

Introduction

'*Bonjour Créole* and 'Éh La Bas' are both greetings I heard while growing up in the New Orleans Creole neighborhood known as the "7th ward." My mother and other relatives would also use both; so I thought this would be a good title for my book. It also shows the fact that the New Orleans Creole language was closer to French than was many of the other types of Creole spoken in the rural areas of Louisiana. This is what my mother told me and this is what my cousin Ulysses Ricard, Jr. (who was a linguist and historian) told me when we were working on the first edition of *Gumbo People* in 1981. This is also why I refuse to use any base for writing Louisiana Creole except French.

Louisiana Creole is a French-based language as well as a French-based culture. For pronunciation purposes I believe that there is no need to use spellings that the Haitians or any others use for their Creole language. According to Felix Morisseau-LeRoi, the "father" of Haitian Kreyol, Haitians wrote it that way to politically pull away from their French heritage. We here in Louisiana have no such reason to do that. Indeed, the pronunciation of that first *Gumbo People* was patterned largely after the speech of our family's ancestors who originated from Point Coupee, New Roads and who migrated to New Orleans. Creole is pronounced a little differently according to the particular place where it is spoken. New Roads' Creole was pronounced with a nasal quality of sound. "Fleu" became "flair," for instance. These relatives passed the language down to us. These were my mother's people. My mother was a student of Mother (now Saint) Katherine Drexel while at Xavier's Normal School and thus she added to the New Road's Creole language an acute sense of the formal French language which she also spoke. Thus, we spoke Creole with a "French" accent as did many of our neighbors and friends. As such, any French/English dictionary can generally be used to learn the basic Creole vocabulary. There is also a Creole dictionary, *Dictionary of Louisiana Creole*, edited by Albert Valdman, Thomas Klingler, Margaret M. Marshall, and Kevin Rottet. It was published in 1998 by Indiana University Press.

I am not a linguist. However, I have spoken and written the language for most of my life. The 1981 edition of *Gumbo People* was the first time that Louisiana Creole was written and used in the creation of original literature. Many erroneous people before that time thought that it was a "baby talk" a "broken French" of slaves "whose bulbous lips and thick tongue made it impossible for him-to pronounce certain French vowel sounds."- Edward L. Tinker, *Gombo, The Creole Dialect of Louisiana*, 8)

Now, in this 21st century, there is a need for materials written in Louisiana Creole so that the legacy of this language can continue. I was urged by my fellow members of the Louisiana Creole Research Association, Inc. to write a guide so that they can have some idea how to speak the language again. I hope that the second edition of *Gumbo People* (Margaret Media, 2000) and cet petit livre va aide' ca.

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