

Creole Education

Creole families have produced a number of clergy, especially nuns, and children who went beyond grades available at St. Augustine school sometimes went to live with relatives in New Orleans where they could attain more education. Boys, in earlier times, were sent to New Orleans to complete their schooling.

Public schools in Louisiana were, until the 1960s, segregated and, of course, Creole children who attended those secular schools were faced with the matter of race, often for the first time. Being of mixed racial heritage, they were usually excluded from white schools, and some attended all-black high schools, particularly the pre-1965 generation living in Natchitoches. Others seemed content on stopping with the eight grades at St. Augustine. Similarly, until 1965 the local Creole population was excluded from nearby Northwestern State University (Normal School, College), and those wishing higher degrees turned to Southern University, Grambling University, and Xavier University in Louisiana, as well as other schools in Texas. While the work force at Northwestern included numbers of Creoles as staff and technicians, they were not allowed to attend classes nor to teach. Craftsmen and technicians, janitors, laboratory assistants, postal clerks, library cataloguers and others were daily present at that institution, but their children and grandchildren were barred from attending. Still, numbers of Creoles became the first generation of teachers for the local black public schools, and

others left to teach at prestigious colleges like Tuskegee and Xavier University. The segregated St. Matthew's school, a black public school on Cane River, had a Creole principal, and Creoles were on the teaching staff. The Catholic church school at St. Augustine (St. Joseph's) produced a wide range of educated Creoles, many of whom pursued their education to higher levels. St. Joseph's alumni still hold celebrations in California.

Confirmation, not always a highly valued sacrament in French-speaking Louisiana, was important at St. Augustine, and young people were, and are still, confirmed at the time of their First Communion (Figure 8). Again, Confirmation services, held annually in the spring, are an important part of Creole life. Children again have adult sponsors chosen by them and their families - their *marraines* and *parrains*, or godparents may or may not be their sponsors.

The Creole traditional family is virtually identical to the French rural extended family, the *meziers* (Levi-Strauss 1983). The grandfather surrounded himself with his descendants and became the center of the family constellation. It is more than coincidental that, Augustin Metoyer-Grandpère Augustin - is the important historical personage that he is, nor is it a surprise that he established his church at Isle Brevelle. Weddings and marriages reinforce that family structure, and the Church has much control over that. Banns are still published, and today the couples must have pre-nuptial instruction before the Church allows marriage. Traditionally, marriages precede or follow the forty-day Lenten season, a

time of penance.¹

1. We Know Who We Are: . . . by H. F. Gregory and J. Moran pp. 44-45