Cajuns Can Claim Status Under Equal Job Act

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Cajuns, the ancestors of most people in Acadiana who made their way to Louisiana in search of a country in each other's own, can now legally claim that they are of foreign descent and have protection under the Equal Employment Opportunity Act.

A federal judge has ruled that although the residents of the small French colony of Acadiana were of mixed heritage and the area was never declared a separate country, the definition of "national origin" is so strong that Acadiana's heritage should have protection against discrimination.

The judge, in an opinion issued on July 17, said a Louisiana law that bars discrimination because of national origin, was enacted July 17. The suit in the case was brought by Joseph Rouche, a descendant of Acadians who lived in the area at the end of the 18th century.

Rouche claims he was fired because his employer, the H.L. Coates Company, Ltd., took the position that the term "Louisiana" is not synonymous with "Acadiana." He was later rehired after an arbitration hearing.

Rouche's case is similar to United States v. Louisiana, 400 F. Supp. 945 (E.D. La. 1975), in which the court ruled that the term "Louisiana" was not synonymous with "Acadiana." In that case, the court ruled that the term "Louisiana" is not synonymous with "the country where a person was born, or more broadly, the country from which his ancestors came."

Dominguezena Called

Among those opposed is the Marine Leonce attorney Joseph Dominguezena, director of COGOL. He said he was asked to define "national origin" to help the judge in his determination of the case.

"I asked the term, "national origin," to be defined," he said.

"Otherwise, the judge would have no idea what he's doing in determining the case."

Dominguezena said the term "national origin" is not synonymous with the term "Louisiana," and that is why he was asked to define it.

"I would have no idea how to determine the case if I didn't have a definition," he said.

"Otherwise, I would have no idea what I'm doing in determining the case."