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# Ordinary and Extraordinary Trauma: Race, Indigeneity, and Hurricane Katrina in Tunica-Biloxi History

**BRIAN KLOPOTEK, BRENDA LINTINGER, AND JOHN BARBRY**

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Tears come before words as Tunica-Biloxi tribal member Elisabeth Pierite struggles to express her experiences with Hurricane Katrina. She sits in the living room of her family's new home in Marksville, Louisiana, two years after Katrina forced them to abandon their home in New Orleans East. It is fitting to start with tears. Really, it is the only proper way to begin the story, to convey what Hurricane Katrina and its human-made aftermath meant for her, for so many of us.

Hurricane Katrina traumatized the city of New Orleans and the Gulf South. It filled most Americans and global citizens with grief and rage in the late summer of 2005. As the world watched, feeling powerless to help the many thousands of suffering people, at first stunned and then furious over the ineptitude of government response to this long-predicted disaster, the Tunica-Biloxi Tribal Nation tended to the needs of thousands of evacuees on its small reservation three hours northwest of New Orleans directly along a designated hurricane

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evacuation route. Among the many nontribal evacuees were a relatively small number of tribal families who had lived in the New Orleans area, some of them for generations, as a result of earlier, less visible kinds of trauma. A few would never be able to return to their former homes. Others would return to find their homes damaged but salvageable, but their communities were dispersed or destroyed, never to return in their previous incarnations. These tribal members living in the New Orleans area had returned on other occasions to stay with their Marksville relatives for a few days during hurricane evacuations, but as the world knows, this turned out to be no ordinary evacuation.

In surveying the ordinary and extraordinary, Hurricane Katrina reveals a number of important lessons about the Tunica-Biloxi people, their history, and the status of indigenous nations in Louisiana. Part of this article's intent is to provide a straightforward narrative of Tunica experiences during a local disaster with global implications that we hope will be valuable to tribal members and historians of Native peoples in the United States. More than just a retelling of events, though, the narrative intervenes in scholarly, popular, and political discourses by connecting Tunica people to contemporary events in a way that undermines the tendency to see Indian tribes as significant players only in a distant past.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, comparing the ordinary and extraordinary allows us to compare and contrast the experiences of racialized groups with experiences of indigenous groups. In Native American studies, scholars have generally avoided the study of race beyond the Indian-white context, preferring instead to focus on the political status of tribes as sovereign nations, external to US social relations. Such an approach has been warranted at times because too many people understand Native Americans simply as minorities without any categorical distinction from other communities of color in the United States, but recent scholarship in the field suggests a need for closer attention to broader racial formation processes and the position of Native peoples within constellations of race relations.<sup>2</sup> Undoing racial projects requires understanding how they function, but we have not yet developed an adequate framework for incorporating racial theory into Native American studies systematically.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, ethnic studies as a field has not demonstrated a solid understanding of the distinction between indigenous groups and racial minorities, and ethnic studies scholars typically fail to see the ways in which the colonizer-indigenous relationship is both central to and distinct from other racial projects. The failure to account for this distinction is the failure of ethnic studies to provide an adequate framework for anyone contemplating indigenous issues or racial formation in the United States more broadly. Native Americans are both indigenous nations and racialized minorities in the United States, and scholars in both Native American studies and ethnic studies should be careful to take each of these issues under consideration.

Theories of race are typically concerned with internal socioeconomic relations among racialized groups within a given society, while theories of colonialism focus on external political relations, territoriality, culture, and natural resource control, in addition to practices of racialization. Racism and colonialism bleed into one another at the edges because they share an

ideology of white supremacy at their center. Based on the fairly simple idea that white people and their ancestors are morally, intellectually, politically, and spiritually superior to nonwhites, and therefore entitled to various forms of privilege, power, and property, white supremacy diverts multiple resources from multiple oppressed groups (internal and external) through multiple kinds of behavior.<sup>4</sup> If we think of racism and colonialism as dual practices guided by the ideology of white supremacy, they become more clearly linked—not only now but also throughout history, and not only in the United States but also around the world. Such a configuration confirms that the struggle against colonialism must be a struggle against racism and vice versa, and that the failure to address either component allows the entire system to survive.

Hurricane Katrina was, among many other things, a teachable moment, an event that helps us talk about race, poverty, and power. The extraordinary trauma of Katrina briefly exposed the slow but ongoing trauma of being a poor person of color in the urban United States in ways that shocked some observers, but merely confirmed the harsh reality of life for many people of color for others. Katrina also makes the connection of race, place, and culture accessible to a broader audience, tying the experiences of Indians to other communities of color even as it allows us to distinguish specifically indigenous concerns. The history of Tunica-Biloxi families emigrating from Marksville, moving to New Orleans and elsewhere as early as the 1920s, provides an analogous earlier example of American failure to value appropriately the connections between culture and place, and the ways that the slow, ordinary trauma of racism and colonialism can be as devastating as a hurricane.<sup>5</sup>

#### RACE AND PLACE: ORDINARY AND EXTRAORDINARY TRAUMA

The forced emigration that followed Katrina provides an important starting point for comparing race and indigeneity. Let us begin with a much-scorned quote from Barbara Bush spoken while she visited Katrina evacuees in the Houston Astrodome: “Almost everyone I’ve talked to says, ‘We’re going to move to Houston.’ What I’m hearing, which is sort of scary, is they all want to stay in Texas. Everyone is so overwhelmed by the hospitality. And so many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this—this is working very well for them.”<sup>6</sup> The remark that living on the floor of the Astrodome was “working very well” for the predominantly black poor evacuees drew considerable criticism, as it revealed a distinct lack of understanding of the connection between race, culture, and place in New Orleans. We want to be careful not to idealize New Orleans; the fact that the vast majority of people in the Astrodome (and Superdome) were black testifies to the role racism played in structuring the city’s history, but a place does not need to be perfect to be cherished as home.<sup>7</sup> For our purposes, in addition to the sheer economic devastation and human tragedy evacuees of all races faced, they expressed a deep sense of loss and anger over the potential obliteration of the unique culture they had been part of in New Orleans. Readers should keep the economic, human, and cultural losses of Katrina evacuees in mind as we continue this discussion.

By way of comparison, well-known anthropologist Ruth Underhill made a statement similar to Bush's, but it was about the Tunica-Biloxi tribe in 1938. Of the Tunicas, she wrote, "All the young people are anxious to move to Houston, Texas, where they will be free of racial discrimination and feel they will have a better chance. Unless they can be content with their present meagre scale of living, this seems the best plan, for Marksville is a small town with limited opportunities for work and with strong color prejudice. Before moving they wish information as to their rights to sell the land or possible money aid."<sup>8</sup> The parallels are striking. Like Barbara Bush, Underhill failed to appreciate the deep connection of a people and their culture to *place*, did not challenge the oppressive local conditions from which the people sought relief, and did not comprehend that racial orders would simply be reconstituted in a new context without significant intervention. Moreover, Underhill envisioned Tunica problems as predominantly racial, when in fact their problems emerged from both their racial status and their status as an indigenous nation in a colonial society. Contrary to her suggestion that they emigrate, staying in their homeland and maintaining tribal sovereignty was the most important investment they could have made in their future, not only for its eventual material and political value but also for its spiritual and emotional value.

The New Orleans example is instructive for helping people understand what would be lost when Underhill casually suggested that the Tunica-Biloxis give up their ancestral home and indigenous status. People understood New Orleans as a unique cultural gem, distinct from all others in the United States. Its francophone traditions, voodoo practitioners, distinct racial history, and abundant connections to the Caribbean world made New Orleans a city apart from the rest of the country. Hence, when Katrina hit and the levees broke, the city's unique culture and history became part of the rallying cry to rebuild. Organizations emerged dedicated to supporting the city's musical and artistic heritage through difficult years of rebuilding. Funding sources were developed to help people move back to New Orleans, which certainly had economic motivations, but the cultural and historic legacy of the place is what made its value more than that of a prefabricated suburb. Many people understood better once it was threatened that the culture of New Orleans was attached to that place with its specific histories and—given this new context of its devastation—that it could not be rebuilt or replicated in any other place in the world. There was a contingent that said to plow it under, but the majority of people understood what a cultural loss it would be if New Orleans as such ceased to exist. And for those who were raised in this place, in this culture, with family and friends, and in these traditions, leaving them behind could be agonizing, even as they sought relief from the corruption and racial dysfunction that also characterized New Orleans.

The Tunica-Biloxis were similarly attached to their land, their particular place in this world. When they talked to Ruth Underhill about leaving their land in 1938, they certainly must have been full of the same kinds of agony that gripped emigrants from New Orleans, because their traditions existed only with their own people and only in that small patch of land that still belonged to them.

They were far fewer in number, though, with less than fifty tribal members in 1938, making their traditions that much more precious and endangered.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, they were indigenous, and their aboriginal right to the land might be alienated forever if they were to abandon it, unalterably changing their collective identity. Blacks and whites will be blacks and whites wherever they go, but when a tribe leaves its homeland in the United States, its indigenous status does not necessarily follow to its new home. This has not always been the case, but it has been increasingly so since the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup>

Still, many contemplated leaving, and many left. When such trauma strikes quickly and forces people from their homes, destroys their communities, and takes their lives, it is newsworthy, easier to identify. But the disaster striking the Tunicas was the slow, ordinary trauma of racism and colonialism, constantly grinding away at their resources, strength, and traditions. As then, so now it is harder to recognize slow trauma going on around us. This trauma has been just as destructive as a hurricane, forcing tribal people to leave their beloved homes in a slow trail of tears, wiping out thousands of other “cultural gems” in the last several hundred years in much the same way as Katrina did. Rather than rallying to save the Tunicas, the federal government pushed them a little closer to the edge. A brief look at Tunica-Biloxi history will add important context for understanding what the decision to leave would have meant in 1938.

At least six historic tribes contribute to the composition of the modern Tunica-Biloxi tribe of Louisiana, the official name of the group still informally referred to as simply “the Tunicas.” Although the membership of the tribe is primarily Tunica and Biloxi, members of the Choctaw, Ofo, Pascagoulas, and Avoyelles tribes became permanently affiliated with these communities by the late eighteenth century, and the Tunicas had moved to the Avoyelles Prairie in central Louisiana by 1786.<sup>11</sup>

The purchase of Louisiana Territory by the US government in 1803 led to difficulties for the Tunica-Biloxi confederation because the United States was the first government it had encountered that would not recognize its aboriginal sovereignty. The federal government failed to uphold protectionist language in the Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts and the Louisiana Purchase Treaty that would have protected Tunica land and sovereignty, and white colonists began attempting to usurp known Tunica lands early in the American era.<sup>12</sup>

A tract of Tunica land near present-day Goudeau (Bayou Rouge Prairie) was lost in an 1826 lawsuit, and in 1842 a colonist named Bordelon submitted a claim for title to land that included the Tunica village at Marksville. Bordelon had his title confirmed without mention of the Tunicas, but his claim became the center of a lawsuit between his successor in title and the Tunica tribe.<sup>13</sup> In events clearly preserved in tribal oral history but not in the documentary record, Bordelon’s successor in title, Celestin Moreau Jr., put new fences in annually on his land abutting the reservation, and when he did, he would have his crew of slaves move the fence over ten feet each time, encroaching on tribal land (the very definition of slow trauma). Tunica Chief Melacon confronted Moreau, who shot and killed the chief and never stood trial for the murder.<sup>14</sup>

The following year Moreau sued to evict the tribe from “his” land.<sup>15</sup> An out-of-court settlement left the Tunicas with 127 acres of land, which remained untaxed as an unofficial tribal reservation from that time forward, a reservation that the federal government had no part in creating or maintaining, but that nonetheless continued to have its boundaries honored by local officials until it was finally taken into trust by the US government in 1981.<sup>16</sup>

The reservation contained numerous significant places to which the Tunicas felt particularly attached, in addition to relying on the land for material subsistence. The graves of their ancestors lay there, central to the annual *fête du blé* (green corn ceremony) and community identity more broadly. The Trou’ Poupone, a ritual diving pool said to be where the Avoyelles people emerged from underground, lay there in the Coulee des Grues.<sup>17</sup> Nearby were the Marksville Mounds, where archaeologists dug up graves in the early 1930s against the wishes of the tribe and with impunity, and the resulting state park allowed visitors to walk over the gravesites, again over the objections of the tribe.<sup>18</sup> Ordinary trauma constantly pressed at a strong Tunica connection to place, and they had been fighting to keep their land for more than 150 years by 1938.<sup>19</sup> The forces pushing them must have been powerful for them to consider leaving, which raises the question of how we are to interpret Underhill’s depiction of Tunica thoughts.

By the time Underhill visited the reservation, many tribal members had already moved away—some to east Texas with the timber industry, some to New Orleans in search of blue-collar work, some to Illinois with other migrant agricultural laborers. Longtime activist and Ponca tribal member Carter Camp adeptly commented in the days after Katrina hit, “as you watch the masses of poor people struggling to survive the disaster, just remember some of them are Indians who were first displaced by the Americans from their homelands.”<sup>20</sup> The Tunica families in New Orleans who were displaced by Katrina certainly prove Camp’s point, as they were among those who had been displaced in the 1930s and more recently by ongoing colonialism and racism.

Ruth Underhill’s 1938 trip to Marksville was prompted by a visit from a delegation of Tunica leaders to Washington, D.C., to request recognition of their tribal status and services from the Office of Indian Affairs.<sup>21</sup> This trip, at great expense to the deeply impoverished community, was the latest incarnation of its efforts to receive federal recognition and was likely spurred by news of federal services received by the Jena Choctaws and Coushattas, neighbors of the Tunica, or perhaps by news of the Indian Reorganization Act.<sup>22</sup> In response to their efforts, Underhill, an anthropologist who was associate director of Indian education at the time, was sent to evaluate the Marksville Indian community to decide whether it merited federal services. Her report on the Tunicas is riddled with historical, linguistic, and ethnological inaccuracies, and she approaches the tribe with a palpable air of skepticism. She only stayed with the group for five days, and her lack of understanding reflected that fact. She placed little value on their tribalism, tribal political status, or the deep connection of the Tunica-Biloxi people to their land. Ultimately, Underhill would contribute to the slow, ordinary trauma of racism and colonialism in various ways in her report.



Underhill wrote that the Tunicas were “obviously much mixed with other Indians, negroes, and whites. The people of Marksville class them socially as negroes and allude to them as Redbones, or negroes with Indian ancestry.”<sup>23</sup> Certainly they had mixed much with other Indians and some whites and a few blacks by 1938, but this characterization of them as a group with an ambiguous identity leaves the impression that they are not a legitimate Indian tribe, and therefore not worthy of any assistance from the Office of Indian Affairs.<sup>24</sup> Certainly that is the impression Underhill’s report made on Director of Indian Education Willard W. Beatty, who, based on her report, described the Tunica-Biloxi tribe as a “group also *believed to be* largely Indian, tho not quite so free of negro admixture as the Houma.”<sup>25</sup> Underhill took the social classification of the group by local non-Indians at face value, failing to grasp the ways locals deployed the term *Redbone* as a weapon in a racist arsenal that kept Indians subordinated to whites rather than as an accurate genealogical descriptor. The Office of Indian Affairs was disinclined to serve Indian communities with black ancestry, to the extent that black ancestry among some Louisiana tribes ultimately contributed to a decision to disavow responsibility for all the tribes in the state by the 1940s.<sup>26</sup>

Accusations that the group was black undermined its claims to indigenous status and thus undermined its claims to the land as well. The racial epithet, *Redbone*, implied that the person so called was racially impure, something like a mongrel. Even though the term implies some degree of Indian ancestry, the significant connotation of the term is that the people called *Redbones* are “really” black, meaning they cannot “really” be classified as Indians. White Americans commonly followed the rule of hypodescent, or the “one-drop rule,” which meant that the presence of African ancestry in any amount automatically classified a person, family, and even a community in this case, as black. Marksville whites knew this when they called Tunicas *Redbones*, and Underhill should have too. It was a means of disempowering Tunicas by erasing their indigenous legal and political status and highlighting their racial status. Black people or “colored” people did not have a collective right to the land under US law. Indian tribes did.

Underhill also claimed that the tribe’s “chief purpose in inquiring about land claims was to inquire if they could sell the 127 acres they occupy” because they were “desirous of leaving Marksville where their children are excluded from school and where they are treated as negroes.”<sup>27</sup> The Tunicas were undoubtedly inquiring about the title to the land they occupied and adjacent land lost to Moreau in the 1840s, but it is much more likely that the land they wanted to sell was the land lost near Goudeau, which they had earlier expressed interest in selling in order to make improvements on the Marksville land.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the only parent of school-aged children, Joseph Pierite Sr., was opposed to moving the tribe to Texas, so the statement’s accuracy is debatable. Some of the group certainly did want to leave Marksville for Houston or elsewhere and did so, but to say that the *group* was “desirous of leaving Marksville” ignored the angst and ambivalence even those tribal members who left felt over what must have been a glum proposition for some of them. One of the chief purposes of the initial visit to Washington a month earlier



had been to try to find some funding or have land confirmed to the tribe so that the Texas émigrés could move back to Marksville; Underhill clearly missed or ignored some of the tribe's sentiments. Many of the young tribal members did leave, but a core population refused to leave Marksville, despite acute oppression, and that is the best evidence of the sentiments left out of Underhill's report.

Katrina evacuee experiences illuminate Tunica ambivalence in the 1930s. In a powerful montage in Spike Lee's documentary, *When the Levees Broke*, a series of survivors speak of both love for the place and their ties to New Orleans and at the same time their powerful sense of rejection from that place. Lower Ninth Ward resident Robert Rocque said, "My roots are tied firmly into this place. My parents and grandparents are buried here. So this is really my home. But it's hard to stay in a place that you feel that don't really want you to be here." Herbert Freeman Jr., whose mother died at the convention center while waiting to be evacuated, said, "I don't even want to be under their jurisdiction. I don't want to be under the, you know, the leadership of no one in New Orleans or Louisiana, nothing."<sup>29</sup> These voices make plain the rejection and resentment evacuees felt for the powers that be in the home community, feelings that were amplified especially for those who had suffered under the ordinary trauma of racism prior to evacuation. Evacuee responses provide insight into what Tunica-Biloxi tribal members felt as they contemplated leaving Marksville in the 1930s, as long as—without diminishing the distress of Katrina evacuees—we keep in mind that the Tunica community was not only much smaller (just a handful of families), but that it was also an indigenous nation. Comparing the extraordinary trauma endured by Hurricane Katrina victims—things such as forced emigration, dispossession, cultural devastation, loneliness, anger, disconnection from family, death by federal neglect—to events in the 1930s lets us visualize more clearly how devastating the ordinary trauma of colonialism and racism was for Tunicas at that time (fig. 1).

Although Underhill's report on Tunica people contained traces of accuracy, it also reflected her skeptical approach to the tribe. At no point in her report did she express any hope that the federal government would offer assistance to the tribe politically, economically, or culturally. Instead of finding a way to help the Tunica-Biloxis stay in their traditional home and facilitate a return of tribal members in Texas, Underhill encouraged them to move to Houston and essentially give up their tribal status, aboriginal sovereignty, and cultural ties to each other and to their reservation. Underhill placed little value on Tunica-Biloxi tribalism, partly because she did not believe them to be much of a tribe in the first place, and partly because she valued assimilative education and material comfort over what she viewed as quasitribal persistence. She seems to have subscribed to the belief that Indians as such were on a steady road to extinction, and that the best course of action for the Indian Office was to help them assimilate into American society as painlessly as possible. Fortunately, Tunica leaders envisioned a different future for their people.



**FIGURE 1.** *Once the office for a sawmill on the Tunica-Biloxi Reservation, this building later became the home of Joe Pierite Sr. (Michael Pierite's grandfather and the last traditional chief of the Tunicas before they switched to a tribal council system in 1974). Erected sometime in the 1950s, the building's disrepair in the absence of visible catastrophe serves as a visual representation of the impact of ordinary trauma on Tunica-Biloxi tribal structures. Fittingly, the building has since been demolished amidst a building boom on the reservation that includes a massive new Cultural and Educational Resources Center. See <http://www.tunicabiloxi.org/museum.php>. Photo by Brenda Lintinger.*

### “PILES OF MEMORIES”

As Katrina evacuees and descendants of émigrés from Marksville in earlier times, the Michael and Donna Pierite family's experience was not typical of Tunica families, but it epitomized the chaos of what became an extraordinary evacuation. The Pierites had been living in New Orleans East for decades. They did not anticipate that Katrina would be the Big One until the night before it hit, so they had little time to plan and no space to bring anything with them by then. Michael had to stay behind because he was a public works employee for St. Tammany Parish, across Lake Pontchartrain, and was expected to participate in response efforts. Donna and sixteen-year-old daughter Elisabeth brought a few vital personal records, some cash, and a few days' worth of clothes as they evacuated to Houston. Everything else was left behind.

Donna had hoped to be able to return after thirty-six hours, but news and footage coming out of New Orleans suggested they could not. They decided

they could no longer afford to stay in a hotel and headed to Marksville, not knowing what to expect there, either. As they left the hotel, they and the other evacuees grabbed extra food from the continental breakfast in anticipation of lean times ahead. "It was like *Mad Max*, it was like *Red Dawn*," Donna intoned.

The tribal hotel, a jam-packed hurricane evacuation center near Marksville, provided a room for them. The mood there was tense: none of the hundreds of evacuees knew if they would be able to return to their homes or work anytime soon or if their families and friends had survived. The postapocalyptic mood of the evacuation center meant that grief and desperation were always hovering just below the surface. Similarly, every gesture of kindness and comfort was reassuring beyond words. When the family was invited to the tribal center for a dinner, Donna describes feeling overwhelmed with comfort at seeing relatives and plenty of food available, despite the desolation in the background. "Brenda [Lintinger (her cousin and fellow evacuee)] was there, and the rest of the council was there, and Brenda . . . was shaking and she was crying. . . . I was so desperate . . . you didn't know where your next meal was going to come from." Access to food, water, clothing, shelter—basic necessities they had been able to take for granted—suddenly seemed imperiled, creating constant, gnawing stress.

Michael Pierite faced his own ordeal in St. Tammany Parish and would not be able to reconnect with Donna and Elisabeth until several days later. He performed all manner of disaster-relief functions, from clearing roads to delivering water and food. It was many days before he was able to sneak past police roadblocks into New Orleans East to check on his house. "When I first went in there," he said, "I had to break the doors in just to get into the house, and then shove the door—because the furniture was blocking the doors. . . . The smell was so horrific" (fig. 2). When he was allowed to return to New Orleans in October, Elisabeth accompanied him. In a class assignment a year after Katrina, Elisabeth poignantly described her experience. "To walk from room to room we had to climb over furniture and piles of memories soaked with the remains of the flood water. The smell was unbearable. We wore masks, but I could still smell the stench of mold and spoiled food."<sup>30</sup>

Despite small miracles, the flood hit their home hard. Extensive research archives related to federal recognition of the Tunica-Biloxi tribe, genealogy, tribal history, and Tunica language research were all destroyed (fig. 3). Donna, a tribal descendant, has worked to revitalize Tunica language and culture since the 1970s, and Michael's family has been deeply involved in tribal leadership for generations, so losing this archive was a loss for the tribe as much as it was a blow to the Pierites. Family photographs, regalia, beadwork, drums, an heirloom blanket, and ball sticks were all destroyed or permanently damaged. A stick ball and a model *pilon* (corn pounder) were saved from the wreckage and cherished, along with a beaded medallion forever carrying the dank smell of the black mold lodged behind the beads. Nearly all their worldly possessions, including the house itself, were warped, rotted, and covered with mold. "These are just things, and you're not supposed to worry about them," Donna remarked, but losing everything at once on top of losing a lifetime



**FIGURE 2.** *The Pierite family living room in New Orleans East, October 2005. The drum floated out of the living room into the kitchen. “It was soggy, with mold all around inside,” said Elisabeth Pierite. Photo by Elisabeth Pierite.*

of community connections made them feel uprooted and desperate. They cleaned out the old house as much as they could so it could sell. Michael was still working, “but,” he said, “with one income coming in and the way that everything was so stretched that at that point . . . it just took one thing and everything would have fell apart.”

The decision to stay in Marksville was not simple, and the transition was not easy. Michael was still working in St. Tammany Parish. Elisabeth enrolled at Marksville High School, and Donna approached the high school about a job. As a French and Spanish teacher with many years of experience and postgraduate education, Donna hoped to find work quickly. The state superintendent of education, she said, had ordered all evacuated teachers to report to local schools in evacuation centers to help shoulder the extra workload of teaching children relocated to those areas. She showed up at Marksville High School on the first day of class, ready to teach and was brusquely rejected. “They said, ‘*Why don’t you go find a job at the casino?*’ Okay? That’s. What. They. Said.” Tribal Chairman Earl Barbry Sr. intervened on her behalf, and she was hired shortly thereafter.

Though her principal was accommodating after she began working, she says, Pierite’s initial experience reveals the impact of what Katherine Spilde has termed “rich Indian racism.”<sup>31</sup> The false stereotype of wealthy Indians



**FIGURE 3.** *The home office of the Pierite family in New Orleans East contained books and archives related to Tunica-Biloxi history, culture, songs, stories, and political efforts gathered over several decades. Photo by Elisabeth Pierite.*

with unlimited resources is “embraced despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.”<sup>32</sup> The Tunica-Biloxi tribe has a successful casino resort and other economic development efforts, but its tribal per capita payments are only enough to supplement family income, not enough to replace a salary or wages. Certainly the fact that Pierite applied for a job likely meant that she needed one, but the stereotype of rich Indians persists nonetheless. Further, a related line of thinking that suggests that Indians (especially from gaming tribes) do not deserve—and ought not seek—jobs or support outside the tribe accompanies the stereotype. This practice is doubly destructive because it is used to justify the exclusion of people who, statistics indicate, already lag economically. Encountering anti-Indian racism of this kind might be unusual in New Orleans, but the family has to expect it in Marksville.

The term *refugee* became an epithet in Marksville and elsewhere, and the Pierites felt that despite overwhelming hospitality in some quarters, many people in Marksville treated them as miscreants. Elisabeth recalls being ridiculed by her peers and teachers in class discussions at Marksville High School. “They were saying, well, y’all were stupid for living in below sea level areas, you know, and after, the teachers, they’d make *jokes* about it, and it’s like,” her voice breaks, and tears roll down, “you don’t really understand unless you lived there.” Keith Anderson, a musician who was transferred from a New



Orleans jail to the Avoyelles Parish jail in Marksville, corroborates these attitudes in *When the Levees Broke*, describing guards there who “relished” beating them. “They didn’t like *nobody* from New Orleans,” he said.<sup>33</sup> It is not difficult to imagine the friends and relatives of the guards treating other evacuees the same way. Thus, the Pierites faced a unique blend of discriminations, as Indians, as evacuees, as a family of color.

Unlike nontribal evacuees, however, tribal families had an additional, more intimate layer of governmental support available to them. The tribal chairman knew them personally and could use his position and established contacts to advocate for jobs on their behalf. As a governmental unit in the federal matrix, the tribe could help them secure funding more conveniently through the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Donna Pierite recalls receiving catastrophic assistance from the tribe, along with suitcases full of toiletries, slippers, towels, and the like. Such added support was unique, because it was more than just hometown or extended family or even Red Cross assistance. It was nation, family, and race all rolled into one—in short, it was tribal support, and it was vital to their recovery.

The tribe provided incredible support for nontribal evacuees too. The tribal council takes their role as good neighbors and responsible human beings seriously, calling hospitality, goodwill, and generosity longstanding Tunica traditions.<sup>34</sup> Although there is not room in this article to address every instance of support for evacuees, let it suffice to say that every conceivable service was provided to evacuees of Hurricane Katrina and of Hurricane Rita, just a few weeks later. The tribe has volunteered the Paragon Casino Resort as a designated Red Cross evacuation center, and tribal members and employees and the Avoyelles community put forth thousands of combined hours of volunteer effort to support evacuees. The tribe spent thousands of dollars in the effort. Rather than viewing such support as a burden, tribal member Inez Sampson suggests that she and others were grateful that so many evacuees were sent to Marksville so the tribe could help take care of them. However, the tribe had specific obligations to tribal members and services they could provide only to them.<sup>35</sup> Michael, Donna, and Elisabeth Pierite fared better than many evacuees, in part because they had been financially stable prior to the hurricane, in part because of the added layer of tribal financial support, and in part because they were able to relocate to a place where they had family, friends, and—uniquely—tribe.

To imagine that the impact of the hurricane was strictly financial would be a mistake. Becky Wambsgans, a tribal member whose former neighborhood virtually disintegrated following Katrina, notes that “it affected everybody, whether they had damage or not. Just mentally, just to see what happened, and how close it came to maybe even death for a lot of people.” Their church was shut down, and many locally owned area businesses never reopened; the somber reality of so many needless deaths shook many people’s sense of safety and faith.

It is perhaps in the area of emotional and spiritual healing such as this that support has been most lacking. Michael observes that these issues are often overlooked when discussing the recovery process.

With me, everybody's saying, well you went through pretty good. Well, it's not that. You've got to think about what I actually saw, what I actually went through. A lot of people got out, and I understand, they had their problems when they evacuated. But I was there during the whole doggone thing and seen a lot of stuff that normally you would never ever see, seen things people do that you would think they're crazy. It was just things like that that I just couldn't handle for a while. . . . We tried making jokes about it, just about anything and everything, but deep down, it was hard, and a lot of times, I just felt like I had to just punch something or just scream.

The anger, frustration, powerlessness, and grief apparent in Michael's description reveal the extent to which, like other evacuees, he and his family were traumatized by their experiences.

Michael and Elisabeth, in particular, felt isolated in Marksville the first year, as surely many other relocated evacuees felt in their new surroundings. "I do feel the pressure or feeling of what I used to do in New Orleans. The way things used to be. It works on me. It's like getting a flashback," Michaels says. Elisabeth adds, "It's like . . . you grew up in that area and you're so used to how you used to live and the people that you're around. They're . . . your support system, all your friends you have, you know, but . . . after the storm, everybody just dispersed all over the country, and you don't have that same feeling of closeness anymore." Michael interjects, "You can call them and talk to them on the phone, but it's not the same." Elisabeth continues, "And . . . you have a new job, a new school or whatever, and you kind of feel a loss. Alone I guess? And people, they can't understand how you feel because they haven't been in that position before." The grieving they identify goes beyond the idea of losing a home or neighbors, tragic as that was. They suffer the collective trauma of losing New Orleans as they knew it and New Orleans East in particular—a place with a vibrant mix of Vietnamese, African American, and other cultural communities; a place with neighborhoods of varying socioeconomic status; a place with its share of both urban problems and pleasures. It was a place where they felt they belonged once, a place that, for them, had become a place of "piles of memories soaked with the remains of flood water."

Though some had family connections in both places, tribal members leaving Marksville in the 1930s had feelings of loss and loneliness similar to those reported by Katrina evacuees. They continued to return to Marksville regularly for decades, ensuring that their children and grandchildren would remain connected to their relatives, tribe, and homeland. Both the emigrants and the core of tribal members who stayed in Marksville had an enduring bond to the tribal community and an enduring hope for the future of the tribe, despite their circumstances and Underhill's pessimism.

As with economic support, having tribe has helped the Pierites in the emotional and spiritual arena. In considering their options after Katrina, which included an offer to live with a friend of Donna's in Nevada, the possibility of returning to New Orleans in a different neighborhood, or even rehabilitating their own home, the draw of tribe was strong. Moving to Marksville provided



not just family but also a sense of belonging and opportunity that felt lost in New Orleans and absent in Nevada. Marksville represented their best chance of feeling like they belonged again.

The family has been closely involved in tribal affairs for decades, but employment with the tribe provided a new sense of belonging and opportunity. Elisabeth, who now works for the tribal housing authority, says she finally began to feel more a part of the tribal community, seeing and helping tribal members every day. Living in New Orleans, away from the tribe, she had not been able to experience that. She now works in an atmosphere that constantly reminds her of the tribe's political, cultural, and historical distinction from surrounding communities.<sup>36</sup>

Michael had no interest in the gaming industry as a career path, and most of the entry-level jobs for which he would be qualified paid near minimum wage, but when a position as manager of environmental quality for the casino resort came open, he leaped at the opportunity. The position called on his career strengths in public works and gave him responsibility for taking care of wildlife in a newly constructed hotel atrium featuring a simulated bayou with live alligators, turtles, and fish. The whole family, including son Jean-Luc, who recently left a career in video game development in California to join his family in Marksville, now conducts shows in the atrium on weekends that include Tunica-Biloxi stories and songs about alligators, a deeply meaningful animal for the tribe culturally. The Pierites have been involved in tribal cultural education for many years; the shows are a natural extension of their previous educational work on Tunica songs, storytelling, and traditions (fig. 4). Working with alligators and doing educational outreach together as a family only enhances their sense of belonging to a distinct community and makes the Pierites grateful to be in the position in which they find themselves, in that sense. They certainly suffered losses in the hurricane, but they also feel they gained something because it led them back to their tribal homeland. "The dances, the songs, the stories," Jean-Luc notes, "they didn't have to load the car to carry those with them." Donna agrees. "We have done well," she says. "Not everybody does well."

## THE TRIBAL FUTURE

Unfortunately, an ideology of white supremacy continues to undergird state politics even today, as is evident in the ways that opposition to the "expansion of gaming" in Louisiana has become a platform issue for state politicians. Governor Edwin Edwards pushed to legalize gaming in the state in 1992, during the beginning of his fourth term. He was eventually convicted of racketeering for granting licenses for riverboat casinos in exchange for bribes. As a result of Edwards's history of corruption, Mike Foster, the Republican governor from 1996 to 2004, ran on an antigaming platform. While in office, Foster continually frustrated tribal attempts either to establish gaming or amend their state compacts. Though gaming is still legal in any parish that wishes it to be so, and video slot machines can be found in nearly every gas station and restaurant in the southern half of the state, the political contentiousness of



**FIGURE 4.** *The Pierite family performs a traditional Tunica song during the Tunica-Biloxi Pow Wow, May 2008. From left to right: Jean-Luc, Elisabeth, and Donna Pierite. Photo by Brian Klopotek.*

the issue has significantly impeded tribal economic development efforts, and it has become a conservative wedge issue in significant state elections since then. David Vitter, the ultraconservative US senator later revealed to have had a long affair with a prostitute, was perhaps the most outspoken in his opposition to the “expansion of gaming.”<sup>37</sup> Centrist Democrat Kathleen Blanco was not vocally antigaming in her campaign, but she later came out against the “expansion of gaming” after enduring political pressure on the issue from Vitter. Incoming Republican governor Bobby Jindal continued this Louisiana tradition, using gaming as a conservative wedge issue in the 2007 election, but he failed to advocate for the state to abolish gaming, which would have cut off an important revenue stream for the state government and numerous small business owners.<sup>38</sup>

In the aftermath of Katrina, state politicians were understandably concerned with trying to reestablish the economy after billions of dollars’ worth of property and businesses were destroyed in the hurricane. The Tunica tribe approached the state in November 2005 to discuss an amendment to its gaming compact that would allow it to issue a high-yield bond—essentially a massive influx of capital from funders who expect a return on their investment—so the tribe could expand its resort hotel. Governor Blanco and Attorney General Charles Foti were taking heat from many constituents at

the time and did not want any more complications. Because of the ongoing relevance of gaming to state electoral politics, however, the governor's staff made it clear that they would not support the use of the bond proceeds to fund the expansion of gaming. Rhetoric around the "expansion of gaming" nearly blocked a project that would provide an immediate return for the reeling Louisiana economy in the construction jobs it created, in addition to the long-term benefit from added jobs, economic strength, and tourist dollars it would bring. Fortunately, the tribe had planned to use the bond to finance construction not of gaming space but of luxury hotel and nongaming entertainment space.

As the first tribe in the state of Louisiana to secure a high-yield bond issue, the Tunicas were charting new territory. The required political, economic, and legal maneuvering would not have been possible even fifteen years earlier, much less fifty years earlier. It demonstrates the savvy that the tribe has developed through years of experience in dealing with governmental roadblocks based in anti-Native politics designed to protect the interests of white Louisianans. The high-yield bond allowed the tribe to contribute to the state economy after the hurricanes hit and, more importantly, to pursue its own recovery from the extraordinary trauma of Katrina and the ordinary trauma of colonialism and racism. That is to say, they could provide economic opportunities for tribal members that were not available under more severe racial practices in years past and compensate for the economic stagnation that comes with losing all but the last 127 acres of their national territory. Economy is a seemingly boorish concern, but it is central to the ability of tribal members to live near each other again and participate in all those ceremonial and everyday events that contribute to tribal identity, in addition to funding the tribal museum, cultural center, powwows, and language camp. Moreover, economic power adds political power and access that helps support tribal political sovereignty as much as it supports tribal cultural activities.

Ultimately, the tribe's experience with Katrina is emblematic of both continuities and changes since the days of Ruth Underhill's visit and the considerable emigration of tribal members to Texas, New Orleans, Illinois, and elsewhere. Since attaining federal recognition in 1981, the tribe's fortunes have been on a general upswing, but the opening of the casino in 1994 provided an enormous financial opportunity. The Tunicas have consistently built up tribal enterprises through the years so that now they are the largest employer in Avoyelles Parish. Rather than merely providing shelter and succor for family members, the tribe has been able to provide aid to thousands of desperate evacuees by using thousands of dollars of its own revenues and resources. With their land and tribal recognition secured under federal law, the Tunicas have had a thorough turnaround from the days when the tribe had to consider whether or not it could even stay in its native land.

Along with the hidden continuities of racism and colonialism, then, we must consider the hidden vitality, strength, and endurance of the Tunica-Biloxi tribe in the face of this onslaught, just as we acknowledge and celebrate the survival and persistence of New Orleans. Even in those dark moments of

the 1930s when the cumulative force of 150 years of ordinary trauma under US racial and colonial regimes pressed the tribe to contemplate the possibility of leaving its reservation, it continued its longstanding effort to have its political status as a sovereign tribe recognized by the US government, regardless of what the Bureau of Indian Affairs anthropologist suggested. A Tunica vision of a *tribal* future endured, and the tribal structure became a critical resource not just for tribal members but also for Avoyelles Parish and even the state. Healthy tribal communities can help support their neighbors, and recognition of their indigenous status is critical to tribal health.

The experiences of the predominantly working-class New Orleanians who were affected so deeply by the extraordinary trauma of Hurricane Katrina illuminate not only the vulnerabilities of people of color (the result of years of experience of the ordinary trauma of racism) but also the connection of culture to specific places. Tunica-Biloxi people shared that connection of culture and place along with many of the same vulnerabilities—some Tunica-Biloxi tribal members were among the New Orleanians displaced by the hurricane—but when Tunicas were being pushed out of their homes by the ordinary, grinding trauma of racism, colonialism, and federal caprice in the 1930s, they were at risk of losing their homeland, collective sense of self, and political status as a nation, and with so few tribal members at the time, their cultural survival was a much more tenuous proposition. Tunicas had an added layer of loss: their preexisting political status as a nation would have ceased to exist if they had been forced to emigrate. However, their indigeneity would become an added resource, economically, spiritually, and culturally, as they worked to revitalize their tribe through the years.

These convergences and divergences of indigenous and racialized groups merit closer attention. Along with race, class, gender, and sexuality, indigenous status (and immigrant status, though that is beyond the scope of this article) must be a significant intersectional category of analysis in ethnic studies and Native American studies. The political status of indigenous groups, their cultures, and their ties to specific places have been crucial components of their identities, oppression, and resistance, and the failure to recognize this aspect of indigenous histories results in deficient scholarship. In Native American studies, we need to see the common roots of racism and colonialism in a singular white supremacist ideology—the many common experiences of blacks and Indians in the United States clearly tie our histories together, suggesting the need for renewed attention to racial theory in the field. Such ties must be more visible in Native American studies, just as the distinguishing characteristics of indigenous experiences must be explicated in ethnic studies. Combining established ethnic studies and Native American studies approaches allows for sounder, more complete analysis of race and colonial relations, which allows both fields to move forward together.

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### NOTES

1. Although many have noted this tendency, Phil Deloria and Paige Raibmon each write compelling theorizations of it in recent works. Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 2004); Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians Episodes of Encounter from the Late Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 2005.

2. Claudio Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Tiya Miles and Sharon P. Holland, eds., *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); James F. Brooks, ed., *Confounding the Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

3. Following Omi and Winant's definition of *racial formation* as "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed," and a *racial project* as "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines." Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 55–56.

4. Although typically the term *white supremacy* conjures images of Klan robes and neo-Nazi skinheads, the term as it is used in contemporary ethnic studies primarily refers to the everyday ideology of white racial superiority and domination carried even by people who do not consider themselves racist, carried even by people of color. For a general discussion of white racial ideology and material advantages in the United States, see P. S. Rothenberg, ed., *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2002) and George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, rev. ed. (1998; repr., Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

5. Michelene Pesantubbee compares the early contact years of the Choctaws with Europeans as "catastrophic disasters" that "occurred relatively quickly," a take that suggests that other indigenous experiences with Europeans might more adequately be described as extraordinary trauma. Michelene Pesantubbee, *Choctaw Women in a Chaotic World: The Clash of Cultures in the Colonial Southeast* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2005), 144–50.

6. Bob Moon, "Houston We May Have a Problem," *Marketplace*, National Public Radio, 5 September 2005, <http://marketplace.publicradio.org/shows/2005/09/05/PM200509051.html> (accessed 20 June 2008)

7. Michael Eric Dyson effectively describes the racial and economic structures related to the Katrina disaster in *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2006), particularly in ch. 1, "Unnatural Disasters: Race and Poverty" and ch. 9, "Frames of Reference: Class, Caste, Culture, and Cameras." Of particular note, he remarks that 27 percent of black New Orleanians did not have access to cars, and that number doubled among the black poor. Only 5 percent of whites lacked access to cars. Combined with a poverty rate among the highest of all US cities, it is clear why so many blacks "chose" to stay in New Orleans rather than evacuate.

8. Ruth M. Underhill, "Report on a Visit to Indian Groups in Louisiana, Oct. 15-25, 1938," 20. File 68776-1931-800, pt. 2, National Archives, Record Group 75.

9. Tunicas could not as easily incorporate new people into their culture after the 1930s because federal definitions based in blood quantum rather than social and cultural belonging began to influence definitions of tribal membership around this time. This disadvantage also separates them from New Orleans in terms of the threat emigration posed.

10. The Tunicas arrived in their present location by 1786, moving from locations up and down the Mississippi River in prior years. The Biloxi tribal members came from the area that is now the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. Although the membership of the tribe is primarily Tunica and Biloxi, members of the Choctaw, Ofo, Pascagoulas, and Avoyelles tribes became permanently affiliated with these communities by the late eighteenth century, and the Tunicas had moved to the Avoyelles Prairie in central Louisiana by 1786. Documentation of Tunica arrival by this date comes from an order from Spanish Governor-General Miro to the commandant of the Avoyelles Post to protect Tunica rights to their lands in Avoyelles Prairie after the Tunicas had protested to him an attempt by a pair of colonists to gain title to their land. Miro to Gognard, 6 October 1786. *American State Papers: Public Lands*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1832), 243. Cited in Ernest C. Downs, "Documentation of the Tunica-Biloxi-Ofo-Avoyel Community Near Marksville, Louisiana," in American Indian Policy Review Commission, *Task Force 10, Terminated and Nonfederally Recognized Indians: Final Report of the American Indian Policy Review Commission* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1976), 201. See also Office of Federal Acknowledgment, "Recommendation and Summary of Evidence for Proposed Finding for Federal Acknowledgment of the Tunica-Biloxi Indian Tribe of Louisiana Pursuant to 25 CFR 54, History Report on the Tunica-Biloxi Indian Tribe" (Washington, DC: Bureau of Indian Affairs, 4 December 1980), 4.

11. See note 10, documenting Tunica presence in Avoyelles Prairie in 1786.

12. Article VI of the Louisiana Purchase Treaty states that "the United States promise to execute Such treaties and articles as may have been agreed between Spain and the tribes and nations of Indians until by mutual consent of the United States and the said tribes or nations other Suitable articles Shall have been agreed upon." Spain's clear policy was to grant Indians one league square around their villages, and Tunica land and Spanish intention to protect it are specifically mentioned in Spanish colonial documents. See note 10. According to one source, a Spanish league consisted of 4,439 acres, or about seven square miles (George Hager, "Tunicas Still Await Recognition,"



*New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 19 November 1798, sec. 1, p. 8). The Indian Trade and Intercourse Act being used at the time is cited by Donald Juneau as follows: Act of March 26, 1804, ch. 13, 2 Stat. 139, *amending* Act of March 3, 1799, ch. 46, 1 Stat. 743, *amending* Act of May 19, 1796, ch. 30, 1 Stat. 469, *amending* Act of March 1, 1793, ch. 19, 1 Stat. 329, *amending* Act of July 22, 1790, ch. 33. The present version of the Intercourse Act is the Act of June 30, 1834, ch. 161, 4 Stat. 729. *See* Rev. Stat. § 2116 (2d ed. 1878), now codified as 25 U.S.C. § 177. The attorney for the Tunica-Biloxi tribe, Donald Juneau, adeptly analyzed the documentary record of the several attempts of white intruders to defraud the tribe. Donald Juneau, "The Judicial Extinguishment of the Tunica Indian Tribe," *Southern University Law Review* 7 (1980): 43–99.

13. Juneau, "The Judicial Extinguishment of the Tunica Indian Tribe," 60–73.

14. Earl Barbry Sr., Chairman, Tunica-Biloxi tribe, interview by Brian Klopotek, 20 May 2000, Marksville, LA.

15. *Moreau v. Valentine et al.*, Civ. No. 1599 (La 6th Dist. Ct. Avoyelles Ph. filed 12 April 1842), discussed in Juneau, "The Judicial Extinguishment of the Tunica Indian Tribe," 60–73.

16. Downs, "Documentation of the Tunica-Biloxi-Ofo-Avoyel Community," 205–6; Office of Federal Acknowledgment, "Recommendation and Summary of Evidence," 9–10.

17. Keith Basso's pathbreaking work on the importance of place in Western Apache culture suggests that scholars need to pay close attention to the connection of indigenous peoples in particular to their places. Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1996). Ernest Downs testified about this in the American Indian Policy Review Commission (AIPRC) Baton Rouge hearing, "I'd also like to add that that dam lowered the level of water in a place called Trou' Poupone, which in old times and as late as the 1930s served as a sacred spot where ritual diving went on during the corn feast and when people passed away there was a special place that people would dive into the water. And this place is now out of Tunica hands and is ecologically unbalanced because of this Coulee Project." Transcript of hearing of the AIPRC, Task Force 10, Terminated and Nonfederally Recognized Indians, in Baton Rouge, LA, March 1976, 63, Records of the AIPRC, 1975–1977, box 315, "Unidentified Records," Record Group 220, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD. Mary Haas refers to diving at the place where the Avoyelles tribe is said to have emerged, which is a place the Tunicas regard "with considerable superstition." Mary Haas, *Tunica Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948), 153.

18. In the early 1930s, the Works Progress Administration made a state park out of a mound group near the reservation. They sent a team of archaeologists to investigate the mounds. Chief Eli Barbry and a couple of other men from the tribe took rifles to the excavation site and chased them away. One archaeologist finally coaxed their fingers off the trigger by convincing them that these gravesites were from a prehistoric tribe not Tunicas. Later investigations in the 1960s revealed more recent burials, so it is likely that Tunicas were buried there as well. *See* Records of the AIPRC Baton Rouge hearing, 56–57; John Barbry, "Tunica-Biloxi Tribalism and Indian Policy Reform, 1922–1947," unpublished manuscript completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the MA in history at the University of New Orleans, 12–13. The problem continued in the 1970s, with Joe Pierite Jr. (father of Michael Pierite) complaining that the state park



authorities let people walk all over the graves of his ancestors. He complained about it during the AIPRC hearing in Baton Rouge (56–57) and complained about it on the ABC News segment with Vine Deloria. “As a tradition, we . . . pay close attention to our dead . . . and respect them very highly. So this doesn’t look right at all for someone to be running up and down. Nobody be able to see any tracks across the graveyard.” *ABC News Americans All: Vine Deloria*, directed and produced by Howard Enders, 7 January 1974, transcript, 2. According to Joe Pierite Jr. the park put up a fence around the mounds the day after the broadcast, but there is no fence today.

19. See note 10, documenting Tunica presence in Avoyelles Prairie in 1786.

20. Brenda Norrell, “New Orleans Lessons Mirror American History,” *Indian Country Today*, 6 September 2005, <http://www.indiancountry.com/content.cfm?id=1096411520> (accessed 22 August 2007).

21. Barbry, “Tunica-Biloxi Tribalism,” 18; Office of Acknowledgment, “Anthropological Report on the Tunica-Biloxi Indian Tribe,” in “Recommendation and Summary of Evidence,” <http://indianz.com/adc20/adc20.html> (accessed 6 June 2008). The delegation drove to Washington in a Model T Ford, and it included Eli Barbry, his son Sam Barbry, Horace Pierite, and Clarence Jackson.

22. See Brian Klopotek, “The Long Outwaiting: Federal Recognition Policy in Three Louisiana Indian Communities” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2004).

23. Underhill, “Report on a Visit to Indian Groups in Louisiana,” 20.

24. The only Indian-black marriage that we are aware of at that time is that of Herman Pierite Sr. and his wife. Percy Pierite fathered children by a black woman but never married her. Herman and Percy were brothers of Joseph Pierite Sr., who married a Biloxi woman.

25. Willard W. Beatty to “Joe” (not Joe Jennings), 19 January 1939, File 68776-1931-800, pt. 2, National Archives, Record Group 75. Emphasis added.

26. Bureau officials expressed concern in 1934, e.g., that they might be called on to serve Louisiana Indians who were “mixed with negroes” like other “so-called Indians in Louisiana particularly in Terrebonne Parish [in reference to the Houma tribe], such people being of various racial mixtures.” A. C. Hector to W. Carson Ryan Jr., 12 September 1934, File 68776-1931-800, pt. 1, National Archives Record Group 75. They did briefly serve the Jena Choctaws and Coushattas, who had not mixed with blacks, but disavowed responsibility for all but the Chitimachas (who had communal land held in trust) shortly thereafter. Black ancestry among state tribes became and continues to be a mitigating factor in determining tribal existence. See Susan Greenbaum, “What’s in a Label? Identity Problems of Southern Indian Tribes,” *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 19, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 107–26.

27. Underhill, “Report on a Visit to Indian Groups in Louisiana,” 25.

28. For information on the Bosra claim, see Office of Federal Acknowledgment, “Anthropological Report on the Tunica-Biloxi Indian Tribe,” 9–10.

29. Spike Lee and Sam Pollard, *When the Levees Broke—A Requiem in Four Acts* (HBO Home Video, 2006).

30. Elisabeth Pierite, “Learning to Count My Blessings,” Ms. C. Puckett English IV Honors, Marksville High School, 6 September 2006. Copy in possession of coauthor Klopotek.

31. Katherine A. Spilde, “Rich Indian Racism: The Uses of Indian Imagery in the Political Process.” Paper presented at the 11th International Conference on Gambling

and Risk Taking, Las Vegas, NV, 20 June 2000, <http://www.indiangaming.org/library/articles/rich-indian-racism.shtml> (accessed 12 November 2007).

32. The quote is from Spilde, but for more detailed information on American Indian wealth in relation to the general US population, see Jonathan B. Taylor and Joseph P. Kalt, "American Indians on Reservations: A Databook of Socioeconomic Change between the 1990 and 2000 Censuses," The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, January 2005, <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/hpaied/pubs/cabazon.htm> (accessed 12 November 2007).

33. Lee and Pollard, *When the Levees Broke*, act V (bonus material for DVD release). After reading a draft of this article, Jean-Luc Pierite noted the parallels between local sentiment toward evacuees in Marksville ("y'all were stupid") and Underhill's attitude toward the Tunicas for their desire to remain in their homeland.

34. Tribal employees Debbie Johnson, Donna Ledet, and Alayna Lee graciously discussed the extent of tribal support for nontribal evacuees with coauthor Klopotek during interviews in Marksville in August 2007.

35. Other Tunica-Biloxi families received assistance from the tribe during the 2005 hurricane season, including Hurricane Rita. The families of tribal members Oscar Mendoza, Brenda Lintinger, Donna Gilmore and Marceline Pierite, Tommy Barbry, and Christina Callahan each received support of some kind from the tribe after evacuating for Katrina and Rita that ranged from housing for a brief time at the tribe's hotel to financial assistance in rehabilitating their homes following the hurricanes. The tribe sent food, gifts, school supplies, and numerous household supplies to tribal families in Orange, Texas, DeQuincy, Louisiana, and elsewhere in the paths of the hurricanes during the 2005 holiday season. Tribal families reached out to one another during the crisis, too, with Bruce Barbre, Rudy Wambsgans III, Becky Wambsgans, and John Barbry and their families, among others, hosting evacuees in their homes. Joe Barbry (Tunica Biloxi Housing Authority), e-mail message to coauthor John Barbry, 11 September 2007.

36. See John H. Peterson Jr., "Assimilation, Separation, and Out-Migration in an American Indian Group," *American Anthropologist* 74 (1972): 1286–95. For more information on Tunica-Biloxi economic development, see Klopotek, "The Long Outwaiting."

37. Alan Sayre, "Coushatta's Lobbying Costly, Leads to Probe," *The Advocate* (Baton Rouge, LA), 15 November 2004, 11B; Michelle Milhollon, "Choctaw Band Sues Governor in LaSalle; Group Wants Money for Denied Casino," *The Advocate* (Baton Rouge, LA), 2 June 2005. "Republican Tied to Abramoff Pushes Anti-gaming Bill," <http://www.indianz.com/News/2005/008825.asp> (accessed 20 April 2008).

38. Stephen Sabludowsky, "Louisiana Election Buzz: Jindal, GOP Make Gambling Campaign Issue," 16 October 2007, [http://www.bayoubuzz.com/News/Louisiana/Politics/Elections/Louisiana\\_Election\\_Buzz\\_\\_Jindal\\_GOP\\_Make\\_Gambling\\_Campaign\\_Issue\\_\\_4907.asp](http://www.bayoubuzz.com/News/Louisiana/Politics/Elections/Louisiana_Election_Buzz__Jindal_GOP_Make_Gambling_Campaign_Issue__4907.asp) (accessed 4 April 2008).