Black Creole Trail Rides: Race, Space, and Belonging in Louisiana

While much scholarly attention has focused on Louisiana’s Cajun communities, comparatively few academics have explored the traditions of the black Creoles, Louisiana’s other major Francophone group. Despite the fact that Cajuns and Creoles share physical space, history, and food and music traditions, gulfs of prejudice continue to divide these communities. These chasms have powerful historical echoes and have presented themselves in erasures within the accepted narrative of the American South’s past. For instance, while black cowboys might seem out of place in popular understandings of ranching’s origins, their historical importance is inarguable. This cowboy culture endures presently in the form of black rodeo cowboys as well as black Creole trail rides. Today, on trail ride weekends hundreds of riders descend on rural communities to celebrate their vibrant culture, including traditional foods and zydeco music. Recent debates about limiting or banning these trail rides from certain Louisiana municipalities underscores the discrepancies in the value accorded to Cajun and black Creole traditions. Using participant observation, archival sources, and interviewing, this research engages with literature on public space and citizenship to explore how black Creoles’ traditional practices create a space of belonging and cultural identity within the racialized context of the American South.