The Croatian Community of Southeastern Louisiana: Immigration, Assimilation and the Retention of Ethnic Identity

Renee Danielle Bourgogne

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The Croatian Community of Southeastern Louisiana:
Immigration, Assimilation and the Retention of Ethnic Identity

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
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Urban History

By

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Abstract

This work is a study of a community of Croatian immigrants to Southeast Louisiana in the twentieth century. Drawn from a multidisciplinary approach that included spatial analysis of settlement patterns, quantitative analysis of seafood industry data, the records of voluntary associations, and guided by the oral histories of men and women of Croatia who immigrated to Louisiana, this work reveals a community that has managed to maintain close ties despite its distribution both in urban New Orleans and rural coastal Louisiana through links created by and supportive of the state’s seafood and restaurant industries. The study points out how the custom of returning to Croatia for marriage and the retention of property in Croatia helped the group maintain links with its national and cultural origins in ways not always seen with other ethnic groups in America, pointing out the range of the immigrant experience in the United States.

Croatian, Croatia, immigration, assimilation, Plaquemines Parish, seafood industry, New Orleans, restaurant industry
Introduction: Coming to Louisiana: From the Adriatic Sea to the Gulf of Mexico

In November 1955, Krasna Vojkovich immigrated to New Orleans, Louisiana, from her hometown of Sucaraji, on the island of Hvar, Croatia. Mrs. Vojkovich was known as a “picture postcard bride,” a young bride of an immigrant male brought from the homeland. Her husband, John Vojkovich, who had immigrated to Louisiana approximately fifteen years prior, had returned to his hometown of Sucaraji to choose a local girl to marry. Immigrant men with the resources to do so sometimes chose to return to their native countries to choose a bride as these women were seen to share a special understanding of their potential husband’s religion, customs, culture, and values. The postcard bride became a partner to share in her husband’s American experience.

Arriving in Louisiana in 1955, Krasna was only eighteen years old, newly married to a man thirty years her senior who owned and operated his own a thriving New Orleans business. John, her husband, postponed marriage until he succeeded in establishing a successful business in the new world. Krasna knew no English, was only educated in a school until the age of eight, and had never even owned her own pair of shoes. Despite her youth and lack of education, Krasna quickly adapted to her new circumstances. Like other Croatian immigrant women who came to New Orleans during this period, Krasna embraced her new life and supported her husband in his business and the community. Introduced to new world, Krasna learned English, had four children in quick succession and eventually took over running her husband’s business as his health declined. Krasna became a pillar of the Croatian transplant community in New Orleans. She raised her family to understand and be proud of its Croatian heritage and her story

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contributes to our understanding of the immigrant experience in New Orleans. The experience of this Croatian immigrant and her dual identities as a successful New Orleans businesswoman and the owner of her family home in Croatia where she spends hurricane season annually is the story of immigrants to America with a distinctive entryway to the American experience.

In her own words, Krasna recounts her journey: “Well my husband he was from there [Sucaraji], he was born there, and he left the village when he was… um… sixteen years old. His father was here [Louisiana], and he came to his father. And then later he brought his mother and two sisters here. His father had a whole idea to work on oyster boats, but he always wanted to go to school, that was the dream for him to come here and go to school. He was very good in math, and he wanted to work in banks. Anyway well that didn’t come up and so he start working, you know, he told his father he work with his father for two months [oyster fishing] and he told his father ‘nahhhh I can’t take these mosquitoes and flies and all I’m going in the city.’ So he found a boardinghouse, a room and boardinghouse. At that time there were a lot of boardinghouses in the French Quarter. And that’s what he did, and he work in a kitchen as a dishwasher, busboy in different restaurants. Some Croatians they owned the restaurants on Rampart Street.”

The story of Krasna and Ivan Vojkovich, their marriage, their family, their social organizations that gave coherence to their community typifies the Croatian immigrant experience in New Orleans and illuminates the experience of the many who came before and after their immigration. It is the purpose of this study to show that although small in numbers, Croatian immigrants in New Orleans had similar, and yet different, experiences when compared to other newly arriving immigrant groups, thereby highlighting the varying patterns of US immigration. Croatian immigrants in New Orleans contributed to the social, spatial and economic

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2Krasna Vojkovich, interview by author, New Orleans, La, March 2012.
development of the city, and most importantly, left a network of kinship and business ties that
bind the Croatian community across parish lines\(^3\). Although often ignored in New Orleans
immigrant history, the Croatian community has been an essential component in Louisiana
cultural heritage. Through their contributions to the state seafood and restaurant industries, the
Croatian immigrant has left a lasting mark on both the city and state economy, making the
Croatian immigrant community in New Orleans and the surrounding area a worthy group for
study.

Immigration to the United States in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and
continuing into the twentieth, is a topic that has both captivated and enthralled urban historians,
anthropologists and sociologists alike. Fascinated by the act of immigration and the experiences
each individual underwent, urban historians consider it a vital component in city and nation
building. Even in 2014, immigration remains an ever-present issue in urban development. Like
many other issues in urban studies, immigration to the Northeastern United States has been
widely studied, while the Southern immigrant experience has been largely ignored. Because the
major cities of the Northeastern United States experienced the bulk of such immigration streams,
they have defined and dominated the literature on the American immigrant experience.\(^4\)

\(^3\)By definition a parish is an ecclesiastical district having its own church and member of the clergy.
Formerly a colony of France, Louisiana has retained the term parish to refer to the equivalent of a county
in other US states. Information taken from

\(^4\)For more information on the immigrant experience in the United States see: Oscar Handlin, *The
Uprooted; The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People* (Philadelphia:
University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951); Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration
Transplanted; A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1985),
Life in Immigrant America 1870-1920* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007); James M. Bergquist, *Daily Life in
Immigrant America 1820-1870* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publishing); Ivan Chermayeff, Fred Waserman,
and Mary J. Shapiro, *Ellis Island; An Illustrated History of the Immigrant Experience*. (New York:
Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991); United States Immigration Commission, *Reports of the*
However, in recent years, urban scholars have turned their focus to Southern port cities. These works have highlighted the importance of cities such as Charleston, Savannah and New Orleans as the ports of entry for various immigrant groups. The addition of Southern cities to the immigrant dialogue has widened the scope of immigration studies to incorporate a largely ignored group into the discussion. This work seeks to add to the existing literature on Southern cities by examining Croatian immigrants in New Orleans, Louisiana, and environs.

Using oral histories, benevolent society minutes, and mapping, this case study will examine the Croatian community of New Orleans and the surrounding area. Often ignored, this group has played a significant role in the Louisiana economy through its work in the seafood industry. Through their efforts in oyster fishing and oyster cultivation, the Croatians of Louisiana have developed an essential element of Louisiana’s economic development. It is the goal of this work to provide a relevant historical context to understand how this particular group has merged, or deviated, with more general immigration patterns. Furthermore, through the use

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of GIS mapping, this study seeks to trace Croatian settlement in the New Orleans region to understand said patterns, to uncover Croatian business and familial networks used to facilitate Americanization, and lastly, to use the immigrant’s own stories to highlight the immigrant experience both nationally and locally. The story presented here is the story of the Croatian immigrants in New Orleans told through their words, my research and highlighted with statistics and GIS technology. What emerges is a case study of one small immigrant group that through maintaining its ties with its homeland has succeeded in incorporating themselves successfully in the American culture while at the same time retaining Croatian identity.

The first chapter of this study provides the reader with the historical context of both the Croatian immigrant coming to New Orleans and the city of New Orleans itself, with regards to its place as a port of entry to the United States. The first characteristic to know about the Croatians studied here is that they are Dalmatian Croatians. They differ from their Croatian counterparts in the interior of the country, and from their immigrant Croatian counterparts in the Northeast United States. Dalmatian Croatians have roots in the coastal regions of Croatia proper, the Dubrovnik Republic and the Bay of Kotor regions. Dalmatians made a living farming olives and grapes, and fishing in the Adriatic Sea and the surrounding waterways. The Croatians who settled in New Orleans, and the greater regional area, were from the towns and villages along the Croatian coast, and the islands dotting the Adriatic Sea to her West.⁶ This section will then

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provide a brief history of American immigration, immigration to Louisiana, New Orleans as a port city, and finally, the push/pull factors for Yugoslav immigration.\textsuperscript{7}

Chapter two discusses the American ethnic enclave and its function in the facilitation of immigrant networks that furthered Americanization and acculturation. The focus of this chapter is the Croatian mini-enclaves found in various neighborhoods throughout the downtown New Orleans region. Here immigration and spatial distribution theory are both addressed and then applied to New Orleans in order to provide a better understanding of how these broad theories can be useful when analyzing why and when certain groups moved, or clustered, over time. To further illustrate this point this chapter addresses the Croatian businesses and residential clusters that formed in the French Quarter and the adjacent areas. It examines the restaurant and associated seafood industries located in New Orleans, and it explores the spatial distribution of said businesses and residences. It also charts over time the movement of Croatians out of the French Quarter into the neighboring areas and the changing nature of employment and living patterns the Croatian community underwent from the 1860s through the 1940s. The purpose of this section is to highlight the crucial urban component in the symbiotic relationship that developed between the city and the bayou, further proving strong connections between the two communities.

Chapter two also focuses on the spatial distribution of Croatian immigrants throughout the various zones of urban development in and around the French Quarter. This chapter examines the ethnic enclave and the Burgess Model of immigrant settlement patterns and applies

\textsuperscript{7}For more information on the history of Yugoslavia see Clissold, Stephen, and H. C. Darby. \textit{A Short History of Yugoslavia: From Early times to 1966}. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966); Leslie Benson, \textit{Yugoslavia; A Concise History} (New York: Pelgranve, 2001).
them to the city of New Orleans. In order to more accurately depict settlement patterns, a sample was obtained through the analysis of historic New Orleans residential and business directories. For the purpose of this study, I examined a variety of city directories between the years 1866 and 1949. Particular years were chosen for their national, state or local historical significance. For example, the year 1873 was chosen because it was one year before the Slavonian Benevolent Association was started. The years 1921 and 1949 were chosen because those were the years following both World Wars. Over three hundred individuals were examined, with some repeating throughout the surveyed years. Once certain names were identified, the focus shifted to include the Croatian oyster retailers, wholesalers, saloons, restaurants and those in the related maritime trades, out of which developed second and third generation businesses. Once I had collected data from the city directories for the year’s chosen, I assembled the names and addresses in a spreadsheet for geo-coding process. Once geo-coded, the information was mapped using the Geographic Information Software ARCGIS, and maps were produced for reproduction. These maps are the visual accumulation of much research and represent the movement of the Croatian community from the central business district and immigrant zones into the more high-class residential zones of the city thereby visually tracking their Americanization. At the end of chapter two one will find both the maps created through ARCGIS, and numerous photographs of various Croatian owned and operated businesses.

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Chapter three examines the urban/rural connection between the Croatian enclave of New Orleans and her cousin enclave that developed downriver in Plaquemines Parish. Plaquemines Parish, located South of New Orleans proper, has a total area of 2,429 square miles. Of that number, 845 square miles of the parish is made up of actual land, while 1,584 square miles is made up of water.\(^9\) The most significant contribution the parish has historically made to the Louisiana economy is the seafood industry. More specifically, Plaquemines Parish is number one in the cultivation and fishing of oysters statewide. As oyster cultivation became big business in the streams and bayous of Southern Louisiana, the Croatian immigrant played an integral role in its development and success. Oyster cultivation became big business in the streams and bayous of Southern Louisiana, and the Croatian immigrant played an essential role in its development and success. The familial and business connections Croatian immigrants fostered over time led to the integration of newly arriving immigrants into the existing fishing and restaurant businesses. The result is a highly functioning network of family and business partnerships that cross parish lines.

In order to more closely analyze the urban/rural Croatian connection, this chapter examines early Croatian involvement in the seafood industry, the bayou lifestyle, and finally, early oyster leases, vessels and canneries, within the Parish. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates Croatian vertical integration into all aspects of the oyster industry and provides evidence of the urban rural connection that existed and flourished between the Croatians of New Orleans and those of Plaquemines Parish.

Chapter four explores the world of the fraternal, mutual and benefit aid societies that abounded in early twentieth century American urban society. This chapter is an overview of the

both the history of the fraternal organization and a discussion on its importance to both the immigrant and American society as a whole. This chapter will explore the mutual aid and benefit society phenomenon that swept American culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Here a clear definition of each type of aide is given along with a breakdown of lodge organizational hierarchy. This chapter provides a road map for mutual aide before the establishment of the welfare state. Furthermore, chapter four discusses the New Orleans experience with benefit and social pleasure clubs, and why the mutual aid organization has played a key role in the welfare of New Orleanians and their offspring. Finally, chapter four takes a closer look the Croatian Fraternal Union of America (CFA) established in 1894 as an example of a national ethnic organization, with the purpose of demonstrating the importance of the fraternal organization to both the ethnic community and to the urban community at large.

In order to demonstrate the role of the fraternal aide society to the immigrant community, more specifically the Croatian community of New Orleans, chapter five examines the United Slavonian Benevolent Association (known as The Croatian Benevolent Association since 1995),

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the Yugoslav Club and the Croatian American Society. All three organizations are native to New Orleans and were never associated with the larger national unions.

Chapter five examines of The United Slavonian Benevolent Association (SBA). The organization was founded in 1874, the organization continues to date as the Croatian Benevolent Association (CBA); the name was changed in 1995. Founded as a humanitarian group, not a social organization, the association is a strictly male group. Through the examination of meeting minutes, club flyers, membership records and oral histories conducted for the purpose of this study, chapter five gives a clear overview of the CBA from its origins to the present day. Recently celebrating its 140th anniversary in June of 2014, the CBA still plays a crucial role in the preservation of Croatian heritage.\textsuperscript{12}

The two other groups discussed in chapter 5 are the Yugoslav Club and the Croatian American Society. The Yugoslav Club developed out of the need for socialization between male and female Yugoslavs. Both the SBA and the Yugoslav Club overlapped throughout time both providing necessary community functions. The Yugoslav Club accepted both male and female members of Croatian descent. They organized dances, supers, bake sales and keno games, and even managed to purchase a clubhouse at 900 Frenchmen street. The Yugoslav Club eventually became the Croatian American Society, which still functions today.

Following in the footsteps of their forbears the Croatian American Society likewise organizes picnics, crawfish boils, barbeques, dances. Furthermore they host oyster booths at numerous local festivals with raw and chargrilled oysters for sale highlighting the Croatian

\textsuperscript{12}The minutes reviewed for this project date back to the inception of the organization in 1874. Stan Cvitanovic a member and former president and vice president of the organization granted me permission to examine the documents. The minutes are extremely detailed and were kept in both English and Croatian starting in the 1960s. In order to obtain access to these documents for further research or examination one would have to contact the organization personally as the papers are not housed in any library or special collections, but instead remained housed with various members. As of 2014 these documents were not digitalized or available to the public.
influence in the oyster industry. They now maintain a clubhouse in Plaquemines Parish that is still under repair from Hurricane Katrina.

Chapter five closely examines these three groups in an effort to prove that although they can no longer furnish hospital and medical benefits, these organizations still provide a necessary function in the Croatian community. They allow for the passing on of Croatian heritage by providing the necessary venue for those of Croatian descent to come together. While the Croatian American Society allows for the socialization of both male and female members, the CBA plays a crucial role in getting both urban and rural Croatian men together in one space thereby allowing them a chance to discuss the preservation of Croatian heritage in the New Orleans area. Although they may seem antiquated, the benevolent/mutual aide society are alive and well in the Croatian community of New Orleans, and chapter five provides a clear synopsis of its importance.

Chapter six is an examination of the Croatian female immigrant experience in New Orleans. An often overlooked story in the past, accounts of female immigration have changed the immigration dialogue from one predominated by men, to one inclusive of both sexes. From the beginning of this project through to the very end it became overwhelmingly clear that the female immigrant has played an integral role in preserving the Croatian culture and heritage within the Louisiana communities. This chapter seeks to explore further the lives of a selected few Croatian immigrant women, tell their story and unearth their roles in the community at large.

Chapter 6 begins with an overview of female immigration. From there it turns to female Slavic immigration as a whole throughout the United States, and finally, it ends with three different oral histories taken by the author of Croatian immigrant women to New Orleans. It is the goal of this chapter to contribute to the growing number of female immigrant stories now present in American history, and demonstrate the importance of the female in these transplanted communities.

In what follows, *The Croatian Community of Southeastern Louisiana: Immigration, Assimilation and the Retention of Ethnic Identity* is ultimately a case study of one, often unseen, immigrant group in a city that was settled and transformed by a variety of peoples from across the globe. The Croatians of New Orleans, and the surrounding area, made an impact on both the cultural heritage and economy of the state of Louisiana thereby contributing to the local, state and national immigration dialogue. New Orleans has a history distinct from the American south and from that of other port cities. Like other places of destination for European immigrants, New Orleans served as a meeting place for people from all over the globe, but as Hirsch and Logsdon pointed out, the resulting way of life here differed dramatically from cultures that evolved in other places, reminding us of the many choices that people make when cultures collide. In the pages that follow, I hope to illuminate the Croatian immigrant experience in Louisiana and demonstrate through research, oral history, statistics and mapping the variety of immigrant experiences in the United States. I therefore hope to demonstrate that although there are similarities within each immigrant group, there are likewise differences that make each group worthy of study.
Chapter One: Introduction to the Problem and a Brief History of US Immigration

The talk is all of America. Fifteen are going from our village tomorrow—men, women and young girls are on their way to America.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{14}\)A Croatian schoolteacher reporting on what was happening in her village, early 1900s.

From as far back as the Greek and Roman empires, immigration has been a significant aspect of urban development, cultural growth, innovation, serving as a general replenishing of a population. Although not the only country to accept large numbers of foreign-born peoples, America, more than most nations, has largely been shaped by the influx of immigrants. In the latter half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, American cities experienced explosive growth due to immigration that would forever alter the nation’s urban landscape. Whether pushed or pulled, immigrants flowed into urban America during this peak immigration period, supplying American cities with a viable workforce that would build and shape the future of its urban centers.\(^\text{15}\) This study is the story of one of those groups of immigrants, the Croatians of the Dalmatian Coast, and the impact of Croatian immigration on the Louisiana coast, and more specifically on the city of New Orleans.


The Yugoslavs and Croats discussed in this study are a group of Croats known as Dalmatians, with roots in the coastal regions of Croatia proper, the Dubrovnik Republic and the Bay of Kotor regions. This particular group made a living farming olives and grapes, and fishing in the Adriatic Sea and the surrounding waterways. The Croats who settled in New Orleans, and the greater regional area, were from the town and villages along the Croatian coast, and the islands dotting the Adriatic Sea to her West. Few, if any, came to Louisiana from north or central Dalmatia, the inland areas of the country. This geographical distinction is important to make at the outset due to the fact that so many South Slavs arrived in the second wave of immigration (from the late nineteenth century well into the twentieth) and settled in America’s bustling new
industrial areas. The Croatians of coastal Dalmatia, unlike their counterparts from the interior, were a seafaring people brought up on fishing and trade. They grew olives and grapes, and ate fish as a dietary staple. Coastal Croatians sometimes describe themselves as differing physically from those Croatians of the interior. These differences set apart the experiences of the Croatian in Louisiana apart from that of her counterparts in other areas, and demonstrate why this particular group is worthy of study in order to form a more complete picture of the Croatian American experience.

Figure 2. Dalmatian Coast Map

*United States Immigration History*

[immigration history diagram]

Immigration to the United States has been said to have two well-defined phases, characterized as “old” and “new.” The first phase (1820-1896), old immigration, involved immigrants from countries of northern and western Europe, principally the British Isles,

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16Stan Cvitanovic, interview by author, Belle Chase, LA, April 2012.
Germany, the Scandinavian countries, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland. During the second phase (1896-1924), new immigration, most immigrants to the United States came from the countries of Southern and Eastern Europe, mainly Austria-Hungary, Italy and Russia. South Slavic immigration, the movement that included most Croatian immigrants to Louisiana, is considered to belong to the “new immigration” wave that swept the United States from the late 1800s to the mid-1920s. In contrast to the earlier immigrant groups made-up mostly of people of Anglo and Germanic descent, this new wave of immigration included Italians, Southern Slavs, Poles and those of Eastern European heritage. Reflecting the anti-immigration sentiment of the times, the new immigration was characterized by the United States Immigration Commission in its 1911 report as follows: “Whereas the old immigration was made up of a large proportion of individuals who intended to become permanent settlers, the new immigration was made up of a large proportion of individuals who apparently had no intention of settling in this country.”¹⁷

There is evidence, however, that the Croats settling in Louisiana defied both of these long-held characterizations. Croats had already settled in-and around the Louisiana Gulf Coast long before the new immigration wave took hold at the turn of the twentieth century, and for most of them, they did intend on making Louisiana their permanent home.

**Immigration in the 20th Century**

Although Croatian immigration to Louisiana had begun much earlier, its immigration to the United States reached its peak in the early part of the twentieth century when a large number of Southern and Eastern Europeans were abandoning their homelands due to political upheaval, oppressive taxes, overpopulation, the lack of economic opportunity, and the lack of available

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land. In the case of Croatian immigrants, the absence of land in their native home was an overwhelming driving force to leave at this time. According to Frank Lovrich, “A succession of rulers had controlled the whole or parts of the coast [of Croatia] from the days of the first Roman colonies, and different systems of land tenure had been in force at different times. Land tenure itself was basically feudal, a condition that existed up until World War I.”\(^\text{18}\) Under Austrian rule feudal land tenure had been abolished, opening up land ownership; however land tenure was maintained along the coast of Dalmatia where most of the Croatian landmass is found. The retention of feudal laws left many individuals impoverished with subdivided land, a majority of which was divided into small plots that could not support subsistence farming. In addition to the lack of land for cultivation, fish catches had become almost completely destroyed in the Adriatic, caused by the failure of Dalmatian fisherman to carry out an effective policy of fish conservation. Furthermore, the appearance in the 1800s of the Phylloxera, an extremely destructive fungus, almost single-handedly decimated the grape and olive vineyards that many relied on as cash crops.\(^\text{19}\) Overall the lack of land and ecological and political conditions that disrupted a food supply were the specific factors that provided the necessary push needed by many Croatian immigrants to leave the mother country.

From the early part of the century through the 1970s, the principle causes for immigration usually revolved around these kinds of economic and political conditions. However, according to Milos Vujnovich, author of Yugoslavs in Louisiana, “there were also secondary causes such as the desire to be united with relatives already here, to escape oppression, or to avoid compulsory

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\(^\text{19}\) Lovrich, “The Dalmatian Yugoslavs in Louisiana, 149.
military service in the armed forces.” Although confronted with a multitude of reasons for immigration according to the oral histories and memoirs, many of these individuals made the active decision to migrate with careful consideration for their futures and that of their families. They were active participants, and were not simply caught up in “America fever” that was supposedly sweeping the European continent. These immigrants were in search of something, be it a better life, riches, land or adventure, and made the serious decision to abandon what they knew in search of hope and opportunity. Whatever his or her situation was, the pull to America, and eventually Louisiana, was always the promise of good wages, and perhaps eventual success in one’s own business.

Second Wave Immigration

Milos M. Vujnovich, *Yugoslavs in Louisiana* (Australia: Firebird Press, 1974), 38. Author Milos Vujnovich immigrated to the United States from Sucuraj, a Croatian island town in the Adriatic Sea. He was just fourteen years old at the time of his immigration. Upon arrival he learned English, received a BA from the University of Southwestern Louisiana, a Masters’ degree in education from Louisiana State University and a masters degree in science from Loyola University, and a PhD in adult education from the University of Southern Mississippi. He was a member of the United Slavonian Benevolent Association, now known as the Croatian Benevolent Association, served a term as its president and was recording secretary for 50 years. He also held offices in the Louisiana Oyster Dealers and Growers Association and the Yugoslav American Club and was a member of the Louisiana Committee for a Free Croatia. He also was a member of the Knights of Columbus Gentilly and Marquette Councils, the Croatian American Society, the Slavonian Pleasure Club, the American Physics Association, Phi Delta Kappa and Delta Sigma Phi.

In 1874 The Slovonian Benevolent Society published his book *Yugoslavs in Louisiana*, in celebration of their centennial. The book was originally available only for purchase through the organization. Because this text was published for the Slovonian Benevolent Society, by the society, it leaves out significant sections of the Croatian immigrant experience in New Orleans. Although the book itself provides insight into the community there are problems with which the material is communicated to the reader from an academic standpoint. The first problem is that due to its purpose as a book documenting the history of an organization there may be a bias in the material. Second Mr. Vujnovich does not provide the reader with any footnotes. Although there is a bibliography and numerous helpful tables, the lack of footnotes is frustrating. I have done my best to take this oversight into consideration when conducting my research, and even went so far as to search out Mr. Vujnovich’s original sources in some cases. And lastly, although I’m sure his surveys and charts are reliable, he provides no methodology section for how he came to his conclusions. In spite of its limitations I consider it to be an extremely valuable source. Milos Vujnovich died on November 3, 2011. Prior to his death Mr. Vujnovich was working on a second book. Unfortunately most of his research was lost in Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

From 1860 into the early 1890s, the influx of South Slavic peoples to the United States increased steadily. According to Gerald Gilbert Govorchin, “During the period from 1820 to 1930 Italy sent 4,651,195 immigrants to the United States, Austria-Hungary contributed 4,132,351, and Russia furnished 3,341,991. These three countries together were responsible for 86.9 percent of the total immigration from southern and eastern Europe in the years 1820-1930.” Next to Italy, Austria-Hungary was the largest provider of immigrants during the new wave of immigration. Although many of these new immigrants chose ports in the Southern United States, many more sought refuge in the Northeast and Midwest. Chicago, Detroit, Allegheny, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, St. Louis and Kansas City all became major hubs for incoming Croatians. Differing from their New Orleanian counterparts, these men generally worked in the mines, furnaces, rolling mills, and factories operating in these industrialized regions.

During this second wave of European immigration, most Croatians reached the United States between the late 1880s and the 1920s. By the latter half of the twentieth century, as conditions in their homeland began to improve, and restrictions in the United States became tighter, Croatian immigration to Louisiana all but stopped. However, their Louisiana communities, created in this period around the turn of the twenty first century, have continued to flourish and retain their separate identity through thick networks of kinship, marriage and business maintaining both their language and tradition, thereby forging their own special version of assimilation and acculturation in Louisiana.

New Orleans as a Port City

Even before the second wave of immigration, the New Orleans area felt a strong Croatian presence through their establishment of the local seafood industry, saloons, oyster houses, coffee houses, and other gathering place around the city. Being a port city, New Orleans, like her

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22 Vujnovich, *Americans from Yugoslavia*, 44.
Northeastern counterparts, was in the position of being the first stop for many newly arriving immigrants. Throughout Louisiana history, the city of New Orleans has been the port of arrival for numerous immigrant groups. According to historian Joseph Logsdon, “Almost from the beginning, South Louisiana had a diverse population of Frenchmen, German, Italians, Indians, Africans, and Spaniards. It contained a mixed population well before Chicago, Boston, New York or Cleveland.”

Following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the New Orleans port grew and expanded as various groups sought entry into the Western United States. As land opened up in the Mississippi River Valley, New Orleans became a prime port of entry for immigrants headed toward the Midwest. The city doubled its population during the 1830s. During that decade the incoming immigrant presence nearly doubled the population, as it rose from about 50,000 to

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102,000.\textsuperscript{25} According to historian Fredrick Spletstosser, “far more immigrants arrived to the United States through New Orleans- over 550,000 from 1820-1860, with 300,000 in the 1850s alone- than any other Southern city in the nineteenth century.”\textsuperscript{26} Ranked the nation’s number-two immigrant port for most of the Antebellum period, the port of New Orleans held second place only to New York, placing her firmly in front of Boston.\textsuperscript{27} The city of New Orleans reached her zenith as a gateway for immigration into America quite early on when compared to other American port cities.

Figure 4. Port of New Orleans

Her prime only lasted until the late 1850s, when railways surpassed steam as the preferred method of travel into the Midwest.\textsuperscript{28} Due to the fact that New Orleans did not possess the necessary rail connections that made other ports more popular, her heyday as an immigrant port

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\textsuperscript{26} Fredrick Marcel Spletstosser, “Back Door to the Land of Plenty: New Orleans as an Immigrant Port, 1820-1860” (Ph.D. dissertation Louisiana State University, 1979), vi.
\textsuperscript{27} Splestosser, “Back Door to the Land of Plenty: New Orleans as an Immigrant Port, 1820-1860,” vi.
\textsuperscript{28} Bergquist, \textit{Daily Life in Immigrant America 1820-1870}, 90.
\end{flushleft}
of arrival was short lived.\textsuperscript{29} However, those individuals who came in the 1800s set up the immigration networks that facilitated the arrival of their future immigrant counterparts.

Although there is evidence that the Dalmatians of Croatia (formerly Yugoslavia) were part of these early immigrant groups, for a variety of reasons, predominantly political, researching the actual numbers is difficult. Although the Dalmatians played an integral part in the city’s restaurant business, and in the state’s massive oyster cultivation and fishery operations, business that practically define Louisiana, unlike other better-known immigrant groups to New Orleans, such as the Italians, Irish and Germans, the Croatians have been largely invisible in a city of immigrants. This invisibility may be due to the practice of the period that census records often categorized this particular group as Austro-Hungarian, German, Russian, and even Italian. Statistics based on nationality cannot be assessed until 1920 when more accurate records began to be kept based on nationality, a result of changing U.S. immigration law. Furthermore, the Treaty of Versailles signed at the end of World War I created nine new countries from the once extensive Austro-Hungarian Empire, allowing for a better control and a firmer grip on ethnic borders. However, it is clear from census data that over a million (about 650,000 Croats; 200,000 Slovenes; and 150,000 Serbs) South Slavs settled in America, and a percentage of those 650,000 Croats came to call Louisiana home.\textsuperscript{30}

\textit{Yugoslavs in the United States}

The first Croatian settlers arrived in Louisiana in the mid-1830s. Although this date may appear to be a rather early date when compared with the rest of the United States, one must take into consideration that New Orleans was a favorite Croatian port of call for many years prior to the mid-century (nineteenth century) immigration explosion that followed. According to Gerald

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\item \textsuperscript{29}Ivan Chermayeff, Fred Waserman, and Mary J. Shapiro, \textit{Ellis Island; An Illustrated History of the Immigrant Experience}. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991), 46.
\item \textsuperscript{30}Vujnovich, \textit{Yugoslavs in Louisiana}, 19.
\end{itemize}
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Govorchin author of *Americans from Yugoslavia*, “large numbers of sailors left their ships before the middle of the century, married and settled in and around New Orleans, where they worked at trading, shipping, and fishing, securing in time control of the oyster industry.”

These men were officers and seamen serving on the sailing vessels that traded in and around the New Orleans port. They saw firsthand the business opportunities and way of life afforded in new American cities, and they too wanted a share. Furthermore they were attracted by the mild climate of New Orleans and the vicinity and the opportunity to work there in the maritime trade. These early settlers laid the groundwork for their future compatriots both on and off the water, and gave Croatians a strong foothold in the newly acquired state of Louisiana. Most of the Croatians that have immigrated to the state of Louisiana have come from Southern Dalmatia, specifically from an area extending from, and including, the Bay of Kotor through the town of Podgora and embracing the nearby islands of Korcula, Hvar, and Brac, a distance of

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about one hundred miles along the Adriatic Coast. During the 1830s and 1840s, the declining economic conditions of Dubrovnik and vicinity, and dissatisfaction with the oppressive Austrian authorities, provided the necessary push many needed to immigrate. According to George Prpic, author of *The Croatian Immigrants in America*, “as early as 1825 or 1830 Dalmatian seamen and ship captains were finding their way up the Mississippi, where crews abandoned their ships. A few became merchants and traders, but most of them transferred to vessels from Louisiana. To these men whose livelihood was the sea this place and climate were like home.” These early pioneers set up cabins and camps in the Mississippi Delta and were eventually joined by their countrymen. They fished, hunted and shrimped, but found their true calling in oyster cultivation. They developed special lugger boats and regularly brought their hauls up to New Orleans for sale. By 1849 there were numerous Croatian businesses in New Orleans that both sold and bought oysters. Those Croatians living in the city maintained contact with those living further south in Plaquemines Parish and through this network increased their influence and their numbers.

The South Slav immigrant was generally a single or married man looking to make as much money as quickly as possible. While some individuals did return to Croatia, purchase land and start businesses there, most remained in America. If this immigrant were married before he came to the United States, he would usually leave his wife at in Croatia. In some cases he might return to Croatia with his American fortune, but more often than not, as time passed he sent for his wife to join him in his newly adopted country. If the immigrant were a single man, rather

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36 A lugger boat refers is a small sailing vessel with lugsails set on two or more masts and perhaps lug topsails.
than married, young, he was generally looking for opportunity with no intention of returning to their native land. In the case of the Croatian immigrants who settled in New Orleans, few returned to their homeland for resettlement.

As with other immigrant groups many Croatian immigrants became accustomed to life in their adoptive country, started profitable businesses and gained prominence and respect from their fellow transplanted counterparts. Although many had no intention of emigrating back to Croatia, this did not mean they cut all ties with their native home. According to George Prpic, “many of them sent home passage money for their brides, or went home to visit, get married, and bring brides back to Louisiana.”

Likewise, many prosperous Croatian Americans paid the passage of their kin from the old country in exchange for their labor. Another common practice was to take in boarders or to live together with kin or fellow immigrants in a cooperative household, or *drustva*. Whatever the process one underwent to arrive in New Orleans the end result was the strengthening of an ever-growing Croatian presence in the city and the surrounding area. According to the United States Census of New Orleans and Plaquemines Parish, by 1850 two hundred South Slavs were living in the area. This number increased by the year 1860 when the total count rose to about six hundred. In 1893, a devastating storm struck Plaquemines Parish, killing a number of Croatian immigrants, and a majority of the remainder migrated to New Orleans.

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38Prpic, *The Croatian Immigrants in America*, 70.
41The Cheniere Caminadaville, also known as the Great October Storm, was a powerful hurricane that devastated the island Cheniere Caminadaville, Louisiana, on October 1, 1893. It was one of two deadly hurricanes during the 1893 hurricane season. It took several days after the storm for word of the calamity to reach New Orleans; a relief boat from the city loaded with supplies arrived Oct. 5. A partial list of victims in the Oct. 6 Daily Picayune took up nearly two columns of the front page. Many victims died when the buildings in which they were taking shelter collapsed; 76 people reportedly perished in a single home. The dead were buried in mass graves, though many were swept out to sea and lost. Graves of
As with other immigrant groups arriving during the same period, Croatian immigrants were given advice and financial aid by their friends and family already in the United States. This act coupled with the visits many paid back to their native land in order to acquire brides, or to claim other family members, spurred Yugoslav immigration to New Orleans and the surrounding area. The US Immigration Commission estimated in its 1911 report that “perhaps one-quarter of all immigrants admitted to the United States had their passage paid in advance by previous arrivals in the country.” According to Vujnovich, “most new immigrants (Croatian immigrants to New Orleans) usually arranged through correspondence for employment, and a place to stay upon arrival. Some even had sponsors that paid for passage in exchange for work, usually in an oyster-producing enterprise.” Even though a number of these early immigrants came only temporarily and brought their earnings back to Croatia, many did choose to stay. These early immigration networks paved the way for future immigrants and their families, allowing them passage, employment and assimilation with greater ease.

_Croats in Other Parts of the United States_

As with other immigrant groups, Croatians generally sought out family members and friends for employment opportunities and shelter regardless of where they settled creating pockets of Croatian communities across the United States. Census data indicate that nearly 400,000 Croatians entered the United States by 1914, with over 100,000 settling in Illinois and some

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43 Vujnovich, *Yugoslavs in Louisiana*, 40.
20,000 alone making their home in the city of Chicago.\textsuperscript{44} More accurate records post-1920, due to the recognition of nationalities on the US census, show that over a million Yugoslav immigrants entered the United States. According to Milos Vujnovich, author of Yugoslavs in Louisiana, \textquotedblleft About 180,000 settled in Pennsylvania; 110,000 settled in Ohio; 50,000 in New York; 40,000 in Michigan; 30,000 in Minnesota; 28,000 in California, and from 15,000 to 20,000 in each of the following states: Indiana, New Jersey, Colorado, Montana, Kansas, Missouri, west Virginia, and Washington.\textquotedblright\textsuperscript{45} By 1940 217,497 South Slavs resided in Northern US areas while 55,625 resided in the West and 10,271 called the South home. Although this data demonstrates their Northern communities were more populous and that South Slavs generally thrived in industrial areas, South Slavs did possess a definite foothold in the southern United States.

The Croatians of New Orleans played an integral role in construction of this Southern enclave, and still today exercise regional/ethnic pride through the business and kinship relationships they have formed. According to the 1920 United States Census \textquotedblleft 312 Louisianans reported Yugoslavia as the country of birth; 397 in 1930; 445 in 1940; 427 in 1950; 358 in 1960; and 411 in 1970.\textsuperscript{46} (Vujnovich 1974, 39). Whatever the cause, Croatian immigrants found a home in New Orleans, and the surrounding area leaving a fascinating narrative for the future.

\textit{The History of South Slav Immigration to the United States}

In the years between 1895 and the eve of World War I, South Slav immigration to Louisiana began to increase yet again, ultimately reaching its highest mark of over a thousand Dalmatian-born in 1914.\textsuperscript{47} Legal immigration to the United States was dramatically curtailed due to WWI,

\textsuperscript{44}Maria Dugandzic-Pasic, \textit{Croatians of Chicagoland} (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2010), 8-9.
\textsuperscript{45}Vujnovich, \textit{Yugoslavs in Louisiana},
\textsuperscript{46}Vujnovich, \textit{Yugoslavs in Louisiana}, 39.
\textsuperscript{47}Vujnovich, \textit{Yugoslavs in Louisiana}, 28.
and in 1917 U.S. immigration law was forever altered when the government instituted literacy requirements for all immigrants. Popularly known as the Literacy Act, this statute stipulated that prospective immigrants sixteen or older had to demonstrate an ability to read in any language. Following the end of WWI immigration policy would change yet again. Many desired to keep out new immigrants, while others greatly feared that the end of the war would bring an unprecedented flood of persons to American shores. The Quota Act, passed in 1921, capped immigration at 358,00, and established individual country quotas based on nationalities. Three years later Congress replaced the 1921 legislation with the Immigration act of 1924. This act lowered the annual limit to slightly fewer than 165,000 immigrants per year and stipulated that within a few years it be limited, yet again, to 150,000. As immigration law changed in the United States many Yugoslavs sought refuge in the South American countries of Brazil and Argentina, and then made their way to Louisiana or California. After the end of World War I, the armistice, and the Treaty of Versailles, some Croatians residing in Louisiana took their life savings and returned to a new, united Yugoslavia. The creation of the new country had long been a desire and sought after Balkan dream to many of her people. Throughout their long, turbulent history, there were numerous attempts to unite the Croats, Serbs and Slovenes into one singular state. According to Milos Vujnovich, “at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as the nationalistic feelings were awakened partly by Napoleon’s unification of the Croats and other South Slavs in the Austrian Empire and partly by the successful insurrections of Serbs against the Turks, the Yugoslav movement gained wide support.” The Yugoslav movement, or the desire among South Slavs to possess and govern their own country while maintaining their

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religions, languages and cultures, was a long dreamed goal among the various nationalities of the lower Balkans.

The movement continued to gain attention and appreciation with the creation of a South Slav consciousness fostered in the linguistic and literary work of the period. This idea coupled with the work done to enhance and further the unifying and standardizing of the literary language of the Croats and Serbs in the arts, sciences, education and literature, gave the movement a strong voice for those involved. That is not to say that the creation of a South Slavic state was a forgone conclusion. Keep in mind that the South Slavic people were not of one political and administrative unit. The South Slav peoples were scattered among many different political, units and each of these units possessed different historical backgrounds, religions, languages and even alphabets.\textsuperscript{52} Regardless of these differences it was a growing desire for most of these differing peoples to come together and control their own fate both politically and economically. Definitive steps for true unification would not come to fruition until after World War I.\textsuperscript{53}

\textit{Yugoslavia}

According to Leslie Benson, author of \textit{Yugoslavia; A Concise History}, “It took the destruction of two great empires to make room for the formation of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1918, a new state created out of the lands straddling the Ottoman and the Hapsburg dominions.”\textsuperscript{54} By May 1913 Ottoman power ceased to exist on European soil, except for a small area around Constantinople, and in 1914 a Bosnian Serb shot and killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand, sparking the general European conflict that eliminated the imperial obstacle of

\textsuperscript{53}Vujnovich, \textit{Yugoslavs in Louisiana}, 14
\textsuperscript{54}Leslie Benson, \textit{Yugoslavia; A Concise History} (New York: Pelgranye, 2001), 1.
Austria-Hungary to South Slav unification. With these two super powers in check, it now came down to the Serbian army to provide the manpower, while political leaders from Croatia and Slovenia wooed Allied cooperation for a new South Slav state. These Croatian and Slovenian politicians formed the Yugoslav Committee with the purpose of leading discussions between their people and the Serbian government with regards to a unified state. In July 1917, an agreement was reached on the island of Corfu between the Serbian government and the Yugoslav Committee that would establish an independent democratic “Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes under the Karageorgevic dynasty.” On October 29, 1918, following the end of the war and the breakdown of Austro-Hungary, the Croatian parliament transferred its authority to the National Council of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. And on December 1, 1918, this group joined with the Kingdom of Serbia in the establishing of a new state, Yugoslavia. This new state was made up of some twenty different ethnic groups. It had a population of some 12 million people, four-fifths of whom were supported by agriculture. According to Stephen Clissold and H.C. Darby, author of A Short History of Yugoslavia, “There were only three towns—Belgrade, Zagreb, and Subotica—with a population of more than 100,000, and much of the national territory had been depopulated by the warfare which had afflicted the area almost continuously since 1912.”

The new Yugoslav state comprised various component parts. Both Serbia and Montenegro were to be independent kingdoms while Croatia-Slavonia would possess some measure of ‘home rule’ under Hungary. Dalmatia, where most of the Croatian immigrants to

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56 Vujnovich, Yugoslavs in Louisiana, 14.
57 Vujnovich, Yugoslavs in Louisiana, 14.
58 Vujnovich, Yugoslavs in Louisiana, 14.
59 Darby, A Short History of Yugoslavia, 165.
Louisiana were from, was considered an Austrian province. Because of the way the new state was designed, by the Croats and the Slovenes joining the already existing Kingdom of Serbia, it would not be long before inner turmoil would culminate in violence. One of the biggest problems was the unregulated frontier region were disputes with neighboring states over dividing lines caused serious disagreements. In these areas claims based on ethnicity, history, economy, or simply strategic location had to be weighed against one another inevitably leaving one party dissatisfied, and the other gloating in victory.

Plagued with problems from the start, the fledgling state had much to overcome both socially and politically. For example, many Serbs looked at Yugoslavia as a mere enlargement of Serbia while most Croats and Slovenes had hoped for a more decentralized democratic arrangement. The 1921 constitution created a strong central government and located the governing body and the army in Serbia. Resentment, quarrels and ultimately violence caused King Alexander to dissolve the parliament and suppress the constitution in January 1929. In October of that same year he officially changed the name of the country to Yugoslavia and ruled by decrees until he was assassinated in October 1934. After his death the regency carried on negotiations with Croatian leaders resulting in the 1939 agreement declaring an autonomous Croatian region, Hrvatska Banovina. Although this decree settled matters temporarily a new dispute was just on the horizon.

World War II presented yet another problem for the young and struggling state. Yugoslavia initially tried to remain neutral, but German pressure forced the young country to join the Tripartite Pact. As a result, a coup lead by army officers overthrew the government,
forced the late King Alexander’s cousin Prince Paul to leave the country, installed the late king’s young son as the new king, Peter II, and proclaimed Yugoslavia as neutral.\(^6^4\) After hearing of the coup Hitler was furious and ordered Yugoslavia destroyed. Germany would ultimately attack Yugoslavia without a declaration of war. On the morning of Palm Sunday, April 6, 1941, only ten days after the coup, Germany invaded Yugoslavia from the Northwest and pushed through to the Northwest shore of the Lake Ohrid where they were joined by Italian forces advancing from Albania.\(^6^5\) Yugoslav resistance was strong, but not strong enough. On April 17, 1941, only eleven days after the launch of the invasion, the Yugoslav High Command capitulated.\(^6^6\) By German standards Yugoslavia was a conquered nation, another piece in Hitler’s empire, and another country created by the Treaty of Versailles destroyed. German and Italian forces quickly partitioned Yugoslavia immediately following her defeat. Yugoslavia would remain occupied throughout WWII.

Resistance to the inhumane treatment of the Yugoslav population by the occupying armies began almost immediately. Initially there were two organized Yugoslav resistance movements. The first crystallized around Draza Mihajlovic, an officer in the former Yugoslav army. His followers were known as Chetniks. The second group, led by a communist, Josip Broz (Tito), was known as the Partisans. According to Stephen Clissold and H.C. Darby, “both leaders were profoundly different in character, background and political outlook.”\(^6^7\) Draza was of Serbian descent, deeply attached to the monarchy, western allies, and the established order. Furthermore, he greatly distrusted Croats and absolutely detested communists. Tito, on the other hand, was a Croat with peasant origins, and a former metal worker. He had fought in the

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\(^{6^5}\) Clissold and Darby, *A Short History of Yugoslavia*, 208.

\(^{6^6}\) Clissold and Darby, *A Short History of Yugoslavia*, 208-209.

\(^{6^7}\) Clissold and Darby, *A Short History of Yugoslavia*, 214.
Austrian army during World War I, where he was captured on the eastern front by the Russians, and converted to communism. He returned to Yugoslavia 1938 to take control of the local communist party. As with their backgrounds each man varied greatly in their resistance style. Draza preferred to lay low, husband resources and build up forces in order strike at a predetermined favorable moment. Tito however, was a man of action, and this was his popular appeal. Ultimately Tito won out, and in November 1943 his army would declare him marshal. As for the former King, Peter, the new government forbade him from ever returning to Yugoslavia. Ultimately, it was Tito who would guide the country in its transition towards communism, not a king, or a parliamentary government. Tito and the Partisans liberated the country and established Yugoslavia as a socialist republic in 1945.

Figure 6. The Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia 1945-1962

The post-World War II communist climate in Yugoslavia set the stage again for many Yugoslavs to immigrate, or wish to do so. Yugoslavia's back and forth relationship with the

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69 Vujnovich, *Yugoslavs in Louisiana*, 16.
Soviet Union presented opportunities for American aide, but ultimately the country maintained its special brand of communism until Tito’s death in the early 1980s. Past-World War II life in Croatia was difficult. Communism, coupled with and the devastated natural landscape and the crumbling built environment, led many to seek relief through immigration.

Like other immigrant groups Croatian settlers initially came to America in search of freedom, and possibly wealth in the land of economic opportunity. Later immigrants came with much the same desires, hopes and dreams. They sought out friends, relatives and established kinship networks to facilitate their goals, and like those that came before them they laid the foundation for future generations to follow. Although smaller in numbers than their counterpart immigrant groups in other American cities, the Croatian community of New Orleans has made its mark on Louisiana cultural heritage and their story is important to both the local and state dialogue. The following pages will examine immigration on the national level, and the state and local level, and demonstrate how this one group maintained ethnic ties while furthering kinship and business throughout the New Orleans metro area.
Chapter Two: New Orleans: An Urban Enclave?

The key to their survival was to ‘cluster’ and ‘stick with their own,’ at first with their Slovenian counterparts but then later branching out to form their own groups. Initially boardinghouses and saloons served as the primary social haven for the new arrivals.\textsuperscript{70}

-The unknown is referring to the significant group of Croatians that arrived on the shores of Lake Michigan around the 1870s, and made Chicago their home.

Immigrants arriving on American shores often encountered a difficult and intimidating world. New arrivals repeatedly found American cities to be hard, cruel places inhabited by ethnically diverse strangers who were unaccommodating and generally untrusting of outsiders. For those who chose an urban destination the new foreign districts that appeared in almost every American city were a far cry from the village life most had previously known. However, these areas housed diverse populations and provided new arrivals with a place to socialize and network with their own kind.

The human need for camaraderie and a sense of community are central themes in the study of immigration history. The ethnic enclave is an example of a common desire to mingle with people who share the same language, similar values, customs, religion and recreational activities. Furthermore, the ethnic enclave contains the necessary networks that facilitate Americanization and, more importantly, acculturation.\textsuperscript{71} In the case of Croatian immigrants arriving in Louisiana, and more specifically New Orleans, the French Quarter became the first neighborhood many would encounter upon arrival. Like many groups that came before them, Croatian immigrants worked in the city’s various bars, restaurants, groceries and bakeries, gaining connections and furthering their desire to establish families, businesses and eventually a functioning community. Although smaller in numbers and more dispersed than some of their

\textsuperscript{70} The Croatians of Chicagoland, 11.
immigrant counterparts within the city, the Croatians of New Orleans tended to stick together when it came to business and living arrangements, thereby forming mini enclaves instead of an ethnic enclave in the strictest sense. Although there was no “Little Croatia” or “Little Dalmatia,” the Croatians of New Orleans forged residential and business clusters that housed the immigrant networks necessary for Americanization. Assimilation in this manner functioned the same way as larger ethnic enclaves in other American cities.

This chapter will focus on the Croatian business and residential clusters that formed in the French Quarter and the surrounding neighborhoods. It will examine the restaurant and associated seafood industries located in New Orleans, and it will explore the spatial distribution of said businesses and residences. It will also chart over time the movement of Croatians out of the French Quarter into the surrounding areas and the changing nature of employment and living patterns the Croatian community underwent from the 1860s through the 1940s. The purpose of this section is to highlight the crucial urban component in the symbiotic relationship that
developed between the city and the bayou, and give a voice to the Croatians who laid the urban foundation for future business and familial partnerships.

_Immigration Theory_

When interpreting the immigrant experience, two prevalent works in immigration can contribute to an understanding of the motivations for immigration. Generally known as “push pull theory,” immigration theory has taken two forms in past literature. The first theory, presented in the book _Uprooted_, was devised by Oscar Handlin in 1951. The book itself was a forerunner in immigration literature and laid the foundation for future generations to study and learn from the immigrant experience. In his work, Handlin argued that the immigrant was pushed, literally forced, to immigrate with little or no control over the circumstances. The immigrant, in this case, is seen as a passive participant in the overall experience with little knowledge of where to go, how to get there, or what to do upon arrival, a hapless victim of political and economic circumstance.\(^\text{72}\) Although Handlin in no way provides a definitive answer for the causes of immigration, he provides the reader with one half of the story. The push factor is an undeniable element in immigration process and should be considered in the case of any immigrant group.

\(^{72}\)Handlin, _The Uprooted_, 3-33.
The second influential theory on immigration used in this study derives from John Bodnar’s 1985 work, appropriately titled *The Transplanted*, written as a direct response to Handlin’s *The Uprooted*. Bodnar, surveys the immigrant experience from 1830 to 1930 and examines its implications for American social history. In the period between the two books sociologists, anthropologists, and historians had begun to agree that the process of immigration was not as simple as being pushed from one’s home by forces out of one’s own control. Handlin reflected this shift, seeing the immigrant as “an active participant in a historical drama whose outcome is anything but predictable.” He explores in depth how the immigrant confronted capitalism, learned his or her role, and eventually overcame hardships through kinship and national ties, to adapt and become a functioning cog in the wheel of American capitalism. In *The Transplanted*, Handlin argues that immigrants made conscious decisions every day that affected their American futures, including the active decision to immigrate in the first place. The immigrant did not simply accept one ideology over another, or lay victim to circumstance. The immigrant negotiated, and adapted, to his or her new surroundings, thereby forging a modern

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74 Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, 1-56.
identity in his or her adopted homeland. Although the newly arriving immigrant may have been an active participant in his or her own destiny, many did have the help of immigration networks setup by those whom had previously made the journey. The term enclave has been defined as “a territory legally and politically attached to a main territory with which it is not physically contiguous because of surrounding alien territory.” An ethnic enclave by definition therefore refers to “a community of an ethnic group inside an area in which another ethnic group dominates.” Such ethnic enclaves could be found in most burgeoning American city between 1820 and 1930. In his work, Cities and Immigrants: A Geography of Change in Nineteenth Century America, author David Ward contends that researchers “generally are able to agree that most immigrants congregated on the edge of the central business district, which provided the largest and most diverse source of unskilled labor.”

These enclaves, or clusters, were made up of newly arriving immigrants that sought refuge with people who spoke the same language, practiced the same religion, and came from a similar background. These areas, nicknamed “Little Italy,” “Chinatown,” or in the case of New Orleans, “Little Palermo,” “Irish Channel,” and the “Greeks of North Dorgenois Street,” allowed new residents a chance to connect, or reconnect, with people from their native land, who in turn passed on the knowledge they possessed about their new surroundings. These enclaves provided employment opportunities, a sense of community, and in some cases a chance of marriage and family.

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79 Campanella, Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historic Geography of New Orleans, 176.
The expression of the ethnic enclave commonly “takes on the form of a concentric zone of ethnic neighborhood which has spread from an initial cluster to encircle the central business district (CBD).” Known as the Concentric Zone Model, brainchild of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology and more specifically the creation of Ernest W. Burgess, this urban development theory examined outward spatial development from the industrial core to the suburban exterior ring. Burgess viewed the city as a living, breathing, ecosystem housing American populations. In his 1925 book *The City*, Burgess argued “a theoretical city’s central business district was surrounded first by a zone in transition, then a zone of working men’s homes, a residential zone, and finally a commuter zone.” In the zone of transition one would find “deteriorating rooming house districts and slums, populated by recent arriving immigrant colonies such as in Little Sicily, Greektown, Chinatown—fascinatingly combining old world heritages and American adaptation.” Burgess goes on to say that “near the zone of transition is

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the Latin Quarter, where creative and rebellious spirits resort.” The next zone, that of the workingman, would be populated by Germans, German Jews, and other second-generation immigrants. The last zones, residential and commuter would be restricted as residential districts and bungalow suburbs. The ethnic enclave, or the zone of transition became an important part of the Americanization and acculturation process for all newly arriving immigrants. The zone of transition, appropriately titled, allowed immigrants to get their bearings in their new surroundings, find lodging, food, and perhaps work while transitioning from immigrant to American.

Like other nineteenth century American cities, New Orleans developed along a similar spatial and organic pattern. When the concentric zone model is applied to New Orleans it overlays perfectly with urban spatial arrangements of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century cityscape. What local geographer Richard Campanella describes as the “immigrant belt,” those neighborhoods nicknames Little Palermo, Chinatown and the Greek area, would all fall under Burgess’ transitional zone. Earlier immigrants, Irish, Germans and German Jews, would have settled in the workingman’s zone, the areas of Lafayette, the Third District, and the semi-rural periphery. The restricted suburbs and commuter zones describe areas of uptown, Esplanade Avenue, Gentilly and eventually Lakeview. As for the French Quarter, originally home to various immigrant groups, it too finds representation in the Burgess model as the Latin Quarter, home to “rebellious and creative spirits” that ultimately gravitated towards its magnetic pull.

83 Burgess, The City, 47-61; Ward, Cities and Immigrants; A geography of Change in Nineteenth Century America, 75-81.
84 Burgess, The City, 47-62.
85 Campanella, Bienville’s Dilemma; A Historical Geography of New Orleans, 177-178.
86 Campanella, Bienville’s Dilemma; A Historical Geography of New Orleans, 178.
Although the concentric zone model is applicable to most developing American cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, cities and city builders were not necessarily conscious of this process. In general cities tended to develop along certain organic guidelines. People did not simply settle at random. According to geographer Richard Campanella, “it is more likely that they gravitate toward areas that provide, first and foremost, available housing, and thence that are perceived to maximize their chances of success (in terms of housing, employment, services, amenities, convenience, safety and existing social networks) while minimizing cost and obstacles (such as price, distance, crime, discrimination, noise, danger, and environmental nuisances).”

In order to better understand the application of the concentric zone model overlay an understanding of the history of urban development in New Orleans is crucial. The early Nineteenth century city, like other American cities of the time, was primarily a walking city with only pedestrian, or equestrian, means of transportation. The core of the city was the most advantageous and expensive place to live. In New Orleans that core was the French Quarter, and until the Louisiana Purchase it was the most desired address. Spatial settlement patterns in New Orleans were influenced by various factors, including transportation routes and economic activities.

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Orleans were complicated by the fact that the city was built in a swamp, literally an island surrounded by various bodies of water. Due to this fact land was scarce, forcing a rather diverse population to intermingle in ways that may not have been common in other cities. Further complicating matters were the presence of both slaves and free people of color that worked and lived in the settled area. Regardless of her differences in terrain and population, New Orleans followed comparable patterns of urban spatial development, and the appearance of the immigrant enclave mimics that of larger cities like Boston, New York, and Philadelphia.88

By the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the early twentieth century, during the second great wave of immigration, settlement patterns in New Orleans, congruent with other American cities, began to change. With the application of the screw pump, which allowed for the drainage the back swamp, people began to settle in the outlying areas distancing themselves from the core. Likewise the streetcar allowed individuals to live and work at greater distances from one another. Furthermore it facilitated commuting, which became the norm allowing the wealthy to maintain distance between themselves and the crumbling immigrant core. Such patterns persisted through the Civil War occupation and into the twentieth century.89

In the period following the Civil War, New Orleans struggled both physically and economically. Although intact, Northern occupation had tarnished the urban landscape. The city’s finances were in ruins and the economic state of her population was critical. Times were had and many were destitute. When she finally did overcome the post war challenges a large number of the wealthy, as they had done in the period prior to the war, chose to relocate to the garden suburbs forming around the Quarter. Likewise modernization and light industrialization now relegated immigrant jobs to the urban core, whereas in the past those jobs had mostly

88 Campanella, Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans, 170-179.
89 Lewis, New Orleans; The Making of an Urban Landscape, 54-62.
existed on the periphery or in the fields. This relocation further deteriorated the Quarter’s former atmosphere and polluted both the streets and emotions of many residents. Newly arriving immigrants wanted to be near work, as they undoubtedly could not afford otherwise, and settled in the core not far from new employment opportunities. Thus those with money, and transportation, relocated to the abandoned periphery leaving the inner core to the working class and industry.  

When discussing the urban development of New Orleans there is an additional factor that cannot be overlooked. Race, like immigration, played a key role in the development of all Southern cities, and was an undeniable force in spatial settlement patterns across the nation. In his work Sorting Out the New South City, Thomas Hanchett examines the period between 1870 and 1920 when Charlotte, N.C., transformed itself from a rural courthouse village into the trading and financial hub for America’s premier textile manufacturing region.  

Hanchett argues that “in the Southern city neither segregation by income, nor segregation by race, have been as constant as one might imagine. Instead the arrangement of the urban landscape has changed markedly during the past century.”  

Hanchett sees the city as a place where people of all types lived and intermingled. Ultimately, the Southern city “sorted itself out”- first into a patchwork of well-defined neighborhoods, then into groups of neighborhoods arranged in sectors demarcated by color and class. According to Hanchett, “segregation by race was not an age-old Southern constant, nor did it spring full-blown into its modern form upon the end of slavery.”
The citizens of Charlotte, like those of New Orleans, held to the old habits of intermingled salt-and-pepper land use long after class segregated residential suburbs for white-collar workers had become the fashion in more-industrialized cities.

Eventually the city of Charlotte would move to separate groups by class and race. Likewise in New Orleans this change occurred in response to the mechanization and light industrialization following the Civil War, and the social tensions this change produced. In New Orleans those with the means moved away from the center of the city where industry polluted the streets and minds of those that remained. In Charlotte those at the top now took steps to insulate themselves physically from the social and political confusion of industrial society. The sorting out of the city was a reaction to the wider reorganization of society brought on by the industrial revolution. Separation seemed the answer to the challenges of that particular tumultuous moment in history. This strategy turned out to have lingering historical consequences for Charlotte, New Orleans, and Southern cities, as they reinforced separation based on race well into the twentieth century.94

For incoming immigrants to New Orleans the French Quarter was often their first stop. As a port of arrival the French Quarter was the core of the concentric model out of which various neighborhoods sprang based on ethnicity, race and class. The spatial development of neighborhoods and communities throughout the city was based on the concept of growing outward in a conic formation from the smaller core. In the case of the Croatian immigrants of New Orleans there was no difference in their physical spatial development than any other immigrant group of the time period. They too found refuge in the Quarter and ultimately set up shop in the various bars, restaurants and groceries housed there. From the French Quarter

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94 Hanchett, Sorting out the New South City; Race, Class and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975, 1-12.
radiating outward, immigrants branched into the various zones of transition surrounding the central core. The neighborhoods of the Marigny, a traditional suburb of the French Quarter, the Bywater, and the area known as Mid-City, all housed clusters of immigrant groups.

Humans do not randomly settle in any given area. They tend to seek out towns, cities and neighborhoods that will suit their needs. The clustering of people based on ethnicity, race, language, or religion, can be defined as an enclave if the numbers are significant enough and the group retains its homogeneity. This pattern of spatial development can be seen in every major American city from the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries. Although smaller in numbers, the Croatian community of New Orleans, was no exception to the concentration rule. Early immigrants to New Orleans found both employment and shelter in the French Quarter and the surrounding areas. The early Yugoslav immigrant had no trouble finding work in the port of New Orleans. Many worked along the riverfront as stevedores, cargo packers, and teamsters while others worked on river vessels as sailors, mates, and even captains. In an ever-increasing number many of these early men opened businesses of their own, utilizing their merchandizing instincts. Most of these individuals came with very little, worked hard, saved their money, bought property and opened businesses catering to the needs of community. In doing so they facilitated networks that would foster self-employment and self-reliance for future generations.95

Upon arrival in New Orleans, many Croatian men found shelter in boardinghouses where the cooking and housekeeping were included in the weekly charge. Most of these establishments were in the French Quarter where they could cater to the flow of newly arriving immigrants. Once these individuals found lodging, the French Quarter provided a multitude of restaurants, bars and groceries, for the purposes of employment thereby allowing new residents to work mere blocks from where he or she might slept at night. Both Stan Cvitanovic and Andrew Pobrica,

95Vujnovich, Yugoslavs in Louisiana, 59.
Croatian immigrants in the early and mid-twentieth century, remember residing in a boarding house located on Chartres Street and working in French Quarter restaurants. Stan Cvitanovic immigrated in the 1970’s while Mr. Pobrica was here well before that in the early part of the century; however, both recalled similar stories of their initial experiences proving the possibility of a trend that survived over an extended period of time. Eventually each man owned and operated tugboat companies out of Venice, Louisiana, and reside in the town Belle Chasse, both located in Plaquemines Parish.96

Likewise Krasna Vojkovich remembers her husband, John Vojkovich, finding a boardinghouse in the French Quarter after a brief stint working on oyster boats out of Plaquemines Parish. Mr. Vojkovich immigrated in to Louisiana in 1923 at the age of fifteen. He later worked at two restaurants, both Croatian owned, on Rampart Street. At these restaurants he worked his way up from dishwasher, to busboy and eventually to manager, before opening his own restaurant, Crescent City Steakhouse, on Broad Street. She also remembered her husband borrowing money from a bank (possibly one of the owners of one of the two restaurants he originally worked at as immigrant banks were a common feature in many ethnic neighborhoods) to start his own business.97 Other individuals would follow suit starting their early immigrant life in the French Quarter enclave where they would meet others like themselves, forge networks, and then branch out into the surrounding area. Many would start up businesses of their own, or in partnership with relatives, thereby utilizing the ethnic enclave as a stepping-stone to future economic independence.

The City directories provide evidence of Yugoslavs working in various trades throughout the city. Similar to other immigrant groups, Yugoslav immigrants tended to cluster their

96Stan Cvitanovic, interview by author, Belle Chase, LA, April 2012. Andrew Pobrica, interview by author, Belle Chase, La, May 2012.
97Krasna Vojkovich, interview by author, New Orleans, LA, March 2012.
businesses and residences for protection from outsiders, access to friends and family, and convenience to those they wished to service. Although not found in entirely homogeneous neighborhoods, Croatian immigrants in New Orleans tended to follow a similar pattern of employment and lodging as their counterparts did across urban America.

For the purpose of this study I examined a variety of city directories between the years 1866 and 1949. Over three hundred individuals were examined, with some repeating throughout the surveyed years. The initial focus of this analysis was strictly based on the Yugoslav surnames found in the directories. Once certain names were identified the focus shifted to include the Croatian oyster retailers, wholesalers, saloons, restaurants and those in the related maritime trades, out of which developed second and third generation businesses. At this point I consulted both residential and street directories to determine where individuals lived and on which streets a predominance of Croatian businesses and residences existed. As certain last names became more prevalent I determined the need to examine other names closely associated with these dominant names. Once I had collected data from the city directories for the years chosen, I assembled the names and addresses in a spreadsheet using an Excel program. This information was then geo-coded using the Geographic Information Software ARCGIS. The maps seen in this chapter, one for each directory consulted, are the result of this effort. There is also one map with each year overlaid upon the one before it allowing the reader to get a more complete picture of the actual movement of individuals from the core into the exterior.

Furthermore, I examined the city directories in conjunction with national and state census records for the years 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940 and 1960 to more accurately assess the actual number of Yugoslavs present in the state and, more specifically, Orleans Parish. This analysis demonstrates that these initial clusters sparked business partnerships, and kinship ties, that
facilitated the expansion of the Croatian community from the French Quarter into the surrounding neighborhoods and rural areas, and furthered the developing relationship between Orleans and Plaquemines Parishes. The evidence that follows is based on this sample.

In the 1866 business directories Croatian immigrants appear in numerous pockets in and around the French Quarter. As expected early on they worked in various traditional immigrant jobs. For example in the 1866 directories there are five Croatians listed as fruit vendors, a job employing many incoming Italian immigrants as well as other immigrant groups upon arrival. The names of those vendors are as follows: Popovich, Radovich, Vidoevich, Gurgwicivich, and Cietoveovich, who was actually partnered with a Pigniol, possibly Italian or French. Regardless of Mr. Pigniol’s ethnicity, this partnership demonstrates a possible connection between the two groups. Furthermore it demonstrates that incoming Croats were living near, and working with, other ethnic groups in the French Quarter. If Pigniol was indeed Italian this relationship was a possible early indication of the Italian-Croatian connection that followed these two immigrant groups throughout history as both shared the living and work sphere the French Quarter, and the surrounding area. Furthermore certain names and families appear more frequently as the Croatian community developed through marriage and business connections.98

In the 1872 business directory a small smattering of Croatian operated businesses can be seen sprouting off from the French Quarter into the surrounding area. Starting in the French Quarter and moving upriver the directory provides the following example of expanding spatial movement from the French Quarter outward. In this year the directory lists M. Popovich as proprietor of M. Popovich Grocery and Saloon located on Ursulines Street and the Mississippi River levee. The Directory also listed a John Popovich, perhaps a relative, as a clerk at the same business and residential address as M. Popovich. Also located in the French Quarter as Antoine

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98*New Orleans City Directory*, 1866.
Racich. Mr. Racich was a bartender and resided at Chartres and Dumaine Streets. John Ramadanovich owned a restaurant at 77 Royal Street, and Mr. Lucas Nazorich operated a saloon at 184 Bienville. Mr. Peter Ochiglevich ran a grocery on the outskirts of the Marigny neighborhood at 18 Elysian Fields. A little further upriver, or uptown, Tony Fuchich was selling oysters with a partner at Schenck and Fuchich’s on Calliope Street near Magazine Street.99

In the 1884 city directory a Mr. Simeone M. Fuchich was listed at 4 North Front Street as the proprietor of both an ice and oyster wholesale business. Another Ochiglevich, first name unknown, was listed as a sailmaker at North Peter Street between Ursuline and Hospital Streets, and a Mr. Rodoslav Abromovich operated a saloon not far away at 233 Decatur Street. Joseph P. Maritiche, an assistant weigher at the Custom House, resided at 133 Ursulines Street in a household that included George Maritche, an agent. Nelson Maritiche, a lottery agent, resided up the block at 85 Barracks Street. Also in the French Quarter was John Radovich, a fruit vendor located at the Treme Market, but who resided just outside the French Quarter at 178 Villere, in the Treme neighborhood. Philip Radovich, a fruit vendor, likewise resided in the Quarter at 425 Burgundy Street.

The 1884 directories provide the first listing for the Slavonian Benevolent Society, founded in 1874. The association is listed under C. Radovich and C. Vucassovich, the association’s president and secretary respectively. The address was listed as 23 Exchange Place. (The association will be discussed further in Chapter Five). Beyond the French Quarter and further upriver Mr. Nicholas Radetich, an oyster dealer, was listed in CBD at 222 Camp Street and was still listed at the same address twenty years later in 1904. Another Croatian, Marco Lucinovich sold oysters at a nearby restaurant located at 192 Camp Street.100

The 1910 census provides actual population numbers that correlate with the city directories and present a more accurate picture of the Yugoslav community in both the state and Orleans parish. The total population of the state of Louisiana in 1910 was 1,656,388. According to the 1910 Louisiana census, under which all Croatians were considered to be Austro-Hungarian (Yugoslavia was not created until 1918), there were a total number of foreign white stock separated by nationality of 164,499. Of that number the total number of Austrian immigrants equaled 2,883, 1.8 percent of the population. Of that total 1,596 were foreign born, 3.1 percent of the population, and five hundred were native with both parents foreign born, and seven hundred and eighty-seven were native with one parent foreign born. In Orleans parish the total population in 1910 was 339,075. Of this number there were six hundred and forty-five individuals born in Austria who resided in the parish. The total number of immigrants from Hungary equaled seven hundred and one, point four percent of the population. Of that number three hundred and ninety-seven, point eight percent of the population were foreign born, while two hundred and thirty were native born with both parents foreign born, and seventy-four were native born with one parent foreign born. There were ninety Hungarian immigrants in Orleans parish in 1910. Both nationalities were assessed to provide a more accurate picture of the aggregate numbers as it is uncertain which nationality a Croatian immigrant would have reported to the census taker (Austrian, Hungarian, or Croatian), or which nationality a census taker would have chosen given the options the immigrant may have reported.

101 By definition foreign white stock “is the aggregate white population which is foreign either by birth or by parentage. It embraces with the foreign-born whites all native whites having one or both parents foreign born, and is in the technical terminology of the census the white population of foreign birth or of foreign or mixed parentage.” U.S. Bureau of Census, “Chapter Six: Mother Tongue of the Foreign White Stock, 1910.” http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/36894832v1ch12.pdf (accessed January 15, 2014).

By 1914, and the start of World War I, the number of Croatians within New Orleans began to increase. Newly arriving, and already established immigrants could be found in a variety of neighborhoods around the city. In the French Quarter George Ziblich had a coffee stand in the French Market called George Ziblich and Sons and resided at 523 St. Ann Street with Joseph G. Zibilich. S.M. Fucich was listed at 536 Dumaine. At this point Mr. Fucich was no longer in the ice business as he had been in 1873, but he still sold oysters wholesale. The Croatian owned and operated Bayou Cook Oyster and Fish Company was located at 511 St. Philip Street. At 530 Toulouse Street, a few blocks away, Michael Sansovich also sold oysters wholesale.¹⁰³

In the Marigny neighborhood, mere blocks from the French Quarter, evidence of expansion into the surrounding area became more apparent. Mr. Andrew S. Bilich resided at 2603 Burgundy Street and was listed as a laborer. A few blocks away at 2407 North Rampart Street Blaise Jurisich, a riverboat pilot, also resided with Joseph, a bookkeeper. Another mariner, and fellow Jurisich, John J., was listed at 2013 North Rampart Street. And at 2001 Royal Street, also in the Marigny, was Anthony Nesanovich, the proprietor of a neighborhood oyster salon. Listed as a shoemaker, a Mr. Miho Ziblich resided at 520 Spain Street at the Chartres Street intersection.¹⁰⁴

During this same time period, the Ziblich family provides a good example of just how far the Croatian community extended from the French Quarter into the surrounding area. Likewise the Ziblich family provides evidence of entrepreneurship as various family members can be seen in a variety of jobs, some of which were family startups. Members of the Ziblich family can be found in the Lower Garden District, the Marigny, Mid-City, Algiers Point, and the

French Quarter. Anthony Ziblich, a laborer, resided at 3417 Chippewa Street, located Uptown. Also close to the river, but further Uptown, resided Frederick J. Ziblich, a boatbuilder. Just around the corner at 326 Alonzo Street was Joseph Ziblich, an oyster wholesaler. In the Marigny Mr. Miho Ziblich maintained a residence at 520 Spain Street at the Chartres Street intersection. He was listed as a shoemaker. In Mid-City Mr. Paul Ziblich was listed at 1129 North Broad while across the river in Algiers Albert N. Ziblich, a mate, lived at 307 Pelican Avenue.\footnote{Soards’ New Orleans City Directory. New Orlean’s, Soards and Co., 1921.}

Before examining the city directories for the year 1921, an assessment of the 1920 national and state census provides evidence of Yugoslav numbers to better explain spatial settlement patterns within the state and the parish. There were 312 Yugoslavs (spelled Jugo-Slavia in the census) in the state, point seven percent distribution within the state. Of that number seventy-eight of these individuals could be found in Orleans Parish, a point three percent distribution.\footnote{U.S. Bureau of the Census. Composition and Characteristics: Table 5, Table 6, and Table 7, 1920. Prepared by The Department of Commerce. Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1922.} Although small in numbers incoming, and established Yugoslavs continued to make their mark on New Orleans furthering networks and relationships that would survive for years to come.

The 1921 city directories provide further evidence of Croatian community expansion into the surrounding area and also demonstrate a changing of occupations and gender roles, as women begin to appear more frequently in both residential and occupational listings. Starting in the French quarter and moving outwards there is an apparent pattern of dispersal, as many established themselves in the zones of transition surrounding the central core. Congruent with other American cities of the time, New Orleans followed the concentric zone model of spatial development and the year 1921 provides a snapshot example of Yugoslav movement. The 1921 directories give further evidence of Yugoslav settlement patterns. In that year Mr. George Barbarich owned a restaurant at 1001 Decatur Street while Benjamin Bilich was the proprietor of
a restaurant two blocks away at 831 Decatur Street. Benjamin Bili, a barber, was located at 506 Dumaine Street. A few doors down S.M. Fucich, previously discussed, remained at 532 Dumaine Street, but the business was renamed S.M. Fuchich and Son. Also in the Quarter, but located at 900 Rampart Street, was a restaurant owned by Nicholas Gentilich. Further up river, but also on Rampart Street, was Ziblich and Nesanovich who resided at 638 Rampart Street. Anton Ziblich, whom worked at Tomesovich and Ziblich and the Paul Ziblich Company Inc. located at 940 North Peters Street, resided at 1227 Governor Nichols Street, formerly Hospital Street. This same company employed both Paul and Noelie Ziblich as president and stenographer respectively. They resided at 1204 North Lopez Street in the Mid-City neighborhood. The Directory lists Joseph Ziblich, presumably another relative, as the vice president of said company with a residence at 326 Alonzo Street. This is the same address where a Joseph Ziblich had previously been listed as an oyster dealer in 1914.\footnote{Soards’ New Orleans City Directory. New Orleans, Soards and Co., 1921.}

Moving into the Marigny neighborhood, Anthony Bilich, a ship carpenter, resided at 1517 Music Street. Blaise Jurisich, previously discussed, resided at 2407 North Rampart Street in 1914 was listed in 1921 at 736 Marigny Street. Mr. Jurisich’s move indicates a move one block down and one block over from his previous address, but still in the same neighborhood. Between the 500 blocks of Mandeville and Spain Streets resided John Bilich, a pilot, at 2419 Decatur. Mr. Bilich was less than a block from Miho Ziblich, the shoemaker, still residing at 420 Spain Street. Also listed in the area were Dominick Ziblich, at 1310 Touro Street, and Joseph G. Ziblich, at 633 Kerlerc Street. The No Name Theatre employed both individuals, perhaps related, as manager and assistant manager respectively.\footnote{Soards’ New Orleans City Directory. New Orleans, Soards and Co., 1921.}
Investigation upriver from the French Quarter and the Marigny neighborhoods into the Central Business District and Uptown areas indicated that the spirit of entrepreneurship was spreading in the Croatian networks. Here the Tortorich family provides a good example of the diversification of business interests. In 1914 the family had a liquor company located at 118 Baronne Street. At that same address in 1921 the business expanded into the Tortorich Cafeteria and Baking Company. Moreover the business advertisement lists three additional locations at 606 and 1001 Canal Street, and 445 Camp Street.\textsuperscript{109}

In addition to the Tortorich family, the Vidacovich family likewise provide a good example of movement out of the central core, the diversification of employment, and the presence of women. Just outside the French Quarter and Marigny neighborhoods Edna Vidacovich, a sales lady, lived at 1124 Elysian Fields Avenue with Irene Vidacovich, a clerk at Union Indemnity Company, and Paul J. Vidacovich, a clerk at the Standard Oil Company. Two blocks away at 1227 Marigny Street resided Frank Vidacovich, perhaps a relative. In the Mid-City area there were Vidacovichs at both 4525 Iberville Street and 3826 Tulane Avenue. At the 3826 Tulane Avenue address resided Louis J. Vidocovich, a chauffeur with the Maison Blanche Company. Rounding out this Mid-City cluster were Albert, a ship pilot, listed at 3325 Tulane Avenue, and John Jurisich, a clerk with Southern Pacific SS Company, who resided at 4048 Ulloa Street.\textsuperscript{110}

The 1933 city directories provide evidence of the continued movement of Croatians into the restaurant and oyster businesses as proprietors and wholesalers. An assessment of the 1930 census indicates that there were a total of 65,766 individuals residing in Orleans parish that were considered native white of foreign or mixed parentage. Of that number 865 were Austrian;

Hungary and Yugoslavia were not assessed that year.\textsuperscript{111} The business directories suggest the growth in population numbers in accordance with the growth in businesses. In the 1933 city of New Orleans business directory sixteen Croatian owned restaurants paid for special listings. What is interesting here is that of those sixteen only four are located with the confines of the French Quarter while twelve were located in other neighborhoods. In fact, five were Uptown, two were in what is now the CBD (Central Business District), two were in Mid-City, and two were in the Bywater neighborhood. This is not to say that there were only four in the entirety of the Quarter, only to state that four paid for the special listing under the restaurant heading in the city directory’s business section. More restaurants can likely be found listed in the residential section with the name of the business accompanying the employee or proprietor. In these cases those individuals would not have paid the extra charge for separate listing. The following listing serves as an example of this process: Juricich and Nesanovich Restaurant located at 1301 St. Bernard Avenue, but listed under Vlacho S. Juricich in the residential listings. Incidentally Nesanovich’s Wholesale Oysters was located directed across the street from this residential listing.\textsuperscript{112}

The 1933 directories, both business and residential, also provide evidence of the clustering of oyster wholesalers, retailers and fisherman. Likewise the prevalence of certain names associated with each integral part of the business becomes more evident. Mr. Culculich sold oysters at the French Market while Paul Zibilich, still resided at 940 North Peters Street, and Aug Zibilich, at 638 South Rampart Street, ran retail establishments. The Nesanovich, Lulich and Mistich families sold oysters in the seventh ward, and in Mid-City; a Luke V. Jurisich, an


\textsuperscript{112}\textit{Soards’ New Orleans City Directory.} New Orleans, Soards and Co., 1933.
oyster fisherman, is listed as residing at 2232 Dumaine Street. Mr. Rudolph Carevich sold wholesale oysters Uptown near Cambronne Street, and rounding out the group, Michael Ziblich of 833 Chartres Street was listed as the president of the Oysterman Alliance, located at 1236 Gallatin Street.\textsuperscript{113} This small sample demonstrates the importance of oyster cultivation to this particular group and will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The 1940 census indicates that there were 14,695 foreign born white individuals living in Orleans parish at the time of the census. Of that number 178 were Yugoslav.\textsuperscript{114} The business directories for later in the decade indicate the spatial distribution of those individuals in both their employment and residence. For example, the 1949 directories indicate that by 1949 many families had moved out of the French Quarter and into the surrounding neighborhoods. However, the Croatian community still held a strong presence on Rampart Street. Kopanica’s oysters was located just across the street from Cosimo Matassa’s, and J&M music. On the next corner at Dumaine Street was Gentilich’s restaurant, and just a block away at St. Philip was Johnnie’s restaurant. These Croatian run businesses were nestled in amongst the Puglia-s, the Kavanaugh-s, and Landry-s. Other neighbors included Rousseau’s and Gauthier’s, Watson’s, Dardella’s, Mintz and Goldblum furniture, Leo Nunez’s Appliances, The Matranga’s Beauty Shop, Sam’s liquor store, Katz’s furniture and appliances, Rudy’s grocery and the Cinema Theatre.\textsuperscript{115} The clustering of so many businesses owned by members of varying ethnicities is further proof of the Americanization and, ultimately, the assimilation of Croatian immigrants into the physical and economic fabric of the city. It also demonstrates the diversity of neighborhood populations throughout the city of New Orleans.

\textsuperscript{114}United States Bureau of Census. Table 24- Foreign-Born white by Country of Birth, By Parishes, and for Cities of 10,000 to 100,000, 1940-Con. Prepared by the Department of Commerce. Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1940.
\textsuperscript{115}Polk’s New Orleans City Directory. New Orleans, Polk Co., 1949.
Investigation down river into the Marigny neighborhood, and the surrounding area, indicated in the 1949 city directories that Joseph Nesanovich, possibly a relative of the owners of Nesanovich’s Oysters on St. Bernard Avenue, operated a wholesale oyster shop in the middle of the block on Port Street at 930, while he resided at 3938 Serantine Street near Gentilly Blvd. During this same period records indicate that at least eight families were clustered around Bartholomew and Dauphine Streets, with at least five other families nearby. Likewise the Croatian families of Jurisich, Mandich, Vodanovich, Tortorich, Voivedich, Jurovich, Lucich, and undoubtedly more, resided in the upper 9th Ward.  

A survey of the data collected for this study examined in conjunction with the data collected by Milos Vujnovich for his 1974 book indicated that between the years 1840-1970 there were approximately 263 business establishments owned and operated by Yugoslavs in New Orleans. Of that number, ninety-five restaurants were, thirty-seven fruit stands, thirty-two oyster dealerships, twenty-five saloons, fourteen groceries, twelve coffee stands, ten oyster bars, seven boardinghouses, three importing houses, three boat building shipyards, three seafood shops, three finance companies, three ship chandlers and three soft drink stores. Furthermore there were two Croatian owned service stations, two clothing stores, two real estate firms, two variety stores, two tobacco shops, and two freight carrying companies. Rounding out this group of businesses was also one shoe store, one billiard parlor, one sail manufacturer, one jewelry shop and one insurance agency.

The data from the early part of the twentieth century likewise indicate that Croatians were generally leaving the French Quarter, and the surrounding zones of transition, and moving into the neighborhoods of Lakeview and Mid-City, slightly further out of the core. Clusters in these

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117 Vujnovich, Yugoslavs in Louisiana, 60-61.
areas can be found from the 1920s onward. Similar to the other immigrant groups that settled in New Orleans during the period of second wave immigration, as Croatian immigrants established themselves, they sought better accommodations and neighborhoods for their futures. As many started businesses, married and had children, they left the concentrated core in pursuit of the American dream where they could own a property, build a house and establish themselves as contributors to the community. Although some remained in the interior, the general trend from the late Forties into the Fifties was exodus from the core into the neighborhoods of Lakeview, Mid-City and Gentilly. What is clear from the directories however is that into whichever neighborhoods they did move, there was still a tendency to cluster on the same blocks near friends and family creating mini-enclaves instead of one large contiguous homogeneous neighborhood.

By the 1960s, census data indicates that there were 1,364 Yugoslavs residing in the state of Louisiana. Of that number, 303 were foreign born. Of this number there were 185 males and 118 females. Of the total population 926 were native of foreign or mixed parentage, 493 males and 433 females.\(^{118}\) Although comparably small in numbers when assessed against other immigrant groups in other cities, Croatians in New Orleans chose to cluster and concentrate in certain areas and occupations as demonstrated in the data used here.

*Restaurants*

Highlighted in the directories, the census, and the data compiled by Milos Vujnovich in his work- is the contribution of Croatian restaurants to cultural heritage of New Orleans. Even as the Croatian community grew and expanded from the French Quarter into the surrounding neighborhoods, many Croatians left their mark on the culinary culture of New Orleans through

their legacy of restaurants, salons and coffee stands. Like other immigrant groups, namely the
Italians, food became the Croatian niche in New Orleans history, and today (2014) they are still hard at work. Of the ninety-five Croatian owned and operated restaurants from 1840-1970, a variety of cuisines could be found. Some were “mom and pop” storefronts while others became prominent gourmet eateries. Some examples are listed below with the name of the owner in parenthesis: Gentilich’s, Johnny’s (John Marcev), Ziblich’s, Cresent City Steakhouse (John Vojkovich), Chris’ Steakhouse (Chris Matulich), Vienna Garden (Matt Franicevich), Bozo’s (Bozo Vodanovich), and Drago’s (Drago Cvitanovich).\textsuperscript{119} A few of these restaurants are still operating today while others have since shut their doors permanently. (See pages 51-52 for photos of each establishment). In part many of these establishments did not last due to the desire of some owners to have their children pursue college, and other avenues of employment, while others simply could not reopen in the post Hurricane Katrina landscape of New Orleans following the devastation of 2005.

A tool used by immigrants as a means of Americanization, acculturation and ultimately assimilation, the ethnic enclave filled a void for many newly arriving immigrants needed, helping them survive in American cities. Although smaller in numbers than their counterparts in the Northeast and Midwest, the Yugoslavs of New Orleans likewise clustered in certain areas and occupations as a means of convenience and survival. Never residing in totally homogeneous neighborhoods, the Yugoslav immigrant to New Orleans negotiated his or her way with the help of his or her predecessors who paved the way. Perhaps not an enclave in the strictest sense, as their numbers were not as large as other immigrant groups in other cities, the Yugoslav clusters in New Orleans provided a means through which incoming immigrants could find housing and employment. These mini-enclaves functioned as their sister enclaves in larger cities, providing a

\textsuperscript{119}Vujnovich, \textit{Yugoslavs in Louisiana}, 61.
network of relief for incoming and established immigrants. As will be seen in the next chapter, the Yugoslav concentrations of New Orleans did not exist within a vacuum. They worked in conjunction with other immigrant groups, and more importantly with their brothers and sisters in the lower lying parishes to create business and familial alliances that persist today. Although different in numbers and size, the Yugoslavs of New Orleans created a community that satisfied their needs for housing, employment and socialization, thereby adapting and solidifying their ethnic enclave in New Orleans for its chief purpose, assimilation into the larger the community.

Figure 12. Crescent City Steakhouse Sign.

Figure 13. Drago's Restaurant Sign
Figure 14. Bozo's restaurant sign.

Figure 15. The original Chris's Steakhouse sign. The restaurant is now called Ruth’s Chris Steakhouse.
Figure 16. Former location of Gentilich’s grocery and restaurant. Currently Marti’s on Rampart.

Figure 17. North Rampart at Ursulines, Puglia’s Grocery story on the corner.
Figure 18. Map denoting Croatian Immigrant Clusters, 1921. Each dot represents one Croatian residence or business.
Figure 19. Map denoting Croatian Immigrant Clusters, 1923. Each dot represents one Croatian residence or business.
Figure 20. Map denoting Croatian Immigrant Clusters, 1933. Each dot represents one Croatian Business or Residences.
Figure 21. Map denoting Croatian Immigrant Clusters, 1938. Each dot represents one Croatian residence or business.
Figure 22. Map denoting Croatian Immigrant Clusters, 1949. Each dot represents one Croatian residence or business.
Figure 23. Map denoting Croatian Immigrant Clusters, 1873-1949. Each dot represents a Croatian residence of business.
Chapter Three: The Rural Enclave—Plaquemines Parish

The development of the urban/rural relationship is a popular theme in urban American history. From as far back as colonial times, the symbiosis that exists between the city and farm has been a crucial element in urban development. Each providing a critical function for the other, the urban/rural connection, and codependence, has been an enduring theme in urban history. An example of this relationship, and the products such interconnectedness can produce, is the focus of this chapter.  

Generally, the farm has provided the raw materials to the city for production, consumption and possible export. In the case of the Louisiana seafood industry, it has been the Gulf of Mexico. The Louisiana seafood industry has been culinary niche that developed in New Orleans and has dominated the palettes of residents and tourists alike. By the early 1900s, Oyster cultivation had become big business in the streams and bayous of Southern Louisiana, and the Croatian immigrant played an integral role in its development and success. The familial and business connections fostered by Croatian immigrants over time led to the integration of newly arriving immigrants into existing fishing and restaurant businesses, resulting in a highly functioning network of family and business partnerships that cross parish lines. This chapter will trace the story of the oyster industry of Plaquemines Parish Louisiana, how it grew and maintained a relationship with the city of New Orleans, and how the Croatian immigrant came to dominant this particular aspect of the Louisiana seafood market.

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Figure 24. Map of Plaquemines Parish

The following analysis will examine early Croatian involvement in the seafood industry, discuss the bayou lifestyle, and finally, provide an assessment of early oyster leases, vessels and canneries- within the parish. Furthermore, this chapter will demonstrate Croatian vertical integration into all aspects of the oyster industry and provide evidence of the urban rural connection that existed and flourished between the Croatians of New Orleans and those of Plaquemines Parish. This symbiotic relationship that developed early on in New Orleans history is still alive in the second decade of the twenty-first century as business and kinship ties have strengthened throughout the years through marriage and partnership.

Of the many contributions of Croatians to the cultural heritage and economy of New Orleans and the surrounding area, one achievement stands out-- oyster cultivation and oyster fishing. Through the Croatian oysterman’s tireless efforts, he transformed the method of gathering oysters into a highly profitable, beneficial and sustainable industry that still employs thousands of individuals in the seafood industry today. Croatian oystermen coupled science and technology with good business practices, and quality, to earn a reputation beyond reproach. Croatian oystermen have been growing and fishing oysters for over one hundred and fifty years
in the area south of New Orleans. In these coastal waters, a Croatian enclave developed based on oyster fishing and ties already established to the city of New Orleans. This rural concentration, much like that of the city proper, allowed Croatian immigrants to live and work in close relation with others similar to themselves. Moreover, through kinship and business partnerships, a powerful alliance grew between the city and the bayou, creating a means through which the Croatian immigrant could assimilate into the business community at large. This alliance, based on ethnicity and a shared experience, facilitated the growth of the Croatian community into a formidable force in the seafood industry, a force that still survives.

Oysters grow in Louisiana coastal waters where fresh water meets saltwater, or more specifically, where the fresh water of the Mississippi, Atchafalaya, and Sabine Rivers mix with the seawater from the Gulf of Mexico. The mixture of fresh and seawater provides the perfect salinity for the growth of oyster beds. Early European settlers recognized the Louisiana oyster and found it resembled its European cousin in both appearance and taste. As early as 1743, the historian Antoine Du Pratz commented in chapter eight of his work, *Historie de la Louisiana*, on “the abundance and deliciousness of the oysters in the Louisiana Bayous.”¹²¹ Furthermore he commented on their location in Louisiana waterways,

> Near the lake, when we pass by the outlets to the sea, and continue along the coasts, we meet with small oysters in great abundance, they are very well tasted. On the other hand, when we quit the lake by another lake that communicates with one of the mouths of the river, we meet with oysters four or five inches broad, and six or seven long. These large oysters eat best fried, having hardly any saltiness, but in other respects are large and delicate.¹²²

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¹²² Du Pratz, *Historie de la Louisiana*, 239.
Later in the chapter, Du Pratz continued, more specifically highlighting the oyster’s natural habit and providing a more complete picture of what is known today as oyster friendly grounds. On page 240, he stated:

Towards the mouths of the river we meet with mussels no saltier than the large oysters above mentioned; and this owing to the water being only brackish in those parts, as the river empties itself by three large mouths, and five other small ones, besides several short creeks, which all together throw at once an immense quantity of water into the sea; the whole marshy ground occupies an extent of ten or twelve leagues.123

The above observations by Du Pratz were common knowledge to early Louisiana settlers, and explain the growing number of fishermen that could be found in the low-lying parishes. As the population of New Orleans and the surrounding area increased, the oystermen of the bayous saw potential economic benefit in the commercial sale of oysters. Soon the oyster was being sold at market with other seafood creating a new chain of supply and demand with the Croatian oyster fishermen in a position to turn a profit.124

Between 1840 and 1850, many of the Yugoslavs arriving from Croatia had been fishermen, or employed by the associated industries, in their native land. Comfortable on the water, many of these men did not seek work in the bustling metropolis of New Orleans, but rather sought to make a living the only way they knew how -- fishing. A large number of these individuals went down the Mississippi River into lower Plaquemines Parish where the rich delta, feed by numerous bays, bayous, and inlets, nurtured a generous supply of seafood. Many of those who sought this lifestyle eventually settled in the Grand Bay, Bayou Cook, Grand Bayou, Bayou Chutte and Bay Adams area located a few miles southwest of Empire, Louisiana.125 Here they built camps, simple one-room buildings on four corner pilings raised about six feet off the

123 Du Pratz, Historie de la Louisiana, 240,
124 Vujnovich, Yugoslavs in Louisiana, 99-108.
125 Vujnovich, Yugoslavs in Louisiana, 100; Govorchin, Americans from Yugoslavia, 93-98.
muddy, unstable, ground, where they lived during the oyster season. As time passed, some of these early settlements became more permanent, facilitating a sense of community in the wilderness.¹²⁶

Living conditions for these early fishermen proved extremely difficult. Mosquitoes, snakes, inclement weather, and dangerous physical labor plagued the oyster fishermen. Many did not survive those first years while others suffered from exposure and improper diet. Krasna Vojkovich remembers her husband, John Vojkovich, lasted only a few weeks on the bayou. John was sixteen years old when he came to Louisiana in the early 1900s to meet his father and fish oysters in Plaquemines Parish. Conditions were harsh. According to Krasna, “He told his father he [would] work with his father for two months [but eventually] and he told his father ‘nahhh I can’t take the mosquitoes and flies and all, I’m going to the city’.”¹²⁷

Over time, conditions began to improve for those who stayed and toiled. Some made enough money to return to Dalmatia, purchase land and start businesses, while others chose to stay in Louisiana and pursue oyster fishing full time. Some returned to Croatia to marry childhood girlfriends and bring them back to Louisiana. Still others married Louisiana girls of French or Italian descent. As this process took shape in the early twentieth century, living conditions on the bayou began to improve both physically and emotionally for the fishermen. Gone were the one-room cabins inhabited by lonely, single men. The Yugoslav fisherman transformed himself through marriage, and fatherhood, into a family man. The camps began to cluster in areas creating new communities for the oystermen and their families. Children and wives could now found in almost every house, and these small groupings acquired a communal style of living. These clusters provided companionship, security and protection for both the

¹²⁶ Vujnovich, Yugoslavs in Louisiana, 100; Gorvorchin, Americans from Yugoslavia, 93-98.
¹²⁷ Krasna Vojkovich, interview by author, New Orleans, La, March 2012.
oyster beds and the families now housed there. Much like the groupings found in New Orleans, these concentrations facilitated Americanization and, ultimately assimilation, but most importantly for the oyster fisherman, these concentrations allowed for business and familial partnerships to develop that still persist.  

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the oyster grew to become one of the most sought-after seafood products in the state, thereby turning oyster cultivation and fishing into an extremely profitable enterprise. Because of this development, there arose a need to regulate and protect the beds of those individuals who cultivated and fished this highly desired shellfish. In order to avoid confusion and preserve ownership over oyster reef bottoms, each parish stepped in to regulate the burgeoning industry. A set fee per acre based on the parish in which the lease was located, determined oyster reef ownership based on the parish in which the lease was located. This process of parish-assessed fees allowed oyster lease owners to protect their oysters, for owners to determine the boundaries of their leases, and most importantly, for others to know the precise location of leased areas in relation to other leases and open water.

The following analysis is threefold. First, it is an examination of oyster leases beginning in 1902 under the newly created Louisiana Oyster Commission. Second, it looks at the Third Biannual Report issued by the Oyster Commission from March 1, 1906, through April 1, 1908 and leases held by Croatians during that period. And third, it is an examination of vessels licensed for oyster fishing and freighting to determine which vessels were Croatian owned and operated. The results reveal an increase in the number of Croatians with oyster leases, and a corresponding increase in the number of Croatians involved in the related maritime industries in Plaquemines, St. Bernard and Jefferson parishes. Furthermore, results indicate the overlapping of

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128 Vujnovich, Yugolsalvs in Louisiana, 107; Govorchin, Americans from Yugoslavia, 93-98.
129 The First Annual Report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana to His Excellency, the Governor, and the State of Louisiana. August 11, 1902- January 31, 1904. 6-8.
surnames in these three parishes with similar clusters found in the city of New Orleans. For the purpose of this study, the majority of the Croatian owned leases examined were located in the above three parishes. The evidence analyzed here further demonstrates the strong Croatian connection between the Croatian community of Plaquemines Parish and her cousin community located in the city. Likewise the evidence reaffirms the notion that through business and kinship ties the Croatian community of New Orleans expanded and thrived through the networks facilitated by the rural ethnic enclave thereby fostering a symbiotic relationship that mutually benefited both regions.

Before delving into Louisiana State oyster legislation it is useful to know the actual numbers of Yugoslavs living in Plaquemines Parish to better assess the changes in the community in the early part of the nineteenth century due to increased federal regulation of immigration. As previously stated, the 1910 census does not specifically designate the number of Yugoslavs, but instead names Austrians and Hungarians as two separate groups. The 1910 census states that there were a total 12,524 individuals residing in Plaquemines Parish. Of that number, 313 were claiming to be foreign born white Austrians, while only one individual claimed to be a foreign-born white Hungarian. The 1920 census assesses Yugoslav (recorded as Jugoslav in the census report) numbers within the state and in major cities, but does not assess Plaquemines Parish itself. According to the 1920 census, there were 312 individuals residing in the state, claiming Yugoslavia as their birth country, about point seven percent of the distribution. Of that number, 78 resided in New Orleans proper. Continuing into the 1930 census, the country of Yugoslavia was again not documented. However, from that census year

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it can be ascertained that there were 1,174 people who designated themselves as Austrians within the state. Of that number, 17 were living in Plaquemines Parish. It is not until the 1940 census that Yugoslavia is again listed as an option for the country of birth for participants. This census indicates that there were 227 seven foreign-born whites residing in Plaquemines Parish. Of that number, 112 claimed Yugoslavia as their country of birth. That means that almost one half of the foreign-born within the parish were born in Yugoslavia, not Louisiana.

Yugoslav numbers in Plaquemines Parish continued to grow as more individuals arrived, and still more married and started families. By the 1960s there were 1364 Yugoslavs residing in the state. Of that number the group was almost equally split with half residing in New Orleans and the other half in the surrounding area. As previously stated, census data is not always correct and in fact often leaves out a significant part of the population. However, it can be gathered that between 1910 and 1960, Yugoslavs were indeed immigrating to Louisiana, and concentrating in both Orleans and Plaquemines parishes. Although small in number, it is clear that a significant group began to form, and grow, in Plaquemines Parish. This concentration found work in the growing oyster industry and made their lives in rural Louisiana beyond the Orleans Parish line.

The following assessment of data from the Louisiana Oyster Commission’s data serves to highlight the Croatian oysterman’s experience in Southern Louisiana. Furthermore, it will

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demonstrate a predominance of Croatians in the oyster industry thereby providing further
evidence of this rural enclave and its urban connections.

The history of oyster legislation in the state of Louisiana began in 1870 when the State
Legislature enacted Act 18 of the Legislature of 1870. This act “fixed a close season, or
determined certain points of time between which oysters could not be fished in the waters of this
State.”\textsuperscript{135} The following year in 1871, Act 91 of the legislature “shortened the close season by
one month.”\textsuperscript{136} In 1876 the state undertook its first major attempt, in any manner, to
comprehensively regulate the oyster industry. Through the passage of Act 106 of the Legislature
that year, the state adopted the oyster law of the state of Maryland. Under this new code the state
was divided into three oyster districts, and the governor was to appoint an oyster commissioner
for each district. According to this new law “boats and vessels had to be licensed before fishing
oysters, oysters had to be culled on the natural reefs, a closed season was established, and the
police juries of the several parishes were authorized to lease bedding grounds, not to exceed
three acres, to any person, at an annual rental of 25 cents per acre.”\textsuperscript{137} This adopted Maryland
code remained on the books for 16 years.

In 1892, the legislature enacted Act 110. Under this new law

The three oyster districts were abolished, the police jury of each coast
parish was vested with exclusive jurisdiction of the waters within each
parish, each police jury appointed its own oyster inspector, and boats and
vessels desiring to fish oysters, had to get separate licenses for each
parish in which they desired to fish. The area of barren bottom which

\textsuperscript{135}The First Annual Report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana to His Excellency, the Governor, and
the State of Louisiana. August 11, 1902- January 31, 1904. 5.
\textsuperscript{136}The First Annual Report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana to His Excellency, the Governor, and
the State of Louisiana. August 11, 1902- January 31, 1904. 6.
\textsuperscript{137}The First Annual Report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana to His Excellency, the Governor, and
the State of Louisiana. August 11, 1902- January 31, 1904. 6.
could be leased by any one person, firm or corporation was increased to 10 acres, and the annual rental remained at 25 cents per acre.”

This act was amended in 1896 by Act 121 of the legislature exempting bedded oysters from taxation.\textsuperscript{139}

From 1870-1900, it became an overarching concern of the state that oyster fishermen, wholesalers, and retailers did not observe the laws in place related to oyster fishing. In fact, upon inspection it was discovered that most individuals involved in the industry overlooked, or breached compliance of said laws on a daily basis. This lack of observance was blamed on no centralized control of the burgeoning industry throughout the state. This disregard for the law demonstrated the attitude of the fisherman to state intervention, especially intervention coming from outside the parish and down from the capital in Baton Rouge. State, as well as local officials, agreed that the system in place was unsatisfactory, but without firsthand knowledge (oyster fishing and cultivation had not been studied or even considered to be a science at the time) of the industry the necessary legislation could not be amended.\textsuperscript{140}

Following the progressive thinking of the early twentieth century, policymakers decided that there must be a means to regulate, count and control the oyster industry on the whole. The Legislature of 1900 enacted Act 159 to accomplish this goal. This act concluded “that it was time that the industry should be studied, and that some intelligent information should be gathered concerning the subject, so that adequate legislation might be enacted.”\textsuperscript{141} A legislative investigative commission was formed composed of two senators and three representatives. The

\textsuperscript{138} The First Annual Report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana to His Excellency, the Governor, and the State of Louisiana. August 11, 1902- January 31, 1904. 6.

\textsuperscript{139} The First Annual Report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana to His Excellency, the Governor, and the State of Louisiana. August 11, 1902- January 31, 1904. 6.

\textsuperscript{140} The First Annual Report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana to His Excellency, the Governor, and the State of Louisiana. August 11, 1902- January 31, 1904. 6.

\textsuperscript{141} The First Annual Report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana to His Excellency, the Governor, and the State of Louisiana. August 11, 1902- January 31, 1904. 6-7.
commission was given the task of studying the industry for the next two years and was to file a full report to the General Assembly in 1902. Using this new information, Act 159 was amended in 1902 and resulted in the adoption of Act 153. This act provided “that the governor of the state was authorized to appoint five persons who should constitute the Oyster Commission of Louisiana, which body by the provisions of the act was vested with the control of the industry, and required to compile statistics and to make recommendations which would be laid before the legislative assembly of 1904.”

The charge of the 1902 Louisiana Oyster Commission was to regulate oyster beds with the understanding that the oyster-water bottoms would now be leased from the state, not the parish. However, enforcement was a daunting task. The commission’s first order of business was to instill in the minds of oyster fishermen, and the oyster industry as a whole, the necessity of compliance with the new state laws. Prior to the establishment of the Louisiana Oyster Commission, the police jury of Plaquemines Parish had issued 116 oyster leases to Croatian fishermen out of a recorded 232 total leases. After 1902, and the creation of the commission, the Third Biennial Report conducted between March 1, 1906, and April 1, 1908, indicated a significant spike in the amount of leases issued to Croatian oystermen. Analysis of the report shows that between the years of 1906 and 1908 the number of oyster leases held by Croatians more than doubled, equaling 336 leases granted to Croatians out of 918 total recorded leases granted. Of those 336 leases granted to Croatians, six leaseholders listed their residence address as New Orleans. They were S. M. Fucich, A.A. Nesanovich, B. Juricich and Co., M.J. Marovich, A. Visich, and Mrs. M. Colandich. Some of these same individuals had dual

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142 The First Annual Report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana to His Excellency, the Governor, and the State of Louisiana. August 11, 1902- January 31, 1904. 7.
143 The First Annual Report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana to His Excellency, the Governor, and the State of Louisiana. August 11, 1902- January 31, 1904. 7.
addresses, one in New Orleans and another in either Olga, Empire and Ostrica. Presumably one address was a primary residence and one was an oyster fishing camp as most families split their time between two residences depending on the oyster fishing season.\textsuperscript{144}

In conjunction with the rise in the number of leases held by Croatians, there was likewise a dramatic increase in the acreage those leases held. Prior to the 1906 – 1908, report the total amount of acreage for oyster bed leases by Croatians was 385.25 acres. After the 1906 to 1908 recorded year the total acreage of Croatian leases went up to 1,798.03 acres, the majority in Bastian Bay, Quarantine Bay and Grand Bay. It is worth noting that some of the other locations where Croatian fishermen held leases bear the names of some of the larger Croatian families. For example Croatian leases can be found in places like Vucovich Lagoon, Parlovich Lagoon, Picinich Bay, Okilijeevich Bay, and Lake Marinovich, all located in the Mississippi River Delta.\textsuperscript{145} Although some of these waterways still exist today, the precise location of others is unknown due to coastal erosion and the shrinking of the Louisiana coastline.

Right across both Orleans and Plaquemines parish lines in the adjacent parishes of St. Bernard and Jefferson, a Croatian presence was likewise apparent in oyster fishing. Analysis of the Third Biennial Report of the Louisiana Oyster Commission shows there were 75 recorded oyster leases for St. Bernard Parish from 1906 to 1908, 12 of which were issued to Croatians, including the company Nesanovich and Belin, a New Orleans based business, with oyster beds located in Nesanovich Bayou and Bay Boudreax. Likewise, in Jefferson Parish out of the 72 recorded leases there were a total of 12 leases issued to Croatian oystermen. Although the majority of the leases in Jefferson Parish were based out of Grand Isle, Louisiana, M.A. Zibilich,

\textsuperscript{144} The Third Annual Report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana to His Excellency, the Governor, and the State of Louisiana. 1906-1908. 2.
\textsuperscript{145} The Third Annual Report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana to His Excellency, the Governor, and the State of Louisiana. 1906-1908. 19-51.
M. Bilich, J. Parlokovich, and Begovich are all listed as New Orleans residents with beds in Barataria Bay, located on the West Bank of New Orleans.  

Another essential aspect of oyster cultivation and production was how to get the goods to market. Transportation of oysters from the oyster beds to the city was by far the most time consuming aspect of the oyster business and left small fishing companies with little actual fishing time at the end of the day. Prior to motorization, oystermen transported their goods with fishing skiffs and sailboats. Goods were sold directly to restaurants, oyster shops, and shucking houses straight from the docks. These establishments sent representatives to the Mississippi river where they haggled over prices and inspected quality. Some restaurants and bars preordered their supply, while others had family connections in both the fishing, transport and restaurant industries thereby ensuring their delivery. This interconnectedness in all aspects of the industry demonstrates yet again how these enclaves worked together for the betterment of the community as a whole. Similar to evidence previously produced here certain family names appear in all aspects of the industry further demonstrating the vertical integration of the Croatian immigrant in the Louisiana seafood industry on the whole.

An example of vertical integration in the oyster business can be seen in the life of Samuel Fucich, J. Joseph Jurisich, and George D. Ziblich. All three men were at one time presidents of the Slavonian Benevolent Association (discussed further in chapter five) and all exemplify the Croatian work ethic that promoted acceptance and profitability in the Louisiana seafood economy. Samuel Fucich, born on the island of Losinj in Northern Dalmatia, served as the fifth president of the Slavonian Benevolent Association from 1901-1903 and again from

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146 The Third Annual Report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana to His Excellency, the Governor, and the State of Louisiana. 1906-1908. 19-51.
147 The Third Annual Report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana to His Excellency, the Governor, and the State of Louisiana. 1906-1908. 79-114.
1909-1910. Fucich spoke nine languages and had been trained as a merchant marine. Upon arrival he first settled in Donaldsonville, Louisiana, near family, but eventually moved to New Orleans and opened an oyster shop on Calliope Street between Magnolia and Clara streets. In 1892 he moved the shop to 530-32 Dumaine Street (both Fucich and his various locations are discussed further in chapter two). Fucich did well in the French Quarter and at one point he was supplied by some 50 oyster fishermen. Moreover, Fucich is credited with the building of the Nestor Canal at Nestor, Louisiana, which allowed fishermen to bring oysters to the Mississippi River where they could be picked up by other vessels and delivered to New Orleans for sale. Along the canal Fucich then built camps where the oystermen could live. He provided the oystermen housed in his camps with food, tools and housing, while they in turn promised to sell all their oysters only to him.\textsuperscript{148} Because of this system Fucich is credited as being the first Yugoslav oyster dealer in the state of Louisiana, further exemplifying Croatian assimilation into the Louisiana seafood economy.\textsuperscript{149}

Yet another example of this integration pattern can be seen in the lives of Joseph Jurisich and George G. Ziblich. At one time both men served as president of the Slavonian Benevolent Association. Jurisich retained the presidency from 1903-1909 and 1915-1916, and Ziblich from 1916-1917, 1919-1922, and again from 1923-1924. Both men were born on the Peljesac Peninsula in Janjina and Duba, respectively. Jurisich came to New Orleans in 1873. A few years later he founded the beloved Morning Call Coffee Stand in the French Market. He descendents still operate the business, although it is no longer located in French Quarter.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{148} Information taken from the membership records of the Slavonian Benevolent Society; \textit{Yugoslavs in Louisiana}, 180-181.
\textsuperscript{149} Information taken from the membership records of the Slavonian Benevolent Society; \textit{Yugoslavs in Louisiana}, 180-181.
\textsuperscript{150} Information taken from the membership records of the Slavonian Benevolent Society; \textit{Yugoslavs in Louisiana}, 182-184.
Further indicating the entrepreneurial spirit of the Croatian immigrant, Ziblich undertook an array of jobs before settling in the theatre business, from which he retired in 1929. Upon arrival Ziblich entered into the oyster business with his brother. After selling his part of the oyster business, he opened several coffee stands in and around the French Quarter. In the 1890s he opened a grocery in the Marigny neighborhood (that also housed oyster sales), and ran the establishment until it burned. From here he tried his hand at insurance sales. This lasted until 1906 when due to ill health he was forced to close the business. In 1916 he entered into the movie theatre business. By all accounts the theatre did well, and Ziblich retired in 1929. He left the business to his two sons, Dominick and Joseph (the theatre and the Ziblich residence are discussed in chapter 2). These three examples demonstrate not only the vertical integration of Croatian immigrants into the oyster industry, but furthermore highlight the predominance of certain names in all aspects of the economy. As will be further highlighted in the assessment of the Louisiana Oyster Commission’s report, certain individuals and families played a key role in the state’s oyster cultivation, and the city’s growing oyster demands.

The following assessment is based on the analysis of vessels licensed for fishing and freighting of oysters conducted by the Louisiana Oyster Commission in 1906 through 1908. During those years a total of 1,460 vessels were licensed. Of that number 208 recorded Croatian vessels were licensed that year, and of that 208, 28 listed their address in New Orleans. Similarly seven Croatian firms were sanctioned by the 1906-1908 Louisiana Oyster Commission for the resale and shipment of oysters out of 39 recorded licensed firms. Of those seven, three have New Orleans addresses: S.M. Fucich, M. Sansovich, and Paul Zibilich and Bro. The other

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151 Information taken from the membership records of the Slavonian Benevolent Society; *Yugoslavs in Louisiana*, 182-184.
152 *The Third Annual Report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana to His Excellency, the Governor and the State of Louisiana*. 1906-1908. 117-118.
four firms were listed were listed as residing in Olga, Ostrica and Empire, Louisiana: A.A. Nesanovich and Tony Protich, both in Olga; Peter Cuselich, located in Ostrica; and John Barbier and Co, based out of Empire.\textsuperscript{153}

Another interesting facet of the Oyster Commission’s 1906-1908 report is found in the names of the vessels. This aspect of the report gives insight into the social history of the Yugoslav fisherman’s identity as both an immigrant and a Louisianan. Many of the vessel names harkened back to Dalmatia and familial ties, while still others provided further evidence of the strong ties between Plaquemines Parish and the city of New Orleans. For example, names such as \textit{Adriatic, Cortuca, Austria, Dalmatina, Dalmacia, Duba, Slovinka, Dalmacya, little Duba, Igrane,} and \textit{Danitsa} demonstrate strong ties with the coast of Croatia while names such as \textit{Three Brothers, Two Brothers and Two Cousins,} all indicate familial relationships. Still other vessel names such as \textit{Uncle Sam, America, Independence,} and \textit{Fourth of July,} all show reverence to the United States as the adoptive homeland of their owners while other names such as \textit{Louisiana, Comus,} and \textit{Proteus,} provide local flavor with a nod to the state and the city of New Orleans’ tradition of Mardi Gras.\textsuperscript{154}

The Third Biannual Report of the Louisiana Oyster Commission proves invaluable when assessing both the quantitative and qualitative nature of early regulation within the Louisiana oyster industry. Furthermore the report highlights the fact that even during this early period, the urban rural connection was alive and strong between the two parishes, allowing for the development of lasting ties that still exist today.

\textsuperscript{153}The Third Annual Report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana to His Excellency, the Governor and the State of Louisiana. 1906-1908. 79-114.

\textsuperscript{154}The Third Annual Report of the Oyster Commission of Louisiana to His Excellency, the Governor and the State of Louisiana. 1906-1908
The Louisiana Oyster Commission lasted until 1909 when a formal government body was appointed and tasked with overseeing wildlife and fisheries conservation throughout the State of Louisiana. In 1909 future governor John Parker, an avid conservationist and friend of President Theodore Roosevelt, convinced the Louisiana Legislature to create the Louisiana Board of Commissioners for the Protection of Birds, Game and Fish. One year later, in 1910, the Louisiana Oyster Commission merged with the Board of Commissioners to create the Louisiana Department of Conservation. Two years later, in 1912, Act 127 of the 1912 legislature created the Conservation Commission of Louisiana as a department of state government. The Commission provided protection for birds, fish, shellfish, wild quadrupeds, forestry and mineral resources within the state. Six years later, in 1918, Act 105 of the Legislature changed the name of the agency back to the Department of Conservation, and directed that it be controlled by an officer known as the Commissioner of Conservation, appointed by the governor, by and with the consent of the Senate, for a term of four years.¹⁵⁵

The Department of Conservation continued in the role of lead agency in charge of wildlife and fisheries conservation until the Louisiana Department of Wild Life and Fisheries was officially created on December 11, 1944, in accordance with the terms of a Constitutional Amendment approved by the people of Louisiana on November 7, 1944. This amendment to the state's constitution separated the former Department of Conservation into three independent state agencies: the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the Louisiana Forestry Commission, and a new Department of Conservation. Thus the Oyster Commission of Louisiana, and her initiatives in oyster protection, licensing and reporting, was eventually absorbed into the Department of Wild Life and Fisheries still working to protect Louisiana’s seafood industry today.¹⁵⁶

Although no longer a governing body of the Louisiana state government, the Louisiana Oyster Commission has had a lasting and profound effect on the oyster industry as a whole. Furthermore it has morphed into the existing Wildlife and Fisheries Department and still exerts force through the Oyster Task Force established by the state legislature in 1999 and still remains functional to present, 2014.\textsuperscript{157} Through the oyster commission’s tireless efforts to establish order

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{157}Louisiana State Legislature, “SUBPART D. OYSTERS AND OYSTER INDUSTRIES,” 1999, www.legis.state.la.us/lss/lss.asp?doc=105289 (accessed in April 23, 2014). Like her predecessor, the Louisiana Oyster Task Force was set up by the state legislature in 1999 to monitor the oyster industry within the state. The following footnote further explains exactly how the task force is set up, who are its members, how they are funded and what their job is within state boundaries and waterways. The information seen here is taken directly from La RS 56:421.

A. There is hereby established the Oyster Task Force to study and monitor the molluscan industry and to make recommendations for the maximization of benefit from that industry for the state of Louisiana and its citizens.

B. The task force shall be composed as follows: (1) The governor's executive assistant for coastal activities or his designee. (2) Two members appointed by the secretary of the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. (3) One member appointed by the secretary of the Department of Natural Resources. (4) One member appointed by the secretary of the Department of Health and Hospitals. (5) Four members appointed by the Louisiana Oyster Dealers and Growers Association. One member appointed under the provisions of this Paragraph shall be from Lafourche Parish and one member shall be from Jefferson Parish. (6) Two members appointed by the Plaquemines Oyster Association. (7) One member appointed by the Terrebonne Oyster Association. (8) One member appointed by the Calcasieu Lake Oyster Task Force. (9) One member appointed by the Southwest Pass Oyster Leaseholder Association. (10) Two members appointed by the United Commercial Fisherman's Association. (11) One member appointed by the Delta Commercial Fisherman's organization. (12) One member who has voting authority and is an oyster grower appointed by the president of the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation. (13) One member appointed by the executive director of the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority. (14) One member appointed by the Louisiana Oystermen Association.

C. The members appointed under the provisions of Paragraphs (B)(1) through (4) and (13) of this Section shall be nonvoting members. However, they shall be considered members of the task force for determination of the number of members necessary for a quorum and for establishing the presence of a quorum.

D. The task force shall adopt bylaws under which it shall operate, and seven members of the task force shall constitute a quorum sufficient to conduct meetings and business of the task force. The task force shall elect a chairman from its membership and may seek and receive assistance from universities within the state in the development of methods to increase production and marketability of molluscan shellfish. The members of the task force shall serve without compensation; however, the task force may receive the same reimbursement of travel expenses for attending the meetings as is allowed for other state employees' travel.

E. The task force is hereby charged with responsibility to do the following: (1) Monitor the water quality and management requirements of the state's molluscan shellfish propagating areas. (2) Coordinate efforts to increase oyster production and salability. (3) Study the decline in molluscan shellfish salability, the degradation of water quality which could adversely affect consumer health, and the reasons for such declines and degradations, and make recommendations to resolve such problems. (4) Make
out of chaos, scholars are left with documentation of the symbiotic relationship that developed between the rural and urban Croatian enclaves of Louisiana. Although differing from the hinterland-to-city enclaves that developed in other regions of the United States due to their smaller numbers in Louisiana, the symbiotic nature of the two Croatian enclaves is clear. New Orleans provided the lure for the immigrant, but Plaquemines Parish provided the means for the Croatian immigrant to become an integrated cog in the economic wheel of the state. For the Croatian immigrant that chose the fishing path, oyster fishing became a way of life. Whether through integration into an already existing familial business, or working from the ground up in the city or countryside, the oyster was a fundamental part of the Croatian immigrant experience in Louisiana. As the data indicate, the Croatian oyster fisherman was able to work his way into American economic society through oyster cultivation and fishing. If he so desired he could partner with others, obtain a lease, purchase a boat, and perhaps even run a restaurant or salon, all through the help of the rural ethnic enclave and the larger urban connection. These two enclaves worked in conjunction to foster the larger Croatian community as a whole and allow for the economic prosperity of both parishes. This is a relationship that still exists today, always in negotiation through business and family partnerships.

recommendations with respect to issues pertaining to the oyster industry and oyster production to the various state agencies charged with responsibility for differing elements of the oyster industry in this state, including the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority Board, the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, the Department of Health and Hospitals, the governor's executive assistant for coastal activities, and the legislature. (5) Employ such personnel as necessary. (6) Develop markets and marketing strategies for the development of new and expanded markets for Louisiana oysters. (7) Represent the interests of the Louisiana oyster industry before federal and state administrative and legislative bodies on issues of importance to the Louisiana oyster industry. (8) Contract for legal services to represent the interests of the Louisiana oyster industry in judicial, administrative, and legislative proceedings. (9) Administer the funds in the Oyster Development Fund. (10) Perform any acts deemed necessary and proper to carry out its duties and responsibilities.
Chapter Four: Fraternal Organizations, Mutual Aid Associations and Benefit Societies

The tendency to join fraternal organizations for the purpose of obtaining care and relief in the event of sickness and insurance for the family in case of death in well-nigh universal. To the laboring classes and those of moderate means they offer many advantages not to be had elsewhere.

- New Hampshire Bureau of Labor, *Report* (1894)

It’s prime object is to promote the brotherhood of man, teach fidelity to home and loved ones, loyalty to country and respect of law, to establish a system for the care of the widows and orphans, the aged and disabled, and enable every worthy member to protect himself from the ills of life and make substantial provision through co-operation with our members, for those who are nearest and dearest.

- L.M. Thomas\(^\text{158}\)

Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations…. Whenever at the head of some new undertaking you see the government in France, or a man or rank in England, in the United States you will be sure to find an association… In the United States associations are established to promote the public safety, commerce, industry, morality, and religion.

- Alexis de Tocqueville\(^\text{159}\)

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Upon arrival immigrants to the United States were in a constant state of negotiation with their new surroundings almost immediately upon arrival. Many of them sought out immigrants from their own countries and created neighborhoods, or enclaves, where they could interact with people like themselves who shared a common language, custom, faith, and a mutual desire for camaraderie. As these ethnic communities began to grow, immigrant networks formed that facilitated the expansion of immigrant churches, schools, newspapers, organizations and businesses that catered to their needs.\textsuperscript{160} These institutions all helped newly arriving immigrants adapt to their new surroundings, and furthered assimilation and acculturation while at the same time signaled the development of a stable ethnic community. According to historian Alvin Schmidt, members of these ethnic communities had a more favorable self-image, were less likely to feel alienated and powerless in their new surroundings, and were more frequently involved in community and ethnic politics.\textsuperscript{161} By the 1870s and 1880s, mutual aide organizations could be found across the American landscape by the hundreds. Historians Alvin Schmidt and David Beito estimate that there were eight hundred different fraternal associations in the United States in 1927, and that 30 million Americans held membership in some fraternal order.\textsuperscript{162} According to Ivan Cizmic, author of \textit{History of the Croatian Fraternal Union of America}, “with approximately eight million members organized in almost one hundred thousand lodges, and with assets of more than $1,250,000, relief organizations were an extremely influential power in American public life.”\textsuperscript{163}

\textsuperscript{163} Ivan Cizmic, \textit{History of the Croatian Fraternal Union of America} (Zagreb: Golden Marketing, 1994), 8.
Many immigrants used the model of the mutual aid or benefit society in an attempt to cope with the ever-changing face of economic conditions in growing American cities. These organizations provided social welfare before the existence of the welfare state in many countries throughout history. In the United States, the mutual aide association became a strategy used by many immigrants to incorporate themselves into American society. Generally speaking they were set up in order to mitigate the effects of illness, death, or disability, and allowed the individual, as well as his family, some relief in a case of crisis. These organizations integrated millions of newly arriving immigrants into American society through their networks of reciprocation, respect and education. Newcomers learned the power of free speech, voting and the democratic process, all without fear of reprisal. The mutual aid society ultimately can be credited with allowing incoming immigrants a chance to participate in the American democratic system thereby giving them a voice in their future. The fraternal, mutual and benefit societies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century both empowered and gave collective power to incoming immigrants thereby allowing them to contribute to the developing fabric of American urban society.

This chapter will explore the mutual aid and benefit society phenomenon that swept America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It will discuss the relationship New Orleans has maintained with benefit and social aid and pleasure clubs, and why the mutual aid organization played a key role in the welfare of many New Orleanians and their offspring. And finally, it will take a closer look the Croatian Fraternal Union of America established in 1894 as an example of a national ethnic organization, with the purpose of demonstrating the importance of the fraternal organization to both the ethnic community and to the urban community at large.

By definition, a mutual aid or benefit society, also known as a fraternal society or fraternal order in some literature, is an organization, or voluntary association formed to provide mutual aid, benefit, insurance, or relief for difficulties. These organizations were sometimes organized with charters or established customs, or sometimes rose ad hoc to meet the needs of a particular time and place.¹⁶⁵ The mutual aid or benefit society could be organized around ethnicity, religion, occupation, or native country; however these were not mandatory requirements. Benevolent societies were set up with the intention of doing good work for its members, or for the community at large. Based on a system of dues, mutual aid societies provided relief financially by tapping into the money collected weekly, monthly or yearly, held by the organization’s treasurer. Mostly these groups worked like insurance companies before the rise of the insurance conglomerate known today. Generally benefits involved money, or some sort of physical assistance in the case of education, illness, disability, dismemberment, retirement, unemployment, or death. According to David Beito, author of *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State*, “the defining characteristics of these organizations usually included the following: an autonomous system of lodges, a democratic form of internal government, a ritual, and the provision of mutual aid for members and their families.”¹⁶⁶ Such organizations were usually male dominated; however it should be noted that where female organizations did exist they too took on the title of fraternal, not sororal.¹⁶⁷

Historians David Beito and Alvin Schmidt break down fraternal organizations into three basic types: secret societies, sick and funeral benefit societies, and life insurance societies. This

¹⁶⁷ Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State; Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967*, 1; *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Institutions; Fraternal Organizations*, 3.
work will use these classifications. The first group, secret societies, emphasized ritual while the second and third groups, sick and funeral benefit societies and life insurance societies, paid less attention to ritual and solicited possible members with the lure of health and insurance protection.\(^{168}\) Although these groups differed in their approach, they shared a common emphasis of respect, reciprocity and mutual aid.

During the period of “new immigration,” American cities experienced a period of unprecedented growth marked by an explosive infusion of ethnic diversity. This growth happened in an extraordinarily short period of time and produced hostility, racism and superstition in the minds of immigrant predecessors. By 1900, four in ten people in America’s largest cities were foreign born, while an additional two in ten were children of immigrants.\(^{169}\) These staggering figures demonstrate why, no matter the country of origin, members of ethnic and national groups sought out each other in order to form both individual and cooperative self-help networks thereby establishing themselves as and collective power and multiplying their chances of survival.

The underlying concept of all mutual aid organizations was simple. The idea was to take care of yourself and your family through a network of reciprocal aid thereby avoiding the federal and state governments, which were not yet equipped to provide the necessary help to such a large mass of incoming immigrants. Reciprocal relief was the most common expression of basic aid used throughout the period. According to historian David Beito, relief was often expressed through “informal giving, the countless and unrecorded acts of kindness from neighbors, fellow

\(^{168}\) Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State; Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967*, 1-2; *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Institutions; Fraternal Organizations*, 3-4.

\(^{169}\) Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State; Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967*, 17.
employees, relatives, and friends. The precise magnitude of informal giving can never be
known, but it was undeniably vast."  

Historians David Beito and Alan Schmidt both agree that individual and collective self-
help networks generally fall into two broad categories within the welfare system: hierarchical
relief and reciprocal relief. Hierarchical relief is usually found in the form of an organized,
formal institution or bureaucracy. The employees and donors come from various backgrounds
and classes; they differ significantly from the recipients of their relief. Charity societies and
settlement houses are the best examples of hierarchical relief found in the historical record. On
the other hand, reciprocal relief is more informal and unprompted. The givers and receivers of
reciprocal relief are usually, but not always, people from the same background and economic
class. The idea here is that benefactors and beneficiaries take care of one another, thereby
eliminating the negative stigma attached to accepting help from outside sources.  

Reciprocal relief was the type of aide most commonly used by newly established ethnic
communities in America. Many felt an aversion to receiving aid from individuals outside the
community, or being judged by individuals of the higher classes. Generally speaking, in ethnic
communities there was a stigma attached to depending on outsider for help. This aversion was
most intense against methods of indoor relief, specifically the almshouse. According to
historian Carolyn Weaver, “When individuals resorted to hierarchical relief, it was generally
with considerable reluctance.”  

Due to many immigrant’s disinclination in seeking indoor relief (governement sponsored
almshouses or charity), it is no surprise that informal arrangements and self-help networks

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170 Beito, From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State; Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967, 19.
171 Beito, From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State; Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967, 18-
19.
172 Carolyn L. Weaver, The Crisis in Social Security: Economic and Political Origins (Durham: Duke
(reciprocal relief) became the choice of relief for newly established immigrant groups during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition to providing economic assistance, they likewise facilitated the immersion of the immigrant in American society, and allowed him or her to use his or her basic skills in securing employment, housing and food. The networks established through reciprocal relief provided a much-needed failsafe in the immigrant community allowing for ethnic groups to thrive regardless of hardship due to sickness, unemployment, dismemberment, or death. Ultimately, mutual aid became the foundation on which some newly arriving immigrants could rely and the institution through which they could further their American dreams.

According to historians David Bieto, Peter Roberts and Alan Schmidt, the most common ethnic reciprocal aid organization was the fraternal society. Although it possessed some of the formal workings of a hierarchical aid organization, it was primarily an institution of reciprocal relief. Settlement house workers such as Jane Adams and Ellen Gates Starr founders of Hull House in Chicago, marveled at the fraternal society and how it seemed to spring from almost every the ethnic enclave. Jane Adams described such organizations as “honeycombing” from the slums of Chicago.\footnote{Christopher Lasch, \textit{The Social Thoughts of Jane Addams} (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1965), 91.} Likewise, in his\footnote{Peter Roberts, \textit{The New Immigration: A Study of the Industrial and Social Life of Southeastern Europeans in America} (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 188, 190.} 1912 work The New Immigration: A Study of the Industrial and Social Life of Southeastern Europeans in America, Peter Roberts described the tendency among Italians to form aid societies. He observed the “number of (Italian) societies as passing computation.”\footnote{Peter Roberts, \textit{The New Immigration: A Study of the Industrial and Social Life of Southeastern Europeans in America} (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 188, 190.} Furthermore he was taken aback at how quickly Eastern Europeans formed lodges and collective groups. He attributed this propensity to the “communal tendency in the
blood of the Slav, finding its expression in organizations in America.”  

Ivan Cizmic likewise commented on the fact that

The newcomers from Eastern European countries more easily accepted the program of American fraternalism. They had brought with them the experience and tradition of gathering in different charitable societies and church communities, a tradition known to them since the Middle Ages. Life in communities was an imitation of a way of life in many of the agricultural parts of Austria-Hungary until the end of the last century.  

Thus, fraternal societies were the backbone of many ethnic immigrant communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As seen from their prevalence in most major American cities, fraternal societies provided basic services not yet allotted through the federal government or the state.

According to historian Alan Schmidt, most fraternal organizations conducted their business and social activities on three basic levels of organizational structure. If the organization did not follow this model precisely, it usually followed an adapted version of this well-known strategy. The first unit of the fraternal organization was known as the lodge. It existed on the local level. Here members were initiated and instructed on how the purpose of the organization and how it conducted its affairs and business. The second level of organizational structure was usually referred to as the grand lodge. The grand lodge was generally a regional unit that follows state lines. The last unit of organizational structure was commonly called the supreme lodge. Both the local and regional lodges are subordinate to the supreme lodge, or national organization. The supreme lodge generally meets at a national convention. Here it establishes policy that is then adopted through vote and passed down through the hierarchy all the way to the basic lodge unit. The Supreme lodge usually maintains a national headquarter building that houses a

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176 Cizmic, History of the Croatian Fraternal Union of America, 7.
permanent staff, and an elected board of directors to make decisions regarding the day to day affairs of the lodge system. An example of the lodge system in America can be seen in the National Croatian Fraternal Union of America, *Hrvatska bratska zajednica*, located in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania., was founded in 1894. In that year, Zdravko V. Muzina, a young newspaperman, enticed some three hundred people to attend a meeting with the sole purpose of establishing a mutual aid society to aid the Croatians of Pennsylvania. The idea was to provide insurance protection for Croatian American workers and their families. Although very few attendees signed up for the organization, the meeting allowed Muzina to make contact with others like himself who were in need of relief. After the meeting, Muzina joined with Franjo Sepic and Petar Pavlinac and called a meeting of six independent societies on September 2, 1894, with the intention of forming the “Croatian Association.” The organization would operate under this name until 1897 when a new charter was issued to the National Croatian Society, or NCS. The organization would retain this name until 1926 when four societies merged- the National Croatian Society; the Croatian League of Illinois of Chicago, Illinois; the St. Joseph Society of Kansas City, Kansas; and the New Croatian Society of Whiting, Indiana—forming the Croatian Fraternal Union. By 1912, the organization had approximately 30,000 members nationwide.\(^3\)

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The first home office of the CFU was located on East Ohio Street in Pittsburgh’s North Side neighborhood. At the 1909 convention, the organization authorized the purchase of 1012 Perry Street in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, for the new headquarters and printing house. The total cost of the building was $17,000 and on May 1, 1910, the union began occupying its new offices. This location was utilized until 1928 when the organization moved to 3441 Forbes Street in Pittsburgh’s Oakland district. The CFU remained at this location until 1961, when the present home office at 100 Delaney Drive was constructed for a little over $1 million. In 2014 the home office houses the CFU organization, the executive board, employees, editorial department, recording studio, libraries and an extensive museum.\textsuperscript{178}

As of 2014 the organization has some 60,000 members worldwide with assets approaching the $4 million mark. The Croatian Fraternal Union offers members affordable programs that meet each member’s financial needs. Furthermore they provide scholarships, sports programs, cultural activities, educational centers, radio programs and a variety of activities.

for young people, all in the furtherance of the Croatian culture in America. Because of this fact, the CFU has absorbed various Croatian, and other ethnic-based organizations, into their ranks as a means by which to carry on their cultural heritage and help promote each organization’s past and present. Much like the lodge system of the past, these mergers have allowed otherwise bankrupt ethnic organizations a chance to thrive under the umbrella of the CFU.

The example of the CFU highlights the positive impact of the lodge system on the Croatian immigrant’s early American experience. The lodge system allowed incoming immigrants a means through which to experience the process of camaraderie and gain a sense of belonging, while at the same time providing them with insurance and aid. Moreover, the early lodge system in America allowed for its members to participate in the democratic process and learn firsthand exactly what a representative form of government looked and behaved like. These organizations encouraged free thought and democracy, and allowed members a chance a collective empowerment. Furthermore, the fraternal organization often allowed for the protection of its members through life and unemployment insurance, while providing a safe place for incoming immigrants to voice their opinions and share in camaraderie with others like themselves. The fraternal, benevolent, or mutual aid society, whether a part of the larger lodge system or not, played a fundamental role in the integration of newly arriving immigrants with their surroundings, and its role is often underappreciated in American history. These societies provided not only monetary and emotional support, but in some cases facilitated networks for housing, employment and marriage. Likewise, they provided the necessary basic education of the American democratic process for newly arriving immigrants to better understand the essentials of the American economy, and the political environment in play. At the same time,

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these organizations allowed the immigrant a more comfortable means through which to become acclimated with his or her new life and, in turn, more acclimated with American society and institutions.

When breaking down the workings of the lodge structure, and the mutual aid society in general, the makeup of its membership can be revealing. Who were the members? What type of person joined such a group? What was the purpose, or goal one intended to attain through membership? Mutual aid societies attracted a variety of individuals, and their popularity among ethnic minorities was beyond compare in the New World. Ethnic immigrants sought out the mutual aid society as a way to avoid public relief from bureaucratic institutions, thereby limiting their humiliation to indoor relief. In his work *The Standard of living among Workingmen’s Families in New York City*, author Robert Chapin examined the budgets of 318 workingmen’s families that collectively earned less than $1000 a year.\(^\text{180}\) He found that forty percent of the families in the sample had at least one family member in a lodge and that lodge membership extended even into the poorest families. Likewise he concluded that ethnicity was far more important than income in determining whether or not to join a fraternal organization and that certain nationalities were more susceptible to the lure of the lodge, regardless of their family income.\(^\text{181}\) The fraternal aid society provided its members with a sense of independence and self-reliance. For those from countries in Eastern and Southern Europe where communal living and shared responsibility were the norm, the mutual aid society was the manifestation of old world cooperation and neighborly assistance. Much like the transplanted ethnic neighborhoods that sprang up in every American city, the mutual aid society was yet another way through which

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newly arriving immigrants coped with their new surroundings and established themselves as Americans.

Benefit organizations not only attracted individuals with similar backgrounds, but likewise offered those with shared values an arena in which to explore their new surroundings and still maintain their old customs and conventions. According to Beito, “By joining a lodge, an initiate adopted, at least implicitly, a set of values. Societies dedicated themselves to the advancement of mutualism, self-reliance, business training, thrift, leadership skills, self-government, self-control, and good moral character.” This system of values was a universal key component in all mutual aid societies and reflected a general consensus regardless of the race, gender, or income of the society’s membership.

One’s tie to a fraternal aid society offered protection from the cruel outside world, while at the same time promoted collective and individual advancement through fraternity and mutualism. Self-reliance and thrift were hallmarks of fraternalism, and were generally the two main objectives promoted by most fraternal aid societies. The immigrant newcomer was not only to become economically self-reliant, but furthermore was pushed to work well with others and exemplify leadership skills. In his work historian David Bieto studied five societies all pursuing these same qualities. They are listed as follows: the Independent order of Saint Luke and the United Order of True Reformers (both of which were all Black), the Loyal Order of the Moose, The Security Benefit Association, and the Ladies of Maccabees. All had very different memberships, but shared a value system common amongst fraternals of the time.

The concept behind the mutual aid value system was simple. A newly arriving immigrant would grow as an individual through cooperation and camaraderie with like-minded members thereby

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182 Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967*, 27
183 Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967*, 29-30
advancing the group as a whole through that individual’s growth and the determination of its members. The following statement written by a member of the Security Benefit Association in 1915 effectively summarizes the defining intentions promoted by this majority of mutual aid organization,

> Its prime object is to promote the brotherhood of man, teach fidelity to home and loved ones, loyalty to country and respect of law, to establish a system for the care of the widows and orphans, the aged and disabled, and enable every worthy member to protect himself from the ills of life and make substantial provision through co-operation with our members, for those who are nearest and dearest.  

Although mutual aid societies could be found in every major American city within the period of modern urban development, one city, the city of New Orleans, upheld the tradition of reciprocal relief out of necessity first and for pleasure second. New Orleans, formerly both a Spanish and French colonial port city prior to the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, maintained various Catholic traits and customs not prevalent in other Southern cities. As a former Spanish and French colony, Louisiana, did not inherit the English poor law that other colonial American cities did. English poor law dealt with the poor through legislation thereby assuming responsibility for those who were indigent. By definition English poor law was a body of laws that provided relief to the poor. Developed in 16th-century England, the laws were maintained until after World War II. The poor laws were administered through parish overseers, who provided relief for the aged, sick, and infant poor, as well as work for the able-bodied in workhouses. Late in the 18th century, the laws were supplemented with new legislation that provided allowances to workers who received wages below what was considered a subsistence level. English colonists carried these laws to the New World where they were applied in the colonies and became colonial law.

The government created English Poor Law as a safety net for the poor, thereby assuming

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responsibility for their well-being and limiting the responsibility of citizens. There were periodic efforts across Louisiana to pass such measures; however, overall they generally failed. It was not until 1880 that the state government passed laws compelling the parishes to support their poor and infirm. Prior to this passage, charity and economic relief generally fell on mutual aid, benevolent, female aid societies through private philanthropy, and most importantly the Catholic Church.

According to Elizabeth Wisner, author of Social Welfare in the South, “New Orleans, perhaps more than other metropolitan areas, has been reluctant to accept public responsibility for the support of local welfare services, and this point of view has continued up to the present.” She likewise contended that Louisiana, in contrast to nearby southern states, had no compulsory legislation for the care of the destitute until relatively late. Furthermore this shared attitude of lack of public responsibility to the poor may have originated in their French and Spanish background. Being that the majority of Southern Louisiana, and in particular the Southwestern parishes, were predominantly Catholic, there was a dependence on private charity clerical orders that was far greater than in Protestant areas.

Throughout the nineteenth century Louisiana, and more specifically the city of New Orleans, experienced epidemics of yellow fever, which greatly reduced the population. In 1853, 7,849 individuals died from a yellow fever outbreak, an estimated ten percent of the population. According to historian Henry McKiven, “between 1817 and 1905 the records indicate that the

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186 Elizabeth Wisner, Social Welfare in the South; From Colonial Times to World War I (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 87
187 Elizabeth Wisner, Social Welfare in the South; From Colonial Times to World War I, 87-88.
188 Wisner, Social Welfare in the South; From Colonial Times to World War I, 86-87.
number of those that died from the yellow fever epidemic had exceeded 41,000.”

During outbreak periods, the relief of the sick and destitute reached almost unbearable proportions. A series of legislation was passed in order to deal with the city’s high demand for help in order to deal with the sick or dying. In 1822 the “Board of Benevolence” was created. The group was made up of private citizens appointed by the mayor, and was directed to open a public subscription to aid the sick. This group found that, “the number of poor persons who yet remain a prey to contagion, renders entirely unequal to resources placed at the disposition of the municipal authorities... but in circumstances so grave and injurious, public benevolence is much less effective and less powerful than private charity, which the sentiment that forms its source is an inexhaustible fund.”

This attitude fostered by government, preached by clergy and accepted by citizens, extolled the virtues of private charity while placing none of the responsibility on local government. It is no wonder the mutual aid society was such an integral part of New Orleans history. If the government could or would not provide aid for her citizens it was up to each individual and each group to take care of their own and provide assistance when needed.

In New Orleans, fraternal lodge practice and reciprocal aid societies initially formed out of necessity to moderate the daily hardships one encountered not yet covered through state or local social welfare laws. Such associations had their greatest impact on immigrant and ethnic minorities prior to the end of the nineteenth century. Most ethnic and national groups in New Orleans formed and organized cultural or benevolent societies, prior to the year 1870. Some groups even formed more than one organization, one to handle the business aspect and one to...

190 Wisner, Social Welfare in the South; From Colonial Times to World War I, 87.
perform the necessary cultural heritage transfer to incoming immigrants and the younger
generations. According to Elna C. Green, author of *Before the New Deal; Social Welfare in the
South 1830-1930*, “by the end of the nineteenth century, New Orleans hosted a bewildering array
of charitable organizations. Dozens of different orphanages, aid societies, and benevolent
organizations dotted the cityscape, each serving the needs of one particular group of the urban poor.”

In New Orleans, the French early on had established the *Societe Francaise de
bienfaisance et d’assttance mutuelle*, and the Spanish founded the Spanish Benevolent Union
Society. The Germans followed suit and founded both the German Emigrant Aid Society and the
German Workingmen’s Association. By 1897, the German community alone had more than
twenty-five different benevolent associations. Likewise the Italians and Portuguese set up
organizations entitled the Italian Society and the *Societa Italiana di mutual beneficenza in Nuova
Orleans*, and the *Lusitanian Portuguese Association*, respectively. These groups provided
newly arriving immigrants with the necessary information regarding employment and lodging, as
well as filling the gap in government assistance in times of financial hardship. The mutual aid
society was a reciprocal lifeline that facilitated assistance as well as assimilation and
acculturation.

Her long history with the mutual aid society aside, New Orleans, like other Southern
cities, did not possess the network of settlement houses or hierarchal relief that her Northern
counterparts thrived upon. Settlement houses of the early twentieth century by definition were
not religiously affiliated institutions. Therefore, they differed from the missions and modified

192 Elna C. Green, *Before the New Deal; Social Welfare in the South 1830-1930* (Athens and London: The
University of Georgia Press, 1999), 81.
194 Vujnovich, *Yugoslavs in Louisiana*, 145.
missions that popped up across the South that were religious in nature.\textsuperscript{195} The Catholic Church, a founding member of the city of New Orleans, was one of the greatest providers of charity and outreach, a practice that carried on well into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As with other Southern cities, New Orleans was segregated, making the establishment of settlement houses an even more complicated issue. The main reason the settlement house movement did not take root and thrive in Southern port cities like New Orleans during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century immigration period is part of larger two-fold dialogue. First, churches and religious organizations filled the gap. Second, the biracial society posed a dilemma for those wanting to start a settlement house. Integrated institutions would not be tolerated in the South. Northern cities did not possess the large African American populations that inhabited Southern cities until after the Second Great Migration, at which point many settlement houses simply closed their doors or refused service to Blacks.\textsuperscript{196} New Orleans, with her long history of mutual aid and social pleasure clubs, was much more adept at the reciprocal relief approach. Although the Catholic Church and various other religious institutions played a role for both blacks and immigrants, most New Orleanian immigrants chose to join groups with ethnic ties thereby avoiding the stigma attached to receiving aid from hierarchal institutions while at the same time maintaining national ties.

The fraternal aid society is an underappreciated immigrant institution and is often overlooked in its achievements. It is clear however, that these associations set up by incoming immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries played a key role in the assimilation and Americanization of newly arriving immigrants into the fabric of American society. Furthermore these groups allowed immigrants a chance to be with others like

\textsuperscript{196}\textit{Black Neighbors}, 48.
themselves, reminisce about home, congregate for games and leisure, and at the same time provided the necessary connections for employment and housing. The fraternal society provided the newly arriving immigrant with a safety not yet offered through the government, and gave many members and their families the only insurance against unemployment, dismemberment and death available at the time. Although a powerful force in American history the fraternal aid society has generally fallen to the wayside. With the development of large scale insurance companies and tighter regulation on business, the future of the fraternal aid society is uncertain. However, as will be seen in the next chapter, the reciprocal/social pleasure society seems to have taken its place. Today many organizations are emphasizing, yet again, ethnic ties to promote membership in more ethno-focused associations. The fate of the fraternal aid society now rests with the next generation and its membership will depend upon how much interest those born in America show in the furtherance of each organization’s purpose and goals while adapting to a new era.
Chapter Five: The Yugoslav Benevolent Societies of New Orleans

The tendency of the European to form and join their ethnic organizations has been criticized as the means of perpetuating the old country habits; of preventing the immigrants from adopting the American way of life; of keeping them from learning the English language and permitting them to retreat to islands of isolation thereby creating a deterrent in the melting-pot process. I wholeheartedly disagree with these charges. I am thoroughly convinced that these social and benevolent organizations help the immigrants become better citizens and speed up the process of Americanization.

-Milos Vujnovich, immigrated from Sucuraj at the age of 14 and was the President, Vice President and Recording Secretary of The United Slavonian Benevolent Associations at various points during his membership.

The mutual aid society became a means through which a newly arriving immigrant could negotiate his or her new surroundings and contribute to the stability of its community. These organizations originally developed to provide compensation for workers. Such groups might also cover widow and orphan benefits, funeral costs, hospitalization and medical needs. Some groups were often part of a larger, national lodge system of fraternals. Others groups maintained independence from a national system and serviced only local members. Early mutual aid organizations serving immigrants in America were usually male dominated, reflecting gendered attitudes of the nineteenth century, as well as the greater numbers of male immigrants during the period. As the nineteenth century came to a close, immigration patterns began to change and female immigration to the United States increased. During the early twentieth century some organizations began to include women and to provide social functions as well.

This chapter will examine two such organizations: 1) the Slavonian Benevolent Association (SBA) and 2) the Yugoslav Club. An all male ethnic group, members founded the SBA in New Orleans in 1874. The organization continues to the present (2014) as the Croatian Benevolent Association (the name was changed in 1995). The organization was founded as a
communal organization, not a social organization, with strictly male membership. The
association today remains a male only organization for those of Croatian descent. The focus of
this chapter will then turn to the second organization, the Yugoslav Club, a group with a social
function that developed out of the perceived need for the gathering together of both the male and
female Yugoslav immigrants in New Orleans. The SBA and the Yugoslav Club occasionally
overlapped throughout time, but both provided distinct community functions. The Yugoslav
Club organized dances, suppers, bake sales and keno games, and even managed to purchase a
clubhouse at 900 Frenchmen Street. The Yugoslav Club eventually became known as the
Croatian American Society (CAS), which still functions in 2014.\footnote{There is very little
documented information on both the Yugoslav Club and the Croatian American
Society. Stan Cvitanovic provided me with two notebooks for the Yugoslav Club and a few pamphlets
for the Croatian American Society. The notebooks for the Yugoslav club hold the minutes for various
meetings from the group’s inception in the 1930s until the sale of their clubhouse in the 1950s. The
group was short-lived due to the lack of involvement on the part of members. The Croatian American
Society has had better success. The group functions out of Plaquemines parish where it holds events at
their clubhouse. Unfortunately there is little recorded with regards to meeting minutes as meetings have
fallen to the wayside in favor of recreational events. As of 2014, the group’s sole purpose is the
continuation of Croatian culture in the community.}

Following in the footsteps of their forbears, members of the Croatian American Society
(CAS) organize picnics, crawfish boils, barbeques, and dances. Furthermore the CAS hosts
oyster booths at numerous local festivals with raw and chargrilled oysters for sale, highlighting
the Croatian influence in the oyster industry. As of 2014, the Croatian American Society owned
a clubhouse in Plaquemines Parish that was still under repair from Hurricane Katrina.

This chapter will demonstrate how these two organizations, the SBA and the Yugoslav
Club, facilitated ethnic solidarity among members while at the same time fostered a means of
assimilation into American society as a whole. The chapter will trace these two the Yugoslav
benevolent and mutual aide societies in New Orleans, the impact they have had on incoming
Croatians to the area, and the role they have played in preserving the cultural heritage of the
Croatian community.

In the case of the Croatian community of New Orleans, the mutual aid society evolved
from the informal social networks already present within the community. In the late nineteenth
century Croatians had been meeting informally in the various restaurants, coffee houses and
saloons around the French Quarter for many years. These neighborhood institutions were natural
meeting places, and facilitated both camaraderie and assimilation in their patrons. Many
Yugoslavs owned and operated many of these establishments. Most of these businesses could be
found along Decatur, Chartres and various other French Quarter streets. According to Milos
Vujnovich, the most popular of these meeting places was a saloon and café located at 233 Old
Levee Street, now Decatur street, known as the New Bazaar Café. In 1874, this establishment
was owned by Luke Jovanovich and became the headquarters for New Orleanian Yugoslavs.

Urban institutions, like salons and cafés, often laid the necessary framework for more
formal organization of immigrant networks and familial ties. In her work *Faces Along the Bar; Lore and Order in the Workingman’s Saloon, 1870-1920*, historian Madelon Powers examines
how the average saloon patron fit into the overall picture of urban American community building
from 1870 to 1920. Powers contends that newly arriving immigrants relied on their recently
immigrated relatives and friends, and ultimately the neighborhood saloon, to translate their new
surroundings and to help them navigate their way in the rapidly growing industrial centers. The
tavern became not only a place of socialization, but also a melting pot of cultures rooting new
immigrants in a new way of life, and a hope for a better future. As these informal ethnic
meeting places multiplied some ethnic groups desire a more formal organization based on

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198 Vujnovich, *Yugoslavs in Louisiana*, 145
199 Madelon Powers, *Faces Along the Bar; Lore and Order in the Workingman’s Saloon, 1870-1920*
nationality or heritage. Such desires culminated in the founding of ethnic-based mutual aid societies in many major developing urban American centers.

In April of 1872, the Croatians, the dominant ethnicity of the Yugoslav community in Louisiana, formed the Slavonian Benevolent Association in New Orleans. On May 1, 1874, the fledgling organization called its first meeting, becoming the second oldest Yugoslav organization in the United States, second only to the Slavonic Illyric Mutual Benevolent Association founded in San Francisco in 1857. It is surprising that this particular group, although small in numbers, chose to organize so early upon settling.\(^{200}\) According to Milos Vujnovich, “the coastal areas of Southern Dalmatia, primarily Dubrovnik and vicinity, where most Louisiana Yugoslavs were born and raised, were rich in the tradition of fraternal brotherhoods, \textit{Bratovstine}.”\(^{201}\) These Croatian-born organizations were similar to their Louisiana counterpart in that they were mainly fraternal and occupational in nature. Their purpose was to provide assistance to widows and orphans of deceased members, to help members who were sick or out of work, and to provide proper burials for the deceased. In addition to these tasks, some groups looked after the moral and religious behavior of their members.\(^{202}\) A long history of old world brotherhood combined with a tradition of aid and pleasure clubs in New Orleans culminated in the creation of this small but ambitious group upon their arrival. Written in the Croatian language and translated here, members expressed the organization’s mission.

On May 1, 1874, the future members of the SBA held their first official meeting. The express purpose described in the minutes reads as follow:

\begin{quote}
The purpose of this meeting is to form a United Slavonian Benevolent Association which will provide assistance for our people, that is for the
\end{quote}

\(^{200}\)Vujnovich, \textit{Yugoslavs in Louisiana}, 144-145.
\(^{201}\)Vujnovich, \textit{Yugoslavs in Louisiana}, 145.
members of the association, in case of sickness and will look after the
orphans and widows of those members who will die and will furnish a
proper and decent place for burial for those members who, by the will of
the Holy Providence, will forever be separated from us. The idea
proposed by the above persons is that this Association should be formed
of Slavonians only. With this suggestion we shall agree and we will
have unity and love which must always be present among countrymen of
one fatherland in a foreign country.203

Following the nominating and electing of a president and various officers, the meeting closed at
7:30 p.m. with the following statement:

This association must be forever called the UNITED SLAVONIAN
BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION of the city of New Orleans, State of
Louisiana; that this association shall not have nor carry any other flag but
only that of the United States of America; that it will not accept into its
membership any foreign persons; that at the meetings of this association
the business shall not be conducted nor the books kept in any other
language except Slavonian; that the officers of this association shall meet
twice weekly to compose the By-laws, Constitution, and the Act of
Incorporation; and that the said documents shall be ready by the first
special general meeting which will be held at the Italian Hall at 4:00
p.m.204

On May 12, 1874, twelve days later, the organization was incorporated according to the laws of
the State of Louisiana with 54 charter members. Most were independent businessmen suited to
the necessary leadership roles required of the new organization.205

In the 1979 minutes, members answered a query with regards to the name of the
organization. Many people, including various members of the organization, asked why the
society chose the name “Slavonian.” The origins of this seemingly fabricated word are found in
Dalmatian history. The word slovinci was a popular name that Dalmatian Croats used for

203 Translated by Milos Vujnovich. Information taken from the original minutes of the first meeting of the
Slavonian Benevolent Association held on May 1, 1874.
204 Translated by Milos Vujnovich. Information taken from the original minutes of the first meeting of the
Slavonian Benevolent Association held on May 1, 1874.
205 Translated by Milos Vujnovich. Information taken from the original minutes of the first meeting of the
Slavonian Benevolent Association held on May 1, 1874, and from the organization’s membership
records.
themselves while in foreign ports. Immigrants to America brought this word, or title, with them to New Orleans and San Francisco where they formed organizations and societies bearing the name Sloveinsko, meaning Hrvasko, or Croatian, for no other nationality of Yugoslavia used slovinci except the Dalmatian Croats. This distinction was important to the original members of the Slavonian Benevolent Association as they saw themselves first as Dalmatians, and second as Croatians.206

Once the group decided on the name and purpose of the organization, the first order of business was to design and draw up a charter that would give the group structure and regulations. The document laid out the organization’s framework and petitioned the state to recognize the association’s corporate status. According to Article One of the charter, the association’s purpose was “the moral and material improvement of its members, to aid them in sickness and need, to contribute to the support of widows and orphans, and to bury the dead.”207 This expanded the first mission statement to include member improvement. Article Two created the Board of Directors, while Article Three held that the organization’s domicile was to be New Orleans. Article Four specified the number of officers, the duties of the board of directors, and the number of meetings and the means by which to call them. Article Five described in detail a method by which the organization was to be dissolved if there ever became a need or necessity.208 The life of the charter was for ninety years. In 1963, before its expiration, members amended the charter, thereby reincorporating the association.209 In 1884, 1910, and 1963, the association amended the constitution and bylaws. In 1963 the bylaws and the constitution were combined

206 The Slavonian Benevolent Association meeting minutes November 25, 1979.
207 Article One of the Slavonian Benevolent Association Charter 1874, 1963.
209 Vujnovich, Yugoslavs in Louisiana, 156.
into a single document now simply called the bylaws. Thus through looking at the changing response of the organization to various shifts in the economy and the need of its members, the organization’s desire to stay relevant is apparent in spite of the growing nature of private insurance and government programs. For example, there were changes adopted in the 1970s and 1980s with regards to medical coverage, assistance to widows, membership status, and even the name of the organization, thereby proving their willingness to adapt to circumstances while still providing some relief to members and their families. As of 2014 the group is working to amend and bring up to date the existing laws, as well as their overall purpose and goals.

One aspect of the early organization that has not changed over time is the gendered nature of its membership. An exclusively male organization, membership in the Slavonian Benevolent Society was limited to male Yugoslavs and their male children. As of 2014, membership is still gender based. According to the bylaws “possible members were to be recommended by two members in good standing, must be of good character, good health, and that each application, where personal statistics were enumerated, must be accompanied by a physician’s certificate.” Originally dues were payable monthly. As of 2014, dues were handled annually. In the 1874 bylaws members might fall into four categories. The first, active members, paid their dues in full. The second, minor member, paid one half the regular dues while the third and fourth groups, honorary and exempt respectively, were exempt from dues altogether. Due to financial struggles in the early twentieth century, and the growing number of

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210 Slavonian Benevolent Association Bylaws 1874.
211 Slavonian Benevolent Association Bylaws 1874.
“exempt members,” this category was eliminated when the charter and bylaws were combined in 1963.\textsuperscript{212}

Membership in the Slavonian Benevolent Association has always consisted of members from various groups from Yugoslavia, not just Croats, and their progeny in Louisiana. It should be noted, however, that not all immigrants joined. In fact, based on the personal census taken by Milos Vujnovich, former president and secretary of the society, it appears that only about forty to fifty percent of New Orleans area Yugoslavs became members. Membership dwindled in the second generation and became almost nonexistent in the third.\textsuperscript{213} Membership among the younger generations has been a consistent problem for many ethnic based organizations across America.

In the case of the SBA and the Croatian community of New Orleans, there appears to be a slight rise in interest among males in the their 30s and 40s with regards to the organization. This can be attributed to two factors. First, in New Orleans membership in social aid and pleasure clubs has increased since the 1960s with the growth of interest in diversity, difference, self-awareness, and ethnic pride. A renewed interest in the tourist and festival market during the same period sparked a rise in local ethnic organizations and contributed to the desire to project a diverse and unique persona. Second, Croatian identity was reinforced by a new wave of immigrants in the late 1960s and early 1970s that bolstered the language and religious community. As of 2014 the association is working to attract new members in order to preserve its cultural heritage and maintain good standing within the Croatian community.

\textsuperscript{212} Slavonian Benevolent Association Bylaws 1874.
\textsuperscript{213} Vjunovich, \textit{Yugoslavs in Louisiana}, 156-158.
In the original charter and bylaws, the SBA laid out guidelines for when meetings were to be held, and which member’s attendance was mandatory for administrative tasks. The next step was to elect a board of directors. The organization then decided that only the board of directors could propose changes in the bylaws, and those changes could only be adopted by the general membership at general membership meetings. Thirty days were required to elapse between the introduction of legislation and its adoption or rejection. Decisions made by the board would not become final until approved by the general membership through the act of accepting the minutes of the board meeting. The board of directors conducted everyday business at board meetings as the minutes suggest, so as not to overwhelm the members with the more tedious tasks associated with its function. The board would meet monthly, except when general membership meetings were held. General membership meetings would be held quarterly, and all meetings would be on the first Sunday of every month unless otherwise specified.214 Since Hurricane Katrina in August of 2005, the association has met more sporadically than in previous years; however, the organization tries to maintain quarterly general membership meetings. As of 2014 the association has attempted to meet on a more regular basis.

Unlike some mutual aid societies in New Orleans, and the rest of the United States, the SBA has never owned a hall, clubhouse or any structure suitable for assembly. This may be due to the fact that many members owned businesses appropriate for meetings, or this may be attributed to the fact, as Vujnovich suggests, that the Croatians of New Orleans and the surrounding area were too busy working, and in some cases lived to remotely, to care for a structure dedicated to housing the organization.215 Whatever the reason, meetings have been

held in buildings owned by other organizations, or in the restaurants, bars and coffee houses of its members. In the early years, the facilities of both the Italian and German associations of New Orleans were utilized for meetings. In the last 60 years, restaurants like Crescent City Steakhouse and Drago’s Seafood Restaurant, both owned by Croatian members, have become popular gathering places for general meetings.

In 1874 when the association was founded, the Croatian language was the only language used for both meetings and record keeping. For over 75 years, Croatian remained the language of choice for the organization, both written and spoken. As time passed and newly arriving immigrants assimilated, there became a need for both the English and Croatian languages to be used. Since 1950, most of the business at the meetings is conducted in English for the benefit of the second and third generation. As of 1960, the secretary was permitted to record the minutes in English; however, it was decided by the membership that all reports, bylaws and the charter were to be written in both the Croatian and English language.

The mission of the Slavonian Benevolent Association was to provide sick, hospital, bereavement, and funeral benefits to members and their loved ones. Similar to many reciprocal aid societies of late nineteenth and early twentieth century, this mission was the underlying foundation on which the organization was formed and, ultimately, the reason behind its initial incorporation and continued success. From its inception in the 1870s through the 1930s, complete aid was given to all Croatians in need.

Written in 1874, the earliest bylaws stated, “the sick members shall have the right to the service of the physician of the association, medicine and five dollars weekly from the treasury of the association during their illness, or, if desired, to go to any hospital selected by the

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216 Vujnovich, Yugoslavs in Louisiana, 156.
association." During the early days of the organization, there was an association physician who was paid a salary for his medical services to members, wives, widows and orphans. The board later changed this policy and the payment plan was altered to a flat amount for each office, home or hospital visits, several doctors in good standing with the association provided the necessary care. Members used the same method of paying a flat amount for medicine and hospitalization. In the case of pharmaceuticals, the association payed a certain amount of each prescription and the member would pay the leftover balance. In the case of hospitalization, the association reimbursed the member a designated amount for each day. In the very early years the association would pay all hospital expenses. As times changed and medicine, doctor’s visits and hospitalization became more expensive the association had to make the requisite adjustments to the bylaws regarding the amount of money they were able to contribute to members in good standing. Changes made in the organization’s bylaws reflect a greater national transformation in economics and welfare taking place across the United States in the twentieth century. During the early part of this period, external aid became available from other sources through the growth of the insurance industry and national welfare plans of social security and disability. These two options usurped the mission of the reciprocal aid society through private and public aid, allowing such organizations to turn their focus elsewhere.

More changes to the bylaws occurred in both 1982 and 1987 with regards to the association’s medical benefits policy. In 1982 the association allowed each member ten visits per year, $6 per visit, up to $60 per year. In 1987 the number of allowed visits was doubled to 20 visits per year, $10 per visit, a total of $200 per year. Likewise the amount of money allowed for medicine and medical treatment also doubled from 1982 to 1987. In 1982 a member could

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217 Slavonian Benevolent Association Bylaws 1874.
218 Slavonian Benevolent Association Bylaws 1874.
receive up to $150 a year for medicine and $10 per day of medical treatment at any licensed hospital. In 1987 the amount for medicine was raised to $100 and the amount for hospitalization was raised to $20 per day for up to 60 days per year. In order to receive reimbursement the member in question would have to submit all claims to the recording secretary. In the case of both doctor’s visits and medicine, “the claim was to be submitted in January of each year for the preceding year or when the maximum is reached or when a claimant is in a dire financial need.”

In the case of hospitalization the claimant was to submit his claim upon discharge from the hospital. It was likewise decided in 1987 that if a member were treated in the Veteran’s Affairs Hospital (VA), or a Charity Hospital, the organization would not reimburse the member, as there was no charge for these hospitals. As of 2014, with the increased availability of health care, hospitalization and pharmaceuticals, the organization no longer provides any sort of reimbursement, or outright paying for medical treatment. Although this seems to be a deviation from the organization’s original goals, healthcare has become far too expensive and would be too cumbersome on the organization. Furthermore, private insurance held by members, social security and disability, have picked up any slack on the organization’s part.

In addition to providing aide to sick members, the duty to bury the dead was the association’s most integral function. When a member died the association, in conjunction with its contracted funeral director, would provide the services and the internment in one of the association’s two tombs-- located in St. Louis No. 3 cemetery in New Orleans and in Our Lady of Good Harbor cemetery in Buras, Louisiana. If the deceased had no immediate family or living relatives, the association would facilitate all of the arrangements and assume responsibility

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221 Slavonian Benevolent Association meeting minutes January 10, 1987.
222 Vujnovich, *Yugoslavs in Louisiana*, 159.
for payment. If the deceased’s family made the arrangements with a funeral home not under contract with the association, the association would reimburse the family the amount charged by the contracted funeral director.\footnote{Vujnovich, \textit{Yugoslavs in Louisiana}, 158-160.} If a widow remained, the association would pay the widow a death benefit based on the status of current membership (occasionally members were lax in paying dues or missed a payment or two). Likewise if a widow were in dire financial straits the association would periodically provide financial assistance. As of 2014 the association allowed any member to be interred in either tomb if he did not have a burial site already chosen. The association no longer covers funeral benefits, but they do donate money to the family and help with the composition and fee of newspaper obituary advertisements.\footnote{Throughout the minutes transcribed by Milos Vujnovich there are numerous obituaries taped and stapled to the book pages. Vujnovich would help compose the obituaries upon family request. Once the add was placed and had run, he would cut the add out, read it at the next meeting and then attach it to the meeting minutes at which it was read. Although this practice seems to have stopped upon Vujnovich’s death, the association will still aide the family in obituary composition upon request.}

In addition to medical, funeral, and widow assistance over the years, the association provided financial assistance in many forms not prescribed in the bylaws. Throughout the years, in times of tragedy, hardship, or economic crisis, the association reached out to its members and their families through financial aid. According to the December 4, 1921, meeting minutes, members agreed that the association would give each orphan five dollars for Christmas.\footnote{Slavonian Benevolent Association meeting minutes December 4, 1921.} Evidence in the December 1922 minutes revealed that “one member met another member of the association who needed a haircut, a meal and some tobacco and that he gave the member three dollars to pay for these things.”\footnote{Slavonian Benevolent Association meeting minutes December 1922.} These acts, although not large monetarily, demonstrate the charitable nature of the organization. The trajectory of monetary charity, as opposed to reciprocal aide, reflects a change in the function of the organization as well as economic and
governmental shifts. During this period in the early twentieth century, the organization made an effort to adjust to the modern world while still sheltering its members.

During times of national economic crisis, the association did its best to assist members and their families. In the late nineteen twenties and into the Great Depression of the 1930s, the association generously helped an increasing number of less fortunate members through financial and material aid. According to Milos Vujnovich, “the leaders of the association used to, and still do, point with pride that not a single member of the association received government relief assistance during the Depression.”\footnote{Vujnovich, \textit{Yugoslavs in Louisiana}, 162; Slavonian Benevolent Association meeting minutes December 1931.} Although the Depression years were a most trying time for the association and its members, their resolve to stick together and take care of each other was astute proving how important the organization was to its members, their families and the community in general.

The association has supplied aid outside its membership on occasion when natural disasters struck the region. The Gulf Coast has often been the site of disastrous hurricanes and floods. In times of crisis, the association did its best to aid those Croatians in both Plaquemines and Orleans parishes. Following a 1915 storm the association gave both financial and medical assistance to those Croatians in need. In 1927, the association assessed each of the 302 members one dollar and donated the proceeds to the American Red Cross for the victims of the Mississippi River flood.\footnote{Slavonian Benevolent Association meeting minutes December 1930.} Similarly, in September 1965, when Hurricane Betsy made landfall, leaving millions of dollars of damage in her wake, the association stepped in again. This time the group helped those Croatians whom had lost property in the storm. On this occasion, members decided to cancel the supper dance for that year and donate the entirety of the benefit’s raffle proceeds to the Plaquemines Parish Relief Association. Most of Plaquemines parish had been destroyed in
the storm and many of the organizations members resided there.\textsuperscript{229} In 1969 when Hurricane Camille swept the Gulf Coast, the association stepped up and contributed $3,000 to the Plaquemines Hurricane Relief Association. In addition, the organization gave financial aid to the widows of members who had died in the storm and direct assistance to members who had lost property due to the storm.\textsuperscript{230} According to Philip D. Hearn, author of \textit{Hurricane Camille}; Monster Storm of the Gulf Coast, “At Buras, Louisiana, formerly at town of 6,000, only six structures were left intact.”\textsuperscript{231} Hearn goes on to say,

In Louisiana’s Buras Township, a large oil barge was lifted over a levee and deposited on the main highway, barely missing a nearby power plant and transformer complex. Demolition of the low-lying Louisiana bayou country was complete from Venice to north Fort Jackson, with only structures of reinforced concrete standing up to Camille’s power— but evacuation of the area was nearly 100 percent.\textsuperscript{232}

Through the association’s efforts some three thousand dollars was raised and a number of widows and members received financial assistance.

In 2005 when Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast, the association could not provide the financial assistance such a large storm made necessary. In fact, the association was unable to even hold a general membership meeting until 2008. Although members kept in touch, and helped each other when and where they could with rebuilding efforts, the devastation from Katrina required financial and material aide well beyond the scope of what the association could

\textsuperscript{229} Slavonian Benevolent Association meeting minutes September 1965.
\textsuperscript{230} Slavonian Benevolent Association meeting minutes September 7 and November 12, 1969, and January 4 1970. On November 12, 1969, it was decided to give financial assistance to all widows in the Empire, Buras and Triumph area and to those members who asked, or will ask. It was then decided to give each widow and each member in question fifty dollars. There were a total of twelve widows and five members. On January 4, 1970, it was decided to give a second half, fifteen hundred dollars of the original three thousand agreed upon, to the Plaquemine Hurricane Camille Disaster Association.
\textsuperscript{231} Philip Hear, \textit{Hurricane Camille; Monster Storm of the Gulf Coast} (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press 2004), 88.
\textsuperscript{232} Hear, \textit{Hurricane Camille; Monster Storm of the Gulf Coast}, 128.
provide. By 2005, the government had subsumed one of the functions once played by the ethnic group and stepped in to alleviate financial hardship caused by natural disasters.

At various times throughout their history, the association’s charity has undertaken an international scope. The meeting minutes refer to instances in which members would request aid for those still living in Croatia. For example, in 1984 the association donated one hundred dollars to the building of a new hospital in Dubrovnik, and asked members to donate personally to the cause.233 In 1985 the association donated $100 to the widows and orphans of a bus crash in Mostar where 35 workers were killed, or drowned.234

During the late eighties and early nineties, when wars ravaged the Balkans, the association yet again came to the aide of their brothers and sisters in Croatia. In 1991 they agreed to donate ten thousand dollars to the charitable organization CARITAS in Zagreb to assist some 350 homeless refugees. These men, women and children fled their homes, villages and towns, most without material possessions but the clothes on their backs.235 The association initially sent $5000, with $5000 pledged as a future donation. The following December, in 1992, the association held an auction, which raised $7000 for the refugees.236 In that same year the association decided to send the remaining $5000 pledged in 1991 in the form of food instead of cash. At this point there were still some one million Croatian refugees who were homeless, hungry and in need of assistance. The idea was to purchase food in Louisiana and send it in bulk thereby helping the local economy while still maintaining their pledge of $5000.237 According to the meeting minutes of August 1992, their generosity was well received.238

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233 Slavonian Benevolent Association meeting minutes July 28, 1984.
234 Slavonian Benevolent Association meeting minutes May 4, 1985.
235 Slavonian Benevolent Association meeting minutes October 1, 1991.
236 Slavonian Benevolent Association meeting minutes December 3, 1991.
237 Slavonian Benevolent Association meeting minutes April 27, 1992.
238 Slavonian Benevolent Association meeting minutes August 30, 1992.
August 30, 1992, a letter was read to the members present from the Archbishop of Split-Makarska thanking the association for their endeavors and their donation of forty thousand pounds of rice. More specifically, the organization recognized Klara Cvitanovic, wife of Drago Cvitanovic and the owner of Drago’s Seafood restaurant in New Orleans, for her efforts organizing and manning the rice drives for the Croatian people.\textsuperscript{239}

Although the initial reason for the creation of the Slavonian Benevolent Association was humanitarian in nature, as early as the 1930s it became clear that the primary function of the organization, to provide financial assistance to members in times of hardship, was no longer as essential a consideration as in times past. With the rise of private insurance and the new role of the United States government in the care of its citizens, the mutual aid society was able to expand its mission. During this period the organization became comfortable enough to change its function and begin to include social events for members and their families. Such events allowed male and female interactions, kept immigrants from feeling isolated and encouraged the Americanization and acculturation of the older members. In the early years of the organization the majority of the members were bachelors, so parties and banquets were an all male affair. As time passed and many of the men married local girls, or brought Croatian brides back to Louisiana, the social climate changed. The men were settling down a bit more, marrying, making homes and having children. Due to these developments, the function of the organization began to evolve and include events for families, and even some American neighbors and friends. Through picnics, dances and festivals, the association now had a dual purpose: 1) to gather together family and friends socially, and 2) to raise money for the organization.

\textsuperscript{239}Slavonian Benevolent Association meeting minutes August 30, 1992.
On July 27, 1934, the association held a picnic on the grounds of the Holy Cross College to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the group.\footnote{Vujnovich, *Yugoslavs in Louisiana*, 166; Slavonian Benevolent Association meeting minutes August 1934.} Three years later on June 6, 1937, the association held a festival dance to commemorate the 63rd anniversary. This event was held at the Deutches Haus located in the Mid-City neighborhood of New Orleans. This was the first event that was a success at both functioning as a social gathering and a profit raising gathering. Many of the younger girls competed for the chance to be festival queen. The contest was decided by votes, each dollar collect by the girls from their sponsor counted as 100 votes. Miss Marion Gerica reigned as the queen of the festival and Misses Marie Bilich and Theodora Vujnovich as Miss America and Miss Louisiana respectively. The organization raised several thousand dollars, setting the stage for future events of this nature.\footnote{Vujnovich, *Yugoslavs in Louisiana*, 166; Slavonian Benevolent Association meeting minutes July 1937.}

For the next nine years such events were precluded due to WWII. The same type of festival-style dances were again organized in July 1946 and July 1947, culminating with the Diamond Jubilee on Sunday, June 5, 1949, celebrating the 75th anniversary of the SBA. The event was held in the Municipal auditorium located in New Orleans. Interestingly the same event was repeated with the same court of queens and kings on July 31, 1949, just down the road in Buras, Louisiana, located in Plaquemines Parish, for the benefit of those unable to attend the New Orleans event.\footnote{Vujnovich, *Yugoslavs in Louisiana*, 164-168; information also gathered from various flyers, photographs and entertainment committee discussions documented in the SBA minutes.} Another repeat-style celebration was held on June 15, 1952, at the Buras Auditorium and was complete with individuals dressed in Croatian national costumes.\footnote{Vujnovich, *Yugoslavs in Louisiana*, 164-168; information also gathered from various flyers, photographs and entertainment committee discussions documented in the SBA minutes.} As entertainment those in costume danced Croatian folk dances for the audience. The most
important of these events occurred in 1954 and 1974, commemorating the 80th and 100th year anniversaries respectively. Both events were held in Downtown New Orleans hotels and both had about 600 persons in attendance.\textsuperscript{244} The last of these celebrations was held in June 2014, when the association celebrated its 140th anniversary. These events are just few examples of how the organization attempted to reach Yugoslavs in both Orleans and Plaquemines parishes thereby strengthening cultural ties. Such tactics encouraged social, familial and business relations to develop producing a close-knit community with a strong ethnic basis. Moreover, these events allowed Croatians to come together, reminisce about the past, and plan for the future. Although the organization was not developed as a social group, these activities resonated with members, their families and the community alike providing a nucleus around which both old and new immigrants could mutually assist the community both socially and economically.

An example of how these events facilitated marriage and economic opportunity can be seen in the marriage of Stan Cvitanovic to his wife Marylyn. Marylyn was the daughter of John and Krasna Vojkovich, owners of Crescent City Steakhouse located in Mid-City New Orleans, and was born in the United States. Stan immigrated to Louisiana in 1973 to join his brother already residing in Plaquemines Parish. Upon arrival, Stan joined the SBA in an effort to connect with the local Croatian community. He attended Delgado Community College during the day in order to learn English, and shucked oysters in the French Quarter at night. Stan eventually attended the University of New Orleans where he obtained an engineering degree. Following graduation he took a job with the Army Corps of Engineers in New Orleans, where he became friends with Marylyn’s brother Frank. Frank convinced Stan to attend one of the association’s dances where Frank introduced him to his younger sister Marylyn. A short time

\textsuperscript{244}Vujnovich, "Yugoslavs in Louisiana," 164-168; information also gathered from various flyers, photographs and entertainment committee discussions documented in the SBA minutes.
later the two were married, moved to Plaquemines Parish and Stan started a marine towing
business with his brother. When questioned about their meeting, both Stan and Marylyn give
credit to the association for holding that particular dance on that particular night. Furthermore,
both commented on the fact that it was an added bonus to share their heritage with each other.
The two are still married in 2014, share five children and reside in the Lakeview neighborhood
of New Orleans, a far cry from the trailer they shared upon marriage in Buras, Louisiana.\textsuperscript{245}

Women have never been allowed admittance into the SBA. Various members over time
suggested the founding of a ladies auxiliary, but those suggestions never came to fruition.
However, in the 1930s the Yugoslav Club was formed for both male and female immigrants,
their families, and any non-Yugoslav friends or neighbors who wished to join. Unlike the
Benevolent Society, this group was created with the sole purpose of providing social functions
for the community on a regular basis. It worked in conjunction with the association on numerous
events, but its goal was to provide the community with at least three functions per year. Unlike
the SBA, which never had an official home/ clubhouse, the Yugoslav Club made the purchasing
of a clubhouse a priority.\textsuperscript{246} In 1953 the organization bought 900 Frenchmen Street, located in
the Marigny neighborhood of New Orleans, for $14,500.00. They collected monthly dues of
three dollars at their monthly meetings and decided on raffles, one every three months, to raise
money. They also hosted dances, dinners, games and even rented the clubhouse out to
nonmembers in order to raise money. In 1956 due to a lack of involvement among members

\textsuperscript{245} Marylyn and Stan Cvitanovic, interview by author, Belle Chase, La, April 2012.
\textsuperscript{246} According to Milos Vujnovich, a home for the organization was never built due to the fact that usually
the main purpose of an ethnic organization is to provide a gathering place for its members where they can
hold their meetings and socials or just drop in during spare time. He claims that the “spare time” factor of
other immigrants who worked in factories, construction gangs, and as longshoremen, was a luxury that
Louisiana Yugoslavs never had. The members, particularly the officers, were all businessmen and their
businesses demanded too much of their time. Therefore they had no need for a home. \textit{Yugoslavs in
Louisiana}, 171.
and overall financial trouble, members made a motion to sell the clubhouse. In July of that year, the clubhouse was sold and the organization shut its doors.²⁴⁷

In the late twentieth century the Croatian American Society (CAS) formed in an effort to provide social functions for Croatians in the New Orleans area, and to preserve local Croatian heritage. Like their forebears in the Yugoslav Club, this group purchased a house in Plaquemines Parish for its members. Today the group provides the community with picnics, barbeques, holiday festivities, dances and even operates oyster booths at numerous local festivals. The group works with the SBA on its annual events, but maintains a strict division when it comes to membership as the CAS is a mixed gender group.

Figure 27. National Croatian American Society Logo

All three organizations have played a necessary role in the furtherance of the Croatian community in New Orleans. The members realize that in order to remain relevant, the CBA and the CAS will have to attract younger members and appeal to those families of mixed heritage to encourage the retention of their Croatian culture. The Slavonian Benevolent Association played a major role in the transition of many male immigrants into the New Orleans community. The organization provided financial and emotional assistance, facilitated the necessary contacts many needed upon arrival, and later served to connect first and second generation Croatians socially in the community. Although dwindling in numbers, as of 2014 the CBA remains a relevant

²⁴⁷ The information here was taken from the one notebook remaining documenting the Yugoslav Club’s meetings. The notebook is nondescript, written in pencil and extremely hard to read. The ledger is held in the possession of Stan Cvitanovic, member of the CBA.
organization to Croatian males in New Orleans area. Bolstered by the social events sponsored by the CAS, the CBA has managed to attract new members and is currently working on a scholarship program. Although separate organizations, the two groups have increased awareness of Croatian culture in Louisiana, thereby accentuating the contribution and place of the Croatian immigrant within the local and state historiography.
Chapter Six: The Female Immigrant: Croatian Immigrant Women in New Orleans

“They transformed America-and even Europe, through their absence. In making the transatlantic move, they not only brought the great benefit of their prodigious labor to the pioneering nation, but they also did something less often recognized: they relieved Europe of the surplus population that created poverty and famine. Indeed, the sad irony is that America at the end of the millennium features more of the great inequalities of wealth that immigrant women sought to escape than does their Old World now.”^248

Historically, scholars in a variety of fields have perceived immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a male-dominated phenomenon. In the period between 1870 and 1930, known as the second great wave of immigration, the United States absorbed the greatest number of immigrants to ever reach her shores. However, of that group statistics reveal that for every ten immigrants that arrived, at least four were female.^249 Whether traveling alone, as single unwed individuals, or meeting up with their husbands, who had previously immigrated, women migrated as well as their male counterparts in search of a better life and in hope of the American dream. These women were active participants in the shaping of their futures for themselves and their families. This chapter will consider the female immigrant arriving in America during second wave immigration, discuss the female Slavic immigrant and her experience in the United States, and examine oral histories of three Croatian female immigrants in New Orleans and their distinctive position in both the community and the realm of business.

Large numbers of women immigrated to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although often overlooked in the past by urban historians, these women provided the backbone of domestic service for middle and upper class Americans and filled

^248 Weatherford, *Foreign and Female*, xv.
^249 Weatherford, *Foreign and Female*, x.
employment gaps in factories and trade work. For example, women were a majority of those escaping impoverished Ireland at the turn of the century. According to historian Niles Carpenter, “between 1899 and 1910, 52% of Irish emigrants were female. About 89% of them were single at the time of their departure, and most were under the age of 24.” He goes on to say, “Indeed, the rarity became a woman who emigrated with a husband: during 1901-1908, for example, of the females between 15 and 35 who left Connaught, Ireland, an astonishing 98% were single women.”

Irish women were not the only female immigrants to make the journey to the new world during both the first and second wave of immigration; however female Irish immigrants did constitute a rather large majority. According to Hasia Diner, “Among the Germans, a group that arrived over the same span of years as the Irish, the women made up 41 percent of the total immigrant population whereas among the Irish, women accounted for 52.9 percent.” She goes on to say,

The contrast with other immigrants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century presents an even more striking picture, Southern Italian women, for example, compromised a mere 21 percent of migrants from their homeland; in 1907 13 percent of all Croatian arrivals were women; and among Greeks only 4 percent of the newcomers were female.

These numbers prove that immigration patterns were in fact changing and that women, an often overlooked participant in the immigration process, now constituted, among some nationalities, the majority of those immigrating to the United States during the late nineteenth and early

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Although a preponderance of Irish women made the journey, still women of other ethnicities likewise sought out new lives in America. The female immigrant, like her male counterpart, was in search of a better life and a new beginning. The rising number of women willing to make the journey during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century foreshadows the rising tension in Europe with regards to both economic and political shifts, and highlights the fact that many saw immigration as a means of survival.

Similar to Irish women, large groups of women varying in ethnicity emigrated during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and many often traveled alone. Even married women frequently made the move without their husbands as men commonly preceded their wives to America. Most married women were left to close up their family property in Europe and to usher their children around the world to their new lives. This practice was common of many ethnic immigrant groups and can be seen in a variety of examples. According to historian Doris Weatherford’s analysis, “By 1910, women accounted for more than four of every ten Jewish immigrants, while Scandinavian and British women came to America at nearly similar rates.”

Further analysis indicates that in some years towards the end of the nineteenth century “women were an absolute majority of those leaving Swedish ports and as early as 1886 women constituted a majority among the emigrants from towns.”

Like their male counterparts, female immigrants left their homes for a variety of reasons. Many women were seen as a burden to families and looked at as a surplus in population. Famine and war, as well as economic, ecological and political turmoil at home, caused many people to seek a chance at a better life on American soil. Likewise agents of American industry provided

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255 Weatherford, Foreign and Female, ix-x.
256 Weatherford, Foreign and Female, x.
motivation for female migration to areas of the Northeast United States thereby fueling the textile and clothing industry. Certain companies practiced recruiting to entice possible female immigrants to make the journey in hope of a better life through paid labor in the new world. For many women, immigration was a way to break the village hold on their bodies and minds. In most old world cultures, the children one bore defined the female life. A large family was a necessity in rural areas and an annual pregnancy was a fact of life for many immigrant women. In the new populous urban centers of the new world, a large family was a liability and many women saw this as an opportunity to break old cycles.²⁵⁷

Figure 29. Female Immigrants at Ellis Island waiting processing

At the same time, many immigrant women were wage earners in the old country and in some cases were the chief source of income for their families. These women contributed

immensely to old and new world national economies, but were largely ignored both legally and politically. Furthermore, most female wage earners were required by their fathers, brothers and husbands to relinquish the wages to the family for family use. In an interview conducted with Krasna Vojkovich in March of 2012, she recalled her work as young girl in a Croatian sardine factory. “I work for three years in sardine factory because I was fifteen, and of course you don’t go to school anymore, you finished. My father said, ‘Well you know how to read and write, that’s all you need, so you go to work.’ And you work in the fields, and then you work in sardine factory during the season of the sardines, and I never saw a dime. And one time I asked my father I said, ‘I didn’t get any money. They won’t give me my money.’ You know they give it to him. And he’s looking at me and he kind of smiles and he says, ‘well, who feeds you?’”

Krasna’s story is typical of the period because it highlights her desire for independence and more control over her situation. Krasna worked very hard for her family without ever seeing the economic benefits of her labor. Like other Slavic women of the period, Krasna knew she deserved more input in family financial matters, but struggled to find her voice. Krasna would not maintain her own finances until years later when she married, immigrated to the United States and began to run her own household; however, she never forgot this conversation with her father years before.

Later in the same interview conducted in 2012, Krasna recounted that as a child and young adult in Croatia she had never owned an article of clothing that was not a “hand-me-down.” She went on to say, “When I made eighteen he [her father] gave me enough money to go to city, and to buy material to make a dress for me and my sister and I can do, I did my hair, I

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258 Weatherford, Foreign and Female, xvi.
259 Krasna Vojkovich, interview by author, New Orleans, La, March 2012.
went to have perm. When I was eighteen, that was the big thing.” Krasna’s desire to have material possessions may seem superficial, but for a girl who had worked all her life, her desire to control her financial destiny and her physical appearance highlights another driving factor in female immigration, control over one’s person without familial pressures.

For women in situations with little to no control legally or socially over their own lives, immigration presented a way in which they might obtain agency. Whether single or married, immigrant women dealt with the complexities of uprooting their lives and joining the new communities forming in American cities. Regardless of her ethnicity, the female immigrant endured the pain of leaving her family in the old world and the hardship of navigating American society to become an essential component in the success of the immigrant community. She often provided stability and partnership to her male counterpart and in so doing helped facilitated the immigrant networks that ultimately led to assimilation.

Similar to other Eastern and Southern European countries in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, women in Yugoslavia, especially peasant women, were regarded as subservient and inferior to men physically, mentally, politically, legally and socially. Many sought the equality promised in the American image. Many female immigrants thought that through hard work, sacrifice and saving they could achieve the American dream of independence and equality, while others simply wished to break the confines of old world domesticity. In Yugoslavia motherhood was a woman’s primary reason for existence. Custom in Yugoslavia dictated that women were to work and bear children. Slavic women did most of the heavy work. They were responsible for milking the cow, goat or sheep, getting food for the family, feeding the animals, baking, laundering, weaving and bringing food to their husbands working the fields. The difficult lives many women led in the old world aged many of them beyond their years, and

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Krasna Vojkovic, interview by author, New Orleans, La, March 2012.
sent a number of women to early graves. According to historian Gerald Govorchin, “It was quite common to see a man and a woman on the road, the woman bending under a heavy load that she was carrying into the village (Yugoslav/Croatian), while her husband walked alongside entirely unencumbered.”

It is no wonder that many Slavic women wished to escape the intolerable conditions at home by migrating to America.

Figure 30. Portrait of Polish and Slovak women, early 1900s.

For Slavic women, immigration to the United States occurred in a number of different ways. These immigration patterns were often first undertaken by earlier immigrant groups and then passed through the generations to those who came later. In the case of most Slavic immigrant groups, the married man would generally travel first, alone, and then return with his earnings. The wife was to remain in the old country to care for the house, the children and the

261 Govorchin, *Americans From Yugoslavia*, 189.
land, until her husband would return. On his second trip, the husband would usually decide to settle in the United States, or at least remain for a longer period of time to establish himself, and then return to his village to take his wife and children back to the United States with him. Later, when immigration routes were better known and transplanted networks were more established, the married man would often send for his wife and children without physically returning to the old country to retrieve them personally. Historian Emily Balch claims that, “She (the wife) was not always eager to begin life again under strange conditions; often she feared to face the long and difficult journey alone with a family of little children.”

Another immigration pattern often undertaken by various female immigrant groups involved the “picture postcard bride” practice. Here, a single man would send back to his homeland for a girl, perhaps one he had never seen before but was recommended by relatives still residing in the village. In some cases, the unmarried male went back and met a girl, married her in their native village and brought her home to her new life in the United States. A still later pattern of female immigration occurred when unmarried girls began to emigrate independently, or with a party of individuals making the trip together, thereby reducing the possible dangers of traveling alone. The practice of traveling independently to the new world was by no means a novel concept on the part of female Slavic immigrants. Both Irish and Jewish female immigrants had undertaken this practice for decades in the nineteenth century, opening the doors for their counterparts to follow suit in the twentieth. According to historian Susan Glenn, “Nearly half (an estimated 43 percent) of the Jewish emigrants were women, compared to only 21 percent of southern Italians. Among all the immigrant groups who left for America in

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262 Balch, *Our Fellow Slavs*, 106.
the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, only the Irish sent a greater proportion of women [than the Jews].”

As the number of women increased many Croatian men married and started families, creating more permanent and stable personal lives as part of the larger ethnic communities. At first, not all Slavic men married Slavic women. Due to the initial shortage of women, many single men married outside their ethnic group. For these men, lives changed with marriage as many men merged their native cultures with that of their new families. It was not until 1904 that a significant number of Slavic women begin to appear in the newly forming Slavic communities of the United States. A good example of Yugoslav marriage patterns can be seen in a case study conducted of a fairly representative Yugoslav colony in St. Louis, Missouri. Clement Mihanovich examined the marriages in the largest Croatian church in St. Louis form 1904 to 1935. His analysis revealed that “43.2 percent married foreign-born Croats, 25.7 percent married native-born Croats of foreign parentage, and 30 percent married native Americans of other groups.” Mihanovich concludes that his study may indicate a pattern in Yugoslav marriages throughout the United States.

In the case of Croatian female immigrants to New Orleans, the immigration pattern many female immigrants participated in was the “picture postcard bride” process. Most early Croats arriving in New Orleans were unmarried men without families. Those who were married generally sent back for their wives as soon as they had obtained employment and saved enough money. Unmarried Croatian settlers found themselves in a new world that possessed few, if any, available Croatian women suitable for marriage. Some of these Croatian men

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264 Susan A. Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*, 47.
266 Mihanovich, “Americanization of the Croats in St. Louis, Mo., during the Past Thirty Years” (M.A. Thesis, St Louis University 1936), pp. 42-43
married Irish or Italian women already settled in New Orleans, while others sought brides back in Croatia. Some early Croatian male settlers would write to friends or family back in Croatia and inquire after young women in the village, or the surrounding towns, considered worthy of marriage. Essentially the only qualification was to be unmarried in order to be deemed appropriate, and many young women vied for the opportunity of marriage and immigration due to the benefits both might provide.

Once the prospective groom had chosen his prospective bride, a letter of courtship would follow, pictures exchanged, and the parents would negotiate. In some cases the girl was sent to Louisiana alone to meet her proposed husband. By the 1920s, custom began to change. In some cases the prospective groom would now travel back to his native country, visit his family, meet his bride and marry her in the local church. United States immigration legislation took effect, and it became more common for Croatian immigrant men to return to their native village, meet and marry an available girl, and then the two would return to the United States together. Still later, some of these young women that married early Croatian immigrant men helped facilitate the marriage of their sisters, cousins and friends, to men in the already transplanted and established community in New Orleans.

An example of a marriage facilitated in the “picture postcard bride” manner can be seen in the experience of Krasna Vojkovich. Krasna and her husband Ivan were from the same village. Although thirty years her senior, the two families were well acquainted and Krasna and Ivan knew of each other. After Ivan had established himself in New Orleans as the owner of Crescent City Steakhouse, he set to the task of finding a wife. Ultimately he decided to choose a bride from his hometown village of Sucuraj, on the island of Hvar, Croatia. In 1955, the two

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were married at the village church in Croatia. After just a few days together as husband and wife, Ivan came back to America and Krasna followed, alone, about two months later. In her own words Krasna recounts immigration story as a young bride, “So he left, and I followed about two months later. [I went through] New York, I flew to New York. [eyes widen and nodding] I never flew in a plane, I never saw a plane. I mean I saw the plane flying up in the air, but never been close enough to the plane. I didn’t know what to expect. I didn’t think anything bad, but…um… it was experience I’m telling you. I was by myself [nodding]. Luckily I meet a man on the plane that was from New York and he was coming back, uh, he went to visit his parents and all and he was Croatian too, so he was helping me. You know go through immigration and all that stuff, and then my husband was waiting for me in New York… yes. So we spent five days there.”

When asked if she liked New York and what was her first impression of the United States she responded, “Like I say it was November and it was Thanksgiving, there was Thanksgiving Macy’s parade, and we were in New York I think twenty-second floor, and he wants me to come to the window and watch. I said, ‘no way.’ [shakes head] I never saw the elevator, I never been in an elevator before. I said, ‘No way am I going to come close to that window.’ [laughing]. America, it was something. We were there for five days and he wanted to stay longer, but I don’t want to stay. I couldn’t…I mean I didn’t understand a word of English, and I didn’t know anybody, and so I said ‘it’s wasting the time.’”

After five days in New York, Krasna and Ivan made their way to New Orleans via train. Krasna took in the sights, but was eager to make her way to her new home and begin life with her new husband. When asked what she thought of New Orleans, her husband’s restaurant (Crescent City Steakhouse) and the local Croatian community she responded as follows: “Well it

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268 Krasna Vojkovich, interview by author, New Orleans, La, March 2012.
269 Krasna Vojkovich, interview by author, New Orleans, La, March 2012.
took me a while, I mean, I was just you know coming from lone village never hardly see big city, and then New York I got lost in those big ..uh.. you know.. uh hotels and twenty, thirty, fifty stories. I mean it’s nothing that I saw anything like that. And coming here it was just …I… I can’t describe it. It was… It was unbelievable. The restaurant. Mainly thing that gets my mind, when I saw the butcher cutting the meat, trimming the steaks because they buy the big pieces. And he would come in he would cut the strips, T-bones, porterhouses, and I saw all that meat on the table and the only thing I can think of was my father. If I could bring him here and sit him down and give him one of those big steaks I think he would have been in heaven. That’s the only thing I thought about it for long, long time. Because he loved to eat and he enjoyed to eat, you can see person when he enjoys something and it’s, that’s nothing that he had or will ever had that kind [inaudible]… in Croatia. It’s seafood and you, we grow our own like…uh…hogs you know we do it and butcher it, or you might have a lamb once a while. You might have a meat Christmas Day. My mother was famous for that she buys uh two pound of meat and she makes a whole big feast of it with those two pounds of meat. She boiled for the…um… soup and then she roasted with potatoes and she would do the same thing if she had one chicken sometimes, once in a while, would kill a chicken but not often she would make a soup of the same chicken and then roast it with potatoes. And so in a family of six with one little chicken, you don’t get nothing. So that’s why I never have like a breast of chicken or a leg or anything [laughs] [inaudible] a wing, if I’m lucky, and still today I like the wings of the chicken. 270 Here Krasna’s discussion of food and the memory of her father illuminates just how excited, yet overwhelmed she felt. Krasna was a relatively unsophisticated young woman thrown into a situation where she was presented with choices. Although it seems rather insignificant, Krasna

270 Krasna Vojkovich, interview by author, New Orleans, La, March 2012.
could now choose which cut of meat she wanted, a process that was beyond her control prior to her immigration. The contrast in living standards highlighted here with her story sheds light on just how overwhelming her transition must have been from village to city, and just how confusing her new world must have been.

When asked about the local Croatian community of New Orleans, Krasna stated, “It was, yeah, and it still is [small]. Now, they used to live all close by, and now of course they spread all over, but at that time there was still a lot of older Croatians that I knew you know when I came here. [interruption]. So …um… you know so it was ok. Yeah we meet once … you know like a weddings, showers, funerals … all of those things. We had Croatian priest and he would say the mass on Christmas, Easter, and for a while on Mother’s Day. And that priest they change him or whatever that happened I’m not really certain. But after that we used to have a priest come in from different places, but there was uh… we used to use the chapel at Charity Hospital, and that was always ours for those days. But since they closed that they changed and they didn’t have chapel anymore, so few times we did use St. John the Baptist. I think it was the Rampart Street right there when you pass overpass. Yeah on the other side on Canal you know…um… Southside I think. Yeah well Loyola and uh somewhere around there. And then I guess everybody nobody really put in request to the bishop to get Croatian priest for us and …um… But now we have, he comes from St. Louis, priest that says the mass for Christmas down in Belle Chasse and St. Anthony down in Port Sulphur. So we have those two.”

The explanation Krasna provided here helps gives meaning to the pressure many Croatians felt in the assimilation process. The fact that there was a Croatian mass with a Croatian priest allowed many to retain a part of their old world normalcy through the practice of their religion in their native language.

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271 Krasna Vojkovich, interview by author, New Orleans, La, March 2012.
while still assimilating into the local business and social economy, thereby providing a release to
the mounting hardships associated with the processes of both assimilation and Americanization.

Once settled in New Orleans, Krasna began setting up her home, learning the restaurant
business, and learning English. The young couple resided above their restaurant, Crescent City
Steakhouse, located at 1001 North Broad Street (a business corridor), where the family remained
until they moved to the Lakeview neighborhood of New Orleans years later. During an
interview conducted in her old home above the restaurant, Krasna described their living
situation, “Yeah, Yeah. This was a dining room. And that was living room, and that was our
bedroom right there. [points to room behind interviewer]. And then other bedroom was his
mother [Krasna’ mother in law, Ivan’s mother], when she was alive, she died in ’61 when
Anthony [her youngest son] was born, a few weeks before Anthony was born, and she used that
bedroom. And so we need to move. And so we bought the house [in Lakeview, a residential
area], and uh it was like closer from the [children’s] school which it was great for me and uh
came out later that it was [a] lifesaver then.”272 The family’s decision to move to a more
residential area of New Orleans reflects the greater national trend of immigrants moving from the
zones of transition into the city’s general population and provides a local example of this
process.

When asked to describe the manner in which she learned to speak English, Krasna
described how she watched television and movies and how the restaurant employees ultimately
became her teachers. In her own words Krasna recounts her English language education, “Well
it took a while because what I would do the first you know I would watch TV a lot and of course
here we live upstairs and it was nothing but English people around and so he [Ivan] would tell
me, ‘I’m not going to talk Croatian. And just we going to talk English.’ But I couldn’t. After a

272Krasna Vojkovich, interview by author, New Orleans, La, March 2012.
while it kind of get on you and little by little before you know it you make a sentence. And we used to go to movie, almost every week, on Friday. Because at that time we were closed on Friday. Since it was you know, all the…at that time nobody ate meat on Friday [here she is referring to the Catholic tradition of not eating meat on Fridays].

Krasna’s experience as a “picture postcard bride,” shaped the outcome of her immigrant experience. Unlike other immigrant women to the United States, Krasna married a man who was well established, economically independent and significantly older. Upon arrival, Krasna did not speak or understand English, was only educated in a Croatian school until the age of eight, and in fact, had never even owned her own pair of shoes. Despite her youth and lack of education, Krasna quickly adapted to her new circumstances. Like other Croatian immigrant women who came to New Orleans during this period, Krasna embraced her new life and supported her husband in his business and the community. Introduced to a new world, Krasna learned English, had four children in quick succession and eventually took over running her husband’s business as his health declined. Krasna became a pillar of the Croatian community in New Orleans. She raised her family to understand and be proud of its Croatian heritage, and her story contributes to our understanding of the immigrant experience in New Orleans. Krasna’s experience recounted here contributes to the local immigrant dialogue, but more importantly contributes to the larger female immigrant experience often overlooked in twentieth century urban history.

Another example of the Croatian female immigrant experience in New Orleans can be seen in the life story of Klara Cvitanovich, wife of Drago Cvitanovich and owner of Drago’s seafood restaurant. Klara’s story exemplifies the changing nature of the female immigration experience because although from nearby villages in Croatia, Klara and her husband met and

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Krasna Vojkovich, interview by author, New Orleans, La, March 2012.
married in the United States. Klara’s husband, Drago, was born in the village of Igrane in Yugoslavia in the early twentieth century, but immigrated to Germany after World War II, where he worked as a civilian employee of the United States Labor department. Drago then immigrated to Canada and eventually to the United States. Like her future husband, Klara was also born and raised in Yugoslavia. Under German occupation during World War II, her family’s business was burned and her father imprisoned. Following in the footsteps of her aunt, Klara immigrated to the United States in the 1950s. Shortly thereafter, she met her future husband on a trip to New Orleans for Mardi Gras. The two were introduced through mutual Croatian friends and were married three weeks later. After several moves together, the young couple settled in New Orleans where Drago began working in his brother-in-law’s restaurant. Klara took a job at D. H. Holmes Travel Agency. In 1969, the two opened their own restaurant, Drago’s seafood restaurant. At night Klara joined her husband greeting guests in the restaurant and after hours helped him with the bookkeeping. Klara and Drago have two sons, Tommy and Gerry. Tommy helps his family run the restaurant, while Gerry is a local practicing physician. As of 2014 the restaurant is still operating in Metairie, Louisiana, with a satellite location in the Downtown Hilton of New Orleans and plans for a new Jackson, Mississippi, location. The restaurant and family maintain strong ties with the Croatian oyster fishing community of New Orleans and the surrounding area.274

Like Krasna, Klara was the young bride of an established, older man. Klara knew very little English and had not been formally educated. Upon arrival in the United States she stayed with relatives that facilitated her socialization with the New Orleans Croatian community, her English education and eventually her marriage. In spite of the fact that Klara only knew Drago

274 Klara Cvitanovich, interview by author, New Orleans, La, March 2012. For more information on the Cvitanovich family and their restaurant see http://www.dragosrestaurant.com/about/family/
for three weeks for three week prior to their marriage have been married for over 50 years and currently own three restaurants. As other female immigrants before her, Klara utilized established familial networks to transition into American society and culture, no means an easy process. Klara overcame the struggles she and her family faced in Croatia during World War II, she immigrated to America, moved to New Orleans and negotiated her new surroundings, all to become a contributing member of the local Croatian community. Like Krasna before her, Klara has retained her Croatian identity through frequent trips back to Croatia. In addition to her travels, Klara also preserves her Croatian cultural heritage through cooking and holiday celebrations as well as the many stories she often tells at these events in both the Croatian and English languages.

The last example of the experience of Croatian female immigrants to New Orleans is seen in the life story of Eva Vujinovich. American born, Eva recounted the story of her father and mother, both Croatian, her on the bayou in Plaquemines Parish, as well as city her life in the city on Rampart Street in the French Quarter. When asked about her parents and how they met, Eva recalled the following story: “My mama and dad...my daddy came here when he was fifteen, and he bounced around here, and he went to Mississippi and you know, didn't know what he was going to do when he came. But I think he came for somebody [former employer], and when you come for somebody you're supposed to kind of work for them a year or two, I think he did that. He didn't get married until he was forty or thirty nine years old. He saw my Mama's picture, that my Mama's brothers, (my Mama had two brothers here)...[Leopold and Cotton Pete] a picture they had. Pete ran the two boats, [thinking about the names of boats- Victoria] two boats, up and down the river...That's how the people used to get their groceries and all. They didn't have no roads to go to Empire [Louisiana]...It was like a freight boat, like a half-freight, and they had
cabins for a few people that wanted to go into town so they had a little place where you could 
sleep and all, but not too many rooms, and then downstairs they had the pigs and the cows and 
the oysters...the oysters, anything they wanted to transfer to New Orleans, because that's the 
business he was in and my uncle Leopold he was kind of in the meat business around the French 
Market, he had a stand there where you sell meat. And he dabbled in a couple things, he ended 
up in Plaquemines Parish himself... and he had orange trees and oyster business, them guys were 
always doing something.”

So then when my Daddy was doing the work with Uncle Pete, I think, then he went to his 
house one day, and they had this picture on the mantel [fireplace] and he told them, ‘I want to go 
marry that girl’ you know, to her brother, and then they wrote letters to one another. She said that 
he asked her and she said ok, so he went around May or June over there [Croatia], and in one 
month he got married and came over here and brought her by ship.” Eva’s memory of her 
mother and father’s meeting and relationship further highlight the commonality of the “picture 
postcard bride” experience in the Croatian community of New Orleans and the surrounding area. 
Furthermore her discussion of life on the bayou reflects the difficulty of the bayou existence and 
how wives and children brought a sense of stability and partnership to an otherwise frontier 
lifestyle.

“Yeah...(laughing) But it was a very lonely place, it was out on the bayou. You had to get 
there with a boat, took about an hour, to get from Empire all the way to the camp… And he had a 
camp for my Ma, they didn't call them camp, but he built a house, you know, he had a bedroom 
and a kitchen and an outdoor toilet and the smoke house so we lived, and it was about six-seven 
feet off the ground, so we lived there, Mama would go to town to have the babies at her brothers, 
she would go to her brother's house and stay there until I was born, and then same thing with my
brother when he was born. Then ...down in the bayou and we stayed there. We stayed there for 8 years and about 8 years old, my mama said, ‘We better get these kids educated or something,’ you know, so she said ‘Time for me to build a house in Empire’ because Empire had the connections to the schools and out there [on the bayou] was nothing. So, she, me and my Daddy go and buy the lot next to St. Anne's Church, the lot was for sale. She worked at it for a bit too [she worked at persuading her husband], she said, ‘Now go get this piece of land, and get a lot corner to build your house,’ and so we did, we went and listened to her, and then she built that house for $2500, two bedrooms, living room, dining room, and a kitchen, and then it was 1936, the house was finished and we had a one room schoolhouse across the street and (names of the people who “ran the school”) they had from first grade to seventh grade at the school, and we didn't have that many kids anyways, two dozen or three kids, and I went there for a year till next year, the bus decided they were going to drive us to Buras. They decided we're all going to Buras School by bus. ‘Course now they had roads and everything because first they didn’t have roads...walk to school...’

Eva described life at home with regards to spoken language and the difficulty of assimilating into the local school, “So anyway, I first speak English [around the time she was eight]. Kids would be all around me, talking to me (shrugs), just saying, you know [Eva did not know English until she attended school]. I was eight years old, and I came out the bayou, yeah. See, came out the Bayou so...there was nobody there, we didn't have no friends, no nothing, it was like one camp here and maybe another camp and then another camp and we used to go visiting with a skiff sometime ...and lots of people lived out there [Croatians and other ethnicities- Creole, French and Cajun], especially the oyster people and so nobody even learned to speak English. So then I was going to Buras and let's see first, second, third grade...I

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275 Eva Vujinovich, interview by author, Belle Chasse, La, May 2012.
remember third, they kept trying to push me [move her up to the next grade], you know, because of my age I was the oldest kid in the class. So from fourth grade to fifth grade they [her parents] asked the teacher if they could push me up from 4th to 5th so I could not be so old when I graduated. I (?) don’t how they did that but in the meantime I was a straight A student until then. When they did that from 4th to 5th Oh, I had it hard. It wasn’t too easy to kind of transfer because they had big things going on, multiplication and, so I did... I was pretty big for my age and they would make me play Santa Claus (laughing) because I was big… so they gave me all kinds of jobs, but anyway I managed to not fail so I don’t know how I did but I kept on going and I graduated with this class in 1947.”

After high school Eva went to New Orleans where she lived with cousin and attended Mohler Beauty College on Canal Street near the former Lowe’s State Palace Theater (the building has been vacant since Hurricane Katrina in 2005). Eva’s cousin later opened a hair salon in Empire, Louisiana, where Eva worked for about six years until she married. In her own words Eva tells the story of how she met her husband, Peter Vujinovich, in Empire, Louisiana, and started her own family. “I met him when I was about sixteen across the street where we went to school, you know, the one room schoolhouse? When they took away the school from Ms. Nora [the former teacher that homeschooled children on the bayou]. She [Anna Beth] stayed there and she kind of taught piano lessons and stuff like that and she played the organ in church, St. Anne the little church, and she always was grooming me to go play, and I thought my mama wouldn’t buy me a piano and she bought me a piano, 75 dollars at Werlein’s, she didn’t have no money to buy that, I don’t know where she got that money and she got me...but that was ok because she couldn’t do nothing without me, he [Father] did believe in education, I don’t know what put that in his head. Until the day he died, he was on his deathbed he said ‘Some education

_Eva Vujinovich, interview by author, Belle Chasse, La, May 2012._
is very good’ you know, especially for ladies you know, in them days, they didn’t want ladies to
do anything but stay at home...So then...Oh yeah, his sister came down to live in the apartments,
they made apartments out of that little school and he came there to see the sister and I happened
to be there making crustula [a favorite native Croatian dessert] or something at the time, as usual,
and he [her future husband] came in and he asked his sister ‘Who's that girl?’ I was sixteen. He
says, ‘I'm gonna marry that girl’ [laughing]... And he went to town and he sent me a Valentine
box... candy. Now you got this box of candy and you don’t know if you’re supposed to eat it or
what. They say if you're going to eat it, you’ve got to marry him [laughing]. But I think they
didn’t hold me to it and we ate it. Nine years. He was courting me for nine years and I wouldn't
give in, and I didn't-I didn't want him. And so, he would, all those years, every year I would have
a Valentine box of candy from then on. So I don't know, I went through some boyfriends and
everything, you know, and kind of ...you know latched on to anybody and then my brother got
married in 1953 and at the church and he [future husband] came down and wherever we'd go he
always talk to us so...and he say ‘You know something? That should be me and you,’ he said to
me, ‘you know?’ And I went away and I start thinking, ‘Maybe that's a good idea’ I was 25 by
that time. I said I should do something with myself. And sure enough, the next year we got
married.”

Later in the interview Eva talks more about her husband, their marriage and their
business. Like her father, Eva’s husband, Peter, was in the oyster business. Here Eva recalls
what life was like, since the couple split time between the bayou and the city. “He was in
oysters, yeah. Sometimes like on a weekend I’d go help him out because we had a shop in New
Orleans...The Captain's Oyster Shop...and we sold oysters to restaurants, *plus*, he had the oyster
boats and the leases. So he was doing the double kind of work, you know? And he had people on

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277 Eva Vujinovich, interview by author, Belle Chasse, La, May 2012.
the boat that was working the boat and then he would come in periodically to the shop and see what was going on...”

The shop was located at 1731 N. Rampart, a bustling Croatian corridor during the early to mid-twentieth century. When asked what Rampart Street was like during the period, Eva responded, “Yeah, lots of Croatians and what happened, the neighborhood went bad. Then they got all bad people in the neighborhood. But since he bought the building, since he was there, we stayed there. But all our people that was there moved away, to Metairie and wherever.” The oyster shop remained at the same location until 2005 when Hurricane Katrina forced the Vujinovich’s to shut its doors. When asked about the shop’s closing, Eva described the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina for herself, her family and the business. “We worked there the whole time though, my husband and I, I did the shop with him, and then I was selling oysters and he was going out to get oysters and then uh, like I said, the storm came, and ...water in the shop, but my house...close to the lake, and the house was under water seven feet for 17 days, the water was in there, so we lost the house and everything in it, and the shop too. And so we said we're not going back. He was in his 80s and I was about 75 or so, so it would be too hard for us to start again...And then the oysters [beds] got ruined out...its a funny thing how a hurricane will twist itself and go way down in there and push the oysters and throw them all around. So, the oysters have to wait until they come back. We're in Belle Chasse now because Peter still works the boats, he's my son, and we still have boats out on Port Sulphur for oysters and he goes out there.”

Eva’s story—growing up on the bayou, learning English, moving to New Orleans, obtaining her education and eventually moving back to Empire, working and marrying a local

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278 Eva Vujinovich, interview by author, Belle Chasse, La, May 2012.
279 Eva Vujinovich, interview by author, Belle Chasse, La, May 2012.
man-- reflects the desire of many immigrants to assimilate into American society and culture while holding on to their past. What is interesting here is that Eva went back to where she was born and raised, yet split her time between the bayou and city. Eva’s story highlights the importance of the oyster industry to both areas and demonstrates how involved Croatian women, whether immigrant or native born, were in their husband’s businesses. Differing slightly from the stories of both Krasna and Klara, Eva’s story illuminates the difficulties associated with assimilation while attempting to preserve familial and cultural ties.

The three stories recounted here highlight the Croatian female immigrant experience in New Orleans and the surrounding area. Croatian immigrant women provided stability and companionship for their male counterparts while further promoting the permanence of their ethnic community. The women presented here contribute to the female dialogue while demonstrating their importance to both local and state history. From the beginning of this project through to the very end it is overwhelmingly clear that the female immigrant has played an integral role in preserving the Croatian culture and heritage within the Louisiana communities of both Plaquemines and Orleans Parishes and should therefore be recognized for her contributions now and in the future.
Conclusion:

On Monday, September 22, 2014, Krasna Vojkovich gathered her family together at Andrea’s restaurant in Metairie, Louisiana, to celebrate the 80th anniversary of her family’s restaurant, Crescent City Steakhouse. Seated around her were her four children, five of her nine grandchildren, and one of her two great grandchildren. Also in attendance were spouses and friends. With a strained voice, Krasna spoke of her husband’s journey to America, his struggles in the bayou, his work in various restaurants on Rampart Street and his crowning achievement—owning his own restaurant at 1010 Broad Street, Crescent City Steakhouse. Krasna and Ivan were married for 35 years. Ivan Vojkovich had died almost twenty years earlier, but his family, friends and especially his wife, preserve his memory through stories of his life and accomplishments while carrying on his name by maintaining the business he created.

In an interview conducted in March of 2012, Krasna spoke of her husband. She stated, “Yeah he was, he was [a self-made man]. From sixteen years old he went on and then came you know good open the business, he was great business man, and uh… he say he was serving in the army WWII and he said that when they go test you, you know, nobody believe it that he never went to college. He said when the man was um… for math doing, asking them questions whatever was and he was trying on the machine he answered before he got it on machine. They couldn’t believe it. You know? [smiling and nodding head]. He was! He really was [a good man]! It was so… people would come here. One time there was Tulane professor, English… I mean language professor, he came there for lunch and I don’t know how they start the conversation, but they were standing up at the bar and start talking about languages. And he was telling my husband the Croatian, Yugoslav at that time, language is Slavic language. And he was telling him about difference, and how this start and this and that, and my husband say no, no,
no, no, it wasn’t like that, it was this and that. And he say, ‘This is first time I meet someone that will correct me on languages.’ [laughing]. And he was so um… impressed with him that he stood there, I think it took a good while, they were talking about you know, languages. He was very… very smart really…”

Krasna’s affection for and admiration of her husband and his accomplishments have been unwavering since their marriage and she continues to hold him in the highest regards. In her opinion, her life changed the day they met and she is eternally grateful to him for altering that course. Although their story is but one in a long list of immigration experiences, it highlights the contribution of the Croatian immigrant to New Orleans as well as contributes to the preservation of local cultural heritage.

In 2014 in honor of Ivan Vojkovich, the family started a scholarship at Loyola University New Orleans, School of Business. Ivan always wanted to go to college and study business, but never had the chance. Through these efforts the family is hoping to aid a student in a similar circumstances to achieve his or her dream of a college education. As for the restaurant, it is still located at the same address Ivan opened in the 1930s and continues to be a great success among Croatians, New Orleanians and tourists alike. Ivan and Krasna Vojkovich’s journey to America, experience in New Orleans and ultimately their marriage highlight the contribution of the Croatian immigrants to both the local immigrant dialogue, as well as their role in the local New Orleans restaurant industry. The story of Krasna and Ivan Vojkovich, their marriage, their family and their social organizations that gave coherence to their community, typifies the Croatian immigrant experience in New Orleans and illuminates the story of the many who came before and after their immigration.

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280Krasna Vojkovich, interview by author, New Orleans, La, March 2012.
In June 2014, the Slavonian Benevolent Association held a slightly different celebration in honor of its 140th anniversary. The celebration honored the 140 years the SBA has been an incorporated organization aimed at aiding Croatian immigrants and their families with financial assistance. Although times have changed and the organization has altered and modified its initial mission, the SBA still seeks to aid its members and their families through the networks of familial and business partnerships it has fostered. For the celebration the association flew in both a Croatian priest from Chicago and the Croatian ambassador to the United States from Washington D.C. A mass was held at Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic church on Esplanade Ave. Following the mass, the priest blessed the SBA tomb located in St. Louis Cemetery No. 3, located across the street from the church. Later that day, the organization held a picnic in New Orleans City Park. The event brought together Croatian members of the SBA, their families and their non-Croatian friends to celebrate the longevity and vitality of the organization, as well as to celebrate the organization’s goal in adapting its role for the future. While the organization is currently seeking new ways to remain relevant in American society, it still plays an important role in gathering together the Croatians of New Orleans and the surrounding area.

Croatian immigrants in New Orleans contributed to the social, spatial and economic development of the city, and most importantly they left a network of kinship and business ties that bind the Croatian community across parish lines. Although often ignored in New Orleans immigrant history, the Croatian community has been an essential component in Louisiana cultural heritage. Through their contributions to the state seafood and restaurant industries, the Croatian immigrant has left a lasting mark on both the city and state economy, making the Croatian immigrant community in New Orleans and the surrounding area a contributing group to the history of New Orleans and to the state of Louisiana. Although small in numbers, the
Croatians of Louisiana continue to play an integral role in the state’s oyster industry thereby enhancing their visibility throughout the state and even the nation.

What emerges in this case study is a portrait of one small immigrant group that established itself in a foreign country under circumstances echoed across the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Croatians of Louisiana immigrated to America, learned the language, obtained employment and housing, intermarried, and created a life in their adoptive homeland, much as other immigrant groups throughout the area had done in the decades before. However, what makes this group distinctive is that despite its small numbers, the Croatians of New Orleans and the surrounding area have not been totally absorbed into the larger immigrant population. This particular group has not been diluted over time and can still be looked upon as distinct in an area populated by numerous immigrant groups.

This case study highlights the spatial distribution of incoming Croatian immigrants to the New Orleans French Quarter and surrounding neighborhoods and demonstrates how and why New Orleans’ oldest neighborhood was the original site for ethnic clustering. Furthermore, this work examines the contribution of Croatian immigrants to the state economy through oyster fishing and cultivation and how relationships developed between Croatians in New Orleans and those Croatians residing in the lower lying parishes. And finally, this work gives meaning to the networks Croatian immigrants facilitated through their aid and social organizations thereby fostering Americanization while maintaining ties with each other and the old world. The Croatians in New Orleans worked in conjunction with other immigrant groups, and more importantly with their brothers and sisters in the lower lying parishes, to create business and familial alliances that persist today. Although different in numbers and size from other immigrant groups arriving to the area in during the same time period, the Croatians of New
Orleans created a community that satisfied their needs for housing, employment and socialization, and established themselves a relevant force in the state economy while still retaining their Croatian identity and culture.

The Croatians of New Orleans and the surrounding area have maintained ties with their homeland, yet have succeeded in incorporating themselves successfully in the American culture while still retaining their Croatian identity. Many members of this group still own property in Croatia. While some Croatian immigrants to Louisiana have inherited family properties in Croatia, still others biannually return to apartments, houses or condos, they have purchased for themselves in their old villages or in the neighboring larger towns. It is not unusual for many of the Croatians in New Orleans to spend a few weeks, or in some cases a few months, per year visiting the old country. Many now return with their children and grandchildren born in the United States to show them their roots. In her own words Krasna explained why she has kept her family’s, and now her own property, in the town of Sucuraj where she grew up. Although at the time of the interview Krasna still had three sisters living in Croatia, she made it very clear she owned her own property and did not stay at a relative’s house during her annual visit home.

“Oh no I have my own house. Because my kids and grandkids they like, they like it, and they go. Last year, year before, my grandson [Ivan] one from Virginia he came. One time he came with two friends, the other time he came with one friend, and so they enjoy it. So I figure I need to keep the house for them. [laughing].”

These visits reinforce Croatian heritage among the Croatian community of New Orleans and have led to an interesting preservation of identity among Croatian Americans in the surrounding area. In fact, in certain villages along the Dalmatian coast like Igrane and Duba,

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281 Krasna Vojkovich, interview by author, New Orleans, La, March 2012.
during the summer months the population swells to accommodate a number of returning and visiting families so much so that it seems all of Plaquemines and part of Orleans Parishes have transplanted to the Croatian Coast. It is a surreal feeling to walk the promenade around the village port and see your Croatian-American neighbors and their families enjoying coffee and ice cream, or returning from a morning fishing excursion. Everyone knows each other, where they are from, which family you belong to, and which house or apartment your are occupying. It is a community that reconnects only intermittently, but retains its bonds with its homeland. Each home maintained in Croatia by Croatian-Americans living in New Orleans and the surrounding area is a preserved connection to Croatian culture and history. It is an impressive undertaking that demonstrates the desire of this group to maintain ethnic ties with their homeland while fostering American lives as well.

The Croatian community of New Orleans has maintained a strong identity in New Orleans and the surrounding area is through the retention of its language. Unlike many other immigrants groups in the United States, the Croatians of Louisiana have generally preserved the spoken Croatian language amongst themselves, their children, and in some cases their grandchildren. It is not unusual to attend a gathering of two or more Croatians and not hear the English language spoken at all. Furthermore, a visitor to any of the coffee shops in Plaquemines Parish on a Sunday morning following mass would be sure to find a group of Croatian men sipping coffee, eating donuts, and talking. The fact that the Croatians of Louisiana have retained their language may be due to the fact that many only arrived in the 1960s and 1970s, a rather short time ago; however, the fact that they have maintained their language in some cases through the third generation, is a distinguishing characteristic among immigrant communities in the United States. The fact that many second and third generation Croatian Americans in New
Orleans and the surrounding area have held onto their language yet become fully assimilated Americans in education and business, reflects this group’s desire to preserve and protect their cultural heritage while still striving to be contributing members of the local and state economy.

Yet another way the Croatian community of Southeastern Louisiana maintains its connection to Croatian cultural heritage while fully integrating into American society is through the networks of familial and business partnerships fostered and developed within the last 100 years. It is not unusual within the community to discover how closely related some members are to others. If not from the same village, one will often find that Croatian immigrants were from neighboring areas and knew each other before immigration. Upon arrival they clustered in comfortable groups, as many immigrants did, and raised their children together further facilitating marriages and businesses ties in the future. It is likewise not unusual to find that many Croatian siblings, born in America or abroad, own companies together in Louisiana, as well as property here and in Croatia. Although this sometimes causes tension within families, it is a pattern that persists within the community though the present (2014), and shows no signs of decline. Familial ties run deep within this community and further preserve this group’s dual identity of both Croatian and American while fostering kinship ties to the larger economy.

The Croatians of New Orleans, and the surrounding area, have made an impact on both the cultural heritage and the economy of the state of Louisiana thereby contributing to the local, state and national immigration dialogue. This case study demonstrates how the Croatian immigration experience is both different and similar to that of other immigrant groups in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and it highlights the fact that this group has maintained its identity throughout the processes of assimilation and Americanization. Although small in numbers, their contribution to the state and local seafood industry has been enormous. They
perfected methods of the oyster cultivation and fishing making the process easier and more profitable, and have operated some of New Orleans’ most widely known seafood bars and restaurants. Furthermore, their work in the marine and oil and gas industry has also garnished attention in recent years. This group has seceded in achieving the American dream and yet has retained its Croatian identity throughout the process. The Croatians of Southeastern Louisiana have contributed to state and local history and as seen here are worthy of study and admiration. This group proves that although small in numbers, one’s impact can be great thereby leaving a lasting mark on the city of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana.
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Fig. 18. Renee Borgogne. 2013. Map denoting Croatian Immigrant Clusters, 1921.

Fig. 19. Renee Borgogne. 2013. Map denoting Croatian Immigrant Clusters, 1923.

Fig. 20. Renee Borgogne. 2013. Map denoting Croatian Immigrant Clusters, 1933.

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Vita

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