

Title: *Menudization* of Gumbo: The Arrival of Latinos in Cajun Land

Abstract:

Over the last couple of decades, Latinos found their way into places beyond the traditional Latino enclaves, most notably in the South and the Midwest. Most of these new-destination areas have historically had few Latinos. One state that represents an anomaly is Louisiana, a state that continued to have a relatively small Latino population while surrounding its southern neighbors attracted many Latinos. Hurricanes over the last several years, however, have changed the situation, with many Latinos making their way to Louisiana to engage in reconstruction activities. While much attention has focused on New Orleans following the devastation spawned by Hurricane Katrina, other more rural parts of the state have a longer history of attracting Latinos in their rebuilding efforts. In particular, the Cajun area of the state has attracted two waves of Latinos following two hurricanes—Hurricane Lili in the early 2000s and Hurricane Rita in 2005.

This study uses quantitative and particularly qualitative data to examine the extent to which Latino newcomers to the Cajun cultural region are likely to settle in this area. The data suggest that Latino immigrants are likely to be sojourners as there are significant levels of social distance between this population and the settled Cajun population. There are three reasons why Latinos are likely to be sojourners: 1) the negative perception that the United States has of a Mexican immigrant, 2) the immigrant sees himself returning home after the acumination of human capital and remittance, and 3) the “mobile immigrant” is unable to develop relations with members of the host society. The paper also examines the factors that attracted Latinos to this particular area. The paper also assesses the extent to which Latinos in the Cajun area differ from those in New Orleans and in the larger region of the South. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of the results for the settlement and integration of Latino immigrants into a well established cultural region such as the Cajun area of Louisiana.

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