

others about what they know, perhaps the globalizing world will also be changed to understand their wisdom and accept the diverse knowledge of all the populations who participate in its life.

History and Culture of the Isleño Community

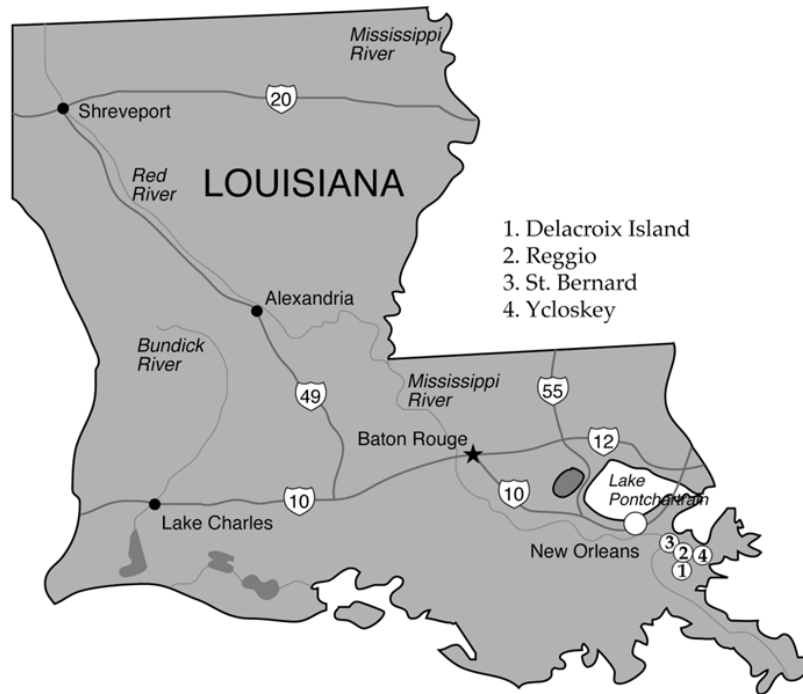


Figure 1: Isleño Communities in Louisiana (adapted from www.mapsofworld.com/usa/states/louisiana/louisiana-road-map.html)

- 3 The Isleños of Louisiana have lived in the southeastern marshlands of St. Bernard and Plaquemine Parishes since 1778, after France ceded Louisiana to Spain in 1764 (DeConde 1976: 30). Intending to repopulate the newly acquired territory with Spanish speakers, the Spanish government recruited soldiers and farmers from the Canary Islands (hence *isleño* ‘islander’), but after it sold the territory back to France in 1803, the Isleños were abandoned and largely forgotten by the European sovereign. The Isleños in their territory served as a buffer among the French, British, and American forces vying for predominance in and around New Orleans in the 19th century. The Isleño dialect of Spanish, a rural, archaic variety (Lipski 1990) provided a hard linguistic boundary (Giles 1979) which separated them from the growing number of English speakers flooding into Louisiana. The geographic and social isolation of the Isleños allowed their dialect to flourish in a supportive community, which linked the language to the history of the Canary Islands before the 18th century. The Isleños’ residence in the coastal marshlands created a sense of a “complete, separate, historically deep cultural collectivity” (Fishman et al. 1985). Relic words from Spanish (*ansina* ‘thus’), relevant terms from the Canary Islands (*chipía* ‘light rain’), borrowings from Caribbean varieties (*jaiba* ‘crab’) and some Latin Americanisms (*nutria* ‘nutria’) composed a “popular, uneducated variety representative of the rural speech of southern Spain and the Canary Islands” (Lipski 1990). The unique dialect was emblematic of the community, as members spoke it naturally and spontaneously.
- 4 When the Americans finally took over New Orleans on November 30, 1803 (DeConde 1976: 95), the Isleños retreated to their enclave, Delacroix Island. As the Isleños flourished, many families welcomed immigrants from the Caribbean and Central America, and the Isleños exerted sufficient social pressure to impel these people to speak Isleño Spanish while incorporating some lexical items. Within their ancestral homesite, it was possible for the Isleños to maintain their dialect as a vital, responsive means of communication because the “social, spatial and ritual environments” (Noy 2009) of the group were nearby. Isleño customs include hospitality to visitors and to display to them the beauty and value of the Isleño territory. In a complementary fashion, Isleños adapted those customs that suited their lifestyle into their own culture. For example, Isleños borrowed whole sets of words from the Louisiana Acadian French, their nearest neighbors, for unfamiliar household items (*garsolé* ‘sunbonnet’) that they put into use for themselves. Isleños were “hybridized” (Berger 2002: 10) by absorbing Spanish speakers, and in turn localized these immigrants by teaching them Isleño Spanish.
- 5 The Isleños lived a relatively peaceful and anonymous existence until the 20th

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