

The Acadian Memorial As Civic Laboratory: Whiteness, History, and Governmentality in a Louisiana Commemorative Site*

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Abstract: In museum and race studies, scholars disagree on how to conceive of the subject: is it an identity defined by enduring interests that authors museal representations, or is it a self in process that sites seek to form and re-orient? I enter this debate by investigating displays in an Acadian commemorative site in Louisiana and the civic aims that motivated its staff, collaborators, and funders. Through analysis of ethnographic material, participants' goals and exhibit strategies emerge as targeting a new historical awareness—and a more “well-tempered” self—that everyday life did not generate. The article concludes that historical sites are best seen as a kind of laboratory—linked to diverse (rather than singular) political projects—for enabling novel behaviors, and that research on whiteness should be more sensitive to the governmental dimensions of how raced and classed subjects are formed. [Keywords: governmentality, history, museums, whiteness, Louisiana]

An unsophisticated agrarian people, [Cajuns] have clung tenaciously to their old customs and traditions. Strenuously resisting most encroachments from the outside, they have rather completely absorbed all the extraneous elements of the population that came among them....These...people until a quarter century ago had preserved one of the purest examples of a seventeenth century folk culture to be found in the United States. Their values and standards still are not altogether the values and standards of their English-speaking neighbors. More than any other factor this [association between low educational status and French language and culture] contributes to Louisiana's poor national standing.
- T. Lynn Smith and Homer Hitt, *The People of Louisiana*

When a regional radio talk-show host jokingly referred to “coonasses” and their spoken English “coononics” (as an analogue of black Ebonics) during a Lafayette women’s club luncheon in March 2001, proponents of French language and Cajun ethnic rights in south Louisiana quickly raised objections in several public fora, renewing a recurrent and often contentious debate. Their chief complaint was that once again, “outsiders” carelessly employed the term in a way that activated its connotations as an ethnic slur. Yet coonass and Cajun often operate as synonymous labels in the everyday speech of those who identify as such, and in a newspaper poll and letters to the editor, many locals rejected the claim that coonass was offensive and pejorative. This development shifted the debate considerably, and one prominent strain in advocates’ subsequent

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responses was to focus on the problematic character of these dissenting “insiders,” in attempts to explain—and reproach—their inappropriate linguistic preferences. “Within every ethnic group, there are those members of the group who are lazy and ignorant,” avowed David Cheramie, Director of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana, a state agency charged with preserving the state’s francophone heritage (Cheramie in Thibodeaux 2001:1). “No one group has the monopoly on ignorance and sloth” (Cheramie in Thibodeaux 2001:1). As his newspaper interview continued, Cheramie ironically embraced the talk-show host’s use of discourse of and about African-Americans to structure his own critical analysis, characterizing the problem among Cajuns as that of an objectionable segment within the entire ethnic population. “In the Cajuns, the term *coonass* is used pejoratively as a metonymy, that is, speaking of a small part to designate the whole,” he intoned. “In that sense, I fully agree with Chris Rock whom I paraphrase, ‘There are Cajuns and there are *coonasses*, and the *coonasses* have got to go!’” (Cheramie in Thibodeaux 2001:1).¹

While many recent accounts affirm Cajuns’ social and political ascendancy, journalists and researchers have focused much less on the serious governmental problem that, as both Cheramie and T. Lynn Smith and Homer Hitt (1952:107) exemplify, Louisiana’s middle classes and elites have made of *coonasses* or Cajuns. In this article, I argue that despite a certain celebratory discourse, this nexus of anxious concerns about Cajuns—namely, preoccupations about their deficient cultural competencies, on the one hand, and over their inadequate historical memory, on the other—motivated civic projects such as historical sites. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in 2000-01 in the Louisiana town of St. Martinville, I focus on one site, the Acadian Memorial and its associated Museum of the Acadian Memorial, as a project that was explicitly conceptualized to remedy these problems. My chief claim is that the site was oriented towards shoring up the perceived frailties of Cajuns in contemporary Louisiana. From this perspective, the Memorial can productively be seen as a kind of civic laboratory, in which objects and narratives were fabricated with the explicit purpose of shaping a historically aware and more fully civil subject.

My analysis takes up several interrelated points debated in the literatures of museum studies, critical race studies, and Louisiana studies. First, it challenges (again) views that community, ethnic, and minority museums represent “an opportunity to give voice and authority to those who were formerly excluded” (Crooke 2006:183), or dialogically negotiated, non-hierarchical “contact zones” (Clifford 1997). In critical race studies, a recent review suggested that the “common denominator” in the best recent work on whiteness is a focus on “how power and oppression are articulated...through various political discourses and cultural practices that privilege whiteness even when the prerogatives of the dominant group are contested” (Twine and Gallagher 2007:7). However, this material suggests the need for a more nuanced appreciation of the heterogeneous, context-specific character both of whiteness and of power, and in particular of the multiple yet shifting political bases for intraracial as well as interracial discourses of subject formation and public policy. And relative to one thread of Louisiana-based research stressing Cajuns’ agency in explaining regional cultural politics—for instance, that cultural and historical sites have enabled Cajuns to “express, affirm, and reconstruct their identity” primarily as a matter of “personal and deliberate choice” (Le Menestrel 1999:384-385)—I foreground the significance of initiatives like Cheramie’s in orienting such projects.

For each of the associated questions raised by these literatures—namely, “What are the civic and political effects of ethnic museums?” “How are the character and power of whiteness as a racial identity best analyzed?” and “What explains the upsurge or ‘renaissance’ of Cajun identity in Louisiana?”—the issue of how to conceptualize the white and/or ethnic subject looms large. Given the various kinds of authority and expertise that, as I will describe below, criss-crossed the Acadian Memorial and Museum, I maintain that a more discursive approach, in which power circulates diffusely as conduct-shaping goals and practices and the individual’s agency is not fully sovereign or intentional but rather subject to power, is a productive lens for analyzing the site, its promoters, and the most salient contexts in which they formulated their aims. In doing so, I attempt to address and remedy a weakness of analyses across the above-mentioned fields: the positing of a white/ethnic subject who purposefully intends and forcefully controls the effects of civic interventions on itself and in the social world. Accordingly, Acadians—and Cajuns, since, as I will make clear, the two were not always used synonymously—emerge here not as a group in possession of a fixed identity or authors of self-liberating representations, but instead, in the manner undertaken by Cheramie, as people whose behaviors were at times intensely debated, as well as something of a project, a subject whom, for different reasons, many actors wanted to celebrate—and re-shape.

This more governmental approach to power and subjectivity also facilitates re-problematizing historical museums as civic interventions. As the following will make clear, the Acadian Memorial and Museum did not take a pre-existing historical awareness for granted, but instead attempted to “produce” a historical space and time along with certain behaviors and dispositions that elites associated with a progressive historical self. In other words, the site’s various groups of staff, designers, funders, and advocates strategically chose and arranged its objects as they did because they considered them crucial to enabling an experience of historical spacetime, which they understood Cajuns to lack. My further contention, then, is that the site’s principals were focused on materializing history through its exhibits such that visitors from the region might more fully adopt historical ways of acting and seeing themselves. Thus, I seek to foreground the formative dimension of historical sites, by which I mean that generating politically salient effects on visitors was at least as important to curators and designers as accurately representing historical truth.

“There Are No Cajuns, We Are Acadians”: Whiteness, Historical Spacetime, and Empowered Political Agency

Smith and Hitt’s reproach of Cajuns (cited in the epigraph) was typical of a recursive strain of social analysis that circulated widely in Louisiana during the 20th century. Many middle-class whites saw Cajuns—a large group of small farmers, fishers, trappers, and wage laborers spread across the state’s southern half—as a deeply problematic group, a troublesome kind of “white trash” whose very existence threatened a polity premised on the natural superiority of whites over peoples of color. Significantly, the class-based differences separating Cajuns from other whites—forms of livelihood not focused on producing surpluses, excessively kin-oriented modes of sociality, anti-social habits (e.g., laziness), and the use of French in an increasingly monolingual public sphere—were often coded as a quasi-racialized inability to adopt the spatial and temporal coordinates of progressive, white subjects (Dormon 1983:53-63; Gilmore 1933;

Smith and Parenton 1938). In the dominant idioms of evolutionary and modernization theories, this troubling distinction was also cast in explicitly spatial and temporal terms, as Cajuns were described as being “stuck” in “another” time and space: they “clung tenaciously” to outmoded ways of speaking, working, and socializing; they were incapable of or refused to shift their practices to properly modern ones; and they were as likely to regress, to abandon their destiny as whites and become more like blacks, as they were to achieve progress. Such characterizations served as rationales for numerous practical interventions—in diverse fields of education, economic development, public hygiene, and social work—designed to reform these troublesome tendencies.² From a certain perspective, this marked the fundamental political difference between whites like Cajuns and blacks under Jim Crow: technocrats and other elites deemed the former to be backwards yet capable of improvement and vital to the future of the state, while they cast the latter beyond the ameliorative concerns of state power (cf. Domínguez 1986).

In many ways, Louisiana’s first museums were inaugurated in order to spell out for the public precisely how to discern the way into a modern future. Following curatorial practices current in other metropolitan centers, staff at the Louisiana State Museum in New Orleans, one of the state’s oldest public museums, sought to display historical objects in such a way as to trace a path through time, marking out through their placement the specific developments that constituted Louisiana’s progressive history. In their biennial reports, the Museum’s Board of Curators consistently stressed the significance of these displays as tools of civic education, by which visitors would come to grasp the state’s historical trajectory:

The welfare of society demands that its fundamental principles be understood and appreciated. The eye imparts to the mind the sensation of learning faster than the ear, hence exhibits in museums well arranged and attractive are primal educational forces....The Museum appeals to direct experience and is concerned with the reality of the past and that the future offers little to those who do not know their way. [Louisiana State Museum Board of Curators 1937:14-15]

This accent on the active shaping of modern tendencies among the population, as well as on the site’s impact on citizens’ behavior, were based on the widely shared premise that museums were spaces for the bodily shaping of progressive subjects (Bennett 2004). While representations of Cajuns were largely absent from the State Museum, other attempts to exhibit their history and heritage during this time shared similar preoccupations. For the dozens of “Evangeline girls”—young women dressed in costumes evoking Evangeline, the Acadian heroine of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s popular epic poem—who were the focus of several pilgrimages to Canada’s Maritime provinces led by state senator Dudley LeBlanc at mid-century, activities aimed at stimulating their modernization were folded into the itinerary. Organizers instructed the young women to keep diaries during the trip, for instance, as a means of enabling a novel mode of reflection, and they also paired those from rural areas together with their urban counterparts, hoping that the former would be inspired to learn English through extended contact with the latter (Brundage 2000). Thus, while these trips were certainly aimed at stimulating awareness of a shared ethnic heritage among LeBlanc’s constituents, they were also focused on inculcating specific “modern” habits and behaviors. Through the intended effects that particular arrangements like these would have, technocrats and others invited Cajuns to shed their regressive ways and become part of a progressive history.

In efforts like this, LeBlanc was typical of the tourism boosters, elected officials, and elite descendents of the first immigrants who began to argue that Acadian, though not Cajun, was a difference that mattered. Countering narratives of Cajuns' degraded whiteness, they posited Acadians as a white group on a par with other Euro-Americans, whose past role in building the state by producing political and professional leaders, making sacrifices in important wars and political initiatives, and so forth, merited a voice in managing Louisiana's current affairs. Not unlike middle-class advocates in other modernizing contexts (Chakrabarty 1992), however, they consequently split this identity between a modernizing Acadian self and a degenerate, tradition-bound Cajun one, the latter in dire need of rehabilitation and reform. In St. Martinville, a proposal in 1968 to inaugurate a festival proclaiming the town as the "Cajun Capital of the World" gave way to a spirited public debate in which opponents of the initiative, who successfully nullified public approbation of the project, argued in much the same terms. Through Longfellow-Evangeline State Park, a commemorative site inspired by the protagonist of Longfellow's poem, local elites long promoted the town as an important venue of Acadian history in Louisiana. Fearing that the lowbrow connotations of Cajun would overwhelm the associations with high culture and history that Acadian conveyed, they laid out their case unequivocally. Cajuns, one resident insisted, were "backwards, illiterate people, suspicious of change and new ways, content to babble in a corrupted 17th century French dialect, wildly gesturing in conversation, indolent and lazy and hanging on to an Alligator's back while hunting possum for the supper table!" (Bulliard 1968:4); meanwhile, Acadians were those who, in immigrating to Louisiana, longed "to once more speak their native tongue and be understood, to have access to the sacraments in the religion that had been so much a part of their lives, to again own a piece of land that was truly theirs and once more experience the anticipation and hope of harvesting this land" (Bulliard 1968:4). The primacy of bodily and behavioral characteristics as the ground for distinguishing between Cajun and Acadian is striking here, and it is this interiorizing thrust that has given these labels their intraracial quality.³ Moreover, the point Bulliard stressed most forcefully (as did other critics) was the inability of Cajun to denote a generative (i.e., historical in a progressive sense) spacetime. As another resident explained, "No one wants to [be] known as a Cajun, because that name always pertained to ignorant people....Instead of cajun capital, make St. Martinville the Acadian Capital of Louisiana....There are no cajuns, we are Acadians and are very proud of our heritage" (Mouton 1968:2).

The intensity of this local debate corresponded to profound shifts in the political status quo that intensified during the 1960s and beyond. A convergence of forces—not the least of which were pluralizing trends in cultural representation emanating from federal entities like the National Park Service and the Smithsonian Institution—broadened what experts and technocrats in Louisiana considered civically significant culture and history. Specifically, actors in these national institutions began to systematically re-define and expand the criteria for selecting cultural and historical forms of national importance (Walker 2007); in the process, Cajuns were increasingly singled out as a remarkable ethnic group with a distinctive folk culture. Shaped by developments like this, change agents ceased to target Cajuns as a problematic form of whiteness in exactly the same way as before; this did not mean, however, that the re-articulation of Cajun practice into spheres of historical representation was seamless, or that the issues associated with Cajuns' suspect sociality simply disappeared. Perhaps most significantly, whiteness itself was, so to speak, under siege: blacks' systematic challenges to whites' ensconced privileges substantially

disrupted social life in post-segregation Louisiana. The latter's responses, though varied and occasionally benign, were at times defiant if not virulent (Bernard 2003:53-66; Fairclough 1995; cf. Sokol 2006).⁴ Moreover, precisely what "Cajun" meant in these novel representational settings was far from clear. Marjorie Esman (1982) has shown, for instance, that decisions about the inauguration and performative orientations of the Crawfish Festival in Breaux Bridge involved competition between the ascendant "coonasses," or newly urbanized, ex-farmers of francophone descent and the more established, genteel "Acadians;" in looking across the entire Cajun festival complex, she found a similar divergence between decorous activities associated with a historical past, which were labeled as Acadian, and those connected to more quotidian pleasures (e.g., dancing, drinking, and eating), identified as Cajun or coonass.⁵ As the quote from Cheramie in the introduction indicates, furthermore, there was significant pushback against the perceived ascendancy of the latter; to those defending proper, civically useful behaviors, Cajuns' ignorance, indolence, and excessive corporality made promoting them completely incompatible with the progress of the state.

Consequently, just how Cajun or Acadian were to be represented, and with what intended civic effects, have been disputed questions. Simply put, it was not self-evident how people and practices that formerly were "not quite white" could be made to shape proper, self-governing subjects.

Civic Laboratories: History, Exhibition, and the Making of Political Subjectivity

From this perspective, acting in and "having" a history can be distinguished from possessing temporality (or historicity), or humans' fundamental capacity to live in *as well as* to shape time (Munn 1992; Ricoeur 2004; Wright 1985:13-16). That is, while the two are often easily conflated, the previous section's analysis should make it clear that their alignment—that is, the intersection of the temporal dimension of human practice with activity and events that are characterized as properly historical—is the result of political and social interventions, and not a given. European and North American social formations have now long focused on regimenting space, activity, speech, and bodily movements such that social forces combine to realize progressive movement toward an open-ended, utopian future; when action and reflection occurs within spaces in which time has been instrumentalized in this way, temporality is potentially experienced as history (Foucault 1977; Koselleck 1985; Thompson 1967). Correspondingly, the rise of nation-states and the expansion of liberal government have opened up intensive efforts to comb through the material traces of the past for objects that can, when displayed effectively, shape dedication to progressive national projects and inform the behaviors necessary to achieve them. Relative to what counts as historical objects or texts that could inform a progressive future, the general (though by no means universal) trend has certainly been away from specifying more exclusive (i.e., unitary) paths of contributions to the nation and progress, and toward acknowledging a multiplicity of distinct contributions (Karp et al., eds. 2006; Kreps 2003). In any case, however, scholars recognize historical and ethnological museums as a means for enabling an awareness of and behavioral alignment with the historical movement of time, neither of which everyday social relations necessarily produce (Bennett 2004; cf. Mitchell 1989).⁶

Consequently, I take up issues of how and why actors “historicize” agency, or endow it with meaningful coordinates of historical time and space. Such issues are especially pertinent in the expanding landscape of sites focusing on ethnic, racial, or regional identities like that of Cajuns. While these sites have become more common, studies rarely focus on how practitioners translate museal practices into the vernacular, as it were, by re-conceptualizing what has largely been a nationalizing discourse in sub-national contexts (though see Ruffins 2006; Gable, Handler, and Lawson 1992). As the previous section illustrates, this case is particularly intriguing in this regard, insofar as both experts and lay people have long shared the view that the temporality of Cajuns is profoundly anti-historical and filled with retrograde tendencies. Simply put, one might ask: How have actors and institutions reconfigured Cajun sociality, such that they can now objectify it as historical? Following Bennett and others, the response I pursue is that the Acadian Memorial *aims to generate* this transformation, as an arrangement of objects that re-encodes spacetime as collective history. In other words, through their distinctive procedures for separating out, transforming, and exhibiting objects alone or in configurations, museums, expositions, and heritage sites like the Acadian Memorial succeed in reifying abstract entities such as communities, national pasts, or history *tout court*. That is, practitioners at the Acadian Memorial have *materialized* Acadian history, as an effect of objects juxtaposed in a particular configuration, in a way that few (if any) other spaces do.

The civic or political (in the broadest sense) goals of such sites are also at times obscured by a narrow focus on the minutiae of display or by taking the stability of the identity being represented for granted. Another feature garnering attention—the spread of historical expertise—certainly operates as a driving force in shaping the parameters of what counts as pertinent history; the growing ranks of public historians typically focus on particular moments in which important lessons about human nature, creativity, and power can be gleaned from their investigations of archival records (cf. Tyrrell 2005). Yet this does not exhaust conceptions of or aims for the civic. While historical expertise certainly conditioned the emergence of the Acadian Memorial, I found history-making to be linked to diverse notions of and socio-political aspirations for Acadians as citizens. In this regard, the Foucaultian prescription to discern and follow distinct social programs—articulated regimes of prescriptions, targeted behaviors, and strategies of intervention—is especially suggestive (Foucault 1991; cf. Dean 1999:20-23). From this perspective, the civic qualities that historical sites seek to enable, rather than strictly focusing on the political as usually defined (e.g., strengthening one’s identification with the nation or a dominant ethnic group), are best seen both as multifaceted and as inspired by motives that straddle the boundary between the political system and civil society.⁷ Following this understanding of power (and thus of the formation of civic subjects) as heterogeneous and widely circulating, a more complex picture of civic formation emerges: while collaborating in a single site, the social actors I will describe were seeking to enable fundamentally distinct (if overlapping) dimensions of agency, and so situated themselves relative to different nodes of political authority. Moreover, the civic qualities they were most intent on generating had much to do with regional understandings of how, in mundane yet important ways, one develops a proper and civil self.

In light of the foregoing, I make two basic assertions that guide what follows. In terms of conceptualizing the white/ethnic subject, I claim that the project’s organizing center *was not* Acadians, if by that one understands a subject structured around a core of stable interests and

behaviors, e.g., to author representations of itself. As I have shown, no broad consensus existed about who Cajuns/Acadians were, and as I will demonstrate, Memorial promoters sought to sponsor a subject whom they thought everyday life did not reliably sustain: a decorous, historically aware Acadian. Moreover, while the state once advanced whiteness *per se* as a core dimension of citizenship, this no longer occurs (Omi and Winant 1994). To be sure, Memorial advocates privileged whiteness in substantial ways and racialized the subjectivity they envisioned. Yet on the whole, the empowerment of whiteness was not the explicit, core motivation or principle of their various objectives. What was clearly articulated, in a manner that encompassed the on-going salience of whiteness as a discourse of identity, were participants' commitments to and knowledges of enabling conduct they considered appropriate to "well-tempered" citizens (Miller 1993). This *governmental* imperative, widely shared as civic "common sense" and institutionalized in diverse ways, provided both the Memorial's authoritative *raison d'être* and its advocates' pragmatic focus. Secondly, relative to what will emerge as designers' purposeful manipulation of objects in pursuit of a novel form of political subjectivity, characterizing the Acadian Memorial as a civic laboratory—a site intended to foster specific effects on visitors as subjects of a given political order—seems apt (Bennett 2005:525ff.). Accordingly, Acadians—visitors who, by touring the Memorial, would act as subjects with a politically salient past and an empowered present and future—are best understood as the site's *objective*, not its *precondition*.

Local Site, Remote Forces: St. Martinville and the Shifting Field of Civic History

Sitting on the oak-lined banks of Bayou Teche, 140 miles west of New Orleans and a 75-minute drive southwest from Baton Rouge, the Acadian Memorial and the Museum of the Acadian Memorial are housed in renovated buildings in the center of St. Martinville. A town of approximately 7,000 residents, St. Martinville has suffered in its decades-long competition with two other nearby parish seats, with a resulting shrinkage of its retail economy and decay of the building stock in a once-lively downtown. The two buildings—a large, two-story, turn-of-the-century city hall and a functional, one-story edifice that once housed both a firehouse and a jail—participated in this general decline, but as publicly owned structures they were targeted for re-use by municipal officials and other residents hoping to re-invigorate the town's reputation as a destination for heritage tourism. From the beginning, the site was organized as a public-private partnership: an ad hoc committee of the municipal tourism commission became a non-profit foundation with a board of directors, to which the town donated the buildings for renovation and use. While the board oversaw operations of the site (with several board seats reserved for elected officials) the municipality paid staff salaries, which included those of a full-time curator-director and several part-time docents.

The Memorial space itself is composed of several elements, the most prominent of which are located on the first floor of the refurbished city hall. Facing each other across the gutted and now-open interior are a series of bronze plaques listing the approximately three-thousand 18th century immigrants from Nova Scotia in a "Wall of Names" and a 12 X 30 foot mural painting depicting the "Arrival of the Acadians in Louisiana." From the center of this space, one can also see and access a small courtyard near the bayou, in which an eternal flame burns atop a low-set granite altar. The building's second floor is reserved for administrative offices and meeting

spaces, though it also holds a small boutique and a genealogical library that are open to the public. Soon after its inauguration in 1996, the site's staff and board of directors decided that visitors needed a more explicit narrative orientation to Acadian history (about which more below), and a museum exhibit was added in the adjacent former firehouse during 2001. Here, too, the structure was emptied of existing walls to make room for an open exhibit space.

As the components making up the Memorial suggest, the site's conceptualization occurred within a field strongly influenced by an idiom of "past-ness" common in regional and national commemorative and historical sites. One of the site's early proponents spoke of his own tour of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., and the National Cemetery in Arlington as compelling inspirations for the Memorial's Wall of Names and Eternal Flame; of the latter, he commented matter-of-factly, "Well, of course, there's Kennedy's grave; it [the Memorial] just seemed like the kind of place that needed an eternal flame" (interview with author, September 28, 2000). Yet the Memorial's designers considered these forms not only as prestigious objects to be copied in the local setting (though that was certainly part of their allure), but also as things capable of enabling an intense historical "feeling." At the moment of commissioning the artist for the Memorial's mural, one supporter specified that "we want to convey a sense of the drama and the struggle these people experienced and the most effective way to do that is through art. We think [the mural painting] will be able to impart this mood" (St. Martinville Teche News 1992:1A, emphasis added). Consequently, part of what they grasped as the public significance of the Acadian past can appropriately be attributed to their own experience of how history "felt" in other sites. As there was no "Acadian" convention of representing the past in this way, this sense of the potency of objects charged with history—and, more fundamentally, that the substance of a proper civic experience of history was the absorption of the "mood" they "imparted"—were assumptions that Memorial designers imported from other venues. From this perspective, the inspiration for the Memorial's Acadian history was profoundly intertextual, though the process might more accurately be described as the designers' effort to transpose their own visceral sense of the meaning of other pasts into an Acadian context.⁸

To be sure, other notions and practices with closer anchorages to local life were also critical in shaping the Memorial's emergence and design. Among those who identified as Cajuns, there was a growing notion of a personal truth available to those who pursued genealogical knowledge. Publications of sacramental records from south Louisiana Catholic churches dating back to the colonial period—which academics considered by far the most popular "history books" sold in the region—were ubiquitous and well-used in even the smallest public libraries, including that of St. Martinville. Family relations were significant among people who identified as Cajuns, but extensive family genealogies were not part of this; rather, the emergent awareness that, for instance, one's family had immigrated to Louisiana from Acadia was largely reconstructed through recourse to these and other published sources (cf. Le Menestrel 2001). For some, genealogical research of this kind offered an avenue to crucial self-knowledge. As Laura Benoit, a middle-aged teacher who participated in the Memorial's earliest fundraising efforts, passionately put it, "Genealogy for people like us is a way of finding out, maybe for the first time, and in a very real sense, who you are....Because until you see an ancestor's gravestone, or a picture, or a name on a census role, when you see any of those things, anything tangible, it makes the past suddenly become very real. You realize you're part of a larger continuum" (interview with author, July 11, 2001).⁹ Over the years, the site's board of directors attracted a

number of new members who similarly described their genealogical activities as leading to a profound re-shaping of their sense of self. Several of these were part of a new network of family-based genealogical associations, and saw directing the Memorial—and making the transformation they experienced available to others—as an important civic outlet for their newfound enthusiasm.

There was yet another way in which genealogy—in the form of a diffuse yet substantial notion of an Acadian behavioral inheritance—became a widespread concern enabling support for the site. Beginning in the 1970s, historians increasingly focused on Acadians' remarkable recovery from the “trauma” of their deportation and their successful adaptation to a dramatically different environment of south Louisiana as two of the most significant historical facts about them (Comeaux 1972; Rushton 1979). Concurrently, writers from various quarters drew on these and other accounts to affirm that the admirable qualities possessed by 18th century Acadians—resilience, pride, and a *joie de vivre*—were plainly present in contemporary Cajuns (e.g., Tassin 1976; Angers 1989). This emergent notion among middle-class south Louisianians that certain practices and behaviors were emblematic of a “culture” and a “history” that they themselves carried became an increasingly common assertion in public discourse. In a crucial initial phase, Memorial supporters mobilized this sentiment through a sustained campaign to elicit formal endorsements of the initiative from governmental entities across the region. Pursued in the early 1990s, the effort produced numerous statements of support, specifying that Acadian immigrants had made invaluable contributions to the state's progress and that their contemporary descendants—inheritors of this tradition of good citizenship, as it were—deserved acknowledgment of this fact. In contradistinction with the past, advocates of the Memorial thus generated widespread support for a novel civic proposition: the qualities of historical Acadians had endured to such a degree that their progeny (along with others) needed to be reminded of those desirable traits.

As such, the Memorial was premised on the notion—exactly the opposite of that expressed in the epigraph—that government *should* enable Acadians' memory of their (now revalued) past. However, not just any version of that memory was acceptable for public circulation. In the case of St. Martinville, these forces were crosscut substantially by the emergent authority of the historical profession over regional and sub-national history-making. Since its inception in the 1920s, locals controlled historical representation at the Longfellow-Evangeline historical site, which above all was focused on yoking Longfellow's prestigious stature and his poem's widespread popularity to lore about the glories of the antebellum era in the state's sugar belt (cf. Kane 1945). Locals who were entrusted with elaborating and narrating this history—most often small business owners or members of elite families—thus emphasized local particularities and engaging story-telling as the site's central aims. When, during the 1970s, academic historians in the region expanded their interests beyond the history of national elites to focus on that of women, the working classes, and ethnic and racial groups, they undermined this local authority and its prerogatives. In particular, historian Carl Brasseaux's *In Search of Evangeline: Birth and Evolution of the Evangeline Myth* (1988) criticized Evangeline-based Acadian history as “fakelore” (cf. Dorson 1976), singling out St. Martinvillers' fabricated attempts to connect Longfellow's protagonists to a real-life pair of Acadian immigrants. Within several years, officials in the state park system, referencing Brasseaux's scholarship, asserted its authority at Longfellow-Evangeline by appointing non-local staff to manage the site, erasing traces of

previous narratives and sanctioning a new, archivally grounded characterization of local history. Many locals were upset—one proponent of what she called the “handed-down history,” who contested Brasseaux’s criticisms, complained sharply that her version was “more exciting than the dullsville that historians write with their facts” (interview with author, August 31, 2000). But agents of a new regime of historical truth were marginalizing what had been the most prominent public narrative of the Acadian past as a “fictitious” legend.

Thus, while the inspiration and administration of the Memorial were locally situated, content was largely guided by professionals and funders based elsewhere. The growing network of non-profit organizations and governmental agencies focused on cultural interventions of this kind increasingly required the support of credentialed expertise as a condition for funding. In this case, Memorial supporters approached the most qualified regional academicians on the subject—including Brasseaux—who made suggestions on the site’s design, guided the research grounding the Memorial’s representations, and wrote the exhibit script for its museum exhibit. Going forward, participants from all quarters accepted that, as possessors of accurate historical truths, historians and their products were the most appropriate basis for generating a civically effective history. In a town long known for its locally produced history, then, it was now the archives as interpreted by historians that operated as the foundation for public accounts of the past.

Before illuminating in greater detail how the Memorial’s design and rationale was thus articulated between these various groups of actors, however, I proceed to an analysis of the space itself, concentrating on how its objects were displayed and on the historical effects that these were intended to enable.

From Cajun to Acadian: The Memorial’s Spacetime of Collectivity and History

In its promotional literature, the Memorial emphasized that it represents “real people” and “factual” historical events.¹⁰ The wall of names (see Figure 1) is crucial in this regard, for it concentrates this documentary facticity in a singular, highly visible form. Through its distillation of documentary texts from diverse archives, it condenses records that, in their dispersion, referenced other socio-political entities (e.g., the Catholic Church, the French Empire, the Port of New Orleans) and their distinct purposes (e.g., sacramental life, colonial administration, municipal inspection). As such, this condensation constituted one of the primary transformational acts grounding the site’s representations. Compiled by one of the Memorial’s founding board members (Landry 1999), the list selectively draws dispersed records together in an original grouping, which conveys an archival historicity through its repetition of a documentary format. Consequently, the wall of names produces effects both of “past-ness” and collectivity. Through its consistent use of dates of arrival and its formal reference to both funerary and memorial inscriptions, the wall denotes a time prior to the present. By organizing together names of immigrants who arrived at different times and places and pursued diverse trajectories thereafter, they appear as a distinct and coherent group.



Figure 1. A visitor reaches to touch the name of her Acadian ancestor after the unveiling of the Wall of Names. Photograph by Henri Bienvenu, May 1998. Originally published in Bienvenu 1998. Courtesy of the St. Martinville *Teche News*.

This effect of collective cohesion is reiterated by the words engraved in marble on either side of the bank of plaques, which read, “Pause, friend, read my name and remember” in both English and French. While a voice in the singular, the inscription serves interchangeably as an address from every individual immigrant to each of his or her progeny, and thus operates as a mnemonic provocation from the collective of Acadian ancestors to all their descendants. Relative to visitors, then, the wall invents a spacetime of intergenerational communication, in which, as the engraved injunction announces, generations speak to each other across time and space. Reinforced in the inscription on the altar encountered in the nearby courtyard—“A people without a past is a people without a future”—it implies that the Acadian dead have a consequential message to impart to the current generation. The plaques thus promote a transformation of archival inscriptions into a living patrimony, that is, a heritage that extends into the present through the visitor-descendant.

Though it does not reference specific archival documents or objects in the way that the wall of names does, the mural (see Figures 2 and 3) nevertheless purports to be a singular trace of historical events. It does so, first of all, in the way that it operates in conjunction with the wall of names directly across from it. Through the brochure that she receives upon entry, the visitor is made aware that some forty of the 70 figures in the mural are intended to represent a selection of “real” Acadians who immigrated to the region, and whose names are all found on the wall’s list of exiles. Historical details about the life of each figure are listed in the brochure, underneath a map of the mural assisting the visitor in connecting these facts with the painting’s depictions.

Together, the wall of names and the brochure bathe the painting in facticity, relaying their more transparent relationships to archival sources towards and into the mural. Conversely, the image also extends the more genealogical theme of the wall of names and library. In depicting the individuals, the muralist chose to use models who, in most cases, were descendents of the immigrants selected for portrayal (LeBlanc 1995).¹¹ Invariably the subject of comment by docents to visitors, this staging of a direct biological connection between contemporary Acadians and their “ancestors” gave dramatic visual form to the Memorial’s explicit but otherwise textually bound emphases on continuity of descent. As with the wall of names, the mural is thereby explicitly oriented toward bridging the spatial and temporal intervals between generations. Intriguingly, in the absence of any documentary trace of 18th century Acadians’ physical features, contemporary subjects substituted for the ancestors’ bodies. In this way, the present was withdrawn, as it were, into a “representation” of the past, projecting genealogical continuity “backwards” from the here-now of the mural’s execution towards the there-then of ancestral arrival.



Figure 2. Standing in front of the mural, a Memorial docent recounts the history of the Acadians to visitors. Photograph by P. C. Piazza, July 1999. Originally published in Delhomme 1999a. Courtesy of the *Lafayette Daily Advertiser*.

The intense intergenerational traffic that the site enables suggests a preoccupation with relaying bodily characteristics across space and time, which I argue is central to the Memorial’s aims. In this regard, the mural serves as the pivot of the entire assemblage. By all accounts, designers understood the painting to convey historical truth through its visual rendering of recent research concerning Acadian character: above all, a resolute persistence throughout their prolonged dispersion, and a vigorous drive to relocate and reconstruct families in Louisiana. As such, the mural both corrected previous historical accounts, and projected—in a subjectively engaging way—current consensus about Acadians’ dispositions. In this sense, the site was meant to inform visitors, but also to form them, that is, to re-shape their understanding of who their ancestors *were*—and consequently, who they *are*. For in the context of Cajuns’ denigration, docents’ invitation that visitors silently contemplate the mural’s life-size figures—many looking confidently out towards viewers, debarking into an uninhabited natural landscape, as if taking possession of newly discovered territory—operated as an interpellation to see themselves

differently. In conjunction with the Memorial's consistent interweaving of genealogical and historical elements, the mural offered a representation of white plenitude, as it were, creating a spacetime in which locals might understand Acadians' positive attributes as both historical truth *and* ancestral inheritance. The site's prompt, one might say, was for Cajuns to reclaim their true character, rediscovering, through the mediation of the Memorial, an empowering heritage that was available to and active in them.



Figure 3. Detail from “The Arrival of the Acadians” by Robert Dafford. Photograph by the author, May 2009. Used with permission from the Acadian Memorial Foundation and the City of St. Martinville, LA.

As a historical exhibit, the museum's architecture followed the common curatorial strategy of a chronological layout of text panels, beginning with Acadian origins in 17th century France and ending in the present (see Figure 4). Drawing heavily on recent research that increasingly circulated as a “black box” or unproblematic fact (Latour 1987:131), the panels' narrative and images consistently reference a collective subject—the Acadians—whose agency, coherence, and survival through time was thoroughly spatialized in the exhibit's design.¹² Its spatiotemporal logic was thus developmental, in the sense that it constructed a path for visitors by which they might physically retrace the linear movement of a subject through successive stages of its existence. Significantly, this trajectory of historical agency is constructed in relation to itself; that

is, one follows the unfolding of Acadian history as a matter of the group's own self-renewing practices of identification. Though they move from place to place across the centuries, and exist as subjects of different political regimes and economies, these diverse situations do not fundamentally alter their ontological status: they are always Acadians, and then, through a mere contraction of the label, Cajuns. This in itself constituted a significant shift: detaching objects like images and photographs from previous inscriptions, the exhibit reworked narratives of a deficient collective historicity, and mobilized the museum's capacity to produce a novel cultural object. Simply put, the museum inducts the visitor into the unfolding life of the ethnic group, which is guided through time primarily by its own internal habits and interests.

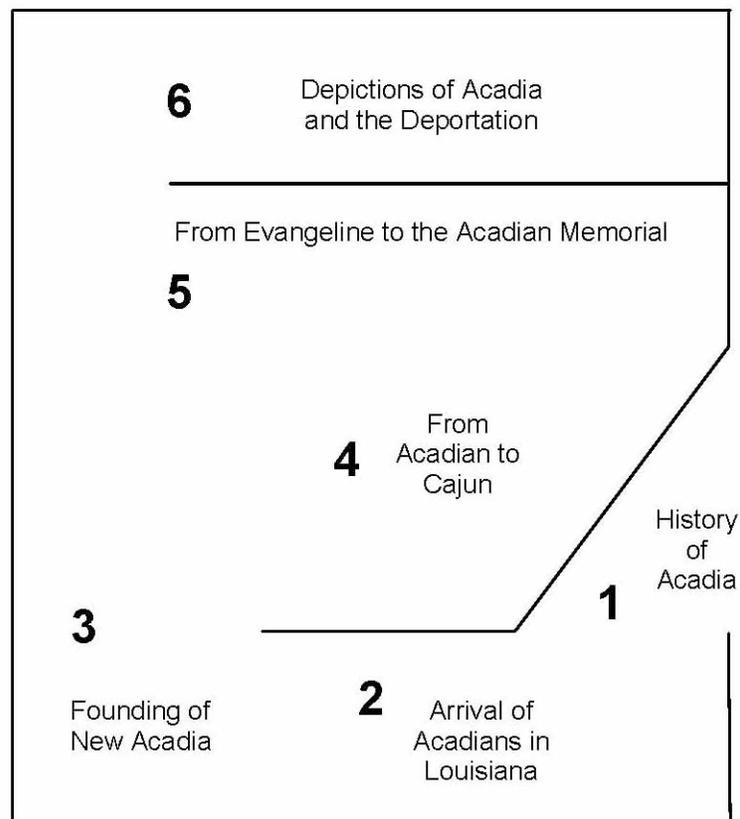


Figure 4. Layout of the Museum of the Acadian Memorial exhibit, based on Acadian Memorial Foundation 2000:4. Courtesy of the Acadian Memorial Foundation and the City of St. Martinville, LA.

At the same time, this historical itinerary was not, strictly speaking, a progressive one; it did not depict Acadian history as a trajectory of gradual improvement or uninterrupted advance. Rather, the visitor was intended to experience a periodic waxing and waning of Acadian agency, with emphasis on moments when Acadians suffered oppression and violence. While the exhibit recounts extended periods of Acadians' prosperity, such as their successful adaptation to living in both Acadia and Louisiana, and the continuity of significant ethnic traits such as *joie de vivre*, it alternates these with text panels depicting their victimization. After describing Acadian ethnogenesis in French colonial North America, the exhibit devotes several panels to their

extended struggle with the British, who took over Acadia in 1713. In these panels, Acadians are acted upon, and exercise little agency themselves, as they are subjected to aggression, coercion, and deception; the accompanying images depict the hardships of expulsion and dispersal in detail. As the visitor approaches the exhibit's end, the panel entitled "Pride" extends this dynamic into the present, describing Acadians' on-going "struggle" to affirm their language and culture after decades of "prejudice and abuse."

This stress on both the treacherous use of force against Acadians and their intrepid response to it sharpens the contrast between Acadians and their opponents, and operates as one of the major interpretive thrusts of the exhibit. Their lack of agency, coupled with descriptions and images of the violence they endure, combine to constitute Acadian selves in a melodramatic mode (cf. Williams 2001), casting them as fundamentally innocent and wholesome.

The Museum was developed simultaneously with an African American Museum, one of the first permanent exhibit spaces devoted to the history of blacks in Louisiana. Located in the same renovated building, the two exhibits shared a foyer in which large matching maps of the North Atlantic faced each other: on the left, one marked "Acadian Diaspora," with arrows and dates marking transcontinental movements, and on the right, a similar representation of the "African Diaspora." The subjects of the two sites thus were framed as "equivalent differences" (Bennett 2005:540), that is, as distinct groups whose historical trajectories were nonetheless similar and equally valuable to the body politic. In contrast to museums' hierarchical ordering of racial difference prevailing during Jim Crow, these adjacent sites were meant to operate in a fundamentally different fashion, juxtaposing white Acadians and African Americans as analogous and complementary constituents of the region

Shades of White: The Memorial and Social Governance in Contemporary Louisiana

"Blameless" White Domination: Remaking White Privilege

If white St. Martinville, which was a hotbed of the state's organized white supremacy movement during and well after Reconstruction, no longer resisted racial integration with the same fervor as it once did, relations between whites and blacks were often far from amicable or equitable. As blacks gradually became a demographic majority in the town during the decades following desegregation, their "encroachment" in formerly all-white zones was particularly vexing for some whites, as was the prospect of the former "taking control" of local government. During the time when the Memorial and its museum were being planned and built, white and black municipal officials waged a determined campaign against each other to redraw town council districts in the most favorable terms possible for their respective constituencies, leading to an eight-year period during which council elections did not occur. When voting finally took place in 2002, it was marred by a voter fraud scheme aimed at securing white representation in a crucial swing district; eight residents, including the white councilwoman who benefitted from the fraud, were later convicted of wrongdoing. While affirming whites' racial superiority no longer had the institutional footing that it did during *de jure* segregation, it nevertheless remained a significant project that many whites pursued in ways formal and informal.

Both locally and across the state, one critical dimension of political initiatives to legitimate the maintenance of white privilege involved how whites characterized their own political motives and responsibilities. Broadly speaking, they structured these narratives through two formulations concerning whether their habits had cumulative or historical effects on equity and justice; these characterizations had profound implications for historical discourse in the widest sense. In situations where blacks explicitly challenged the exercise of power as racially biased, whites responded, on the one hand, by advancing a normative notion of their political agency. In a civil case brought by citizens in order to resolve the town council redistricting dispute, the plaintiffs argued that whites' consistent bloc voting for white candidates discriminated against blacks, amounting to a refusal to elect blacks as political leaders in a municipality with an African American majority. At a crucial juncture in the case, the municipal attorney, arguing on behalf of the white city council members and mayor, essentially affirmed the acceptability of whites' voting practices, suggesting that black voters attain the same degree of political cohesion in order to resolve the issue.¹³ Similarly, in their discussion of the failure of racial desegregation in the public schools of nearby Lafayette, academics Carl Bankston and Stephen Caldas (2002) contended that middle class whites were "correct," "realistic," and "rational" in pursuing maximizing strategies for educating their children by avoiding schools with high concentrations of poor blacks. In these cases (and many others), the explicit assumption was that white motives qualified as normative political dispositions: that is, they were more grounded in practices motivated by a (largely ahistorical) quality of reason and embodied the proper, optimizing orientation that all citizens should possess (Chandler 1996).¹⁴

On the other hand, the related charge that white actions in the present had some relationship to a history of biased and inequitable acts also needed a response. In essence, whites have tended to claim either that no substantial relationship exists between flawed white actors in the past and reasonable ones in the present, or that they were something like blameless subjects—ones who had historically acted in accordance with reason, were eminently fair and just in their public dealings, and/or whose history, like that of blacks, was also marked by oppression.¹⁵ In this light, several trends in historical narratives concerning Acadians were significant. In various judicial and legislative contexts, individuals and groups have adopted black political discourse in cases of alleged discrimination against present-day Cajuns (Domengeaux 1986; Belkin 1988; Bernard 2003:136-137). In a moment of strategic challenges to white practices, such formulations served both as a defense against charges of racism (e.g., Ancelet 1992) and as proof of Cajuns' status as victims of oppression (e.g., Reed 1976). Recurrently, self-identified Cajuns also undertook projects aimed at ensuring that accounts of Acadians' historical hardship circulate more widely.¹⁶ In St. Martinville, some whites resented what they considered African Americans' excessive recourse to narratives about white culpability for blacks' suffering, and several locals countered a perceived "imbalance" in this regard with spirited claims that their families' lives had been dreary and harsh as well. Some Memorial supporters, especially those linked to elected political offices, understood the site as a crucial intervention with respect to this interracial dynamic; as one foundation board member put it during a meeting, since "white youth" were being made to feel "ashamed of their heritage"—"our children are being taught [in public schools] that Martin Luther King was the only great man who's ever lived" (author's fieldnotes, March 20, 2001)—it was important that Acadian children visit the Memorial so that the situation be reversed and they become "proud" of who they were.

This privileging of white historicity worked to undermine the recasting of racial hierarchies that some intended the adjoining Acadian and African American historical exhibits to effect. Certainly, some Memorial affiliates theorized that visitor-descendants' tours of the site would renew their self-esteem and thereby diminish Cajuns' motivation to discriminate against blacks. Similarly, members of the bi-racial steering committee overseeing the two sites spoke openly about the positive effects of their own successful interracial collaboration, which they hoped would "set in motion a healing process against the...prejudices stunting our economic development and overall well-being" (City of St. Martinville 2002:9). At their most optimistic, Memorial supporters expected that the project would generate a reciprocal re-evaluation of Cajuns by blacks; as one board member claimed (to nods of approval from others), "By them learning our history, and seeing how we were treated, that will make them feel closer to us" (author's fieldnotes, March 20, 2001).

In practice, however, the extent to which the Museum of the Acadian Memorial invited visitors to consider Acadian history in its interracial dimensions was limited. While the diasporic framing at the entrance posited two subjects with intersecting histories, the exhibits themselves radically separated their respective historical experiences. Practically speaking, Acadians' moral innocence was enabled by generating a historical spacetime in which the only significant actors were other whites. This circumscribed historical significance within the field of whiteness and allowed Acadian victimization to be foregrounded, but placed enslavement, Jim Crow, and the on-going ambiguities of post-segregation outside the realm of relevant, collectivity-shaping experiences. Moreover, early attempts by locals of mixed African and Acadian heritage to generate a more racially inclusive representation of Acadians were emphatically rebuffed. In St. Martinville, both blacks and whites acknowledged (though the latter did so less openly) that many Gallic patronyms shared by families of both races resulted from miscegenation. Thus, while some mixed-raced locals argued for recognition of this racially heterogeneous history, Memorial proponents insisted on representing the Acadian past as a racially "pure" one.

Of equal or greater significance, diaspora's connotations of coercion and victimhood, so thoroughly represented in the Acadian exhibit, were substantially muted in the African American Museum. In those diasporic moments where the Acadian exhibit emphasized violence—capture, dispersal, relocation—the African American Museum passed largely in silence over the antagonistic aspects of enslavement. Instead, much of the exhibit focused on the lives of particular free people of color as exemplars of the success achieved by enterprising Africans who "left" slavery during the antebellum era. This configuration of black historical agency as a trajectory of upwardly mobile determination was the outcome of complex negotiations. Black steering committee members were middle-class business owners and professionals who were keenly concerned with how the exhibit might enable ambition and self-esteem among local black youth. In their desire to minimize the on-going effects of intraracial class divisions, they also chose to underplay conflicts between Creoles of color and freedmen, rejecting proposed panels recounting the former's exclusionary practices against the latter. Both of these orientations intersected with the goals of several of the committee's white members, who minimized the brutality of slavery, insisting that the exhibit focus solely on blacks' "triumphs and successes" (Delhomme 1999b:12A). At the same time, the uneven circulation of authority between whites and blacks, inflected by local electoral politics, was folded into the process of each sites' development. While Memorial participants finalized their exhibit's design among themselves,

their input substantially reshaped the African American exhibit until the end. For example, white committee members and design consultants succeeded, over objections from blacks, in moving a pair of shackles out of the Louisiana section of the exhibit. Ultimately, only Acadians could be formed as guiltless victims of past violence.

From a certain perspective, such an outcome can be seen as entirely in keeping with previous representations and their intended effects. Public history in Louisiana (and elsewhere in the South) has largely existed to affirm whites' indispensable contributions in creating society and polity, downplaying failures, mistakes, or enduring problems (Brundage 2005; Horton and Horton, eds. 2006). That Memorial advocates wanted to enroll Acadians in just such an empowered history was certainly the case. With its strong emphasis on Acadians' history of suffering, however, this version of Acadian history—and the subjectivity it aimed to shape—was novel in crucial ways. As Shane Bernard (2000) has shown, promoters of the 1955 Acadian Bicentennial Celebration took great care in their historical accounts to avoid suggesting that Acadians were oppressed or victimized, revising language that could be interpreted to suggest such notions. In the post-segregation moment of its elaboration, the Acadian Memorial instead foregrounded this dimension of the past as the crux of what a historically informed Acadian identity meant. Thus, while the Memorial's elaboration was largely consistent with the long-standing white imperative to diminish the threat of social pollution posed by contact with blacks, it did so with a crucial contemporary twist. As one white with considerable influence on the design of both sites put it, these exhibits would counter a problematic attitude among African Americans. Specifically, the museums would counter a refrain she often heard in her work in local politics—"They think, 'You owe me,' because they feel like you enslaved their ancestors...two weeks later, it doubles, they feel like you owe them that much more"—with a "truthful" account revealing blacks' claims to be "a myth" (author's fieldnotes, March 20, 2001). Everyday challenges like these clearly rankled some Memorial advocates, such that reinforcing whites' sense of inheriting a morally blameless past—and of living in a present with the same quality—was their explicit aim for the site.

Historical Literacy and Cajun Uplift

If the project of sustaining white privilege motivated and oriented some participants, it was far from being the only nexus of authority that Memorial advocates leveraged in order to develop the site. The venerable project of public literacy, considered in its broadest but also its most concrete terms—namely, as a linked series of public mandates, institutions, targeted behaviors, and strategies of intervention—was also a crucial and distinct point of agency and leverage. Some advocates were focused on a fundamental reformulation of Cajuns' subjectivity toward historical texts and the "progressive" behaviors they might enable—in itself a novel initiative, though not entirely unrelated to previous forms of intraracial uplift.

As governmental and non-profit organizations targeted Louisiana's perennially high levels of illiteracy for increased intervention during the early 1990s, they highlighted more than usual the centrality of a lettered public to a productive and successful Louisiana. Stressing that literacy was a matter vital to society; the then-governor proclaimed to members of a new literacy task force, "You could not pick a subject...that relates to everyone's health, mental and physical, and

everyone's future like this one does" (Roemer 1990:15). The resulting imperative to improve literacy shaped the Memorial in two significant ways. First, it helped transform new research on Acadian history into a public policy issue; that is, advocates of numerous projects began to claim that, as a matter of public welfare, it was critical that such information circulate more widely. Ethnographic research increasingly revealed that there was no shared awareness of Acadian history among south Louisianians: little in conventional speech genres or folk song, for instance, referenced experiences of colonial Acadia or early American Louisiana.¹⁷ In this context, academics, along with teachers, journalists, writers, and others, argued that in order to become more effective and tolerant—indeed, for Cajuns themselves, to become more fully aware of who they really were—citizens should be familiar with the emergent truth about Cajuns and their history, *as revealed by historiography*.

Correspondingly, memories and notions about the past that were transmitted orally or without secure grounding in archival sources became suspect, increasingly cast by professionals as ignorance, misconception, or worse. At their most polemical, professional historians in the region suggested that many Acadians were incapable of speaking or writing truthfully about the past. Historian Glenn Conrad—an early advisor to the St. Martinville residents who proposed the Acadian Memorial—justified his most detailed historical work in relation to popular accounts of the past, which he characterized as deeply problematic. In the introduction to a two-volume monograph on late colonial and early American land ownership in south Louisiana, he framed the project as a successful attempt to refute the thesis that wealthy Creole and Anglo-American planters had systematically displaced Acadian farmers from prime farmland on river and bayou ridges, in what some referred to as a second displacement or *dérangement* (referencing the British expulsion from Acadia that initially led Acadians to emigrate to the state):

It appears to me that the picture projected by many writers of Acadian history between the 1950s and 1980s is a picture largely based upon what "grandma" related....But popular oral tradition disregarded the complex factors contributing to the ruination of the agricultural economy and substituted instead simplistic reasons that became cliché and were constructed around words like "carpetbagger" and "greedy neighbors"....Unfortunately,...the vision of the writers did not sufficiently penetrate the fog of ethnic or racial pride to permit perception of the real causes for the long degradation of a people. Only through careful examination of the extensive documentation available and only after trained critical analysis can historians and other writers hope to produce what has so long been wanting in the literature of Louisiana, a social history of our state. [Conrad 1991:xxvi, xxvii]¹⁸

More or less explicit in this passage is the premise that speech about history should have normative qualities across the population, along with the characterization of its modes as both acceptable (reliable professional texts) and unacceptable (benighted oral tradition). Significantly, Conrad gendered and ethnicized this disparity in knowledge, positing a feminine Acadian subject ("grandma") as the problematic source of falsehood, juxtaposed to the (implicitly male) expert who, alone and by virtue of possessing certain specialized methods, could generate a truthful history appropriate for public consumption. Thus, the distinction between an impartial, authoritative (and implicitly white) subject and a troublesome, behaviorally compromised

(unable to overcome “the fog of ethnic or racial pride”) ethnic one was again based on the possession (or lack thereof) of literacy.

With proposals like the Memorial, however, Conrad and other advocates self-consciously initiated the extension of a mandate for this “historical literacy” to regional and local levels, together with a novel application of spatial and technical means for fulfilling it. Certainly, state and federal governments had long supported numerous public sites judged to have national significance, and academic historians in the state argued (at times fervently) that a basic awareness of that history was critical to effective citizenship.¹⁹ What they did not posit as a matter of public policy was the systematic enabling of historical knowledge of sub-national entities among the state’s residents as a public benefit or dimension of the common good. Yet with the assistance of its funders, some of whom were committed to similar goals, this was precisely what Memorial supporters sought. In the Memorial’s funding proposals, grantwriters framed two centuries of “fanciful speculation” by “history buffs” as a “problem” that academic scholarship since the 1970s had corrected (Acadian Memorial 1992:1). However, the circulation of these “accurate, factual account[s]” was being undermined by “the reluctance of Louisianians to acquire and read about new historical findings..., the continuing use of...inaccurate...textbooks, the strong popular devotion to...inaccurate historical traditions, and Louisiana’s perennially low levels of literacy” (Acadian Memorial 1992:1). By contrast, the Memorial, in “providing...the new historical information to persons of all backgrounds,...[would] provide as much or as little information about the Acadians as individual visitors...[would] require” (Acadian Memorial 1992:1). Unable to capture residents’ attention through books alone, designers envisaged the Memorial as an engaging spatial translation of historical knowledge, as it were, aimed at overcoming obstacles to disseminate literate representations of the past.

On the receiving end of these applications, grant-making institutions encouraged this effort, which some considered an innovative means of relaying legitimate knowledge into hard-to-reach sectors of the public. In particular, staff at the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, who were focusing on new ways of responding to a literacy problem involving “an absolutely enormous proportion” of the population (Sartisky 1990:8), were especially receptive to Memorial grant proposals, funding several distinct aspects of the site over six years. If, however, these actors were bringing resources and techniques to bear on addressing illiteracy as a serious social problem, the Memorial’s most ardent designers and supporters, far from experiencing it as a difficult undertaking, embraced this mission first and foremost as the extension of their own passion for historical texts. Among the mostly non-academics in this group, many were also amateur researchers and avid consumers of the professional historical literature of the region. Their enthusiasm in this regard was often palpable; as Lorraine Jeansonne, an early supporter and Memorial board member, explained: “For me, the thing was reading Carl [Brasseaux]’s first book, *The Founding of New Acadia* [1987]. It was the kind of book I couldn’t get enough of. I couldn’t put it down, and it’s not the kind of book you’d think you wouldn’t put down. It was like a revelation. I’d always had the image of these people as ones who just accepted what happened to them. And it wasn’t true” (interview with author, September 29, 2000). As accomplished literates, Jeansonne and others like her were above all concentrated on opening a path to this enlightened understanding for other residents of the region. It was the convergence of these goals and interests—those of passionate local literates, whose desire to spread the historical

word intersected with that of the university-based historians who had authored it, and who in turn enlisted the support of state-level bureaucrats concentrating on public illiteracy—that made the Memorial a governmental (in the Foucaultian sense) initiative. United by a shared sense of social norms and a common institutional framework, they mobilized collectively to inflect the conduct of other citizens.

By the same token, Memorial administrators understood fostering historical literacy as requiring the bracketing of existing behaviors among visitors, and were thereby preoccupied with a certain reform of Cajuns' comportment. As one of the project's initiators commented at the moment of the Memorial's opening, "[The Memorial] allows [Cajuns] to have something beautiful, something nice. It's not a Saturday night dance, or a *boucherie* [i.e., hog butchering]. It's the first time they are associated with something beautiful" (cited in Le Menestrel 1999:247). By bringing Cajuns into contact with refined examples of "high" art forms, Memorial designers anticipated the kind of (re-)education of taste that Louisiana art and history museums have traditionally favored (Delehanty 2000). The staff and board were also interested in creating a space in which different types of comportment might be inculcated, beginning with the respectful silence that docents were to foster among visitors. Consequently, the board decided to close the Memorial on the day that a street festival took place in front of the site, as they judged the loud speech and drinking that festival goers brought into the space during the previous year to be inappropriate. According to the mayor, Memorial advocates also pressed him to ban two elderly retirees from a spot they regularly occupied near the site, where they supplemented their pensions by playing Cajun folk music for tourists. Together, these and other practices sought to create spatial and temporal separation from a common Cajun sociality, so that the cultivated dispositions encouraged by the site might stand out and take hold.

Without suggesting that all parties shared complete consensus about its contours, a new kind of subjectivity was at the center of these efforts, one that stands in sharp contrast to that proposed by Smith, Hitt, and their cohort of professionals, technocrats, and scholars. The latter assumed that a corrupted memory and sociality needed to be sloughed off as modernist institutions "assimilated" Cajuns into a mainstream and toward a widely shared "national" understanding (of politically significant history, for instance). Instead, these advocates and funders of the Memorial were intensely focused on promoting Cajuns' (and others') recollection of the Acadian past as crucial to their own and the public's welfare. The principals in this effort, however, did not understand this awareness as pre-existent among Cajuns, but rather as a disposition that had to be generated: reticent subjects had to be lured, as it were, into a space where "progressive" habits might be fostered. This orientation was implied in the title of the Memorial Foundation's regular newsletter: it was periodically *Calling All Cajuns* to the *Acadian* Memorial, there to be re-oriented toward a literate understanding of "their" past.

Activating Cultural Resources and Healing the Ethnic Self

There was yet another social project that shaped the motivation and practice of some Memorial advocates and staff. As with the other nodes of power, it was anchored in a broad range of state-sponsored initiatives, but also informed by the ardent engagement of individuals and a loose network of non-governmental organizations. Broadly speaking, these individuals, civic groups,

and state agencies were focused on activating Cajun sociality as a cultural resource for public benefit, often with the aim of addressing a perceived lack of “pride” among Cajuns. While they shared something in common with those focused on literacy and uplift, the former oriented themselves toward a distinct network of state agencies and initiatives, and drew on different sources of experience and interest. Importantly, those who held this focus more frequently identified as Cajun or Acadian and were explicitly concerned with addressing—or perhaps better, healing—Cajun subjectivity “from the inside,” as it were.

Though journalists and scholars often single out the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) as the pre-eminent state agency charged with fostering the state’s francophone heritage, it was only one of many similarly focused institutionalized groupings that were relevant to Memorial principals. In particular, several civic groups, especially the Confederation of Associations of Families Acadian, a regional grouping of genealogical societies, became a source for recruiting new board members. More broadly, there was something of an Acadian museum complex across the region; some of these sites, including the Acadian Unit of the National Park Service’s Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, also had explicit mandates to preserve Cajun culture and history. Indeed, Memorial staff and board members initially expected that its visitors would frequent one or more of the other, more “didactic” Acadian sites and would need no explanation of its representations; when that proved not to be the case, they decided to add their own “orientation” through the historical exhibit. Finally, state-sponsored initiatives attempting to systematically co-ordinate and expand the promotion of Louisiana’s cultural heritage were filled with like-minded technocrats who provided crucial funding. One such project, the Atchafalaya Trace Commission (ATC), chose the dual site of the Acadian and African American exhibits as the first initiative it funded. For its part, the Commission was not exclusively focused on Acadian heritage, but instead sought to energize the public’s commitment to a whole range of local ethnic and racial identities; as the first goal of their strategic plan, commission members stressed that “there is a need to popularize a stronger regional identity and to cultivate a heightened appreciation of the authentic... We need to understand who we are, in our many derivations, to celebrate our distinctions, and to convey the story of this place and our ways to ourselves and others” (Atchafalaya Trace Commission 2002:25). Together, these various institutions all shared the notion of a Cajun subjectivity needing not so much to be *shed* through discipline or reform but to *develop itself* through care, cultivation, and promotion.

That a nurturing of ethnic identity—which would have been anathema for experts like Smith and Hitt—could become the aim of a range of state agencies meant that conceptualizations of the social and of government had shifted considerably. In various ways, the projects pursued by these groups constituted Louisiana as a heterogeneous yet stable amalgam of peoples, as opposed to a unified space with its entire population moving along a single, modernizing path into an integrated, national society. Thus, instead of seeking to eliminate social differences in the name of producing a common subjectivity and a shared progressive history, governmental practice in this mode increasingly sought to enhance the life of citizens *qua* members of distinct communities. Practitioners advanced a number of objectives that could be achieved by cultivating citizens’ awareness of their shared ethnic trajectories and spaces: preserving these would counter the “bland” homogeneity of modernity and foster cultural “self-determination” (Dunbar and Owens 1993:9), “elicit positive emotional responses...that contribute significantly

to [citizens'] enjoyment of life" (State Library of Louisiana Division of Archaeology and Division of Historic Preservation 2001:4), and promote tolerance by "ensur[ing] that the many voices which have shaped this great state together are heard" (Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities 1994:2).²⁰ As with ecomuseums in France (Poulot 1994), these efforts redistributed a singular state heritage and history (as formerly concentrated in the Louisiana State Museum) across discrete locales, and presumed a novel conceptualization of government. Initiatives like the Memorial encouraged members of ethnic communities to look inward, as it were, and develop "native" practices as resources for their own enrichment and that of the entire population. In its fixity, the Memorial was a strategically placed local node for enabling this "ethnicizing" of citizens' conduct.

Of course, the project of animating Louisiana as a space brimming with cultural diversity was linked to more conventional initiatives like growing the economy by increasing the number of tourists visiting the state. Among those associated with the Memorial who were self-identified Cajuns, however, it would be difficult to overstate how much their involvement was a matter of passionate personal commitment, pursued at times like a vocation. Some, especially those who worked as staff or held office on the board of directors, experienced the activity as a means of profound self-discovery or achieving a deep sense of personal fulfillment. They often characterized the Memorial as an invaluable resource for sustaining their undertakings; among them, a common sentiment was that the space was like a shrine, a place to which they occasionally retired seeking greater focus or inspiration. Many of them were also involved in a range of francophone cultural activities, such as community theatre, *tables françaises* (informal, French-speaking social gatherings), and French immersion programs in public schools, all of which were aimed at expanding a francophone public sphere in the region. They understood the Memorial as distinctive intervention in this effort—and made bilingual interpretive materials and signage a priority—and were deeply ambivalent about local government's periodic calls that the site pay for itself through admission fees. For them, the Memorial, like no other historical site in the area, enabled an exalting experience of being Acadian; enhancing this feeling and offering it to the widest possible audience formed the core of their concerns.

These commitments to and conceptualizations of the site and the larger project of Cajun "renewal" enabled a distinct approach and practice within the Memorial, which did not entirely overlap with those of other projects. For one, those who held this perspective concentrated singularly on the site's potential effects on Cajun visitors as they made decisions about its design and interpretation. Deidre Gautreaux, a former chair of the foundation board, readily acknowledged that Acadians were for her the Memorial's primary target audience, insisting, "It's important to me that what we do here makes sense and serves as the right thing to do as far as people of Acadian descent are concerned. We're that first, and tourist attraction second" (interview with author, May 29, 2001). Moreover, she articulated a vision of the Memorial's functioning that was pastoral in its orientation, insofar as she sought to heal what she characterized as Cajuns' injured selves. Beginning from the premise that Acadian descendents shared a common experience of oppression by the region's white anglophone elites, she felt that a number of the former's contemporary social problems—and especially their lack of self-esteem—could be traced "to misconceptions about our history," such as the notion that "nobody wanted [the Acadian immigrants]" in colonial Louisiana and that they were immediately pushed onto the most marginal lands (interview with author, May 29, 2001). Replacing this false and

debilitating account with the historical truth, she contended, would effect a profound shift in Cajuns' self-image and generate positive effects in broader social relations. By deliberately crafting a historical account signifying that "the Acadians were totally good people" (interview with author, May 29, 2001), Gautreaux and others who shared this perspective sought to make a curative intervention in visitors' subjectivity.

Certainly, the distinctive orientations outlined here—the disciplinary thrust of uplift through literacy and the more pastoral approach of developing ethnic community—overlapped in their techniques and aims. From the communitarian perspective, however, there was a fundamental difference, insofar as the guiding principles for designing and managing the site were situated *within* the collectivity, so to speak; what mattered most in how the Memorial shaped conduct were Cajuns' *own* needs and values. During the production of the museum in 2001 when I was asked to comment on exhibit drafts, I raised questions about how they represented the contentious history of CODOFIL, which was potentially a significant episode in the exhibit given the agency's long-standing identification with Cajuns' cultural interests. Intriguingly, the social valence of CODOFIL's significance shifted in revisions from script to text panels: Brasseaux's research stressed that the agency had stumbled badly by "impos[ing] standard French [in classroom instruction] as a new form of systematic cultural denigration" (2000:71), while in the latter, Memorial staff and their consultants emphasized that it had largely worked to stimulate "Cajun pride." John Judice, a foundation board member who was working to finalize the text panels, responded that the script's emphasis on conflictual social relations was subordinate to the exhibit's aim of revitalizing a fractured collective will. As he put it, "Given that I don't have a lot of space, I don't want to speak just about [class] conflict. And even if [James] Domengeaux [CODOFIL's first president] was elitist, he was a Cajun. And if he did elitist things, it was because of everything [i.e., the social marginalization] that he endured before. He wouldn't have acted like that if he hadn't experienced oppression like everyone else" (author's fieldnotes, February 7, 2001). In these comments about CODOFIL's controversial founder (who long insisted on teaching continental French instead of the local vernacular), Judice expressed views common among those committed to Cajuns' renewal: namely, that ethnicity was the more profound source of identity (trumping social class), and that while class certainly distorted relations within the ethnic collective, these could and should be repaired. Accordingly, Judice was not primarily focused with cleaving to the "accuracy" of the archival record as he drew on the script in designing the exhibit. Instead, he sought to address the widespread effects of Cajuns' "oppression:" by avoiding an excessive concentration on how it warped collective solidarity, one could generate a narrative that potentially healed this rift.

This example, minor though it may seem, could be multiplied to suggest how frequently and systematically Judice, Gautreaux, and their allies shaped the site in pursuit of a new subject: a proud, well-adjusted, empowered *Acadian* citizen, member of a revitalized collectivity to whom the region truly belonged and who duly belonged to it. This linking of ethnic subjectivity to public space and state-endorsed goals for well-being profoundly reconfigured the historical dimension of Cajuns' "culture." Indeed, the Memorial materialized something that, for all practical purposes, did not exist before: an ethnic past extending far back into time, with the attendant notion that colonial- and antebellum-era forces determinatively shaped contemporary Cajun comportment. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this shift is that, in taking up this strain of racial thought—namely, that centuries of customs and habits generated inherent, lasting,

and exclusively held collective traits—this group of Memorial supporters folded it back into public policy during a moment of apparent, post-Civil-Rights-era de-emphasis on race. Their goal in doing so was thoroughly governmental: by objectifying the Acadian past, they sought to shift Cajuns' conduct, whereby those who had learned to see themselves as in some way unfit for society might cultivate a rehabilitated and fully authorized Acadian way of citizenship.

Conclusion

In this piece, I have made claims about the relationships between whiteness, the making of historical spacetime, and the articulations of civic formation and projects of social governance. By way of conclusion, I want to draw out the implications of this material on each topic relative to literatures intersected by these analyses.

Given the intriguing context and ways in which Acadian history was materialized in the Memorial, this case foregrounds the critical importance of display practices and expertise necessary to historicize space and time. The broader significance of this claim lies in the fact that despite the growing acknowledgement of the complexities of curation and display, practitioners often hold that past-ness is straightforwardly inherent in objects, and hence that collective histories can uncomplicatedly be re-presented in displays and exhibits (e.g., Handler and Gable 1997; Hall 2006). At the same time, one common argument against these claims asserts that recognizing the social constructedness of historical objects radically undermines their truth value, leaving us without solid criteria for grounding judgments about the accuracy and authenticity of historical claims. In one strong version of this critique, history emerges as a kind of perverted fabrication, whereby political objectives distort or betray the original or previous meanings of objects that are subsequently “traditionalized” or given historical value (Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds. 1983; cf. Loewen 1999). While I would not assert that historical discourse is never shaped by the “Machiavellian” or pragmatic considerations of political authorities, this perspective treats objects as mere chimera that “mirror, congeal, crystallize, or hide social relations” (Latour 1999:197) and obscures the stable, often institutionalized conventions that exist for identifying, experiencing, and displaying that which connotes the past. In this case, Memorial designers had more or less distinct notions of the social effects that they wanted to enable and selected objects accordingly, based on (at times implicit) conventional understandings of their power to sway human behavior. Thus, the objects of the Memorial were neither passive vessels for social relations nor autonomous emanations of a pre-existent past, but were instead recruited—from among a finite group of potential candidates—to “develop” a history that previously existed largely as a (negated) possibility. In other words, the pastness of objects resides in a “conventional wisdom” about history and the protocols of its display as much as it resides in objects themselves. Simply put, then, an adequate appreciation of the power of historical objects requires a corresponding appreciation of socialized customs for their identification and use.

Consequently, the preceding also indicates that the power of things historical—the qualities of pastness and collectivity that were inherent in or folded into the mural painting, the wall of names, the text panels of the museum exhibit, and so on—derived largely from objects or protocols of object-making that were *extrinsic to local spacetime as such*. The historical

properties of the wall of names and the eternal flame relied heavily on their links to agents, sites, cultural forms, and institutions without ethnic affiliation; it took a series of transactions to transpose them into representations of Acadian history. To put it differently, it was less the endlessly repeated stories about the Acadian past that made these objects signify as Acadian history, and more the widely circulating stories about the qualities of objects on display in museums, about the truth of archival documents, and, of course, about historical time as a “thing” that “a people” potentially possess.²¹ All of this is to contend that the Memorial is best seen as a hybrid construction, relying on material linkages between historical discourse, exhibitionary display practices, and emergent notions of a “deep” Cajun past to enable an experience of collective history.

I write “experience” advisedly, because in attempting to answer the questions “Why this history?” and “Why now?,” I am stressing how focused these practitioners were on producing subjective effects in themselves and others. Indeed, my chief contention is that it is to this governmental (in the Foucaultian sense of interventions seeking to shape conduct) dimension of the Memorial’s advocates’ practice that we should look in order to illuminate the coherence of the particular configuration they gave to the site. One cannot, for instance, fully appreciate why its designers generated the Memorial space in an experiential, “direct-address” mode—as opposed to the more didactic approaches of most other historical sites in the region—without grasping their preoccupations with Cajuns as people in need of certain behavioral adjustments. By proposing that museums are “contact zones” (Clifford 1997) or by focusing too tightly on how curation and display effect historical truth (Handler and Gable 1997), scholars have perhaps underappreciated this aspect of subject formation in other sites as well. In any event, the material presented here points to the centrality of subject-making in the Memorial: with no abiding consensus concerning who Cajuns are in civic or historical terms, the site’s administrators and designers made decisions about display in service of their primary objectives of re-shaping people.

That said, a related finding worth underscoring is that there was no single political rationale—no overriding civic objective, no monolithic “ethnic movement”—that coherently drove the site’s inauguration and elaboration. Instead, there were multiple social projects, as I have called them, which formed abiding political contexts in which Memorial actors developed goals for and made decisions about the site. Given this conclusion, and allowing for the specificity of this case, I suspect that recent work emphasizing that ethnic, regional, or community museums are “vital to those groups seeking...to be granted greater political rights [or] autonomy” (Kaplan 2006:154) or that they are unambiguously “linked to the idea of democratizing history and the museum space” (Crooke 2006:182) has not tended to the full array of concerns that preoccupy museum actors. For to recognize this multiplicity of purpose is to re-focus on what agents use history *for* (as opposed to treating it as an end in itself) and to favor a much more conduct-centered and context-specific notion of the politics of civic formation than one sometimes finds.²² In particular, Memorial participants formed contingent alignments between their “own” specific interests and stable nodes of civic intervention, drawing on these ostensibly “non-museal” imperatives in such a way that the latter—e.g., the widely shared mandate to enhance public literacy—shaped what they were trying to accomplish. To put it simply, this material implies that we should pay more attention to these social projects, these existing ensembles of objectives and techniques for managing the social, as the “ground” informing the behavioral shifts that history-

makers seek to enable. Moreover, it may be—and was the case here—that the means and goals of multiple projects coincide and overlap in a single site (cf. Trodd 2003). While specific decisions concerning display perhaps favored the realization of some aims over others, they did not preclude participants from continuing *to pursue their various objectives simultaneously*: as some focused on the civic advantage the site gave whites in their “competition” with blacks, others concentrated on the goal of expanding historical literacy, and still others were preoccupied with the healing of “wounded” ethnic selves.²³ In short, the Memorial site suggests a less monolithic notion of “the state” and a more complex set of intersecting civic aims than does the “subaltern versus elite” logic undergirding many analyses.

Accordingly, I am also suggesting that this governmental register constitutes the most inclusive and all-embracing civic ethos or rationality in which to situate the Memorial. That is, these various normative aims of appropriate comportment for citizens animated proponents, staff, funders, and researchers, connecting and motivating them as they conceptualized and materialized the site. Yet while citizenship was not explicitly equated with racial identity—e.g., authorized discourse did not generally racialize *as such* the literate or well-adjusted self (see Bonilla-Silva 2001; cf. Hartigan 2005:4-6)—white racialness remained a prominent dimension of what participants intended. In each of the distinct governmental projects identified, actors articulated aspects of racialized practice to the civic aims that they pursued, conflating governmental objectives and desired behavioral qualities deeply inflected by practical commitments to whiteness. At the same time, two caveats that corroborate the emergent thread of research stressing the heterogeneous and place-specific character of whiteness (Hartigan 1999; Wray 2006; cf. Trainor 2008) bear emphasizing. If one considers race through the lens of interracial relations—and there are obviously good reasons for doing so in Louisiana—then the Memorial might appear to be primarily an exclusionary and hierarchical intervention, reinforcing racial boundaries between Cajuns and African-Americans and intervening one-sidedly in charged debates about historical victimhood. This it did, yet the racialness of the Memorial was not limited to an interracial struggle between blacks and whites, and interpreting it as such would be overly reductionist. Instead, analytical room must be made to grasp that other foci of Memorial designers and funders operated in an *intra-racial* register. That is, they concentrated on ameliorating the civic capacities of a class-inflected category of whites *as whites*. This was clearest in relation to the focus on literacy and uplift: while the aim of enabling literacy may often be “unracialized,” actors in this context—in their circumscribed focus on transforming Cajuns into historically literate Acadians—concentrated on diffusing this skill among those defined in terms of a deficient ethnic whiteness.²⁴ It is crucial to grasp that these “problematizations” of whiteness constituted distinct (if interconnected) dimensions of social life—both in terms of how people experienced the “problem” and which social resources were brought to bear upon it—and not simply extensions of all-encompassing interracial dynamics. Consequently, rather than assuming that the pursuit of such a goal translates *ipso facto* into fortifying distinctions between races, we increase clarity by positing a difference between intraracial and interracial dimensions of social labeling and then *tracking their articulations in their contingency*.²⁵ One Memorial principal, for instance, committed to the premise that the Memorial might diminish white racism by increasing Cajun self-esteem, also collaborated closely with his counterpart in the African-American Museum, joining the latter in successfully lobbying elected officials against their initial position that no mention of slavery be made in the black exhibit.²⁶ Interracial distinctions were undeniably salient to this project, but they did not

contain and drive all dimensions of it. While intraracial and interracial politics have been intimately and problematically intertwined in Louisiana, it is crucial to recognize their relative autonomy and the emergent potential for their re-alignment.

Finally and as something of a corollary, if we are to approach whiteness as a contingent and shifting (if durable) project—and I contend this case indicates we should—then we need to see the distinct social capacities that the Memorial sought to enable—a guilt-free conscience vis-à-vis black neighbors, a decorous, tasteful, and literate population, a wounded ethnic self on the way to being healed—as multi-faceted “components,” as it were, of a (desired) local and specific mode of white subjectivity. To be sure, certain ways of “being white” precede this intervention and serve as its predicate. Yet Memorial proponents, as self-identifying whites, sought to address a white subjectivity *in need of* improvement and healing as well as distance from blacks’ criticism, and *not one in full possession of these qualities*. In other words, whiteness in this context was a category and diverse social experiences *in flux*, whose shortcomings and uncertainties could be dealt with, they believed, through a museal intervention. When situated in this context, the Memorial can be properly understood as aimed at “articulat[ing]...a new [version] of white racialness, oriented as much toward an unfolding present as [it is] bound to a determining past” (Hartigan 1997:498). As a result, while agreeing with the spirit of Helan E. Page’s exhortation that “we shouldn’t study white ethnics, but how whiteness is constructed” (1995:21), I would disavow its substance: by exploring the objectives and practices of those interested in representing white ethnicity in the Memorial, it is possible to illuminate the ongoing (re-)articulation of whiteness.

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Notes

1. For summaries of previous public debates over the appropriateness of using the label *coonass*, see Dormon 1983:87-88; Henry and Bankston 2002:43-44, 172. In his dismissal of *coonasses*, Cheramie was referring to comedian Chris Rock’s controversial claim about the intraracial difference between blacks and niggers, in which he sarcastically asserted: “You can’t have anything valuable in your house. Niggers will break in and take it all. You can’t do anything without some ignorant-ass niggers fucking it up....It’s like our own personal civil war. On one

side, there's black people. On the other, you've got niggers. The niggers have got to go. I love black people but I hate niggers. I am tired of niggers. Tired, tired, tired" (Bennun 1999:6).

2. For problematizations of Cajuns in these diverse fields, see Bertrand and Beale 1966; Borst 1920; Kollmorgen and Harrison 1946; McIlwaine 1939:134-152; Roman 1924.

3. Given the limitations of space, I cannot fully discuss how these distinctions also constitute a *conflation* of race and class, insofar as they collapse these social orders by objectifying both class and racial distinctions as a function of bodily and behavioral characteristics. On this conceptual use of conflation, see Hartigan 2005; Williams 1991. In pursuing this line of analysis, I also draw on work exploring the subtle intraracial registers of bodily comportment and cultural "suitability" (e.g., Stoler 1996:99ff.; cf. Bourdieu 1984).

4. At the very least, desegregation, black enfranchisement, and the shifts associated with them disturbed the easy confluence of white social practice and political power; at most, whites re-asserted their prerogatives, including the maintenance of racially exclusive cultural events (Le Menestrel 1999:89-92; Spitzer 1986:511-516; Stivale 2003:132-153; Zwerdling 1995).

5. Among other significant events of the same order, one could also mention the Louisiana Legislature's criminalization of the use of coonass through two legislative acts (Bernard 2003:138). Tensions in everyday speech, performance, and representation similar to those evoked by Esman (1982) have also been noted by Gutierrez 1992, Rickels 1978, and Walton 2003.

6. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett puts it in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, "As a space of abstraction exhibitions do for the life world what the life world cannot do for itself. They bring together specimens and artifacts never found in the same place at the same time and show relationships that cannot otherwise be seen" (1998:3). With the exception of the verb "show"—which I might replace with "enable" or "generate"—her characterization captures the point that I stress here.

7. This breadth and elasticity of modes of shaping civic qualities is a primary implication of Foucault's concept of governmentality, another being that under liberal government, the exercise of power has a practical focus on shaping conduct (Foucault 1991). Both notions inform the following analysis.

8. On the tendency of minority historical narratives to rely heavily on analogies with dominant discourses, see de Certeau 1997. For an ethnographic and phenomenologically inflected study that elucidates the occurrence of transposition, see Munn 2003.

9. This and other proper names of interviewees are pseudonyms; their identifying characteristics have also been modified.

10. This section draws its conceptual bearings and inspiration from Bakhtin's (1981) notion of the chronotope, or the distinct, contingent articulations of space and time that emerge from and enable particular types of human agency.

11. Individuals or families could name distinct figures in the painting and propose family members as models in exchange for donations to the Memorial. Like other elements of the site, the mural painting was also funded by a wide range of organizations, including the National Endowment for the Arts, the Louisiana State Arts Council, the Louisiana Division of the Arts in the Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, and the Acadiana Arts Council.

12. According to Latour, a technoscientific black box is generated when “a number of allies...[act] as a unified whole,” and thereby “a large number of elements [comprising the black box] is made to act as one” (1987:131). Though applying this to a historiographic text may seem inappropriate, I contend that the analogy holds, insofar as the monographs to which I refer (especially Brasseaux 1987 and 1992) were complex textual assemblages that, from the early 1990s onward, were put to use in a variety of contexts—besides the Memorial, they were used extensively in two other historical sites and a documentary film—as uncomplicated truths about Acadian history. Though I cannot fully explore it here, my point is to suggest that the Memorial’s designers participated in this transformation.

13. In a memo explaining the town’s position, the attorney wrote, “The victory of the white candidates can be attributed to higher levels of crossover voting among African-American than white voters. Strongly cohesive behavior among African-American voters is necessary for an African-American candidate to win city wide” (McHugh 1998). As consistent white bloc voting is construed as an obstacle to fair elections under the Voting Rights Act, the United States Department of Justice emphatically rejected this position during the 1990s (see Lee 1998).

14. As Chandler characterizes it, the “conceptual infrastructure” of domains in which racial distinctions have been central “presupposes the status of European, Euro-American or white identity as coherent, as homogeneous, as a pure term, and on that basis as the norm, *telos*, or orientation of identity as such” (1996:82). For critical evaluations of how racial distinctions inflect legal discourse, see Delgado and Stefancic, eds. 2000.

15. For analyses of how whites’ assertions of innocence have operated in other contexts, see Amy Ansell and James Statman (1999) and Geoff Mann (2003). Wiegman’s (1999) critique of whiteness studies questions the project’s motives and effects from a similar perspective.

16. Two examples of this were State Representative Raymond Lalonde’s call for a commission to study past and present discrimination against Cajuns (Baton Rouge Morning Advocate 1988), and attorney Warren Perrin’s successful campaign to extract an apology from Britain’s Queen Elizabeth for the colonial deportation of Acadians (Perrin 2005).

17. In addition, respondents gave widely differing definitions of who they are in terms of origins (Brassieur 1980:37-38; Gutierrez 1992:16-19; cf. Tentchoff 1977:111-112; cf. Trépanier 1989), many emphasizing instead differences in language and social practices rather than seeing themselves as sharing a common identity with other Louisianians of francophone descent (Dorais 1980; Gold 1979). Moreover, official narratives and commemorations of Acadian history have often met with indifference, skepticism, or disagreement over what is considered significant or memorable (Brown 1993:77-78; Dubois and Melancon 1997).

18. On the “second expulsion,” see Comeaux 1972:146-148; Rushton 1979:89.

19. In broader terms, the unqualified centrality of historical education for forming Louisianians’ civic capacities was forcefully argued in Gentry, Dormon, and Watson 1983.

20. To appreciate this shift, these views can be contrasted with those concerning what classic modernization theory called intermediate groups—collectives organized according to relations of affect, identification, and care (such as ethnic groups) and situated between the individual and society—which, it was thought, were destined to be reconfigured to the purposes of a uniform national citizenship. Here, communities are understood as sectors that, *in themselves*, provide spaces through which governmental aims could be accomplished.

21. In framing my findings in this way, I am inspired by Bennett’s (1995:147ff.) conceptualization of how the historical object signifies.

22. It may be that in larger sites with more extensive professionalization this multiplicity “congeals” more durably into a “unified” focus and purpose, e.g., the strong concentration on achieving a high degree of historical verisimilitude that characterizes—apparently as something of an end in itself—some “national” sites. However, in the Memorial, whose elaboration (perhaps not unlike other regional sites) unfolded gradually in discontinuous moments of collaboration across extended networks of participants, it would appear that the separate civic aims and apparatuses for their support remain distinct and efficacious, and do not “melt” into a single, dominant order guiding and justifying the site’s existence.

23. In presenting the Memorial as structured by distinct objectives and projects, I have not meant to suggest that participants in its elaboration and operation always acted as if they belonged to different “camps.” At the same time, in large part for reasons of space, I have not explored those moments when important differences were in play—for instance, when the (to use convenient shorthand) pro-uplift and pro-healing factions disagreed over representational strategies for the site, or when usually enthusiastic funders declined to support a new representational initiative. What stood out, precisely at these moments of disagreement, were the stable configurations of practical objectives, methods, presuppositions, and institutional nodes of funding and technical support through which they oriented themselves to the issues at hand.

24. This suggests that what Steven Gregory asserted concerning interracial relations—that “racial meanings are implicated in discourses, institutional power arrangements, and social practices that may or may not be explicitly marked as ‘racial’” (1993:25)—applies to intraracial ones as well.

25. Though I can do no more than gloss it here, my understanding on this issue is influenced by Stoler’s (1996) reading of Foucault (2003). In it, she makes it clear that the latter’s understanding of race as a biopolitical imperative involves intensifying governmental mandates to both protect the “normal” population against threats (e.g., the social pollution that came through intimate contact with blacks) as well as to improve the former’s vitality (e.g., by enabling higher levels of physical and social well-being among targeted groups). Hence, each social project is best seen in its specificity as it relates to broad yet powerful mandates both “to ‘make’ live and ‘let’ die”

(Foucault 2003:241), and not simply as another instance of a fixed and totalizing “white domination” over non-whites (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2001; Smedley 1993).

26. Unquestionably, distinctions between black and white—and attendant exclusions—have profound and widespread significance in the region’s social life. At the same time, in both my own fieldwork and as a reader of others’ work, I am struck by how shifts in racial understanding do occur in particular settings. While I do not want to exaggerate its prevalence, spaces of musical performance seem to have been one such space in which people reconfigure their racial practice (see e.g., Stivale 2003:149-150). In the case I referenced, the Memorial was another. At a certain level, to ignore this is to privilege—implicitly but without adequate justification—the academy’s transformative power in this regard.

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