

SPECTACLES OF ETHNICITY: FESTIVALS AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF ETHNIC CULTURE AMONG LOUISIANA CAJUNS

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Drawing on the example of the Louisiana Cajuns, an ethnic group that has been enjoying a wave of popular revival in recent years, this study suggests that changes in the perception of an ethnic identity are related to socioeconomic transformation. We identify the festival as a key aspect of the Cajun revival since the 1960s. An examination of the history, activities, and contemporary spatiotemporal organization of festivals reveals similarities to other aspects of a society of mass consumption. Niche marketing, the structuring of recreation around the modern work week, and the establishment of personal identity through the purchase of symbolically rich commodities are all embodied in present-day Cajun festivals. At the same time, the consumption of ethnic commodities is linked by the consumers with a sense of tradition and descent from a mythic past. The festivals of southwestern Louisiana are, in this sense, "invented traditions" and, paradoxically, a measure of the assimilation of this particular ethnic group into American culture.

What is an ethnic group? The Greek word *ἔθνος*, from which we derive our words *ethnic* and *ethnicity*, is often translated as *nation* in the older and etymological sense, a set of people who share a common peoplehood by virtue of birth and ancestry. Claims of descent, from Aeneas or African captives or the Acadian exiles, give ethnicity much of its emotional force and

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sacred character. A number of anthropologists and other social scientists have therefore emphasized the "primordial" character of ethnicity (Geertz 1973; Isaacs 1975). The need for belonging causes individuals to identify strongly with the particular groups into which they are born and with the cultural expressions of those groups.

Although beliefs in a shared heritage do seem to be a fundamental characteristic of ethnic groups, the objective reality of a heritage passed from generation to generation is open to question. The "socially constructed" nature of ethnicity is widely accepted (Nagel 1994; Allahar 1994). Although claims of ethnic tradition can often be traced to actual historical events, these are generally matters of people in the present interpreting history, and interpretation is of necessity selective. The past is a ground that can be mined for many different metals.

Because ethnicity is a matter of interpreting and reinterpreting a putatively primordial collective past, the nature of ethnicity changes and specific ethnicities change in character as the social influences on interpretations change. New ethnic groups come into existence, a process referred to as "ethnogenesis" (Roosens 1989). Some ethnic groups assimilate; they disappear or merge with others (Gordon 1964). Ethnic identities may wax and wane in popular appeal, so that some periods may be times of ethnic renaissance or ethnic revival (Royce 1982; Thompson 1989).

In this study, we sought to address the question of why and how ethnicities may change in character. We drew on the example of the Louisiana Cajuns, an ethnic group that has been enjoying a wave of popular revival in recent years, to suggest how changes in the perception of a primordial collective identity may be related to socioeconomic transformation. We identified the festival as a key aspect of the Cajun revival since the 1960s. An examination of the history, activities, and contemporary spatiotemporal organization of festivals, we maintain, reveals similarities to other aspects of a society of mass consumption. Niche marketing, the structuring of recreation around the modern work week, and the establishment of personal identity through the purchase of symbolically rich commodities are all embodied in present-day Cajun festivals. At the same time, the consumption of ethnic commodities is linked by the consumers with a sense of tradition and descent from a mythic

past. The festivals of southwestern Louisiana are, in this sense, "invented traditions," as defined by Eric Hobsbawm, (1983:2), "responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations."

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Socioeconomic Structure and Social Identity

Much of the literature on ethnicity in American society has concerned itself with immigrant ethnic groups; that is, with groups that owe their distinctiveness as minorities to migration into an Anglo-dominated society. However, many of the arguments and perspectives concerning immigrant ethnicity are also applied to those who trace their ancestral presence in North America back to the days before English-speaking European Americans attempted to establish squatting rights. Literature reviews of articles on both immigration and ethnicity routinely begin with the work of Gordon (1964), who identified what he believed were the possibilities for cultural minorities. Although Gordon recognized the theoretical possibility of cultural pluralism, he believed that assimilation to the social structures and cultural forms of the dominant society was much more likely. Gordon maintained that nonimmigrant groups, such as African Americans, who had assimilated culturally but not structurally were exceptions to be explained by special barriers, such as racial prejudice and discrimination (see also Myrdal, Sterner, and Rose 1944 on the blocked assimilation of African Americans).

It seems fairly evident that a good deal of assimilation in American life has taken place. Even among the most recent immigrants, Portes and Rumbaut (1990) have noted a second-generation shift toward English. Zhou and Bankston (1998) have remarked on a similar generational shift among major Asian groups. The ultimate form of structural assimilation, marriage out of the ethnic group, has become common in American society. Analyses of nationwide samples of ethnic groups have consistently shown that the majority of ethnic minority marriages are exogamous with rates of in-marriage among the major ethnic groups typically varying from 15 percent for spouses declaring multiple ancestries to a range of 30 percent to 40 percent for spouses of unmixed ancestry (Alba and Golden

1986:206–8; also Lieberman and Waters 1988). The majority of Japanese American marriages are to non-Japanese Americans, and out-marriages of other Asians increase steadily with each generation in the United States (Barringer, Gardner, and Levin 1993; Kitano 1988; Kitano et al. 1984).

This apparent trend toward assimilation has led a number of influential observers to maintain that minority ethnicity in the United States is declining (Alba 1990; Lieberman and Waters 1988). However, although objective ethnic traits do seem to be in decline, even among the Hispanic and Asian groups who have arrived in the post-1965 immigration wave, it might be difficult to conclude that ethnic identification is disappearing. Novak (1971) has noted that even third- and fourth-generation descendants of many groups continue to identify strongly with the ancestral heritage, and this has been a basis of political mobilization. Others have noted an “ethnic resurgence” in the United States since the 1960s (Alba 1990; Waters 1990; Bakalian 1993). Native Americans, African Americans, Italian Americans, Irish Americans, and others seem to be eagerly embracing the identities of their putative forebears (Royce 1982; Thompson 1989). The subjects of the present study, Louisiana’s Cajuns, a group of White ethnics who arrived in the United States in the eighteenth century, have shown a similar flourishing of ethnic identification (Henry 1997).

Objective ethnic traits, which Barth (1969:15) famously and dismissively referred to as “the cultural stuff,” may fade even while claims of ethnicity grow louder and more intense. The concept of “symbolic ethnicity” proposed by Herbert Gans (1979) is a plausible response to this apparently contradictory state of affairs. Gans (1979:205) described this kind of ethnicity as “a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior.” Symbolic ethnicity may be felt even more deeply than other forms of ethnic group membership. However, as the Gans quotation indicates, symbolic ethnicity is less a matter of contemporary ties to coethnics than it is a matter of perceived historical bonds. The new ethnics Gans described are categories of individuals who have similar views on their descent; they do not make up social groups in the strict sense of the term. When they do interact with one another, on St. Patrick’s Day or a similar event, they are like shoppers seeking

the same product meeting in a store at the shopping mall. Indeed, we argue below that they are not like shoppers at all. They are, we suggest, purchasers of symbolic goods in the mall of the United States.

How does it happen that people who are losing the objective traits of ethnic group membership come to claim ethnic identities so insistently? Joane Nagel (1994) examined this question in an insightful article on the construction of ethnicity. She described how ethnic groups and ethnic boundaries constantly undergo redefinition and transformation as a consequence of "the interplay between ethnic group actions and the larger social structures with which they interact" (p. 167). Both the groups themselves and their cultural contents shift as members negotiate with the society surrounding them. Nagel's schematization has contributed greatly to our own thinking on this subject. However, her discussion raises at least two problems. First, although the dynamics she described can help us understand many of the more activist ethnicities, it is difficult to see what kinds of larger social structures may be shaping the boundaries of symbolic ethnicities, because, as she recognized, symbolic ethnicities may depend little on group boundaries. They may not even involve group membership, but categorical membership. Second, Nagel described many of the major social pressures that can lead to the construction of ethnicity, but she did not consider how changes in the fundamental socioeconomic framework of modern society can affect how people understand and express themselves and their connection to the world around them.

To suggest that ethnicity is "grounded in real life context and social experience" (Conzen and Garber 1992:5; also Isajiw 1993) is to raise the question of what is the real-life context and social experience of people? Once this question is answered, one can say what shapes ethnicity and what makes it change its character. Perhaps the most fundamental change in the social experience of people in developed countries has been the rise of economies of mass consumption.

The nation-state, with its centralizing, assimilative tendencies, emerged with the development of classical capitalist means of production (Hobsbawm 1990). Anderson (1991) has argued that the "imagined communities" of nationalism followed the decline of dynastic and religious traditions. He maintained that the rise of the bourgeois, tied to one another by official-language print

media and by economic activities rather than by personal allegiances, led to self-identifications based on the idea of common membership in the nation. Languages and cultures of politically dominant groups and areas became identified with the nation itself, and those who participated in these languages and cultures developed myths of common heritage and descent (Anderson 1991; Conzen and Gerber 1992). Other languages and cultures could continue to exist, but they would be identified with people who became "ethnic minorities." Variations in recency of immigration, intensity of resource competition, and degree of political mobilization could help to produce differences in ethnic minorities (Nagel 1994). Nevertheless, being "ethnic" means being part of a group that defines itself and is defined by others in contrast to a central national community. As Conzen and Gerber (1992:4) have observed

in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Americans themselves were engaged in a self-conscious project of inventing a national identity, and in the process found themselves also inventing the category of ethnicity—"nationality" was the term they actually used—to account for the culturally distinctive groups in their midst. These two inventions were closely intertwined with one another and indeed with the invention of particular immigrant ethnicities in ways that historians have only recently begun to uncover.

In the industrial market economies that fostered the development of modern nation-states, the groups that were defined by contrast to the central national community often shared a common class or socioeconomic position. Glazer and Moynihan (1970; 1975) saw ethnicity as arising from the solidarity created by a common socioeconomic position among people who could see themselves as sharing ancestry and historical experience. The emotive, primordial character of ethnicity made it a more useful basis for political organization than social class alone (Yancey et al 1976; Rothschild 1981).

The industrial market economy has not disappeared, nor have social classes. Therefore, socioeconomic position can still be a structural influence on the shaping of ethnic groups (Henry and Bankston 1999). However, the economy of the late twentieth-century United States is not the same as the economy of the nineteenth- or early twentieth-century United States. As early as 1958, J. K. Galbraith observed that techniques of production had

outripped distribution, resulting in an unprecedented quantity of goods available for consumption, even though the buying power of individuals might lag far behind this productive capacity. Schor (1998) has argued that the heavy debt burden of Americans is due to the effort to consume heavily to keep up with consumption, an effort strongly encouraged by the advertising industry. At the same time that mass-produced commodities became a more prominent part of the social landscape, the geographic and social mobility of the late twentieth century tended to loosen many ascriptive social ties so that the role of individual choice in group affiliations became even greater than it had been earlier (Friedman 1999). Even religious affiliation became less a matter of ascriptive connections to others and more a matter of voluntary choice among institutions competing for adherents in the manner of producers competing in a market for customers (Warner 1993).

As a consequence of these changes in American society and economy, social organization, behavior, and normative expectations have come to be based increasingly on the consumption of mass-produced commodities. Although the word *consumerism*, may have a number of different uses (Swagler 1994), one of the most prevalent uses refers to the organization of social activities and individual beliefs and behaviors around the consumption of products. Referring to this sense of the word, Bocoock (1993:77) has remarked, "Consumption [has] become established as the characteristic sociocultural activity par excellence of late twentieth-century post-modern capitalism . . . Consumption is a, or even the, major characteristic of postmodernity." Other authors have also seen consumerism as a central characteristic of the contemporary American scene (Campbell 1985; De Oliver 1997; Ritzer 1999).

The marketing of goods in a consumer-oriented society tends to become the marketing of social identities (Gill 1997). Consumers are categories of people that are based not on the relations of people to each other but on shared relations to classes of chosen products. Thus, identity-based theories of consumption (Beck 1991; Giddens 1992; Beck, Giddens and Lash 1995) have emerged to address the growing tendency of individuals to define themselves in terms of what they buy rather than in terms of their primary groups or economic or political interest groups. De Oliver (1997:214; see also Ewen 1988) has noted that "commodities convey the social attributes of the group and

individual (i.e. clothes, musical recordings, personal adornments, etc.) as well as providing sites of socialization (shopping mall)." Because they are means of defining people, in their own eyes as well as in the eyes of others, commodities are rich in symbolism. The choice of a sports utility vehicle or a compact disc is not simply a choice of an object, but a choice of an identity. Sites devoted to consumption, such as McDonald's, Walmart, and shopping malls, have become central to this identity quest. George Ritzer (1999) has evoked the almost sacred character many of these sites seem to have in his phrase "cathedrals of consumption."

Ritzer's (1999) thinking was heavily influenced by that of the French social critic Guy Debord (1967). Debord argued that the modern consumerist economy was tending increasingly toward a "society of the spectacle." Spectacles involve the control of time and space to present human experience as a series of staged, marketed events. According to Ritzer, the rationalization of society by the market tends to "disenchant" human activities, to deprive these activities of their symbolic import. Extravaganzas and simulations are ways of reenchancing human life within the context of a consumer economy by staging symbolically charged events as commodities (see, in particular, Ritzer 1999, chap. 5).

Other theorists and researchers have also noted the growing role of staged spectacles as symbolic representations and sources of individual identity and group membership. In a collection of essays on celebrations in the modern world, Frank Manning (1983a:6) noted that "cultural productions have become the generative basis of myths, lifestyles, and even worldviews. Instead of social formations giving rise to symbolic expressions—the nexus identified by Durkheim—it is now symbols that are creating social groups." In the same volume, Manning (1983b) and Konrad (1983) portrayed public celebrations as balances between play and ritual that confirm a social order.

Given the growing influence of consumerism in defining the social order of American life, we suggest that much of contemporary ethnicity can be understood as a form of consumption and that ethnic displays can be understood as spectacles, in the sense that the word was used by Debord (1967). The centralizing tendencies of earlier market economies have been partially superseded by the marketing of symbolically rich commodities.

The commodities themselves refer to an imagined earlier set of social relations, in somewhat the same way that the imagined communities of nationalism referred to recollections of pre-nation-state historical traditions (Anderson 1991). Nevertheless, the ethnic identification is based less on social ties to other group members and distinctive cultural and linguistic characteristics than it is on the consumption of commodities that express a self-ascription to ancestral social ties, culture, and language.

In the theory that we propose here, identification with a social group involves three factors. First, there is the objective socioeconomic position of group members: the nineteenth-century bourgeois or working class, middle-class suburbanites, or contemporary blue-collar workers. Second, there are images of an interpreted past that can be used to render an objective position meaningful. Third, there is the means of expressing these images of the past that is provided by the contemporary organization of social activities. Nineteenth-century social classes drew on images from the dynastic and religious past to express their situations in nationalistic terms. Similarly, Bankston (1997) has argued that Laotian Buddhists living in American suburbs and working at skilled manual occupations have used an idealized cultural heritage to develop a group self-image that enables them to adjust to greatly altered circumstances. The consumption of ethnic commodities, from this theoretical perspective, is not simple nostalgia. Instead, it is a response to novel situations (contemporary socioeconomic position) that takes the form of reference to old situations (images of a shared heritage) in terms of the contemporary organization of social activities (the consumption of symbolically rich commodities).

Festivals and Ethnic Tourism in Acadiana

The commodification of Cajun cultural products in recent years has been noted by a number of authors, and various explanations of this phenomenon have been offered. On the basis of ethnographic data collected in a small village, Esman (1984, 1985) proposed that tourism encourages Cajuns to act out their culture for both commercial gain and cultural preservation. In disagreement, Trépanier (1993) viewed the commodification of Cajun culture as an indicator of its incorporation to American culture; Cajun culture has become unauthentic in Trépanier's view, a sheer commercial attraction devoid of meaning, and this evolution signals its impending demise. A

noted and involved folklorist, Ancelet (1992) argued in favor of cultural tourism, a measured exploitation of cultural resources informed and controlled by scholars.

This limited analysis leaves much unanswered and is in part questionable. The claim by Esman (1984) that tourism perpetuates ethnic behavior, such as speaking French for the contentment of visitors, is eminently doubtful considering the communicative imperatives of a commercial transaction and the limited and stereotyped use of the language often reduced to "Bonjour! Comment ça va?" Trépanier's (1993) condemnation of nonauthenticity assumes a static and now largely rejected view of culture as content shaped by tradition threatened by change. Ancelet's (1992) hope for a measured impact of commercialization on his own culture is in part embodied in recent creations such as Festivals Acadiens (which he helped create in 1974), the best known of the festivals. However, numerous other endeavors have suggested that entrepreneurs have the upper hand over academics when cultural items are marketed; there is a proliferation of "Cajun" restaurants and boat tours complete with alligator calling and ethnic joke telling. Interestingly, in another work, Ancelet, Edwards, and Pitre (1991) pointed to the adaptability of Cajun culture and the fact that today commercial Cajun culture bears little resemblance to traditional fare. However, he viewed it as only a superficial transformation to "appeal to the sophisticated tastes of a mostly urban population" (p. 228).

In works that offer the most authoritative treatments of Cajun festivals, LeMenestrel (1997, 1999) offered to reconcile the various approaches by studying the interaction of identity construction and tourism. Drawing from extensive fieldwork in four communities, she noted that festivals and other touristic activities reinforce social bonds, contribute to the economy, and foster identity construction in a dual mechanism. Two concepts of culture coexist: one as commodity and one as heritage. Cajun culture, rehabilitated and a unique resource in a rarified Louisiana economy, is valued and promoted by insiders who can use it to shore up ethnic awareness; popular, consumed by others, a commodified Cajun culture signals acceptance outside the ethnic group and its integration into American society, again reinforcing a positive ethnic identification.

The anthropological treatment of the celebration of Mardi Gras in a small rural community over the past 60 years illus-

trates how one ethnic event became a commodity. David (1996) proposed that the recent revival of Mardi Gras results from its appropriation by the wealthy, well-read, and French-speaking elite of the rice-growing community. Once a ritualistic celebration reversing the community's diversified social structure of large and small landowners, Mardi Gras has been reborn with the same traditional format but as a commercial event controlled by the local elite to symbolize the strength of tradition, social cohesiveness, and their dominance.

The explanation of Cajun ethnic expressions offered in our examination of festivals attempts to avoid judging cultural expressions as authentic or inauthentic. Seeing cultural commodities as preservation, moreover, ignores the transformation of the nature of ethnicity in the contemporary United States. Therefore, we sought to look at the development of the Cajun festival as part of the changing meaning of ethnic identification in the United States. As in the rest of the United States, relatively few people in contemporary Louisiana are engaged in small-scale agriculture, hunting, trapping, and fishing. Among people who refer to themselves as Cajuns, employment in the oil industry, factories, and service activities are especially common (Gramling 1989, 1996; Henry and Bankston 1999). Like other working-class and middle-class Americans, the southern Louisianian of today is much more likely to buy dinner at the Super K-Mart than to trap it in the bayou. However, the past, our evidence indicates, has not become irrelevant. Many southern Louisianians draw on images of an agricultural past to make sense of a postindustrial or late industrial present. They express and experience these images of the past as items of consumption in a marketplace because they are fitting a subjectively primordial social identity into contemporary forms of social organization.

METHOD

Our aim in this study is the interpretation of the theoretical significance of a social phenomenon rather than the testing of a hypothetical question of fact. In other words, we intend to present the case for interpreting festivals as an expression of ethnicity in terms of the cultural context of a consumer economy. This involves providing a concrete description of the economic base of cultural expressions in modern Louisiana,

describing the historical development of festivals in terms of changes in this base, and demonstrating how festivals and festival events may be usefully interpreted as the consumption of ethnic commodities.

We have used a variety of data sources to piece together a picture of the Cajun festival. We have had access to two valuable sources of quantitative information. To describe the socio-economic setting of modern Acadiana, we use data from the Louisiana Electronic Assistance Program, made available by Northeast Louisiana University and available online at <http://leap.nlu.edu>. To look at characteristics of festival attendants and examine the association of participation in Cajun-themed festivals with Cajun ethnicity, we made use of a unique data set collected by the Council on the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) on participation in activities relating to Louisiana French ethnicity in 1989. This was produced by a random telephone survey of 1,020 households in the eight parishes in the center of Louisiana's Cajun country. Although this data set is now a bit old, it was collected after the ethnic festival movement was well established in southern Louisiana. Moreover, to our knowledge, it is the only survey in existence with detailed information on participants in Louisiana Cajun festivals.

We also made use of lengthy and detailed collection of qualitative data through participant observation. Both of us have attended and observed Cajun-themed festivals. From 1984 to 1992, Jacques Henry was an official with CODOFIL, one of the key organizations in the Cajun ethnic revival movement. In this position, he took part in arranging festivals and maintained continual contact with festival organizers and ethnic activists throughout the Acadiana region.

ANALYSIS

The Socioeconomic Setting of Modern Acadiana: The Ecological Context

As we are suggesting that the meaning of ethnicity is related to socioeconomic structure, it is useful to look briefly at the socioeconomic structure of contemporary Acadiana, the region that is home to the Cajun-themed festivals. As we note below, the images of Cajun life celebrated at these events are rooted in rurality. Is the society surrounding them equally agrarian?

Table 1 shows numbers and percentages of jobs in various industries in the parishes of Acadiana in 1996. Agriculture employed fewer people than any other industry: Barely 2 percent of workers in Acadiana were in agricultural jobs. Not at all an agrarian society, the region on the contrary does have substantial employment in industrial activities, with about 28 percent of its workforce in the classic blue-collar industries of construction, manufacturing, and mining. Over 7 percent of the workforce were in construction work, over 11 percent in manufacturing, and just under 10 percent in mining, virtually all of which was petroleum mining. On this last percentage, we should note that only about 3 percent of all workers in the state of Louisiana were in mining in 1996, so that Acadiana's concentration in mining was actually quite large, a consequence of petroleum mining activities along the Gulf of Mexico (Gramling 1996). The areas of greatest employment, though, were those usually associated with postindustrial economies: the service and retail sectors. Close to one third of all workers in the region were in the service industry, and over one out of every five were in retail sales.

A corollary to industrialization of southwestern Louisiana in urbanization is this: Approximately 7 out of 10 Cajuns in this region live in metropolitan areas (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992). Assuredly, this rate is smaller than that of the area's non-Cajuns (80 percent), and for that matter of Louisiana and the

TABLE 1 Distribution of Employed Persons in Acadiana in 1996, by Industry

Industry	No. workers	% total workforce
Agriculture	6,430	2.02
Construction	23,531	7.39
Manufacturing	35,534	11.15
Mining	29,286	9.20
Service	98,485	30.92
Retail sales	66,264	20.81
Wholesale sales	17,371	5.45
Finance & real estate	15,053	4.73
Transportation	26,641	8.36
Total	318,484	100.00

Note. Data from Louisiana Electronic Assistance Program, Northeast Louisiana University.

United States (77 percent); the ubiquity of pick-up trucks, boats, and horses, as well as the much-enjoyed proximity to waterways, prairies, and woods, testify to the continued relevance of a rural lifestyle. However, the modern amenities and pastoral surroundings are mostly used by a commuting workforce for recreational use.

The festivals of Acadian Louisiana, then, do not take place in a geographic setting of farmers, hunters, trappers, and fishers. The potential audiences for these events are people who earn income from jobs found elsewhere in the late twentieth-century economy. Because it may be thought that the festivals are a direct inheritance of an earlier socioeconomic structure, we turn now to an examination of the historical development of these events.

Origins and Development of Cajun Festivals

Just as modern-day Disneyland emerged from the older models of the World's Fair and the amusement park (Ritzer 1999), contemporary festivals in Louisiana have historical precursors in parish (county) and state fairs, as well as in the seasonal celebrations of rural people. The fairs were designed to meet the needs of an agricultural economy. State involvement with fairs began in 1861, when the Louisiana legislature established the Mechanics and Agricultural Fair Association (Puncky 1961). In 1877, the state held its first annual fair, which became known in 1905 as the Louisiana State Fair. Also in the late nineteenth century, farmers began to form farmer's institutes, "sessions in which farmers met to hear lectures on solving their problems" (Puncky 1961:1–28). In 1897, these farmer's institutes formally established the Louisiana Farmer's Institute, which helped to create six parish fairs the following year. By 1902, there were 16 parish fairs. Louisiana's largest parish fair, the Washington Parish Fair, began in 1903. It is worth noting that this largest fair has moved away from agricultural exposition as a chief purpose in recent years and toward the reconstruction or construction of ancestral heritage. During the 1980s, old residences, a blacksmith shop, and a general store were moved to the fair grounds from scattered sites and restored as a museum village of the parish's founding families (a village that, in fact, never existed until the restoration).

Festivals in southwestern Louisiana, as opposed to state and rural fairs, began to appear toward the middle of the twentieth century. The oldest one, the National Rice Festival, took place in

Crowley in 1937, a successor to the original Rice Carnival, which had a short run a decade earlier. Other festivals were later organized such as the blessing of shrimp fleets (1930s), the Yambilee Festival (1946), and the Dairy Festival (1949; LeMenestrel 1993). The growth remained limited: By 1965, there were 21 festivals in the southwestern area of Louisiana known as Acadiana (Henry 1997).

In several ways, the festivals that were established from the 1930s through the 1960s were heirs to the traditional celebrations of agricultural societies; they were dedicated to the main local agricultural product, be it shrimp, crawfish, cattle, sugar cane, cotton, or oranges; they mostly took place during the months of September and October to coincide with the end of the harvest season or the beginning of the fishing or planting season; finally, although early Louisiana festivals were secular affairs, they typically included a mass or a blessing by the local clergy. In all, they contributed with Catholic holidays (Easter, All Saints Day, Christmas) and secular patriotic celebrations to form the cycle of community activities.

The launching of efforts to revitalize Louisiana's French culture in the 1970s coincided with a significant increase in the number of festivals and a change of their meaning. By 1977, there were 36 festivals in Acadiana, 88 in 1985, close to 300 in 1993, and 240 in 1998. Most of the festivals in existence today were established after 1968. Explanations of this phenomenon, also noted statewide, rely on two main factors: ethnic revival and economic diversification. Whereas early festivals had only implicit ethnic connotations, recent festivals have made the Cajun connection explicit: Thirty-four percent of festivals in Acadiana in 1993 had an ethnic marker in their name (Lagniappe on the Bayou, Festivals Acadiens, South Lafourche Cajun Festival; Henry 1997); in 1998, 19 percent had an ethnic marker, but the ratio increases to 40 percent if the 60 different celebrations of Mardi Gras are included.¹ The launching of Festivals Acadiens in 1974 was a particularly important point in ethnic festival history in Louisiana. This was a conscientious and self-conscious attempt to maintain Cajun music as a living tradition. Many individuals were active in organizing this yearly

¹ The decrease is likely due to a change in the reporting of events and manifestations by the Louisiana Office of Tourism as it appears that some festivals in Acadiana do not appear in the listing. Other indications that ethnicity remains vibrant commercially are events by other groups such as the Black Heritage Festival, St. Patrick's Day, Calling of the Tribe powwow, and even an Irish/Italian Festival in Lake Charles.

event, but its most active proponent and most tireless supporter was Dr. Barry Jean Ancelet, a professor of French at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, who later earned a doctorate at a French university. In various accounts (Ancelet 1980; B. J. Ancelet, personal communication, Feb. 17, 1995), Dr. Ancelet reported that he had discovered his own sense of heritage while abroad in the French-speaking world, a significant fact when thinking about the meaning of contemporary ethnic festivals. The role played by the in-dislocation, the separation from group membership stimulating the search for the historical roots of ethnicity, has been similarly reported by other Cajun activists of this period.

Festivals are dedicated to major topics in Cajun culture, particularly foodways and music. In 1998, 17 of 46 festivals were dedicated to products from the environment (wildlife, oysters, crawfish, frogs, peppers), crops (sugarcane, rice, cotton, herbs), and 14 were dedicated to processed products (gumbo, boudin, sauce piquante) with an emphasis on pork products (cochon de lait, cracklin, grande boucherie, viande boucane) and seafood. The remaining third are mostly dedicated to Cajun music (Festival de Musique Acadienne, Accordion Festival). In 1999, the state of Louisiana dedicated its 300th anniversary year—and a special brochure—to the FrancoFête, a year-long celebration of its French heritage with an emphasis on Acadians who plan to meet by the thousands at the *Congres Mondial* (Louisiana Office of Tourism 1998, 1999).

From the inception of the ethnic revitalization movement, ethnic claims were connected to economic pursuits. The 1968 legislative act establishing CODOFIL instructed the state agency to develop actions for the “cultural, economic and tourist benefit of the State” (Louisiana Legislature Act No. 409, p. 1)—largely successful, CODOFIL officials have repeatedly emphasized their ability to bring dignitaries and paying visitors to Louisiana as well as the free worldwide publicity their endeavor generated to justify their mission and request state funds. The state and local municipalities also strived to capitalize on the promotion of an ethnic image; in addition to festivals, twinings with foreign cities mostly from the French-speaking world, close cooperation of local officials with cultural associations, renovation and building of local attractions (commemorative parks, theaters, museums) became major tools of economic development.

At the state level, the economic downturn brought about by the oil crisis of the mid-1980s triggered a renewed interest in tourism as an alternate industry. A Louisiana Office of Tourism had been established in 1977 but really became active by the 1990s with increased funding and the launching of coordinated programs (tax-free shopping for foreign visitors, nationwide advertising campaigns, division of the state into five specific zones). Although claims of the economic impact of tourism are inherently difficult to gauge (tourism is not listed as an industry, anyone traveling 100 miles for at least one day is considered a visitor) and tend to be inflated by interested parties, tourism appears to be a significant industry: It is estimated that over 20 million visitors spend \$6 billion, filling 97,000 jobs and generating \$765 million in taxes in 1994 (LeMenestrel 1997).

Here again, the importance of foodways and music is flagrant: They are part of respectively 64 percent and 46 percent of local attractions compared with 20 percent and 14 percent in the rest of the United States (cited in LeMenestrel 1997:161). This situation is due in part to Cajun cuisine and music. All accounts of the popularity of Cajun cuisine point to the skills of chef Paul Prudhomme, who almost single handedly made Cajun dishes, spices, and ambiance a nationwide phenomenon. The fame of Cajun music owes more to the recognition it has gained among aficionados of American folk music and the ongoing expansion of the musical tradition by young musicians to new audiences.

Expressions of Ethnic Group Membership: The Decline of Language and the Prominence of the Festivals

The *Encyclopedia of Cajun Culture* (Douglas and Isherwood 1979) says of festivals in southern Louisiana, "Attracting both locals and tourists, festivals are an important part of Cajun life, and occur throughout the year in Acadiana. Most of these feature Cajun food and music, as well as arts and crafts" (p. 257). As we have seen, however, this important part of Cajun life is a fairly recent addition to the social landscape of southern Louisiana. Nevertheless, data from a survey conducted by CODOFIL support the contention that these events are widely attended in this part of the state. In Table 2, we present reported attendance at Cajun-themed festivals in the six parishes in the central part of Acadian Louisiana, by claims of Cajun or Acadian ethnicity and by age. We report attendance at these festivals with and without the Festivals Acadiens in Lafayette as this is

TABLE 2 Attendance at Cajun-Themed Festivals, at the Festivals Acadiens, and at all Cajun-Themed Festivals Except the Acadian Festival, and French Language Ability, by Age

Festival Attendance, French Language Ability	Cajuns			Non-Cajuns		
	< 40	40–49	50+	< 40	40–49	50+
All festivals						
No attendance	74.2	81.6	94.6	81.2	87.2	94.8
Attended one festival	17.8	16.7	3.6	17.6	11.7	5.2
Attended two festivals	6.7	1.8	0.9	1.2	1.1	0.0
Attended three festivals	0.6	0.0	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
Attended 4 or more	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Festivals Acadiens						
No attendance	91.4	93.9	98.2	87.2	93.1	96.9
Attended	8.6	6.1	1.8	12.8	6.9	3.1
All festivals but Acadiens						
No attendance	80.4	86.8	95.5	92.8	93.1	97.9
Attended one festival	13.5	12.3	3.6	7.2	6.9	2.1
Attended two festivals	5.5	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Attended three festivals	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
Attended 4 or more	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	163	114	112	250	188	193
French language ability						
Neither understand nor speak	48.1	15.9	6.3	70.7	54.8	46.1
Understand, do not speak	1.9	4.4	0.9	2.4	2.7	2.1
Speak, but not fluently	37.7	26.5	22.3	20.5	17.0	15.2
Fluent in French	12.3	53.1	70.5	6.4	25.5	36.6
Total	162	113	112	249	188	191

the best-known, attracting the largest non-Cajun tourist audience. Table 2 also reports French language ability by age group, as language use is considered one of the chief objective ethnic characteristics of the Louisiana Cajuns.

Three interesting facts appear in the data on all festivals. First, in the two younger age groups (under 40 years and 40–49 years), those who classified themselves as Cajuns were more likely than those who classified themselves otherwise to have attended a festival. Over one fourth of Cajuns aged 39 or less had attended at least one festival compared with fewer than 19 percent of

non-Cajuns of comparable age. In addition, 8 percent of these young Cajuns had attended two or more festivals compared with just over 1 percent of the young non-Cajuns. In the middle age group, over 18 percent of Cajuns had attended a festival compared with under 13 percent of middle-aged non-Cajuns. Second, festival attendance is linked to age as well as ethnicity. The younger people in both ethnic categories were more likely than older people to have participated in these events. Multiple festival attendance, moreover, occurred primarily among young Cajuns. Of the 22 people who had attended two or more festivals, 17 (77 percent) were Cajuns and 13 (59 percent) were young Cajuns. Third, participation in an ethnically themed festival is fairly common in southern Louisiana. Over 14 percent of all those in this random survey said that they had been to one of these events. If we take into consideration the fact that older people tended not to take part in these activities, it seems to be even more common. If this random survey is representative of the population, it appears that nearly one out of every five people under age 50 and between one out of every four and one out of every five people under age 30 in southern Louisiana has been to a festival dedicated to the celebration of Cajun ethnicity.

We report attendance at the Festivals Acadiens, the best-known and most self-consciously "authentic" of the Cajun-themed festivals in southern Louisiana, separately. The non-Cajuns were more likely than those who labeled themselves Cajuns to have attended this event. Further, this was the festival in which most of the non-Cajun participants had taken part. It would appear that the very success of the festival has led it to appeal chiefly to an audience outside of the group it represents and whose name it bears. This wide popular appeal is interesting because Festivals Acadiens features music, cultural activities, and foods that are virtually exclusively devoted to the celebration of Cajun ethnicity. We suggest that ethnicity as a commodity blurs the line between authenticity and inauthenticity. Although ethnicity can be marketed to ethnic group members, it may be most successful when the feeling of participation in an ethnic heritage can be sold to the larger public. The more apparently authentic this heritage claims to be, the greater its marketability.

Once we remove Festivals Acadiens from the analysis, the association of Cajun-themed festival attendance with self-

described Cajun ethnicity becomes evident, particularly among the young people. Indeed, one out of every five younger Cajuns had participated in one of the festivals other than Festivals Acadiens. The association of youth, particularly Cajun youth, with festival attendance is interesting in light of data on language. As has been previously documented, French-language ability, the chief objective cultural marker, is in a state of rapid decline (Landry, Allard, and Henry 1996; Bankston and Henry 1998). Only 12 percent of young Cajuns in our sample were fluent in French, compared with 70 percent of Cajuns in the oldest group. The young people were the least likely to bear the linguistic marker of their ethnicity, but they were the most likely to enjoy ethnically themed festivals. Ethnic expression through festival attendance, moreover, was as accessible to nonmembers as it was to ethnic group members.

Table 3 gives selected characteristics of festival attendants and nonattendants. There was no clear linkage between parish residence and festival attendance, except that attendants were most likely to reside in Lafayette, particularly when Festivals Acadiens was included in the analysis. Whites were much more likely to participate in these events than were Blacks, even considering the fact that Whites constituted the majority of the population. Again, festival attendants were generally younger than the nonattendants.

Perhaps the most interesting results in Table 3 are the findings on occupation. People with professional, technical, and managerial jobs were proportionately the most likely to attend festivals, among both Cajuns and non-Cajuns. Those in working-class types of jobs made up the majority of the population, particularly among the Cajuns, and therefore most of the festival-goers were working class. There were very few people in agricultural activities in our sample, and none of them had been to a Cajun-themed festival.

As we have discussed above, festivals emerged as a vehicle of ethnic expression in recent history, when Acadiana had changed from a rural farming and fishing society to a modern industrial, retail, and service economy. This ecological shift, we suggest, dislocated the population from its older identities and social ties and created a desire to reconstruct identities by reconnecting with a rapidly disappearing past. Here, we see that those who were most uprooted, the professional classes, were the most likely to visit the places where ethnic identity is marketed.

TABLE 3 Selected Characteristics of Attendants and Nonattendants at all Cajun-Themed Festivals and at all Except the Acadian Festival

Characteristics	All festivals		All except Acadian Festival	
	Attendants	Non-attendants	Attendants	Non-attendants
Parish of residence (%)				
Acadia (rural)	6.7	13.0	9.2	12.3
Evangeline (rural)	10.7	5.8	18.4	5.4
Iberia (urban-rural)	10.0	12.5	9.2	12.4
Lafayette (urban)	44.7	19.8	23.5	23.0
St. Landry (rural)	4.7	18.0	6.9	16.8
St. Martin (rural)	14.0	6.6	19.5	6.5
St. Mary (urban-rural)	5.3	13.1	8.0	12.3
Vermilion (rural)	3.4	11.2	5.7	10.6
Race				
White	91.9	82.3	94.1	82.7
Black	6.8	17.0	5.9	16.4
Median age	36	47	36	45
Occupation				
Professional, technical, managerial, higher sales	29.3	20.8	25.3	21.8
Cajuns only	26.1	16.6	21.2	17.8
Lower clerical and sales, crafts, operatives, laborers	55.3	56.0	60.9	55.4
Cajuns only	62.3	63.8	67.3	62.9
Agriculture	0.0	1.0	0.0	1.0
Cajuns only	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.6
Other	15.3	22.2	13.8	21.9
Cajuns only	11.6	19.1	11.5	18.7
N	150	869	87	932
Cajuns only	69	320	52	337

Festivals and the Commodification of Time, Space, and History

Festivals are by definition spectacles, staged public events. When Debord (1967) argued that the modern market economy was creating a society of the spectacle, he was not suggesting that spectacles came into existence only with mass consumption. However, the pervasiveness of the spectacle is a consequence of the postindustrial capacity for reproducing human

experience as a marketable commodity in a temporally and geographically delineated setting.

Agricultural societies are strongly influenced by the rhythm of planting and harvesting, with the harvest typically the chief occasion for celebration. As Table 4 indicates, Fall, the time of harvest, continues to be a popular season for festivals. The greatest number of festivals in 1998 fell in February, because so many of these ethnic-themed festivals were associated with Mardi Gras, which came in February in that year. However, five Cajun-themed festivals were held in September and six in October, the harvest months in Louisiana. Also note, though, that there are no months without festivals. This is because the timing is driven less by any agricultural or religious calendar than by marketing calculations. In interviews with festival officials and in the course of participation in festival organization, the organizers continually stressed the need to spread the events over the course of a year in order to avoid competing with one another for attendants and to account for the region's hot summer weather.

A second important point about the timing of festivals concerns their placement in the week. All of these, without exception, are weekend events. Some may start on Thursday afternoons, but they are timed around the modern workweek,

TABLE 4 Number of
Cajun-Themed Festivals per Month
in the Year 1998

Month	No.
January	2
February	9
March	3
April	5
May	3
June	2
July	3
August	2
September	5
October	6
November	1
December	5
Total	46

with the main events scheduled Friday evening through Sunday afternoon. This may seem obvious: Of course, one might object, who could attend a festival on Monday morning? The very assumption that this is an obvious time to hold spectacles, when examined, suggests how deeply the modern workweek has sunk its framework into the organization of time. The weekend is the time for social events, for the shopping mall, for trips to Disney World. It is also the time for spectacles of ethnicity.

If Cajun festivals resemble other commodified entertainments in their temporal organization, they also display commodification in their arrangement of space. All festivals are held in open spaces, usually in parks and downtown areas. Festivals *Acadiens*, for example, is held in the central park of Lafayette, Girard Park. Very few actually charge admission fees. The Crawfish Festival in Breaux Bridge is notable because it recently started to charge an admission fee in order to control the impact of large crowds (over 100,000) on a small town. Most of these are manifestly free events, not commercial endeavors. However, the intentionally noncommercial character of the festivals makes the predominance of commercial activities at them all the more interesting.

The center of the festivals is generally a stage, providing free music for all the attendants. At the Festivals *Acadiens*, music is provided either by zydeco bands or by groups that provide some variant of traditional Cajun folk music. A number of the other festivals, particularly those outside of the Lafayette area, present the "Cajun country music" that blends local strains of music and characteristic Louisiana instruments such as the accordion with electric guitars and the rhythms of contemporary popular country music. Around the stage, the festival grounds are organized as temporary shopping malls, with booths under small tents.

Two kinds of activities predominate in the booths: the sale of putatively ethnic foods and the sale of arts and crafts items. All of the booths that we have visited readily accept credit cards (see Ritzer 1999:156 on the importance of the credit card for the new means of consumption). The foods include dishes such as jambalaya, stuffed breads, and crawfish and alligator dishes, all prepared by local merchants. These foods may vary in their quality and in the degree to which they would have been familiar to inhabitants of southern Louisiana in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, we are not interested

in evaluating the historical authenticity of foodstuffs or in acting as culinary critics. The important point is that all of these foods have explicit associations with Cajun ethnicity; those who eat them are consuming ethnicity by ingesting ethnic products.

The arts and crafts items are also symbolically rich. Paintings, carvings, decorated aprons, t-shirts, and miscellaneous knick-knacks predominate. Again, all of these items intentionally evoke Cajun ethnicity. They also display an ironic relationship with history, in which an idealized past is re-presented through contemporary media. An illuminating example of this ironic representation may be found in the work of the popular artist Floyd Sonnier, whose images are ubiquitous at these festivals. Sonnier is a skillful draftsman, and a man old enough to remember southern Louisiana in the decades before World War II. His paintings dwell on old Cajun barns, horse-drawn vehicles, musicians playing informally for friends and family under moss-hung oak trees, and humble old-style homes with outhouses. The rural imagery of these pictures portrays the lives of farmers and trappers, of people who live off the land and make their own entertainment.

As is the case with all artistic representations, the scenes in Floyd Sonnier's work are interpretations of the world. However, these scenes are emotion-laden interpretations of a world that no longer exists. Even the humblest of homes do not have outhouses today, and the musicians are professionals performing on stage, not playing informally on the galerie under the moss. Sonnier's paintings are sold as prints, but they also take a variety of other formats. Booths will sell Sonnier images on t-shirts, coffee cups, plates, calendars, and virtually anything else that has a surface. Ordinary items of consumption are thus transformed into emblems of ethnic identity.

As iconography, Floyd Sonnier's art provides an interesting example of the commodification of history. Products sold at boutiques connect individuals to a version of history. It should be noted that ethnicity, while constructed, is not constructed *ex nihilo*. Sonnier can actually remember the scenes that he portrays. Similarly, the musicians do draw on an indigenous musical tradition when musically inclined relatives and neighbors would indeed gather to play informally. The commodification of ethnicity does not involve inventing ethnic fictions so much as drawing on a deeply felt tradition and recasting this tradition in the form of reproducible, marketable products.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: POSTINDUSTRIAL AMERICA AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF ETHNICITY

We have presented four major findings regarding the relationship between Louisiana Cajun ethnicity and festivals. First, we have seen that the economy of "Cajun country" in Louisiana is similar to the economy of other regions of the contemporary United States. The service sector provides the greatest proportion of jobs, although there is also a fairly large percentage of jobs in manufacturing, mining, and construction. Agriculture and related "traditional" activities do not employ many people. Second, we have seen that Cajun festivals are not inherited, primordial celebrations but "invented traditions" of recent history.

Third, we have seen a complex relationship between ethnicity and festival attendance. Those who identify themselves as ethnic group members are more likely than others to participate in these events. However, the most self-consciously "authentic" ethnic display, the one that makes the greatest efforts to root itself in pastimes, crafts, and skills with the purest pedigrees of traditionalism, is the one that is most likely to appeal to outsiders rather than to insiders. Younger people, especially among those who identify themselves as Cajuns, are more likely to participate in festivals than older people. On the other hand, younger people are less likely than older people to be fluent in French, the single most important objective marker of this group.

In large part because the self-consciously ethnic Festivals Acaadiens is set in Acadiana's urban center of Lafayette, festival attendants tend to be drawn more heavily from the urban-suburban region of Lafayette than from the more rural parishes. Although the majority of those in the area and at festivals are blue-collar workers or service workers, particularly among the Cajuns, people at the professional-managerial-technical level are proportionately the most likely to attend festivals.

Finally, in looking at the actual occurrences of these festivals we have seen that they are concerned with the marketing of symbolically rich commodities in the context of the contemporary American market economy. Festivals are weekend events, not celebrations of harvests. They are organized as temporary shopping malls, with staged entertainments surrounded by bou-

tiques. Still, although the form of the activities is that of the present-day cathedral of consumption, their content is historical nostalgia.

Much of this seems to evoke the symbolic ethnicity of Herbert Gans (1979): the consumption of symbols of ethnicity divorced from ethnic ties. However, we would like to suggest that *symbolic ethnicity* is a misleading phrase. All ethnicity is symbolic, as ethnicity is a meaningful categorization. In earlier times, ethnicity symbolized a relationship between politically and ethnically dominant in-groups and disadvantaged out-groups in the centralizing nation-state of classical capitalism. This symbolism has not receded entirely into the past: Group differences in political and economic power are still a major part of the American social landscape. Nevertheless, the economy of mass production has given a new emphasis to the social identity of consumer: the individual who exists out of the context of group ties and in relationship to commodities, objects of consumption. Thus, a more accurate term for ethnicity based on the consumption of ethnic products might be *commodified ethnicity*.

Why should ethnicity continue to exist, or even become more self-consciously emphasized, as ethnic social ties and linguistic and cultural markers weaken? Here, we should recall the putatively primordial character of ethnicity: Ancestry links one to a past that is perceived as "authentic" and provides one with an identity taken to be authentic precisely because it seems to be so deeply rooted. To the extent that individuals are socially identifiable as consumers, as people who are connected to one another through items of purchase, they lack the sense of having primordial ties and identities that they perceive as authentic. The answer to this dilemma may be to imbue commodities with historical meaning, to make items of purchase reverberate with the significance of an idealized past. Indeed, this recent tack taken by Cajun activists and entrepreneurs on their heritage has been met with popular, commercial, and media success. It can be interpreted as an indication of the ability of Cajun ethnics to adapt to a changing socioeconomic environment. Thus Cajuns are not "selling off" their culture but rather accommodating it to a postindustrial, postmodern society.

The paradox of commodified ethnicity is that it can easily provide a vicarious sense of primordial identity even to non-group members. Although Cajuns are more likely than non-

Cajuns to attend festivals, the latter do participate in large numbers. At Festivals Acadiens, the most self-consciously "authentic" ethnic event, the latter actually predominate. Vicarious ethnicity may actually be the key to much of contemporary resurgent ethnicity. Commodified ethnicity can provide a sense of being connected to a meaningful past (albeit a somewhat weaker sense) to out-group members as well as in-group members. One need only reflect that the Native American renaissance in literature that has made best-selling authors of Native American writers such as Sherman Alexie could not have taken place if it had to depend on Native American readers alone. Similarly, African American identity is marketed as a commodity to both group members and non-group members in television shows and music CDs.

This brief examination of the ethnic festival in south Louisiana can, in our view, shed some light on the ongoing construction and reconstruction of ethnicity. We suggest that the assimilation versus ethnic identity dichotomy that has historically shaped a great deal of thinking about ethnicity was a product of centralizing industrial nation-states. The "ethnics" were defined by contrast to a central national community that was, by default, "nonethnic." However, individuals increasingly participate in the contemporary economy as consumers, deriving social identities from choices of categories of products rather than from participation in social groups. Participation in the contemporary economy also means a disjunction between current socioeconomic position (as nine-to-five workers or oil-rig hands) and ideas about group membership derived from historical traditions. This disjunction tends to heighten ethnic awareness rather than diminish it: English-speaking grandchildren paradoxically have a greater attachment to ethnicity than their French-speaking grandparents, and the foreign-educated professor returns to Louisiana with a sense of his heritage that he never had as a child. Perceptions of historical tradition provide the substantive imagery of ethnicity, but this imagery must be reshaped into contemporary forms. To fit into a consumer economy, ethnicity must become a commodity.

Although we maintain that our concept of commodified ethnicity has wide application to other groups, one of the chief problems in this line of thinking is to determine the extent to which other ethnic and racial categories may be reasonably defined in terms of the consumption of commodities. As we suggested above, some aspects of contemporary Native Amer-

ican and African American identity may be reasonably understood as commodification. We do not see that membership in groups such as these can be reduced to consumption of products, because group membership is still closely connected with systematic socioeconomic disadvantage. Nevertheless, even for these groups, the consumption of symbolically rich commodities is becoming an increasingly important part of self-identification and identification by outsiders.

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