheaded ones, but most of 'em, the majority of 'em, get along with people" (Interview #20, 11).

Although ethnic choices may never be overtly stated, all the clues to ethnic identity discussed in the preceding chapter inform the way people place and then interact with one another. The extent to which people's group identity affects interactions with others and the manner in which people present and perceive that identity will be sketched and then briefly explored.

Among Outsiders

"The people around here, now, they have a lot of pride, whether you believe it or not" (Interview #18, 10).

In new situations where community members are not certain how they will be received or judged, the people often respond with the wariness or shyness an outside schoolteacher at Ebarb described as being "'shamed" (see chapter 3). A man who had lived in Houston for many years and was no stranger to strangers became noticeably nervous and withdrawn when his Sabine Parish prayer group traveled to Alexandria for a state-wide retreat. At this same gathering, a successful couple who had lived most of their
married life in Shreveport reacted with the same peculiarly shy reserve. Although they were open and friendly when people sought them out, they consistently chose the tables furthest to the back in the dining hall.

A more acculturated, more marginal community member explained this behavior by saying the people were "shy but proud. Not proud of who they are, but proud" (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 324). This initial reaction might more accurately be interpreted as a reserve maintained due to dignity, insecurity, or well-seasoned caution.

In the past, people have tended to insulate themselves from the negative feedback they may have received in outside interaction. A teenager at a crowded beach, for instance, remarked uneasily at all the unfamiliar faces. Throughout the afternoon, she continued to scan the crowd and then detailed her connections (through kinship or simple association) with every community member she managed to spot (Fieldnotes 1985-87, 169). When an elderly woman needs a clerk in a local department store, she also prefers to seek out "one of our people" (Interview #10, 14).

The Catholic school may have been an institutionalized form of this; people have compared its sheltered environment to a womb (Interview #20, 16). Withdrawal, like the successful couple's self-imposed isolation at the retreat, serves as a protective tactic. This even functions among well-known others: Certain community members regularly
attended the cook-outs at a local fishing camp, but they usually sat together along the fringes of these congenial gatherings.

Rather than retreating from social encounters all together, another protective ploy has been to refuse to reveal what have proven to be unacceptable markers of ethnicity. An Anglo schoolteacher in Zwolle, for example, vainly attempted to get the children to bring in recipes from home or to learn Spanish from their parents. The teacher concluded the children were ashamed of their heritage (Interview #17, 3).

A more comprehensive interpretation might be that they were too proud to expose their distinctiveness to potential ridicule. Similarly, elderly people who had known both fieldworkers for several years only recently admitted to being fluent Spanish-speakers, and an extremely wary community member whose intimacy with the fieldworkers had lapsed denied any knowledge of sensitive community lore like family nicknames.

A community leader explained that the people had "been belittled for what they are . . . , they have a sense of guilt, a guilt complex, you know. And it is wrong to do a people that way." He concluded by saying, "I'm real thankful that the attitudes of people has changed over the years" (Interview #3, 4). In recent years Ebarb high school students readily recorded their elders' herbal remedies, and
children have followed the promptings of another elementary schoolteacher to learn Spanish from their grandparents.

Another response to past ethnic slights has been a heightened sensitivity about the issue. Community members who move away initially consider inquiries into their nationality as offensively inappropriate as questions about income tax returns or paternity. In the words of a bright, outgoing young woman:

"When I first left Zwolle to go to school, I was very defensive because I was like a crab getting out of its shell for the first (time). And just any little thing was going to upset me, you know" (Interview #11, 13).

A man a generation older echoed these feelings. He described how wary and defensive he had been when he first moved to Shreveport: "They'd mention Zwolle, well, the first thing . . . I'd think was they thought they was better'n I was" (Interview #18, 5).

This man now believes he may have read more into others' behavior than they intended--like a community elder who took offense at a weekday homily. The speaker meant to emphasize how all people, even if they did not have much education or were of a darker skin color, were worthy enough to say, "My Lord and my God." This community woman completely misinterpreted the message and indignantly wanted to know why this nun thought she was better than the people "just because we're darker" (Interview #5, 5). Another community member recognized his tendency to such overreaction: "I've been put down, you know, all my life;
you think they're doing it" (Interview #2, 12).

Although the elder's perceptions, like the man who moved to Shreveport or the withdrawn charismatics, might represent over-reactions now, as the last speaker indicates they do not have a fictitious basis. This man's wife, originally a Baptist from the Many area, described her people's opinion of her prospective husband: "He was a Catholic, from Ebarb, everything he wasn't supposed to be" (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 314). Although they eventually settled among her people, the gap between him and her family never really mended.

Even today children whose dark complexion marks them as being from this area are less readily taken in at Baptist church camp (Interview #9, 10). According to a recent high school graduate, outsiders still expect community members to be, "Loud, obnoxious, ready to fight in a minute" (Interview #1, 4). Perhaps that explains why a Shreveport dentist asked the blond-haired, blue-eyed wife of an Ebarb resident, "How did you end up in that town--and married to an Ebarb?" (Interview #8, 5).

This same woman has a policy of telling strangers she's from Sabine Parish rather than Zwolle (her mail route) or Ebarb (her school district) to avoid responses like that or like the man in the Shreveport hospital lobby who refused to talk to her--or anyone else from that area--because his nephew had been killed in some bar by someone with a
community surname (Interview #8, 4-5). The high school graduate's mother considers such responses "on people's ignorant side," and generally retorts by citing the bad news about Shreveport daily reported by the local news media (Interview #12, 12).

A youthful, well-groomed woman of forty who waitresses in a local cafe parried the potential damage to her desired image by disassociating herself from the least sophisticated connotations (rowdy backwoods) of her ethnic identity. She told a group of admiring regulars that she used to be less outgoing because she hadn't known many people from Zwolle, and, when asked, replied that she was from Shreveport (where she and her husband had lived for ten years before returning to the area). The woman's dark good looks unmistakably announced her connection with local residents, and, in fact, both she and her husband had graduated from Ebarb High. (The Anglos who inquired accepted the remark, however, and we observing anthropologists did not participate in the conversation.)

Her nephew, the young man who laughingly described the Ebarb image this woman took such pains to avoid, did not deny his point of origin but compensated for any potential negative ascriptions by his excessively correct speech, studious politeness, and tastefully fashionable dress. Peers who meet him through trade school or his part-time job in Many are surprised to discover this urbane person is
indeed from Ebarb.

One man, himself now a gentleman of substance, recalls how "We were made aware of it by our environment" (Interview #6, 13) to such an extent that some individuals chose an opposite defense: "I remember one guy saying, 'One Mexican is worth more than any two white trash.' There was some fights" (Interview #6, 10). A contemporary concurred:

Most people kinda look down on a Mexican as some kind of a low, low class of people . . . . People long time ago wouldn't put up with nothing like that at all" (Interview #18, 10).

The genteel speaker quoted first now counters uncomplimentary associations with his ethnicity by his own exaggerated good humor and courtly formality.

The group's negative stereotype, along with the hostility and defensive withdrawal which it fueled and fed on, seems to be diminishing. A young woman noted that when she first went to college people were automatically afraid of someone from Zwolle, but as they became acquainted with her, her friendliness and proven academic ability won them over (Interview #11, 10). Similarly, the young ladies of neighboring schools deigned to talk with boys from Ebarb once they had demonstrated their worth on the basketball court (Interview #13, 5). Such individuals have become accepted on the basis of their achievement; their marked differences no longer weigh so heavily against them.

Attitudes towards the group as a whole have been slowly changing. According to one elderly gentleman, in his youth
a white young lady would not have been seen talking to a Spanish boy from across the tracks, but in the past several decades people have begun to mix more (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 404). Among people thirty years old and younger such distinctions no longer make as big a difference.

Individuals' interactions are increasingly less constrained by the "complex" that prompted protective withdrawal, sensitivity to slights, or counter measures of defense. This shift may be typified by the man in his late forties whose name and appearance have always announced his identity. In contrast to the self-imposed isolation of the community members at the Catholic retreat, this man did not simply service the stranger who came into his place of business, but warmly engaged him in conversation on points of common interest. Although he has readily discussed how the people were put down in the past, he chooses to act on his own image of commonality rather than reacting to some implied evaluation of otherness (Interview #3, 1).

Outsiders Among Them

"If they like you, they like you. If they don't, you don't have a chance" (Interview #13, 3).

A death draws out the community's strength and also lays bare the latent alienness of outsiders. In preparation for this old man's burial, relatives from as far away as Lafayette and the Rio Grande Valley crowded into his
six-room lumber house for the rosary and all-night setting-up. The Anglo women who had married in seemed to seek each other out along the edges of the action, as if suddenly conscious of their otherness. One found me in the kitchen among the pots and plates of donated food and asked, as everyone did, how I and my co-worker were related to the old couple. She had been trying to figure out who we had married (Fieldnotes 1985-87, 203).

In a community defined largely by kinship, intimate outsiders are indeed an anomaly. The first evening of the first weekend my co-worker and I volunteered to spend with the elderly widow (it is not customary to leave the newly bereaved alone), the woman's brother had to visit and see just who his sister was trusting to stay with her. His son and grandsons also paid a call that night (Fieldnotes 1985-87, 205, 214) to check out the strangers.

With this testing of strangers, a process we were initially unaware of, the situation rounds out a picture of the people's reaction to outsiders in their midst. In the people's experience, others fall roughly into three categories: strangers "from off," outsiders who reside in the area, and blacks whose radically other status will be considered separately.

Others who have actually married in to the group recall the wariness they initially met with and how the people cautiously, intuitively tried them out (Fieldnotes 1982-84,
According to the widow, her people can tell by looking at a stranger's eyes whether or not they can be trusted (Fieldnotes 1985-87, 214). This idea, widespread among the older, more traditional people, accounts for the definitive like or dislike referred to in the introductory quote. Once an outsider meets with approval, they are often overwhelmingly taken in.

And yet it is no small matter to enter a community where people have known one another's families and personal relationships from the womb. A woman who had married into the community just before the lake clearly stated, "If you didn't belong here, you were an automatic outsider" (Interview #8, 7). She was continually urged to interact with a sister who had married a neighboring community member, as if her husband's kinpeople wanted her out of their way. She felt like "a total misfit" until she finally had children. With time and this blood tie, she came to "feel as loved now as if I were one of their own" (Interview #8, 7).

Part of becoming "one of their own" may have been in process the day I saw two nurses' aides in the hospital corridor. One, an obvious group member, was deep into an explanation of some other individual's place in the community for the benefit of the other aide who had apparently married in (Fieldnotes 1985-87, 263). Another outsider, now a wife of some ten years, commented on how
helpful it would have been had someone taken her under their wing in just that manner (Interview #10, 4). All she had been told was not to call people Mexican and not to talk about anyone since everyone was related and word-of-mouth travelled so quickly. She remarked on how difficult it was for her to fit in to such a close-knit group (Interview #10, 7).

Others, even though they may be part of community members' everyday world, do not necessarily belong within the sphere of community life. Two incidents at the Paul Ebarb Store in Zwolle illustrate the felt intrusion of outsiders into intimate community exchanges.

The assistant manager at the store, whose father was a community member, and two delivery men, also half community members, began picking at each other about plans for the coming weekend. The manager, J. R., joked that if he went to the horse races (as a mutual friend was urging him to do) instead of participating in a family fish fry there would be one dead Mexican (his friend) and one half-Mexican dead (himself). They all laughed.

Two blond Anglos who had arrived to deliver milk listened to the exchange and grinned with them. Later, when one of them attempted to joke with J. R. about it, J. R. tersely refused to be drawn into conversation. J. R., who would probably consider himself white or Spanish, freely referred to the groups' stigma in jest with other community
members, but it was clearly inappropriate for a white outsider to presume the same familiarity.

On another occasion, J. R. came out from behind his counter to offer a recently widowed elder a hug of sympathy and respect (a common gesture within the community) while reassuring her that her credit at the store would continue as always. As the elderly woman moved on down the aisle, a young Anglo near the door called, "J. R., you do all the women like that?" Both he and the widow had to pointedly ignore the impudent remark.

Perhaps in tacit recognition that outsiders will not understand their ways and cannot be trusted to act in an appropriate manner, a cautious, almost suspicious attitude towards strangers has been especially typical of older, more traditional people. In an echo of the reserve and withdrawal exhibited among strangers, one generally kind-hearted old woman will scarcely let an unknown person past her yard gate. This attitude, however, competes with the traditional ethic of generous hospitality. In the opposite extreme, time after time people have welcomed us into their homes without even inquiring who we were or what we were about. One outsider who had not even established affinal kin ties claims to have had no difficulty at all being accepted, perhaps because she was actively involved with the Ebarb school.

Reactions may depend on how strange the strangers seem
and how well they appear to accept the people as they are. The elderly woman who guards her yard so vigilantly has told us how uncomfortable she feels around "high classy" people. The interaction between herself and three would-be fieldworkers illustrates the range of mutual acceptance.

The first of these three professionals, a nervous folklorist and linguist, conducted himself in the abrupt manner of a busy scholar leafing through some quaint old manuscript. He was indeed interested in the people's ethnicity and expounded on their heritage in perfect academese--to us in the old woman's presence. No one, in all the homes we guided him to, offered him anything to eat. Perhaps they knew he would have refused.

The next man, himself part Indian and at home in the woods, stayed across the road with the old woman's kinpeople, dressed commonly in blue jeans, and relished everything set before him. The old woman still speaks fondly of this man; although she spoke more Spanish with the previous fieldworker, she claims this fellow brought it out of her the best of the three.

Finally, a linguist/Spanish professor visited the old woman while she was preparing to cook corn in a washpot in the yard (for use in hot tamales). After patiently watching her stoke the fire, he praised the coffee she offered him and listened to her rambling stories. Although some people later said they entertained this man only on my account and
he was not remembered with the warmth of the second fellow, his willingness to meet and accept the people as they presented themselves made him, in turn, more acceptable to them.

A woman's profound offense at her daughter's city friend who disdained their country food underscores this mutual interchange of acceptance (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 307). Interestingly enough, food—a distinctive ethnic marker—often serves to test outsiders' reactions and signal their acceptance. The strangest linguist was not even given anything to drink; newcomers who are accepted are heartily invited to share whatever the people have to offer. I relived this process shortly after we became involved with the elderly widow.

An community member who operated a fruit stand as well as several other enterprises had always treated me with the minimal deference business transactions require until the day I drove the elderly widow and her sister into town. "Who are you?" he asked as I made our selections. I gave him my name, but since that did not tell him what he needed to know to identify me, he asked point-blank whether I was a relative. After I properly explained my relationship to the two women, he warmed considerably, pointed out one of the best watermelons, and even carried one to my trunk himself (Fieldnotes 1985-87, 225-226). He has waved cordially to me ever since.
This scene recapitulates the sequence sketched at the funeral. I had been investigated and approved because I had chosen to identify with the people, to relate to them on their own terms. Outsiders who are willing to do so, who do not view the people's cultural distinctions as something to be "shamed" about but are, on the contrary, open to participating in their community life, are often overwhelmingly received.

Blacks, the Permanent Outsiders

"I'm not prejudiced against 'em, I just don't want 'em--I don't want to associate with 'em, let me say it that way" (Interview #2, 14).

During my very first week in Ebarb I accompanied a pair of teenagers who transported elderly people to a congregate meal program. The girl became increasingly uncomfortable when the time came for a black woman to get in next to her, although she behaved civilly enough once the older woman situated herself. After my co-worker arrived several months later, she and I decided to find the Quarters, as the black sections of Zwolle are called. The Quarters are so far across the tracks that we drove around that town of less than 4,000 for over half an hour without locating them. The sharp separation between black and non-black, and the desire to minimalize contact between them, still remains important.

Members of the Zwolle-Ebarb community traditionally
have had very little interaction with blacks. As a group member from Many drily noted, "You didn't see a one past the Ebarb School—and he was lost then." A man in his early thirties vividly recalls how this extreme separation affected his first face-to-face encounter with blacks.

When he was scarcely five years old his grandmother who lived next to a black section in Zwolle took him along on a visit to some of her black neighbors. He and his younger brother clung to her skirts in terror and refused to play with the children there. "I couldn't've been no more scared of anybody in my life than I was there," he recalled. "You know, we lived in the woods. The only time I'd see 'em is we'd pass by" (Interview #20, 4). He compared it to confronting beings from another country or another world (Interview #20, 5).

Many community members consider these alien people threatening. One of the selling points of the tiny Ebarb School is the fact that the minority status of its Indian population prevents it from being forcibly integrated with blacks. An otherwise sweet elderly woman continually repeats how happy she is to be surrounded by her own people because no blacks can buy land and come anywhere around them.¹

¹This same woman tells us that whites decorated their boats to look like candy and ribbon stores, lured Africans on board, then set sail. The whites then sold them amongst each other like dumb animals. The woman doesn't think that was right; the whites should've left the blacks in Africa.
A number of community members actively guard the distinction between themselves and the blacks. This well-known state of affairs prompted our neighbor's black employee to refuse to come down into Ebarb, even during the day, to mow his lawn. The Catawba enforce the same distinctions between themselves, the non-blacks, and the blacks. Blacks did not even venture onto their reservation after dark (Hudson 1970, 72). Similarly, in the pre-civil rights era, blacks were warned to be off the streets of Zwolle by sundown—or face the consequences meted out by local youths (Interview #20, 5).

To many community members, anything less than a respectfully cowed attitude still seems unacceptable. During one unforgettable tribal council Christmas party, Ebarb school and tribal leaders complained at length about how "these young niggers don't know they're niggers" (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 239).

Eventually, however, several council members who had had contact with blacks in other settings turned the conversation by relating their own positive experiences (Fieldnotes 1982-84, 239). People who have not been so isolated from blacks, particularly those who have worked side-by-side with them as co-workers, are generally less quick to make such remarks and more prone to counter them with personal examples.

The frightened young man's grandmother visited blacks
because these black women had helped her raise her family when she became widowed during the Depression (Interview #20, 4-5). Other community members relate similar stories. In Zwolle, school desegregation proceeded with very little open conflict (Interview #20, 5-6; Oral history interview #45); the current schoolboard member there, a black man, twice defeated the former Spanish-Indian representative.

Today an educated young woman from the heart of Ebarb jokes congenially with the kitchen help at a local restaurant or the black woman who works with her in the parish courthouse. Yet even though black and non-black friend may greet each other with the region's ritual half-hug when they meet on the streets of Zwolle, separation remains an accomplished fact. The black woman in the restaurant, like other local cafe employees, worked over the fire while whites and Zwolle-Ebarb community members waited on the public. The joking exchange focused on the fact that she really ought to be back in the steaming kitchen.

At teen dances held in St. Joseph's gymnasium, Anglos and Hispanic-Indians mingled, but blacks rarely attended— and then only because as cheerleaders or ball players they had to help sponsor the affair. In the local washateria blacks almost always moved back into the side wing while others used the central portion of the building.

The following scene exemplifies the separate—but-not-equal attitude which generally characterizes the peoples'
interaction with blacks. An Anglo, a community member, and a black man, all evidently working together, had picked up some lunch in a convenience store in Many. The Anglo bossman checked out first and magnanimously invited the black man to put his coke and chips on the same bill. When the Anglo extended the same gracious offer to the Ebarber, he responded by coolly declining and then gallantly allowing me to go ahead of him in line.

This man's refusal to accept the patronage of the Anglo and his own independent act of chivalry clearly (if unconsciously) declared the distinction between himself and the non-white worker. Whatever he might or might not claim to be, he made it clear that he was not a dependent of the bossman or an uncouth creature from the unpaved sections of town. This vital separation may even explain why normally generous community members express extreme disinterest in helping a destitute Hispanic-Indian family who live in a shack in the Quarters: In some way these people have transgressed the boundary which other community members politely or profanely attempt to maintain. As I observed during my first months in the area, much as possible blacks continue to be invisible and appropriately distanced.

Summary: Group Members and Others

Although terms for community ethnicity seldom overtly come into play in the course of normal social interaction,
the issue of group identity does. Ebarb-Zwolle community members have had their sense of otherness uncomfortably impressed on them. In addition, they act to maintain their own distinctions between group members and outsiders.

Among outsiders, community members often move guardedly. Because their distinctiveness has been negatively evaluated—especially in the past—community members often approach strangers and strange situations with a protective reserve which may be perceived as shyness or shame. This withdrawal occurs in truly foreign situations (the charismatic retreat in Alexandria) as well as among familiar others (fishing camp cook-outs). In another protective maneuver, community members avoid the risk of exposing their uniqueness to ridicule by refusing to reveal too much of themselves to others.

Past experience tends to make community members hyper-sensitive to potential slights from others. Some, like the teenager at the beach, choose to wrap themselves in the insulating comfort of the familiar. This same sensitivity in other community members has made them quick to interpret offense in others' reactions to them. In the past this has caused people to lash out defensively or over-compensate for the stigma of their group's reputation.

Outsiders who enter the community often initially face a cautious trial period, partially due to the way community members have been made to feel unacceptably other in the
past and partially because group cohesion sets the outsider apart as other. Others who intrude on group interaction, like the exchanges in the grocery store, may be summarily dismissed. Strangers who are perceived as a threat because of their failure to accept the people are likewise shunned or viewed with suspicion. Community members warm-heartedly reciprocate acceptance with strangers willing to participate in community life, be that through the symbolic sharing of food or active involvement with their school.

Community members perceive one set of outsiders, blacks, as permanently other. In part, this pervasive racism stems from community members' unstated desire to make the distinctions between themselves and this other category of non-white as sharp and undeniable as possible. Although overt Ebarb-Black antipathy has diminished, structural separation like the labor division in local cafes and subtle indications like the scene at the convenience store continue to reassert the gulf between the two groups.

Individuals' chosen ethnic designations slightly flavor but do not substantially affect their daily interactions. As the above situations illustrate, people ordinarily present themselves and are placed by others as group members. The relationship between group identity and the possible options for identifying it will be explored next.
"I believe the people was so mixed up they didn't know they ownselves what they were."

The question of Ebarb ethnic identity has been considered from the perspective of how group identity manifests itself in daily interaction, how ethnic labels demonstrate the manipulation of available choices, and what these choices and projections mean to the people themselves. As the possessors of a unique, awkwardly defined ethnicity, the people have found themselves in a situation similar to other American Isolates, and they share some of the tactics of negotiating the options available within this uncomfortable social position.

One of the methods of projecting a viable identity or promoting the positive aspects of a previously unacceptable one has been to host some ethnic celebration. The Alabama Creek's pow-wow is an example of this tactic. While the Indian Program centered in Ebarb has never organized such a public display, the Tamale Fiesta in Zwolle might appear to serve this purpose.
"The Fiesta was the beginning of something big--a new folk festival in Louisiana and a new identity for the townspeople" (1986 Tamale Fiesta brochure).

"The Fiesta is really not what Zwolle is supposed to be" (Interview #18, 11).

The Zwolle Tamale Fiesta's origins give some indication of the extent to which the celebration is intended as an expression of community identity. The Fiesta began twelve years ago as the brainchild of the manager of the Sabine Parish Chamber of Commerce (a Many resident) and a prominent Zwolle/citizen originally from South Louisiana. The latter man, Mr. L., had married into one of the Zwolle-Ebarb elite and was principal of Ebarb High School at the time (Sabine Index Sept. 6, 1979, 12B). Like several other festivals that sprang into being after the first flush of the Lake subsided, the Fiesta was frankly designed to promote tourism. One of the initial organizers explained that the tamale was chosen simply as a convenient focal point--as innocuously as some other locale might celebrate the bluebird or the crawfish (Interview #13, 12).

The Tamale Fiesta also aimed to improve the area's image. In the words of one of the first committee members, "We wanted to bring some good, positive publicity to the area" (Interview #13, 12). Outsiders who had to travel through the town still responded to Zwolle's negative
reputation by fearfully locking their car doors and running red lights to hurry through; the Fiesta invited them to stop and view the place and the people in a different light.

In addition, Mr. L., the local initiator, also hoped to increase the people's pride in their heritage. Publicity for the Fiesta repeatedly refers to the area's Spanish culture. Everything, even "authentic" costumes purchased in Mexico, is labeled Spanish--with the notable exception of the tamales themselves. The tamales (one of the few ethno-graphically accurate components of the celebration) reportedly come from an old Indian recipe.

Most of the imagery associated with the Fiesta actually derives from Mexican motifs. The first official Fiesta poster (issued in 1985) depicted a well-fed, sombreroed, moustached Mexican dozing while visions of tamales and senoritas danced above his head. This year's featured a lithe dancer on a sandy, Southwestern stage with a gallant trio of musicians (not the fiddle and guitar traditionally found at the region's country dances) in the background. None of the decorated stores I observed reflected anything local besides a small, side-street window with a merry hog's head (the favored source of tamale meat) surrounded by ears of corn. Most visitors would not be aware of that image's significance, although they would readily recognize something in the pinatas and rebosos featured elsewhere.

Residents do and do not pick up the same messages.
People who object to the Fiesta do so because it centers on something they adamantly are not—Mexican—instead of reflecting their own images of themselves. One anti-Fiesta man refuses to attend and predicts future trouble over this Mexican thing (Interview #16, 10; note that this man strongly asserts an Indian identity). Another traditional community member tersely commented that things like costumes can be called Mexican, but people had better not be (Fieldnotes 1985-87, 377), while a third plainly called the Fiesta "dumb and ignorant" (Interview #5, 8).

Other community members have been equally indignant:

I don't know why they want to say "Spanish people, hot tamales." Durn, it's Spanish people everywhere, but they want to put Zwolle down. "Ain't nothing but a bunch of Mexicans." We aren't no Mexicans (Shoemaker 1986, #14, 11).

The interviewee explained her sister's above remark:

A lot of people get mad 'cause Mr. L. went and made the town the Spanish heritage and all this stuff . . . . They didn't want that. They thought the white people'd laugh about 'em (Shoemaker 1986, #14, 11).

Community members who find the Mexican imagery of the Fiesta distasteful point out that it is the whitefaces who put it on. "To me, the thing was born in the mind of a white person. It wasn't born among the Spanish" (Interview #6, 11). Even a new community member who has actively participated in the celebration noted that the people who ran the Fiesta weren't "dark" while "the majority of the people who really show the blood" are only minimally involved (Interview #10, 13-14). Others reputedly
participate purely for personal gain. "Dollars talk," one critic succinctly stated. He continued "You could call 'em slough-footed if . . . it meant recognition, it meant money" (Interview #6, 11-12).

A larger number of community members respond to questions about the Hot Tamale Fiesta positively, however, primarily because the publicity has improved the area's image (Interview #1, 13; #3, 17; #18, 11). The annual celebration has dispelled some of the town's bad press. Visitors realize they will not be attacked on sight, and at least one liked the place so well she decided to stay (Interview #11, 4). Even those who would like to replace some of the Mexican imagery with something closer to the people's original culture speak first of the way the Fiesta has helped replace the community's long-standing negative reputation (Interview #3, 17; #18, 11).

Many residents who perceive no slight in the Fiesta symbols seem to interpret them as generic Hispanic. "Each year they go through a little ceremony of respecting the Spanish nature," one woman told me (Interview #12, 2). Another community member explained, "That's the Spanish part of your side, Spanish and Indian. So they dress up like that, Spanish, you know" (Interview #20, 24).

One Fiesta supporter complained that the people really didn't know what was Spanish and what was Mexican; when she decorated, she tried to use things directly from Spain like
matadors and flamenco dancers (Interview #11, 27). Others have accurately observed that items from south of the border are cleansed of their original taint by being rechristened "Spanish" (Interview #8, 16). An informed outsider confided, "They probably ease their mind by saying it's Spanish. Don't you imagine?" (Interview #4, 16).

Some community members do whitewash the Mexican imagery; others recognize the incongruity and dismiss it, often through humor. "They Mexican for that one weekend, and that Monday morning they go and get their feathers, put back in their hair. They Indians then," is a common remark (Interview #2, 45). People come to the Fiesta to enjoy themselves without thinking too seriously about the party decorations along the streets.

Behavior at the Fiesta seems to reflect this light attitude. Events like tamale-eating and log-cutting contests as well as the popular street dance (recently and regretfully discontinued) which relate to community traditions draw high attendance from the Spanish-Indian population. Proportionately fewer whites and even less blacks participate in these events. Also, contrary to the predictions of Fiesta critics, the majority of the costume contest contestants (all female) up to the adult category were from the Hispanic-Indian community.

The matter of the costumes proves to be particularly telling. Both pro-Fiesta and anti-Fiesta comments
recognize that the dress does not necessarily reflect the people's true heritage. "Why'd they come around with that black and that red and all that? We never did wear that kind of clothes," an elder very knowledgeable in her traditions objected (Interview #14, 9). Another community member lightly dismissed the matter by saying, "It's like Halloween, you know. It's just something that you're dressing up for" (Interview #12, 15).

Few people other than Fiesta officials and costume contestants actually do dress up. This past year the most lavish female costume was worn by a wealthy woman from Many who displayed it as well as her horse in the parade. The ruling parish elite continued to make their noble presence known. The parade's most outlandish costume featured a clownish Paco on a donkey. This man was clearly a community member; no white would have dared perpetrate such an overstated joke about the supposed ethnic content of the celebration.

Equally significant were the formal costume contest entries. The younger girls stood stiffly smiling in their taffeta ruffles and sequined sashes, but the half-a-dozen or so adult contestants approached the event in a very different spirit. About half of them were Anglo, none over-dressed, and all kidded each other or joked with the most accurate entry on stage--a robust grandmother from the Ebarb-Zwolle community with a red flower in her iron-grey
hair, double string of black beads around her neck, a red knit top, and black slacks. People in the crowd cheered her on. She laughed back. From everyone's evident good-humor, it was clear that none of the adults took the event—or perhaps even what it was purporting to portray—seriously enough to be offended by this obviously facetious entry.

This seems to concur with the opening quote: "The Fiesta is really not what Zwolle is supposed to be" (Interview #18, 11). In keeping with the original intent of its founders, the celebration serves first as tourist bait which locals laughingly employ. In this light, the costumes provide an elaborate joke by community members on the outsiders and echoes the remarks of the man who good-naturedly decided to tell his Shreveport co-workers he was a Mexican (p.82). Community members strategically (and somewhat subversively) manipulate their ascribed identity by milking it for material benefit and remaking it (Mexican becomes Spanish) in a preferable light.

Viewed from that perspective, the Fiesta mirrors rather than masquerades the state of community identity. The term Spanish has again been applied as a whitener, even on imported Mexican costumes. The label Mexican, properly reserved for visual and verbal joking among community members, is politely avoided. Comments like the informed outsider's, "To me it look like they would admit that they are more or less Mexican to have all that," (Interview #4,
21) hint that this may be an unconvincing performance. The seriousness of the younger costume contestants and the younger community member's suspicion that there are Mexican women in Zwolle (p. 77) indicates that more recent generations may be close to similar conclusions. In an effort to draw on widely recognized symbols (the very thing American Isolates so often lack), the people demonstrate the puzzle of appropriately matching themselves with a readily acknowledged identity.

Significantly, the Tamale Fiesta projects no overt claims for any Indian identity—in spite of the fact that one of the tribal organizers was also instrumental in establishing the Fiesta and the current tribal chairperson has been actively involved in it from its inception (Fieldnotes 1985-87, 372). Again, this reflects community identity choices. The focus of Indian identity centers in Ebarb; the people in Zwolle have been more inclined to project the traditionally more prestigious European options. People most hostile to the Fiesta generally have an Ebarb orientation, are very traditional community members, or have faced more problems in interaction with the outside world.

By their tacit recognition that projections of an Indian identity at the Feista would be both inappropriate (due to the Zwolle setting) and unsupported, the two leaders cited above further exemplify community adeptness at manipu-
lating ethnic labels. The public at large may be willing to humor these former Spanish-speakers by not calling the tamales and costumes Mexican, but it would seriously stretch credibility to mix unfamiliar Apache-Choctaws into this backdrop of sombreros and embroidered peasant blouses. The leaders realize, perhaps unconsciously, that the identity would not be validated, and they do not weaken their group's position by risking such a public failure. In this instance, the people again withhold aspects of community identity which would expose them to others' ridicule.

The Tamale Fiesta--in addition to reflecting community members' manipulation of ethnic labels, the problem of finding recognized signals of their identity, and in-group choices--does accomplish what other Isolates' ethnic celebrations attempt. On the surface the ethnicity in question appears muddled by Mexican jokes and Indian tribal leaders promoting a Spanish heritage. Rather than denying their identity, however, these two individuals' involvement reasserts their group loyalty. Group identity resides more in the unique community--defined primarily by kinship and locale--than any reference to a recognizable ethnicity.

If, in a given situation, group members choose to call themselves Spanish, Spanish-Indian, Indian, chonchi, or slough-footed, they still acknowledge one another as Zwolle-Ebarbers. By upgrading the public image of the area, the Fiesta fulfills the function of projecting a more
desirable image of the group. As both ethnic celebration and caricature, the Tamale Fiesta did not give the area a new identity any more than its official images depict the people's heritage. The event itself, however, expresses the complex perplexities of the people's identity.

**Ebarb Ethnic Identity and Identifiers Reviewed**

"But a lot of these people, they ain't worried about what nationality they are. I would like to know, myself" (Interview #16, 7).

"What?" the council member exclaimed with a wink after J.S. explained her language study, "Spanish amongst all these Indians?" (Fieldnotes 1985-87, 25).

Community members reacted positively to the Tamale Fiesta not because it accurately portrayed some aspect of their heritage but because it improved their area's reputation. Whether individuals called themselves Spanish, mixed, or Indian, all suffered from the negative image associated with their place and benefited from recent positive press. In addition to this one atypical event, daily interactions place all community members within the same larger category, underscoring how the people identify primarily with the group which has been so intimately associated with this locale.

Community members define this group by kinship, common geographic origin, and a shared heritage. Individuals do choose to use different ethnic labels or identifiers for
their people. The suave professional in Many adopted Hispanic (Interview #6), a sophisticated version of a country cousin who, in her carefully if not correctly cultivated manner, said she was "of the Spanish nature" (Interview #12). Both of these individuals also freely admitted to some Indian admixture, but they did not emphasize it like the frustrated leader who was able to live up to his image of himself through this retooling of his group identity (Interview #2).

In contrast to any of these, a woman whose self-esteem and public image had never been bound by any interpretation of her ethnicity has called the people's Spanish-Indian mix Mexican (Interview #17). In equally startling fashion, a younger but more traditional group member identified the community as Spanish-Indian, enjoyed the Tamale Fiesta, recognized the group's specific tribal affiliations, and labeled his distinct people chonchis (Interview #20).

Ethnic identifiers may also reflect an in-group social scale based on racial and cultural distinctions inherited from colonial Spain and reinforced by the dominance of European-derived Americans. Especially in the past, community elite and those aspiring to higher status have claimed the whitest category possible (see chart p. 83); those lower in the community hierarchy were more likely to be pointed out as Indian. Since those with more European background felt more at ease in white society and more
readily became acculturated while those who were more Indian tended to retain more of their tradition, these labels may have initially corresponded to genealogical fact.

The un'shamed young man who called himself a chonchi followed the unusual course of choosing a label which might more closely describe his unique ethnicity but did not widely or positively identify it. Most of the people, like members of other groups who face the same difficulty, lay claim to a label which can be readily recognized and thus more easily validated. Many community members do not seem quite certain about what that involves, as the authentic Spanish costumes from Mexico demonstrate.

Others, like the community leader who helped form the Tamale Fiesta while actively promoting the Indian Program, knowingly manipulate options and ethnic signifiers in light of what seems most applicable or to the greatest advantage. A housewife in Ebarb puts Indian on all her children's school papers, marks white on census forms, and calls herself Spanish (and Indian) in general conversation (Interview #12).

To say that ethnic terms may vary within the group according to social position or given circumstances does not address what these identifiers supposedly identify. Within the American experience, a designated ethnicity usually refers to place of origin and links individuals with some previously identified and defined group. The orignal choice
of ethnic terms available to a mixed but cohesive group like the Ebarb-Zwolle community confuses this pattern. The creation of a new, previously unknown group through this mixture further confounds the problem. Because they often stem from mixed groups, because they are indigenous people located where only immigrant populations (white or black) are expected to be, Isolates jar the underlying premises of the American pattern. As such, their uniqueness deprives them of the ready-made reference available to other American ethnic groups.

A recognizable ethnic identity has the advantage of providing symbols which mark the identity for others and also serve as rallying points for group members. A pair of Delft wooden shoes on the living room shelf or a miniature windmill in the yard might announce the householder's ethnicity; a Freejack or an Ebarber does not have recourse to such widely agreed-upon symbols. Commonly, ethnicity also links the individual to a larger body which can serve as a reference point. Again, Isolates' very distinctiveness precludes this.

In everyday interaction, less explicit signals mark but do not name community members' amorphous status between less-than-white and not-quite-black. Patterns of exchange in the Ebarb store, for instance, reestablish the otherness of outsiders while reaffirming group membership through the comfort of shared knowledge and style. The gallant Ebarber
in the Many convenience store also reasserted the unique status of his people—although he may have been hard-pressed to verbally identify that group.

The uncomfortable fit between themselves and standard, available identity classifications remains. Ebarb-Zwolle community members appear to desire a label and a recognized group to associate themselves with and to serve as a reference point for their identity.

Those who call themselves Spanish, however, usually disassociate themselves from all other Hispanics. They then defensively struggle to assert the right kind of Spanish heritage without any reference point beyond themselves (and other descendants of the East-Texas, west-Louisiana colonial frontier) to draw on. Confusion continues over what that involves, as the Tamale Fiesta symbols amply illustrate. They remain in isolation.

Choosing to focus on Indianness, popular with other Isolate groups, continues to be more underground, more problematic in its projection, and often discredited by those who resort to it opportunistically. This provides a more comfortable option for those who perceive themselves to be dispossessed, like the extreme case of the man who lost his land and his way of life and now seeks kindred spirits in the other Indians who cross his path.

As this chapter's opening quote indicates, the people cannot easily say where their people came from as most
American ethnic groups do. Group members do not agree on the aspect of the people's background which their ethnic identifier ought to reflect. That they do know what their group is, however, can be illustrated through both internal and external consensus on the definitive characteristics of the group and through group interaction patterns. Attaching an appropriate label to this group identity continues to be problematic.

The question which community members have posed to me and my co-worker, "Can you tell me who my people are?" reflects their precarious position. Although community members can clearly state who is and is not part of their people, the problem of conveying this group identity—both in terms of a name and positive public validation—remains. The people's own inquiry properly probes for another possible solution. This investigation of community responses to my similar questions hopefully serves to clarify their situation and perhaps allows them to come closer to their own resolutions to their perplexing situation.
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### APPENDIX

#### INTERVIEWS

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133
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Membership Terms:

- **Traditional**—holding traditional values, actively identifying with the community
- **Marginal**—not actively involved in the community
- **Educated**—not a naive informant
- **Informed outsider**—outsider familiar with the community, actively involved with the people in some fashion
- **Married in**—married into the community
- **Moved out**—left the community

Community areas:

See maps, p. 29, 31.
Denotes primary orientations (Zwolle, Ebarb, Noble, Converse, Many) as well as place of residence
IDENTITY INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Name and approximate age

2. Where do you go or would you go to church? to school? Where do your children go?

3. If I asked you where you were from, what would you say? If someone from around here asked the same question? from Many? in Shreveport or Natchitoches?

4. Where is this home community or settlement? Could you describe it? If you were to draw a circle around it, where would it lie?

5. Who were/are your neighbors there?

6. What were some of the communities or settlements around you? What were they like? Who lives there?

7. What do you call home? What do you consider your home territory or area?

8. Are there places or people that make you feel uncomfortable? where you can really relax and enjoy yourself?

9. When you think about home-folks, the type of people you were raised up with, what sticks in your mind? What would you miss most if you moved away from them?

10. If someone asked you what was unique or special or distinctive about your people, what would you say? (For instance, certain foods, special ways of celebrating ...)

11. Have you ever lived away from home? What did you miss most? Did people ever ask what nationality you were or what type of people?

12. Did the way people did things there strike you as odd? When you came back home, was there anything you had to readjust to, that seemed strange?

13. If you were doing business in Many or Natchitoches or Shreveport and saw someone you thought might be from around here, how could you tell? How would you go about finding out for sure?

14. Have you ever seen or heard of someone who moved off and then pretended not to be from here? Why do you
15. If we were going to try to fool someone and tell them I was your niece or cousin or granddaughter, would it work? Could I pass for someone from around here? Why or why not?

16. Suppose I had never been here before and I asked you who these people were, what kind of people they were, what would you tell me?

17. What do you put for ethnic identity on a census form or job application? Is it different than what you'd have put 20 years ago?

18. Have you ever been called something you found offensive? Is there some name that would offend your father or brothers?

19. When people find out you're from here, what do they expect you to be like?

20. I've heard some people say that people around here are Spanish. Who is Spanish? What makes them Spanish? Mexican? Indian?

21. What do the following terms mean or how are they used: meco or chichimeco, chimonca, whiteface/American, French, chonchi.

22. Do you remember when the Indian Program first came in? What did people think of it? Did it surprise them to find out they were Indian?

23. If it were up to you to decide who should or should not benefit from the Indian Program, how would you decide? In other words, who belongs in the Indian Program?

24. What do you think of the Zwolle Tamale Fiesta? If some people get mad when they're called Mexican, what about these Mexican costumes and things?

25. How did people react to the Lake? Have things changed since? Has the Lake been a positive or a negative thing for the community?

26. Is there anything you wish you knew about yourself, your people; you wish you could learn from or ask your parents, grandparents, the old people?

27. Is there anything you wish your children could know or carry on?
VITA
Mary B. Van Rheenen

Background:

Born and reared in peripheral regions of the Dutch-American, Reformed enclaves of the Midwest.

Education:

M.A., August 1987, Anthropology
Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

B.A., May 1981, Humanities, English-History major
Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

Honors:

Best Graduate Student Paper Award (refer to 1987b).
Nominated to Phi Kappa Phi, honor society, Louisiana State University, 1987.
Member, Sigma Tau, honor society, 1980.
First place, annual literary publication (refer to 1979, 1978).

Research and work experience:

Administrative assistant and archivist (of Folklife photograph and slide collection); Louisiana Crafts Program Program, Division of the Arts, Office of Cultural Development, Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism; January 1987-present.

Research assistant: the geography of the Prairie Cajuns, Jean Lafitte National Park; Dr. Fred B. Kniffen, Boyd professor emeritus, Department of Geography and Anthropology, Louisiana State University; February 1987-present.

Editorial assistant for Journal of Mayan Linguistics and Anthropology & Humanism Quarterly; Geoscience Publications, Linda L. McQueen, managing editor, Louisiana State University; 1985-86.
Researcher: compiled community genealogy records, collected oral histories, wrote community history, implemented Louisiana State Folklife grant for community craft survey; Apache-Choctaw Community of Ebarb, Noble, LA; 1982-84.

Editor (new tabloid for prospective college students); Update, Northwestern College, Orange City, IA; 1981-82

Writer/publicity director: edited and produced church newsletter, created news releases for outdoor worship program; Hawarden Community Church (RCA), Hawarden, IA; Summer 1981, 1977.

Oral history intern: interviewed residents of Dutch communities in Chicago; Dr. David Clark, Chicago Metropolitan Center, Spring 1981.

Publications and Presentations:


1987b. Place as an Indicator of Ethnicity Among the Hispanic-Indian People of Sabine Parish. 1987 annual meeting of the Southern Anthropological Society, 28 March, Atlanta, GA. The Southern Anthropologist, in press.


1982. Old Furniture. Speech duet performed at local Iowa high school speech contest by Maurice-Orange City High School Drama Department.


1981a. When Night Falls Early. Speech duet performed by Maurice-Orange City High School Drama Department; placed first at state Iowa high school speech contest.

1981b. Dutch Communities in the Chicago Area. Audio/visual presentation of internship material; archived at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, IL.

1979. Jim Tainer. Spring Leaves, Northwestern College, Orange City, IA.

1978. In an Alien Land. Spring Leaves, Northwestern College, Orange City, IA.

Member:

American Anthropological Association
Louisiana Folklife Society
Louisiana Folklore Society
Reformed Church in America Historical Society

Personal and professional interests:

People's stories; identities from a people's past and their present reinterpretations; creative wordscraft; active participation in the already-but-not-yet Kingdom.
Candidate: Mary B. Van Rheenen

Major Field: Anthropology

Title of Thesis: "Can You Tell Me Who My People Are?" Ethnic Identity Among the Hispanic-Indian People of Sabine Parish, Louisiana

Approved:

[Signature]
Major Professor and Chairman

[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signature]

[Signature]

Date of Examination:

December 15, 1986