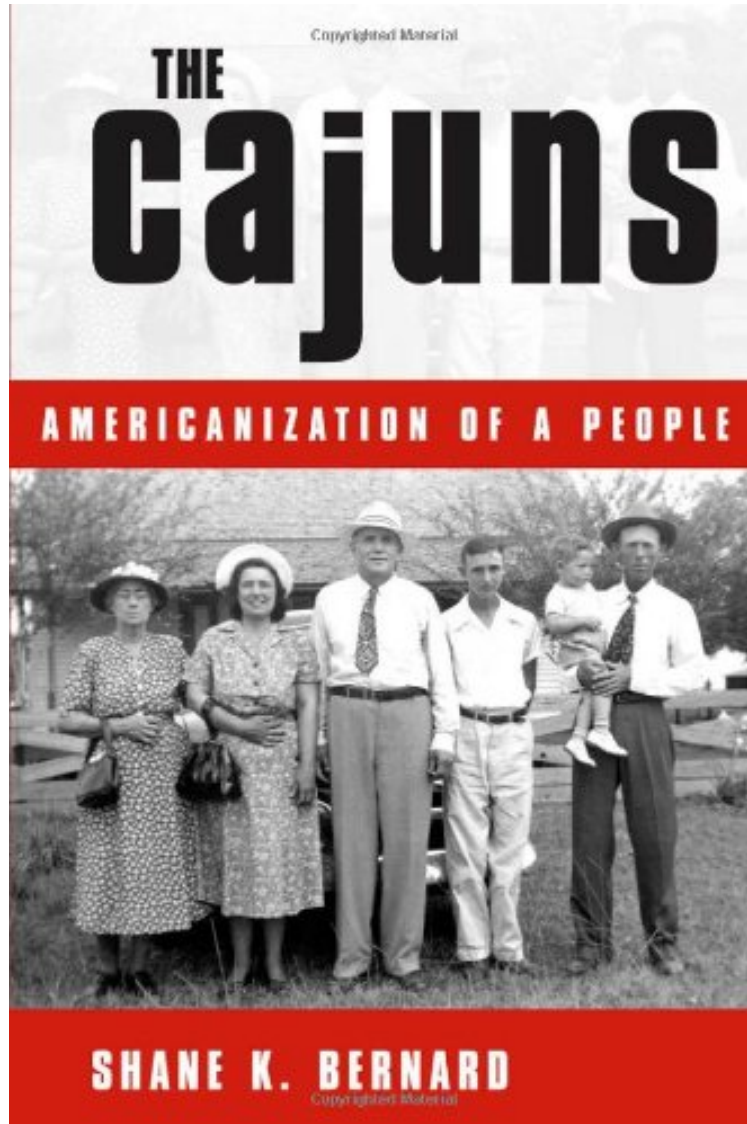


The Cajuns: Americanization of a People

Shane K. Bernard

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Shane K. Bernard : The Cajuns: Americanization of a People before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Cajuns: Americanization of a People:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Great social commentary for the misplaced cajun generations! By J. Theriot First off, a qualifier, I am not through the book yet. Second, kudos for it being offered via Kindle. Third, everyone who is cajun and born after 1940 should read this. Fourth, I HOPE... Mr Bernard, that you continue to write about your ethnic background. And hello from a fellow Aggie. I am going to dig up your research because I hope it is as good as this book. Having been born and raised in Pt. Arthur/Grand Chenier region, this book describes wonderfully

what I experienced growing up as a child, teen, and adult. I had elders in my family who spoke broken English and just smiled at me when I spoke to them. These people were parents of the generation that this book is centered around—the 'WW2 family starting generation'. I have great memories of my family and this book helps me better understand who they were and the generations that defined them. I don't find the book as 'critical' as some others have mentioned, I find it to be very honest about certain topics than most 'educated' historians would have no clue about. Personally, I have run into ethnic stereotypes about Cajuns throughout my life (most recently while doing my master's in NY) (the most funny being a girl I dated family labeling me in a negative manner as a 'Creole boy'). This book helped me understand why this occurs, and in some way accept the ignorance of those who do this to us. Aside from me thinking "Yes, I experienced that" / "I remember that when I was younger" / "I grew up in that family" while I was reading this book, it is a great summary on a very important time period overlooked by the Acadian / Cajun historians. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Understanding Other Cultures: Bliss vs. Ignorance By Joel K. Lucks A succinct, yet information-packed accounting of the Cajun culture in southern Louisiana during a period of incredible change, cultural pressure and "growing pains" of a country. In this vast United States how many cultures never "hit the radar," and what a shame. We grow up in a town that we never leave, and we never "see" how the rest of the country grew up or lives now; hence, we miss so much. Cajun culture, of course, is as much a part of our American culture as any, and to better understand it enables us to embrace just how diverse and beautiful this Cajun inheritance is. With each new and ever-changing decade of change, Shane Bernard captures those "key moments in time," and allows those mile markers to mark our own lives and to learn from other's experience. The only next best thing is to visit south Louisiana for yourself! Joel Lucks Long Island, N.Y. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The Cajuns By Anita Loseweight This book was not what I was expecting. It was better. It talks about how the Cajuns have come to be Americanized. While that may sound strange to anyone who is not Cajun, I understand exactly what the author is talking about and can relate so well to his book. I recommend it.

The past sixty years have shaped and reshaped the group of French-speaking Louisiana people known as the Cajuns. During this period they have become much like other Americans and yet have remained strikingly distinct. *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People* explores these six decades and analyzes the forces that had an impact on Louisiana's Acadiana. In the 1940s, when America entered World War II, so too did the isolated Cajuns. Cajun soldiers fought alongside troops from Brooklyn and Berkeley and absorbed aspects of new cultures. In the 1950s as rock 'n' roll and television crackled across Louisiana airwaves, Cajun music makers responded with their own distinct versions. In the 1960s, empowerment and liberation movements turned the South upside down. During the 1980s, as things Cajun became an absorbing national fad, "Cajun" became a kind of brand identity used for selling everything from swamp tours to boxed rice dinners. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the advent of a new information age launched "Cyber-Cajuns" onto a worldwide web. All these forces have pushed and pulled at the fabric of Cajun life but have not destroyed it. A Cajun himself, the author of this book has an intense personal fascination in his people. By linking seemingly local events in the Cajuns' once isolated south Louisiana homeland to national and even global events, Bernard demonstrates that by the middle of the twentieth century the Cajuns for the first time in their ethnic story were engulfed in the currents of mainstream American life and yet continued to make outstandingly distinct contributions.

In *The Cajuns*, Shane K. Bernard relates the story of how one of America's most distinctive ethnic groups, the Acadians, or Cajuns, of South Louisiana, made the transformation from a close-knit people retaining the strong cultural ties of their heritage to a group that has become assimilated into the mainstream of American society. Bernard maintains that for much of their history the Cajuns were looked down upon, derided as "backward, ignorant, and un-American" (p. xvii). They spoke a separate language and lived a life-style that emphasized isolation and separation from traditional American culture. World War II changed that. Thousands of Cajuns served in the armed forces, and for the first time many were exposed to outside influences. Those influences were, of course, accelerated by such postwar developments as the introduction of television into typical homes and the creation of the interstate highway system. In addition, young Cajuns found themselves strongly influenced by the advent of rock and roll music and other national cultural trends that led to a sharp reduction in traditional Cajun habits. Most people think of the Cajuns as Caucasian, but in 1960, 28 percent of Acadiana's population was black. Although several violent incidents did mar the region's integration, in general it progressed quite peacefully. One reason lay in the large degree of racial intermingling that the region had historically experienced. Another lay in the strong support for desegregation by the Roman Catholic Church. Today, many African American Cajun families have surnames such as Doucette and Thierry. Many are as proud to proclaim themselves "coonasses" (p. 109) as their white counterparts. By the early 1970s the Americanization of the Cajuns had proceeded so rapidly that some of the region's leaders organized efforts to preserve its rich heritage. The Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL), for example, forcefully espoused the teaching of French in the schools and helped to restore some of the traditions and values of the Cajun language. CODOFIL also became known for its promotion of Cajun pride and empowerment. Cajun music and cuisine

also became highly publicized features of this movement. Bernard concludes that during the last sixty years of the twentieth century the meaning of the word Cajun was redefined from the popular perception of a lazy, shiftless, ignorant people; Cajuns came to be recognized as a unique and valued ethnic group. The core identity of the Cajuns has transformed itself into one of pride. Bernard has done an excellent job in treating this neglected aspect of Cajun history. His sources include a wide variety of both primary and secondary works. His chapters on the influences of World War II and of the atomic age on the Cajuns are fine interpretations. He also gives full credit to the important roles played by women and blacks in the region. This reviewer highly recommends this immensely readable and informative volume to anyone interested in learning more about one of America's most fascinating peoples. -- *The Journal of American History* (June 2004) Shane K. Bernard, a descendant of Acadian exiles who settled in Louisiana, wondered why in his lifetime, "after more than three hundred years in the New World, [his] family had suddenly lost the ability to speak French" (p. xii). He, and Cajuns in general, Bernard concludes, had been "Americanized." That transformation, which he thoroughly explores and examines, was "rapid, widespread . . . sparked by the onset of World War II and fueled by the convergence of several ensuing trends and events during the postwar period: the advent of mass communications, rampant consumerism, interstate highways, the jet age, educational improvements, even the rise of rock 'n' roll". . . . The strength of this study rests in the way Bernard follows the effects of postwar changes as they ripple through Cajun culture. . . . Bernard, as both scholar and participant, has written a thorough and interesting study of that transformation. -- *Journal of Southern History* (August 2004) From the Inside Flap A history of how Cajun culture coped with forces that threatened its uniqueness About the Author Shane K. Bernard serves as historian and curator to McIlhenny Company, maker of Tabasco brand products since 1868, and Avery Island, Inc. He is the author of *Swamp Pop: Cajun and Creole Rhythm and Blues* (University Press of Mississippi). His work has been published in such periodicals as *Louisiana History*, *Louisiana Folklife*, *Louisiana Cultural Vistas*, and the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*.