Editor, Morning Advocate:

Use of the word “Cajun” in South Louisiana has been controversial. Traditionally Acadians have insisted on being called by their historical name. Within recent years the term “Cajun” has come into wider usage, especially by non-Acadians, but has not by any means been accepted by all Acadians.

Definitions given in the following sources will probably come as a shock to people who call themselves “Cajuns” or even to non-Acadians who apply the term to us:

Reference (1) Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia
Authority — not given.

“The Cajuns have a mixed white Indian and Negro ancestry. The best known group is located in the swampy back woods area along Bayou Teche in Louisiana.”

The author fails to state whether Cajuns are bipeds or quadrupeds, but from the order of reference to their “habitat,” a Cajun is regarded as just one more creature of the swamps.

(2) Encyclopedia Britannica
Authority: Arnold M. Rose, Professor of Sociology, University of Minnesota.

“Another such group is the Cajuns of Louisiana and Alabama. They claim ancestry, probably accurately, from the French Acadians who were driven out of Canada by the English in the 18th century and who took up residence in the French Colony of Louisiana.

“What they fail to acknowledge is that their French ancestors amalgamated with Negroes and probably also with American Indians. They insist that they have Caucasoid ancestry which neither the whites nor Negroes of their communities accept. So the Cajuns live an isolated existence, the whites will not associate with them, and they will not associate with the negroes.”

Absurd assertions by Rose that Acadians are an “amalgamation” of Negro, Indian and white races can only be called an irresponsible falsehood. Certainly a person in Rose’s position should have been able to evaluate abundant information to the contrary available from reliable sources. Such an outpouring of misinformation couched in crude and offensive rhetoric is hardly the sort of thing we expect from the faculty of one of our great universities. As to claim of social ostracism suffered by our people, one must ask the question: Rejected by whom? People of major prominence socially, educationally and otherwise in South Louisiana are largely of Acadian extraction and take great pride in their ancestral heritage.

Acadians can cite unquestionable evidence that they are indeed whites thanks to strict marital standards, church records and the work of excellent genealogists both in Canada and Louisiana. Few racial groups in this country can equal the evidence and its documentation.

Accomplishments of Acadians in old Acadie as colonists under extreme difficulties are certainly notable. And, when the colony became an English possession, Acadians chose to give up fertile farms, comfortable homes and possessions accumulated over more than a century for a principle that meant even more to them. They refused to sign an oath of allegiance to England that would have required them to give up their religion and fight against France in case of war.

There is much that can be written on the leadership provided by Acadians in the development and growth of early South Louisiana. Among other things Acadians gave Louisiana four governors before the Civil War. They have taken and are continuing to take a leading part in the professions, business and farming activities of the region.

Most accounts of our people publicized in recent years have been anything but flattering to say the least. The sordid “documentary” “Good times are killing me” produced and aired under auspices of PBS was outrageous. The article on Louisiana “Cajuns” in a recent issue of US News and World Report was not much better. A serious investigation on contemporary Acadians should certainly be comprehensive enough to include a more representative range of economic achievement and social status, not to mention simple decency. But most important of all, such demeaning inaccuracies about our people in publications that are standard sources of information in American schools and homes should be the deep concern of local and state historical societies. Steps should be taken here and now to see that appropriate corrections are made.

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