



## HISTORY AND CURRENT STATUS

### OF THE HOUMA INDIANS

ANN FISCHER

Brewton Berry, in Almost White, reports that there are some 200 groups of "racial orphans" in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Among these, those who have some claim to Indian ancestry are known as "so-called Indians." This term is apt, for these peoples have a tenuous racial status. Although so-called Indians are of mixed ancestry, they emphasize their Indian identity. Mulatto groups, on the other hand, consider their own status to be midway between white and Negro. Both Mulatto and so-called Indian groups may be found today in Louisiana, living in separate, isolated social units. In these Indian groups in Louisiana, there has been consistent strong resistance to identification with Negroes. Whites, Indians and Negroes agree that as a result of this resistance the Indian groups are more deprived than Negroes who live in the same areas. The racial status of these people varies from parish to parish, and migration can often overcome the problems of racial identity.

The so-called Indians of Louisiana live in settlements which are isolated from the Negro settlements of the same area. Negroes work in the cane fields and usually live in identical unpainted houses in rows perpendicular to the road, surrounded by sugar cane fields. Indians live in houses, often run-down, along the levees in the typical line villages of the bayou country. In many parts of this region white and Indian houses may be mixed in the line villages, due to the movement of the whites down the line. Negro and Indian housing, on the other hand, is never mixed in the situations which I have observed. Many Indians know no Negroes, and when they compare themselves to any other group it is usually to the white French. They reject the white judgment that they are sexually immoral, pointing out, probably accurately, that the same sexual patterns are common to both groups. It is in sexual behavior and the differences in the standard of living that Indians compare themselves to others. When Indians improve their economic circumstances and these improvements become visible, they feel that the whites resent their successes and think they are not entitled to them.

Some of the best evidence that these groups think of themselves as Indian are the collections of items about U. S. Indians from the newspapers which can be found in many homes. On reading about the Chicago Conference for Indians being organized in 1961, one group of Indians collected money

and sent representatives to the conference with no more than newspaper reports as a stimulus. These Indians also have occasional contact with Indians on the Choctaw Reservation at Philadelphia, Mississippi, through church gatherings. The Choctaw, in turn, know of their existence and their problems and recognize the affinity of these so-called Indians to the Choctaw.

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In the summer of 1960 I lived among the Houma, a group of so-called Indians, studying their herbal medicines and collecting genealogies. Since then I have been in fairly constant contact with groups living along Bayous Terrebonne and Pointe au Chien (alternatively Chênes) and to a lesser extent with a group on Isle de Jean Charles. The Houma live in these places as well as along many other bayous which divide like the fingers on a hand to flow into the Gulf of Mexico at the southern end of Louisiana. From the Mississippi west to Morgan City their shrimp boats and muskrat traps are found throughout the swamps and brackish bays separating the Gulf from dry land. Around 2,000 people identify themselves primarily with the Houma. They are divided into small groups, widely separated by swampland, but genealogical relationships and names unite them psychologically. The Houma have only a few surnames. Some of these, such as Billiot, are almost exclusively Indian. Others, such as Naquin, are also found among descendants of the Acadians who occupy territory slightly upstream from the Houma.

Names have enabled the surrounding whites to identify the Houma as individuals, although their physical type does not mark most of them as distinctive in the local population. This region has been invaded repeatedly by single males, hunters and trappers of many nationalities and races. Some of them have established long-term affectionate ties and other more transient ties with women of all three local groups, Indian, Negro and white. Therefore, identity within the framework of the rigid caste system of the South is not only a problem for the Houma, but for much of the surrounding population.

Whites who live close to them know practically nothing about the Houma. Sabines, the local derogatory term for the Indians, is known to the white community, but many whites would not be able to identify a member of the group.

There is great variation in physical type among the Indians as well as among the local French-speaking population. Indian hair form varies from almost kinky to straight; hair color varies from reddish blonde to black; eyes may be blue although they are usually brown; skin color varies from brown to very white. F. G. Speck, an anthropologist who visited the Houma in 1938, reported to the Bureau of Indian Affairs on their physical character as follows: "In my judgment, as based upon comparisons with Indians

of the southeastern tribes over a number of years, I should rate the Houma as a people possessing Indian blood and cultural characters to a degree about equal to that of the Creek, Choctaw, Catawbe, and Seminoles."<sup>2</sup> A special investigator from the Bureau of Indian Affairs pronounced the Houma to be too mixed to be considered Indian by the Bureau.<sup>3</sup> However, aid was given to the Chitimacha, who are simply a localized group of the people who now call themselves the Houma Indians.

There is little historic documentation of the Houma as a tribe. They evidently originally lived to the east of the Mississippi, and moved steadily southwestward from the time of French and Spanish settlement of Louisiana. The Houma language is said to have belonged to the Muskogian language family.<sup>4</sup> A few numbers in the Houma dialect are recalled by some present-day informants, although the Indians are French-speaking. The Indians recognize their linguistic connection with the Choctaw.

Many accounts report that the Houma tribe is extinct. Ruth Underhill says, in a report to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and I agree, that "It is the opinion of the writer that Houma has become a generic name for a number of Muskogian remnants which mixed and concentrated in southern Louisiana."<sup>5</sup>

The Houma reportedly moved from West Feliciana Parish in Louisiana to the delta near New Orleans in 1706. From there they drifted south along the bayous through LaFourche and Terrebonne Parishes. Presumably they got along well enough with the early white settlers, and since they presented no problems, they did not benefit by treaties made with the more warlike groups to the west. Swanton visited them in 1907 and reported that they were being pushed back steadily by the French settlers.<sup>6</sup> Swanton's material, however, is very incomplete, because he stayed only a few days among the Houma.

Present-day Indians are still bitter about Swanton's chief informant, Bob Verret. Indians say Verret misrepresented himself as their chief, and did harm to the people. Verret is said to have been a rogue who kept more than one wife. The Indians report that he was half Negro, and the Houma have some feeling that he was partially responsible for their segregation. Verret is described as non-negroid in appearance. Supposedly he left descendants along one bayou, causing a sub-class to develop within the Indian group.

Swanton based his remarks on his knowledge of the same group of Houma which I studied. I question Swanton's contention that the Houma were being steadily pushed back in 1907. At that time they were located exactly where they are today. At present they are being infiltrated. It is literally impossible for them to be pushed back, for, as the Indians say, "One more step and we will be in the Gulf." They have been pushed back economically and socially rather than physically.

The history of the economic exploitation of the Houma, a partial result of the rich natural resources of their environment, is so clouded by rumor and passage of time that fact and fancy are woven into tales from which it is impossible to untangle fact. This paper makes no attempt to do so. The story is more appropriately told as the Indians feel it and tell it.

Rosalie Courteaux is remembered as the first Indian to have trouble with the white French. Terrebonne Bayou is known as "up front" to the Houma of this locality, and Bayou Barré, behind the houses which face on Bayou Terrebonne, is known as "back behind." Rosalie lived "up front" and the Lirettes who did, and still do, live "up front" burned her house and chased her "back behind." Back behind is relatively unsafe in hurricane weather.

According to tradition, there was a trial over this episode with the Lirettes which occurred early in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Rosalie, the Indians concede, liked to drink, and was, perhaps, an undesirable neighbor. Rosalie may have been given a land grant, possibly at this time. At any rate, her descendants are still looking for this grant, and indications that it actually existed were recently uncovered in the U.S. land patent files. These patents are in the name of Rosalie Houma. In addition to receiving land grants, Rosalie may have purchased land.

Rosalie Courteaux married Jacques Billiot. Court records of Billiot indicate that he was a half-breed Negro and Indian.<sup>7</sup> The Houma say that he was French. In view of the constant changing of Louisiana birth certificates by high-handed registrars of births, the truth will never be known. The couple had a number of children, but only four of their sons are said to be the ancestors of the entire group of living Houma. Rosalie's sons married women of mixed Indian and white blood. All present-day Houma descent is traced in terms of Alexander, Bartolme, Jean and Celestin Billiot, the four sons of Rosalie. A photograph of these four sons as old men indicates that physically they were completely white in appearance.

## II

In addition to social problems created by local prejudices against them, the Houma have been the victims of a long series of ecological and economic changes in their homeland. The Houma live on top of one of the richest natural gas and petroleum fields in the United States. The development of this field has changed the face of the land, altered the economy and brought in outsiders. Exploitation of the wildlife resources on which the Houma exist, the age-old complaint of Indians against whites, goes on apace.

The oil on the land has led to increasing agitation among the Indians to reclaim the land they feel is rightfully theirs. Various legal procedures, formerly unintelligible to them, have lost the Houma their land titles. Although the land is immensely valuable, it is my opinion, after five years of

trying sporadically to get legal help to untangle the problem, that it would cost more than the land is worth to resolve the matter. Ruth Underhill came to the conclusion that the land was irrevocably lost over 25 years ago. At that time she reported that many lawyers had looked over the matter and had given up in despair.<sup>8</sup> The Indian interpretation of this has inevitably been that these lawyers were bought off by competing white title holders. My presence in the area has tended to spread hope among the Houma for recovering their land. Even though I have often indicated the practical impossibility of this task, my willingness to listen to the accounts of land problems and to investigate them has resulted in renewed hope.

Even before the development of the oil field, land was a problem for the Houma. The land on which the Indians now trap was once public land. Public lands in Louisiana in other places were originally established on land which the Indians claimed and to which the whites disputed their titles. Doubtless the land of the Houma was such a case.<sup>9</sup> From the courthouse records Ruth Underhill concluded that the swampland was purchased by private individuals from the levee districts of Atchafalaya in 1895.<sup>10</sup> In 1924 the owners noted the high price of furs and decided to charge for trapping permits. The land was suddenly offered for sale or lease in the local papers. The illiterate Indians were faced with incoming trapping companies who bought up or leased these tracts and negotiated with the Indians for the rights to trap muskrat on the land. Indians had to work for the companies, starve or trap illicitly in the more inaccessible regions. Annually Indians were required to sign leases indicating that they had no claim to these lands. The fur companies owned the local stores to which the Indians sold furs and from which they received credit. The credit system led to further losses of other lands to which the Indians had sounder claims.

Over the years the trapping and land companies, with legal advice and technical maneuvering, have acquired titles to a considerable acreage. One method used has been to put up fences on Indian lands as an indication of ownership. Where these fences have gone unprotected fairly solid claims have been established by the companies.

While most of my summary is based on the Indian view of the matter, legal efforts have disclosed elements of truth in the Indians' stories of exploitation. The truth of all of their claims is difficult to ascertain, however.

Trapping companies have meant lowered returns on furs for the individual trapper. And, since the Second World War, other things have worked to depress the trapping industry. In an attempt to raise nutria on a farm at McIlhenny Island, these animals were accidentally released into the swamps. Nutria now thrive in the swamps and fill the traps in place of the desired muskrats. There is no important market for nutria in the United States, although with assistance it is possible that one could be developed. Nutria

can be sold only as dog food at present; it is not profitable for the trapper to collect it.

Rice was formerly raised as a crop in the area. Some of the older Indians can remember this period. Diversion of fresh water from the region has made this impossible.

Oil from the off-shore oil fields has polluted some of the oyster beds. Damages can be and have been collected in some cases, since oyster beds are considered to be privately owned. But the Indians, who work on but usually do not own the oyster beds, have not benefitted from these reimbursements.

Sportsmen find ready access to Indian fishing and hunting grounds by means of roads built to develop the oil fields. In spite of legal protection against fishing for profit, many sportsmen fill large deep freezes with their catches, depleting the quantity available to those who are dependent on these resources for a livelihood. Indians, many of whom cannot swim, are afraid of the waters of the open Gulf. They confine their shrimping to the bays which are also most accessible to sportsmen. The white French work in the more distant shrimping grounds and have managed to maintain a higher productivity.

The economic difficulties encountered by the Houma have been aggravated by their lack of education. The history of Indian education in Terrebonne Parish is a history of bitterness and hate. From the beginning, Indians have been denied entrance to white schools in Terrebonne Parish on the basis that an Indian is equivalent to a Negro. Ruth Underhill wrote in 1938, "The question [of their status] has been decided by the courts. They are negroes." The case on which this decision was based was, according to Underhill, "that of N. L. Billout [sic], a so-called Indian, [who] sued Terrebonne Parish for permission to send his children to the white school." This case was heard in 1918, and the plaintiff had to admit that one of his grandfathers was a slave.

From the beginning, Indians would not attend Negro schools and were denied access to white schools. Until about 1937, Indians had no schools at all. At that time, church groups began to take an interest in them. Missionaries offered education, and as a result many formerly Catholic Indians became Baptists or Methodists. But today, much of the adult population is actually illiterate, and most of the remainder are functionally so. Most Indians over 40 years of age sign documents with an "X." This inability to read what they are signing adds to their already well-founded suspicions that they are being duped.

Eventually, schools were built exclusively for the Indians in Terrebonne Parish by LaFourche Parish which adjoins Terrebonne. This deviousness enabled the local Terrebonne Parish government to avoid recognizing the Indians as a distinct group, somewhat in the manner in which the U.S. government avoids recognizing Red China. Bayou Pointe au Chien divides

Terrebonne from LaFourche, and Indians live on both sides of this bayou. In LaFourche, an Indian is considered to be white, and may attend the white schools. In return for certain considerations from Terrebonne Parish, until 1964 LaFourche Parish operated two schools for Indians, one on Bayou Pointe au Chien and one on Bayou Terrebonne. In 1964 one of these was closed. These schools were elementary schools; until about 1957, when a child graduated from the eighth grade, he had finished school unless he chose to drive 30 miles into LaFourche to attend high school, or left Terrebonne Parish for more distant New Orleans private or public schools. Very few Indians managed this difficult arrangement, and few were able to finish high school.

A few years after the Supreme Court decision directing schools to integrate with all deliberate speed, Terrebonne Parish established a high school exclusively for the Indians. Beginning in 1957, a year of high school was added each year until in 1961 Indians were able to graduate from high school in Terrebonne Parish. During the first year the high school had about 14 students, and this number increased over time to around 30 in 1963. At first the Houma from Pointe au Chien, Terrebonne Bayou and Isle de Jean Charles disliked the idea of the Indian high school, feeling that it was one more step in the direction of continued segregation. Up to the present, very few of these Indians have attended this school, preferring to go to LaFourche to the white high school, to join the armed forces for a high school education or to go away to live with relatives and get their diplomas in areas where they are accepted as whites. The Indians who have attended the Indian high school are mostly from Grande Caillou or Bayou Dularge, both too distant from LaFourche for daily commuting.

Difficulties in getting an education and economic pressure combine to encourage children to drop out of school to help parents as soon as they are physically able. Indian girls usually manage to finish elementary school, and if they are able students or if their parents are ambitious for them, they attempt to continue for a few years in high school. Boys generally begin dropping out of school at about the third grade. They attend regularly when their fathers do not need them on the shrimp boats, and less regularly when they are needed.

In the close school community, where students and teachers are all too aware of each other's weaknesses, discipline is at times difficult to maintain. Teachers, expected to act in all kinds of capacities, including that of janitor, tend to neglect these extra duties, and the schools may be quite dirty. Discipline is alternately tough and negligent. Classes usually do not last the full period allotted to them, and school lets out up to an hour and a half early at times. Needless to say, no Indian school is accredited by the Southern Regional Educational Association. Parents and teachers seldom meet and have little respect for each other. Complaints on both sides may be well founded.

The Houma as a group are distinguished by law in only one sense: Indians may marry on either side of the Negro-white caste line with no objections from authorities. In the last generation or two, marriages to Negroes have meant that the Indian partner lives among the Negroes and the children of the union identify themselves as Negro. One woman interviewed in Charity Hospital was the child of an Indian mother. Her mother, after bearing her, married a Negro. The Indian child grew up with Negro siblings and now identifies herself as a Negro. She is very loathe to discuss any matters relating to her Indian relatives. Most marriages with whites have occurred between Houma girls and white boys from the vicinity. If the children of mixed marriages have surnames which do not identify them as Indian, and if they move into the town of Houma, the children pass into the white school system unnoticed, or at least unchallenged.

Marriages occur when Houma boys meet white girls from other parts of the country during their tours of duty in the Armed Forces. None of these partners live in the Indian communities. It can be said that the people who remain in the community for life marry within it. Out-marriage usually means departure. The exceptions to this are two marriages between white women, who came to the Houma as missionaries, and Indian men. These married pairs resided in Indian communities for some time, but one pair has now left, and the second has reached the point where the son must be sent away to school. It seems possible that this pair also will leave in the not too distant future.

There are only a few routes of escape from the community, and these mostly present themselves during adolescence. For girls, the chief method of escape is going away to school, meeting white boys and marrying them. For boys, going into the Armed Services seems to be the easiest way to learn a trade other than that of their fathers. The traditional occupations of fishing, hunting and trapping are territorial in nature; the territory must be maintained and exploited or it will fall to other hands. The territorial nature of the occupations of the Houma has forced them to remain in a region which deprives them of other opportunities, and in which a century of prejudice works to their disadvantage.

Identification with Indianness follows the cycle indicated above. During adolescence, when there is the best opportunity to escape from their deprived condition, a number of patterns of activity are evident. Parents with adolescent children become concerned with the problem only in cases where there has been some outside contact through missionaries or jobs on boats or oil rigs which carry the men to the outside world. Where traditional patterns of life have been followed by the parents, the extra impetus needed to overcome the difficulties is not present. Where parents have had a glimpse of the economic contrast between themselves and the rest of the world, many of them become militantly interested in obtaining equal rights for their children. Once the crisis is past, and the children have either

succeeded or failed in escaping the cycle of poverty and deprivation, the parents' interest in working for Indian rights disappears, and they return to their life within the ingrown Indian community.

Another factor in escape seems to be the number of children in the household. Younger sons may more easily leave home than elder sons. Elder sons have at times contributed to the education of their younger brothers. Men do not like to go alone shrimping or fishing. Accidents occur, and if the men are alone they may drown. After the father has initiated one son as his helper, he is much more willing to allow the others to leave home.

The individual nature of the effort made to solve various problems among the Houma is in part responsible for the failure to find a solution for the social problems of the whole group. The oil on the land, like the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, glitters in the eyes of many of the people and distorts their vision completely. For if a Houma profits from the lease of land to the oil companies, his neighbors will often suspect him of profiting at their expense. Proof of title depends much on having birth, death and legitimate marriage records of a person's ancestors. Many Indians, if they married legally, married in churches where records have since been destroyed by fire or thievery. Whole volumes of land records have been stolen from State records offices. It seems unfair to those who do not have the proper documents that they should be deprived of their rights, while those who are no more justified in receiving rights claim benefits. Yet, if all are to benefit, profits will be smaller for the individual. Under such circumstances, suspicions directed at neighbors lead Indians to refuse to sign papers drawn up to help them by lawyers because they distrust the motives of their neighbors who are working with the lawyers. This is a force that pulls the Houma apart psychologically and adds to their problems of identity.

Many lawyers and "lease hounds" hold signatures of Indians whom they presumably represent. Some Indians sign these papers easily, and readily sign up with more than one representative. Others will not sign with any of them. Eventually, this kind of behavior becomes unprofitable for the legal representatives, since they must fight even for their rights to represent certain of the people who have signed up to be represented by them. Lawyers' visions of profits fade into nothingness in the confusion.

In spite of the fact that Swanton reported that Bob Verret was the chief of the Houma, it seems unlikely that the Houma have ever had a very strong central authority among them which might act as a rallying point for action to overcome their social condition. A missionary residing among the Houma when I first visited them reported that their last chief had died just a year or so before my arrival. The missionary was concerned lest they choose a man he considered immoral as the chief's successor. If there was indeed a former chief in 1958, the Indians have followed no other's lead since that

time. It seems doubtful that the presumed former chief had very much influence over the people. The scattered residences of the Houma make it unlikely that his influence could have extended very far beyond Isle de Jean Charles where he lived. One historical reason for this lack of central authority may be the diverse nature of the tribal origins of the group.

The Houma at Pointe au Chien and Isle de Jean Charles may have had more cohesiveness up to about twelve years ago when the first road was built into their territory. Before that time all contact with the outside world was by boat. The people are reported to have been more friendly toward outsiders prior to this time. Pointe au Chien now has running water and a number of telephones as well as some modern fabricated houses. Isle de Jean Charles has electricity, but no other modern conveniences. The development of the standard of living at Pointe au Chien in the last five years during which I have visited there has been startling. The road has made the important difference, but it is not the only difference. What might be called a model Indian family lived at Pointe au Chien. The father spent time in France during the second World War. He sent his daughter to college when he returned and she became a school teacher. He built a house with modern accoutrements, and when his children married they began to follow his example. From this example other young people learned something about how modern standards of living might be obtained, even though it meant going into debt.

There have always been some individuals who have been actively working for their own social betterment, seeking help from the outside when completely frustrated by the local white community. One man wrote repeatedly to the Indian Bureau just prior to World War II. He and a few other Indians still retain letters from the Bureau and from anthropologists sent to investigate the situation. Speck evidently visited the Houma under this stimulus. Speck attempted to revitalize the local crafts and for a time he succeeded in getting a few craftsmen into the production of baskets. He is still remembered by those who had contact with him. The Houma man who was particularly active in seeking outside contacts has dreams similar to those found in other North American Indian groups. One dream he told me involved a huge flag waving over the shore line with an Indian chief's head in the position where the field of stars should be.

When I came to the Houma, the middle-aged people were most interested in soliciting my help for them. They quickly told me about their problems when they became convinced that I was not a spy for the authorities looking for illegal medical practitioners. I wanted to learn about the local remedies, but the Houma were interested only in gaining help with their land claims. For every ounce of knowledge I painfully acquired about herbal medicines, I received pounds of volunteered information on land frauds. They appealed to my sense of justice, and catered to my ego, until finally I agreed to make an appeal to the Association for American Indian Affairs,

naively stating that this was as far as I intended to go. Not being a lawyer, I felt that I could not personally help them. My efforts resulted in finding some legal help, through John P. Nelson, a New Orleans lawyer. Nelson too fell under the spell of the Houma and never completely gave up their cause, although the hopelessness of the legal task gradually dampened his enthusiasm. These efforts gained the confidence of many Indians, while at the same time they increased the suspicions of others. Old interests in the Indian case were revived; leasehounds reentered the area, thinking action was in the offing, and new lists of signatures were acquired by all of those waiting on the sidelines to cash in on years of sporadic effort.

In New Orleans a committee was formed under the auspices of the Association for American Indian Affairs. The committee generally agreed that the school problems could be solved, but the Indians, although complaining about their educational lot, gave no indication that they were willing to try to integrate the schools. So long as this was so, it appeared that there was very little the committee could do if financial help was not forthcoming for work on the land case. For the moment there seemed to be no way of obtaining such help. After a year of meetings, the committee subsided into inactivity.

A year later the efforts to help the Houma were suddenly jogged to new life by the appearance at Pointe au Chien mission of a new and enthusiastic missionary, who was unfamiliar with the difficulties in the case. Like other outsiders who had come before him, he could not believe that there would be any objection to the Indian children attending the white schools. He felt, as had others, that the Indians were simply imagining that such deep prejudices could be held against them. Buoyed up by his confidence and enthusiasm five children went with him to register for the white high school. The registrar, seeing nothing out of the way in their appearance, began the registration process. When asked what school they attended last year, the Indians gave the name of the Indian school. At this point the registrar telephoned the superintendent of schools, following which he informed the Indians that they would not be able to register.

Previous to this the Indians did not feel actively rejected by the whites and had been able to maintain their self-respect. The rebuff they received in response to their attempt to register set them apart and marked them as inferiors in their own eyes. They were a group in a way that had not seemed possible previously. All were eager to retaliate, although some felt the slight much less than did others. Letters from my Houma friends told of this event, and requested that I come to Pointe au Chien to meet the new missionary and hear the story. Indian informants felt certain that if the opportunity were offered, Indians would be willing to attempt to integrate the white schools.

In New Orleans John Nelson agreed to take the school case without fee if the court costs could be met from some source. I appealed to personal

friends for contributions by means of a letter, telling them the story of the Houma. They were invited to send money, if they wished, to Mr. Nelson. The response was such that the costs were more than adequately covered. Over fifty Indian children signed as plaintiffs through their parents on Bayou Terrebonne, Bayou Pointe au Chien and Isle de Jean Charles. A suit was filed and a federal judge heard the case about ten months later after numerous delays brought about by the opposition. Indians developed a new pride in themselves which they expressed to me as the case progressed.

That year the judge delayed his decision until after school started in the fall. After school had been in session for two weeks, the decision was that Indians in the eleventh and twelfth grades would be admitted to the white high school. No plaintiff was eligible to attend, since children from the bayous where the suit was filed were not in the eleventh or twelfth grades. Children living many miles from the area where the suit originated were surprised to learn that they had received this new privilege.

The judge made his decision at night. The following morning teachers in the Indian high school announced to eleventh and twelfth grade children that they would be able to choose which high school they would attend. They were asked which they would choose publicly, and unanimously they chose to remain in the Indian school. Rumors spread among the children that outsiders were trying to force them into the white schools.

Mr. Nelson waited until the weekend after the decision was handed down to visit the Houma. Learning that children on Grande Caillou were eligible to enter school, he visited a leader there. This leader visited the most intelligent of the school children and urged them to reconsider, and to help Indians take this important step. Two of the children reconsidered several times, deciding first one way on the advice of the leader, then another when their friends urged them to remain with their own group. Finally, it was decided that it would be unwise for the leader to attempt to urge them further, but rather that he should prepare the way for a large shift to the white schools in the following year.

In October the judge lowered the entrance requirement for entrance into the white schools to the tenth grade. But it was too late. An Indian boy from Isle de Jean Charles who would have been in the tenth grade had attempted to register at the white school at the beginning of school. When rejected, he became quite angry and decided to quit school entirely and accompany his father in working on his shrimp boat. All in all, the first year of integrated schools was singularly unintegrated.

Word of the entire history of the effort to enter the white schools quickly spread up and down Grande Caillou and Bayou Dularge through Indians from the areas who had made the integration effort. One of them visited these regions for the first time and informed the people of what had been done, urging them to cooperate. By the time fall came in 1964, Indians along all bayous were eager to join in the desegregation movement. The

judge moved the requirement for entering the white schools down to the seventh grade level, the Civil Rights bill had been passed by Congress and the legal opposition to Indian entrance into the schools began to disappear. The Terrebonne school board closed the Indian elementary school on Bayou Terrebonne, and the 24 children attending that school were admitted to the white elementary school nearest to their home. Most of the Indian students eligible elected to enter the white schools. In all, some 60 Indian children were admitted to six previously all-white schools in the fall of 1964.

During the year when the school problems seemed certain to be resolved, Indian minds returned to the question of the oil land. A strange messiah appeared upon the scene, and Indians were learning about him by messengers from relatives living to the east along Bayou LaFourche at Golden Meadow. Radio and television, as well as limousines bearing loud speakers, assaulted their ears with messages of new land grant evidences discovered in Washington. Already loyal Indian supporters of this messiah, who was introduced into the group in a manner unknown to me, had developed a following for him among their close friends and relatives.

My friends along Bayou Terrebonne sought me out again to interpret the motives and intentions of this man and to resolve for them their natural suspicions of strangers with papers to be signed. Catherine Wright, a lawyer associated with Nelson's firm, accompanied me and two Houma friends to an Indian store in Golden Meadow. There a large crowd of Indians had gathered in response to the invitation to "Come by car, come by plane, come by helicopter, but come to Golden Meadow on Saturday to sign up for your share of Rosalie Courteaux's land." The man we confronted there did not know that Catherine was a lawyer, and his initial suspicions of our motives gradually disappeared. Eventually he showed us copies of patents he had obtained in Washington. It was Catherine's opinion that while these were worth investigating, it was very misleading to the Indians to let them believe that their problems were going to be solved simply and easily by taking the case into court immediately. This man, with his green Cadillac, his plastic deerslayer's jacket and his Navajo string tie was a leasehound in a new guise. He was a leasehound with his own view of the rainbow's pot which could more than match that of the Indians for irrationality. Since that time, he has several times asked for money directly from the Indians to support his cause. He collects this in small amounts when he runs low on funds. This man has done a remarkable job of getting Indians to come to him and sign up with him as their representative, in a way that no other leasehound in recent years has been able to do. The sad part of it is that the long-time funding needed to carry on a difficult five-year legal investigation with the decided risk that all will be lost in the end is not available to him or to anyone else connected with the case.

A group which has been so frustrated and deprived as the Houma, in which internal organization is lacking, must usually get help from the outside. The Indians recognize this and have never ceased their efforts to reach possible outside sources of aid. Only when the goals of the Houma are in some accord with the goals of these outsiders is it possible for the Houma to succeed. Insofar as the Houma appeal is of interest to me as an anthropologist or as a representative of a people deprived of one of the values I hold, that of equal educational opportunity for all, will I acquiesce in being of service to them. Insofar as Mr. Nelson sees them as an interesting legal case, or as a group deprived of equal opportunity before the law, he will help them. Insofar as the leasehold sees in them an opportunity to get rich he will help them. But none of us behaves as a Houma himself would in support of his own cause. Neither do the Houma themselves behave in a manner in accord with some group ideal, for group cohesiveness is based on ramifying kinship ties rather than on central group ties. Kin ties are often unsuitable for acting in relationship to institutions which are non-kin institutions in the larger society. Kin ties are of varying strength, in part depending upon the genealogical distance from the individuals with whom you are concerned in interaction. Group ties are of a single strength for all members of the group from the point of view of any one member.

Even with individuals representing the outside world to help them, more is needed to insure success in any venture with such deprived people. I had to appeal to a group of friends who feel as I feel about the values of education. There had to be a movement in the outside world like the passage of the Civil Rights bills or our meager efforts would have come up against a much larger opposition in the immediate and prejudiced white community. The leasehold would need powerful friends with the financial resources sufficient to overcome the resistance among the land companies and other contesting title holders. This power is not at present in evidence, and an individual here and there grinding away at the work which the problem requires will probably have little effect. The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow remains there, however, and it is certain that it will never go unsought. Eventually, the external conditions necessary to the solution to this problem, too, may be found, by which time perhaps there will be 3,000 or more descendants of Rosalie Courteaux to share in the pot.

Tulane University

Footnotes:

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- <sup>1</sup> Brewton Berry, Almost White (New York, 1963), 16.
- <sup>2</sup> Frank G. Speck, letter to Dr. Willard Beatty, October 1, 1938.
- <sup>3</sup> Bureau of Indian Affairs, File 33902 (1931).
- <sup>4</sup> Ruth Underhill, "Report on a Visit to Indian Groups in Louisiana, October 15-25, 1938" (typescript), Bureau of Indian Affairs, Washington, D. C., 1938.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., 2.
- <sup>6</sup> J. R. Swanton, "The Indians of the Southeastern United States," Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 137 (Washington, D. C., 1946).
- <sup>7</sup> Underhill, "Report."
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Joyce Purser, "The Administration of Indian Affairs in Louisiana, 1803-1820," Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association, V (1964), 401-421, 407.
- <sup>10</sup> Underhill, "Report," 6.