



# French Creoles of Color in English: Origins of a Louisiana Dialect

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# Project Overview

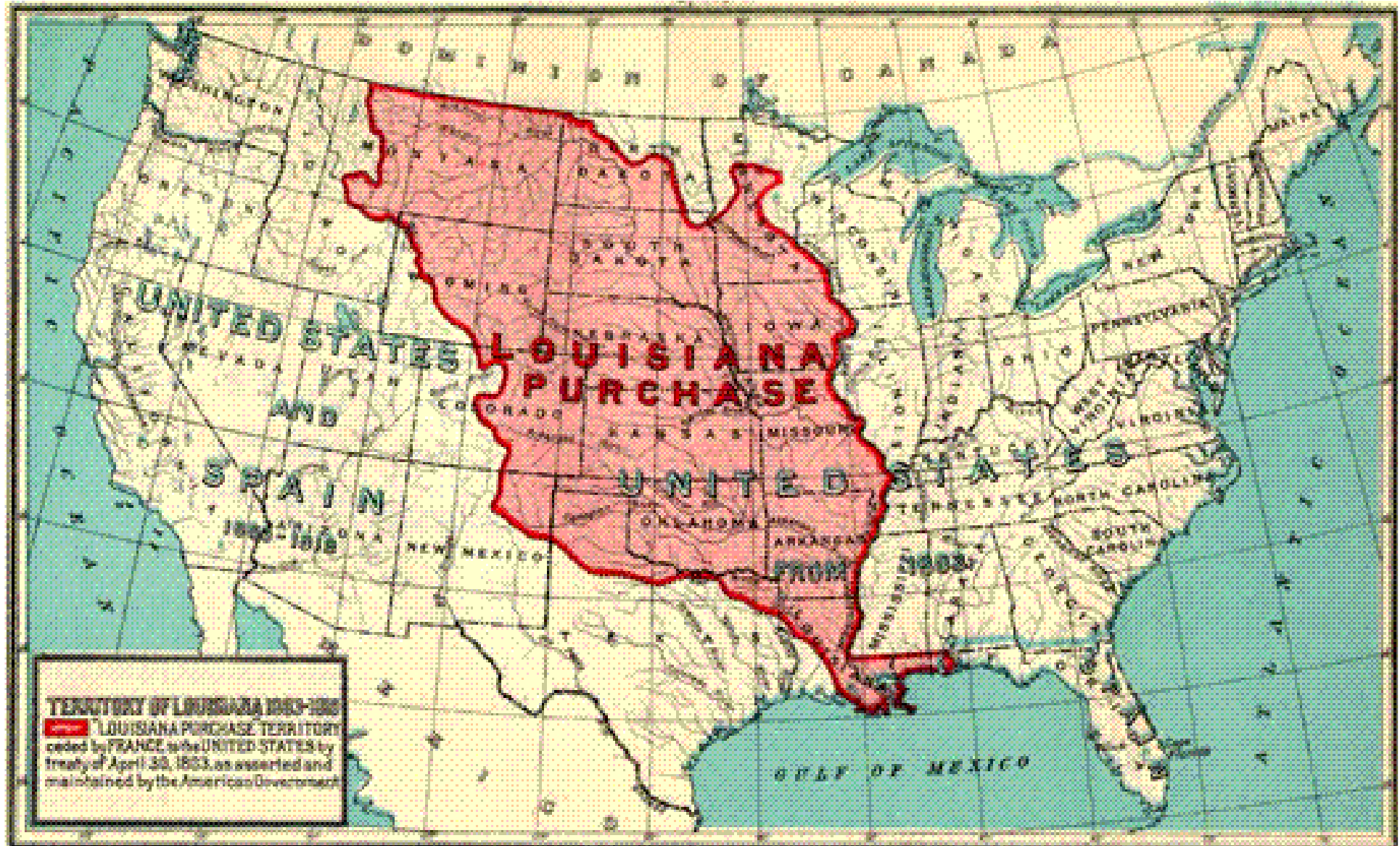
- Creation of Corpus for larger project (Dubois & Richardson)
- Letters written in English by Free People of Color in Louisiana from 1803 to 1900
- Emphasis on French speakers - Creoles
- Finding the Origins of the Dialect



# Timeline: Louisiana History

- 1682 – Territory claimed for France
- 1699 – The royal French colony of Louisiana founded
- 1700s – Slave importation began
- 1763 – Spain acquired Colony
- 1803 – Colony returned to France
- 1803 – Louisiana Purchase by USA
- 1861-1865 – Civil War
- 1870s-80s – Reconstruction

# Louisiana Purchase 1803



# Louisiana Location

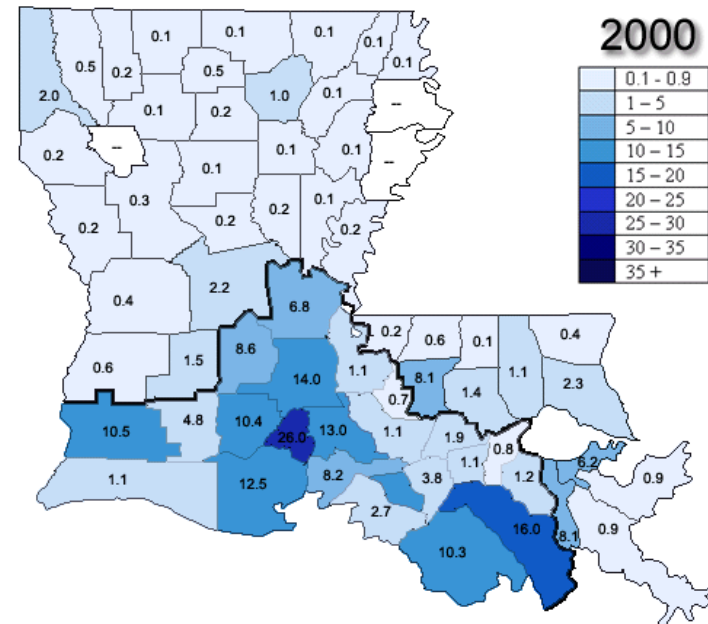
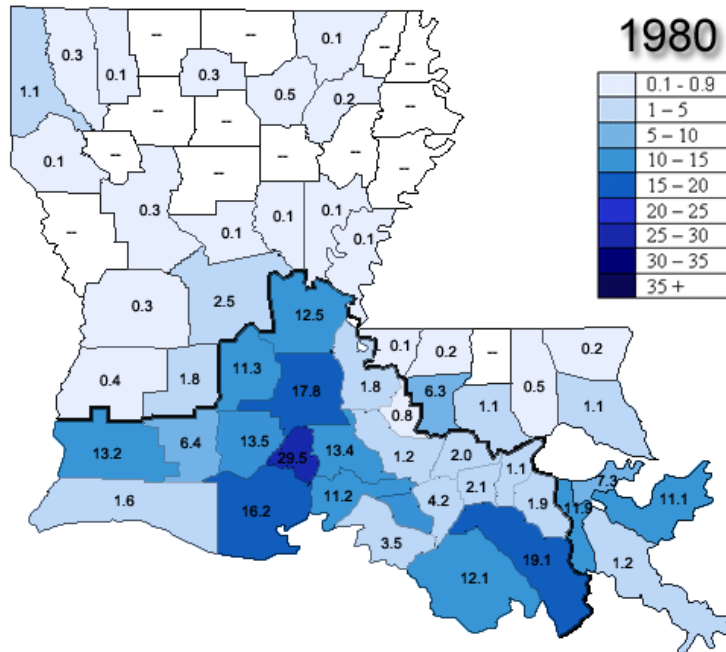
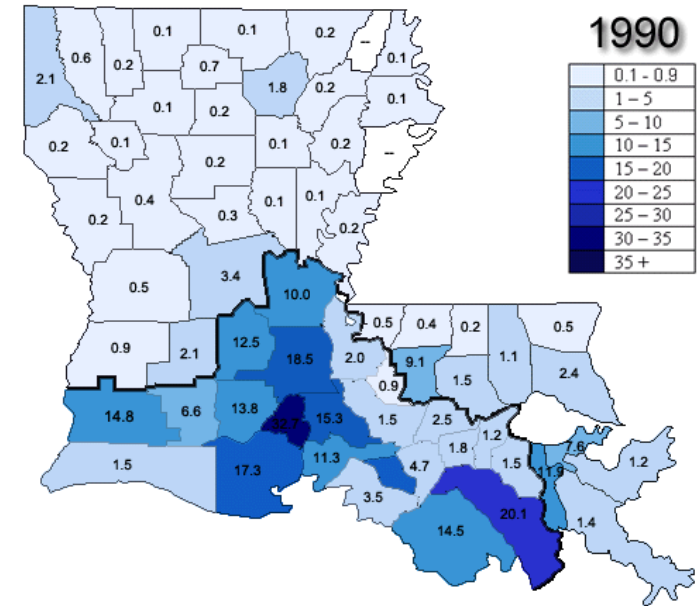
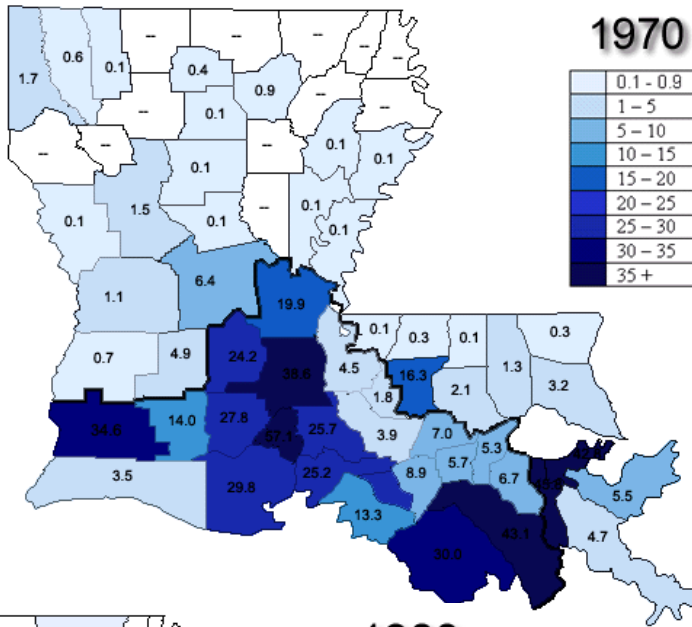




# Trilingualism in Louisiana

- Most heritage languages in the USA = subtractive bilingualism in a three generational pattern.
- In Louisiana there was an extensive period of bilingualism maintained over several generations. This implies that the loss of French as a prestige or everyday language was not a forgone conclusion; the "triumph" of English was thus by no means a given but rather the result – at least in part -- of historical events which were unpredictable in 1840 or even 1860.

# Decline of French in Louisiana





# Colored Creoles

- Their ancestors were the offspring of unions between Whites and Blacks.
- They were officially recognized as the children of these unions, and most were free before the Civil War.
- They were socially and economically stratified:
  - a small number of wealthy planters,
  - many farmers, both landowners and tenants,
  - a large number of laborers.





# A Creole Family – Gens de couleur libre.

- Norbert Badin was a free man of color who owned a Plantation in the Cane River area (Norbert Badin Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries).
- Letters relevant to this research were written by Gabriel Metoyer.
- The Metoyer family is one of the best known and frequently referenced families in literature about Louisiana Creoles and Free People of Color of the 19th century (Mills 1977; Gehman 1994).
- The matriarch of the family, Marie Therese (or Coincoin), was a slave born in Louisiana of parents imported from Africa.
- Scholars disagree on the details of her life's story, but it is generally accepted that she lived with Thomas Pierre Metoyer, a Frenchman, for many years as his mistress (first as the slave of another who leased her to him, than as his slave, and finally as his free mistress) and who bore him 10 children during a relationship that lasted decades (probably around 25 years). She was freed in 1778 and she continued to live with him for another decade (until the time of his marriage) before leaving to manage a tobacco plantation he conferred upon her at that time. She also acquired land from the Spanish Government on which she ran a dairy. Over the years she accumulated wealth and property which she bequeathed upon her children, including Yucca Plantation (now Melrose).
- Nicholas Augustin Metoyer, one of her sons, was patriarch of the Cane River community (Gehman 1994) where the Badin family lived. One of her sisters, Marie Jeanne became the matriarch of the free community of color in Campti in Natchitoches Parish (Mills 1977), from whence Gabriel and Pauline Metoyer wrote most of their letters. It seems from the content of the letters that the Badins and the Metoyers were cousins.

Campte La Feb 19th 1889

My deare frind

I have recive your letter with  
pleaser that your dauther wase goine  
to get married but i am mighty sorry  
that i could not get to they weding  
for i am not abel to walk yet  
but i wishes im good luck and  
prosper give my fectionet love to all  
my frinds and so is Pauline to and all  
so to uncel John and all his femley  
I wish you would have they kindness  
to ask Mr Gilma and his wife  
to have they kindness to give you my  
money for i am in need of it now for  
i am sick and not abel to worke  
to see what ancer the will give you  
and if they speake about moven you  
will size enough for they sherrife  
and I to be payed and if he is goine  
to stay for him and his wif to make  
a note for this year and you will  
have uncel John to make it to be payed  
onthey 1 of june 1850c  
your coton is not sole yet soon as  
it will be soled i will let you know  
so that if you wants me to send it  
in they letter you will let me know  
i and father Polain is always about  
they same thing some day he fele lettel  
beter and there again he feles  
worse I finished my letter by bid  
you goodnight give me they anacer quick as  
poseble

Yours truly friend  
Gabriel Metoyer

Campte La Feb 19<sup>th</sup> 1889

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so to uncel John and all his femley  
I wish you would have they kindness  
to ask Mr Gilma and his wife  
to have they kindness to give you my  
money for i am in need of it now for  
i am sick and not abel to worke  
to see what ancer the will give you  
and if they speake about moven you  
will size enough for they sherrife  
to stay for him ~~to~~ and his wif to make  
a note for this year and you will  
have uncel John to make it to be payed  
onthey 1 of june 1850c  
your coton is not sole yet soon as  
it will be soled i will let you know  
so that if you wants me to send it  
in they letter you will let me know  
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they same thing some day he fele lettel  
beter and there again he feles  
worse I finished my letter by bid  
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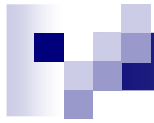
Yours Truly friend

Gabriel Metoyer



# Modern CAAVE

- An identity marker.
- Influenced by heritage languages such as African languages and French.
- Strong traceable influences from Irish English and that of other varieties of English of the period (esp. in glide absence and monophthongization).



<b>Features in AAVE, CAAVE and SWVE</b>	<b>Early AAVE before 1875</b>	<b>Middle AAVE 1875-1900</b>	<b>Modern AAVE after 1945</b>	<b>Modern CAAVE</b>	<b>Modern SWVE</b>	<b>Examples</b>
unmarked past tense	+	+	+	+	+	I talk to him yesterday.
double negatives	+	+	+	+	+	We don't have no money.
omission of noun plural -s	(+)	+	+	+	+	I have three cat.
omission of noun possessive -'s	+	(+)	+	+	+	That is Mary hat.
omission of 3rd person sing. present tense marker -s	+	+	+	+	+	He walk to work every day.
use of 3rd person sing. present tense marker -s with other grammatical persons or numbers	+	+	+	+	+	I swims a lot.



# How do Early/Middle CAAVE Compare?

## Idiolect:

- “We have **they** Garip” vs. “to see what ancer **the** will give you”

## Negation:

- I haven Seen **no** body

## Plural:

- We had three Marriego this week
- some day he fele lettell beter



# Verbs

## Unmarked Past tense and preterit

- “I have **reciev** your letter yesterday” AND “ I have **recive** your letter with pleaser”
- Teremin **IS** Sick with they Grip nearly a month
- your coton is not sole~~o~~ yet

## Omission of 3rd person sing. present tense marker –s

- some day he fele~~o~~ lettel beter and there again he feles worse

## Use of 3rd person sing. present tense marker –s with other grammatical persons or numbers

- but i wish**es** im good luck and prosper
- if you want**s** me to send it

## Other tense marking omission

- I finish**ed** my letter by bid~~o~~ you goodnight
- if he is goin**e**~~o~~ to stay



# Conclusion

- Many of the features present in modern CAAVE date back to the 19th century.
- Closer look at context needed, especially for non-standard verbal marking.
- Influenced more by dialects around them than by foreign (esp. heritage) languages.

Campite sa Feb 11 the 1876

Mr Robert Bardin.

My Dear Friend

I have reciev your letter yesterday with much  
Pleasure Dear friend we have they grip  
Dretly bad at we are all kindly sick Allen  
Is right sick with a pain in his head sence  
Friday & had right smart of death Terrence  
Is sick with they grip nearly a month &  
had they bad luck of losing his Mother they  
12 of penury they grip is work of poor old  
Aunt Arrilise has left us to she was married  
this gone Saturday since it is January 30  
If you please let Coror know that her Aunt  
Is dead you said for me to give you some news  
about your horse but it is impossible for me to  
give you any news about him now for haven  
seen no body from there lately We had a  
Marriage here to day Mr. Noble Conday with  
Miss Suze Lebrun there is to be another one  
this comen Tuesday We had three Marriages this  
week 2 of whites there is right smart of  
Sickness here now you will give my best regard  
to ~~father~~ the Bishop Reges for me & also to  
Alnoel John of family & to my old Aunt to  
all they family joins there self to me to give you all  
there best regard I finish my letter in wishing you  
A happy good night.

As ever your Sener

Companer

Gabriel Metoyer

# Sample Clip

- Gabriel Ledet – Learned Creole French speaker at home, then learned English in school. From Breaux Bridge, Lafayette Parish, aged in the 70s
- Joseph Dugas – Creole French speaker from childhood, 65 years old (from Parks, St Landry Parish?)