Racial and Ethnic Groups in the Gulf of Mexico Region

Native Americans

Introduction

As part of a larger project that examines demographic and community-level changes in the Gulf of Mexico region, we reviewed racial and ethnicity literature for eight key groups with significant influence in part, or all, of the region. The Gulf of Mexico region is incredibly diverse, with more than 13.5 million residents who trace their origins to scores of places in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America (see Table 1).

Of these various groups, we have focused our reviews on eight specific racial, ethnic and ancestry groups: African-Americans, Cajuns, Creoles, Croatians, Latinos, Native Americans, Vietnamese and Other Asians (not Vietnamese). Although some of these groups many be small in number, their effects on the region have been substantial (see Table 2). For instance, although only about 0.64 percent of the residents in the region identify as Native American, this group was the foundation of the culture, economy and history of the region, and many Southerners can trace their ancestry to Native American roots.

These eight groups emerged as significant through the existing literature that details their unique influences in building the culture, economic stability and political climate in the region, as well as their ties to the oil and gas industry operating in the Gulf of Mexico. For each group, we have focused our review on common elements such as the culture, history, immigration, ties to the oil and gas industry and economic standing. In addition to these common elements, we examined other prominent themes that emerged for particular groups. For instance, the effects of Hurricane Katrina on the Vietnamese fishermen living in southern Louisiana were widely discussed by scholars and thus became a prominent discussion in our review of the literature on Vietnamese living in the region.

This is the sixth in a series of reviews. This review discusses the experiences of Native Americans in the region – a group that was the foundation of the southeastern United States long before European or Spanish colonization[1]. Although much of the documentation about American Indian history, migration and culture is fragmented, this group had substantial effects on the economy, culture and history of the southeastern United States.

Origins and History

Researching Native Americans

Scholars face a myriad of issues when studying Native American history. The primary issue is that many of the existing records about Native American history are incomplete, leaving scholars to try to make sense of what archaeological, ethnographic and historical fragments we do have. Not only are these sources fragmented, they also are often unreliable because they were typically written by "outsiders" such as European settlers, which leaves Native American documents and experiences open to misinterpretation (Wilson 1996, Mihesuah 1998, Perdue and Green 2001).

It was not until the 19th century that a small, elite group of Native

[1] This group has been referred to as Native American, American Indian and Indian throughout the existing literature. For the purposes of this paper, all three terms should be considered interchangeable.

Table 1. Diversity in the Gulf of Mexico Region

Ancestry Category	Percentage of Total Population	Number
British	15.36%	2,147,789
French	7.81%	1,092,377
German	8.71%	1,218,236
Middle Eastern	0.49%	68,544
Northern/Eastern European	5.24%	733,424
Southern European	3.09%	432,724
Subsaharan African/West Indian	1.22%	170,670
	Total Population:	13,985,914

Data from ACS Five-Year Estimates.

Table 2. Groups of Interest in the Gulf of Mexico Region

Racial/Ancestry Group	Percentage of Total Population	Number
African-American	19.14%	2,568,703
Cajun	7.81%	1,092,377
Croatian	0.05%	6,422
Latino	29.72%	3,988,491
Native American	0.64%	85,455
Other Asian	2.95%	396,007
Vietnamese	1.15%	154,669
White	63.72%	8,912,239

Data from ACS Five-Year Estimates and 2010 Decennial Census. Numbers do not add to 100 percent because individuals can indicate more than one race, ethnicity or ancestry group. "Other Asian" refers to Asian groups other than Vietnamese.

American people began documenting their own experiences, and by then, their culture had changed dramatically and much of their history had been lost. This pattern continued into the 20th century, and, according to the historian Donald L. Fixco, as of 1996, "More than 30,000 manuscripts had been published about American Indians and more than 90 percent of that literature was written by non-Indians" (1996). As new methods and data sources have emerged in the past 50 years, however, research on the Native Americans living in the region has shifted. Scholars are now challenging the previous portrayals of Native Americans and are presenting the Native American culture and history as far more complex and nuanced than previously articulated. This analysis aims to bring some of the existing literature together to give readers a glimpse into Native American life in the region both historically and today.

Terminology

The name "Indian" was first applied to the Native Americans when Columbus arrived. In his journal, Columbus referred to the inhabitants of the land he had "discovered" as "the people of god" or in Spanish, "in dios," which later became the word "Indian" (Soule 1995). According to the U.S. census, the term "American Indian" refers to a person who is either enrolled in a recognized Indian tribe or recognized as an "Indian" by the community (GSRI 1973, Norris et al. 2012). This definition is problematic because tribes often have great difficulty gaining official recognition and individuals often have difficulty proving their "right" to membership within a tribe (see section on recognition). In Louisiana, this definition is particularly problematic because Native American groups often intermarried with others, including Cajuns, adding complexity to issues of Native American identity and heritage. These issues of official recognition and terminology have only created more barriers for scholars hoping to critically examine and document the lives of Native Americans.

Origins

Most scientists accept the Bering Strait theory of Native American origin that suggests Native Americans migrated from Asia across the Bering Strait land bridge between 25,000 and 14,000 years ago seeking food. Many Native Americans challenge this theory, however, suggesting instead that they have always inhabited the Americas. Each tribe typically has their own origin myth that details how they came to inhabit the earth (Gatschet 1893, Bushnell 1910, Soule 1995, Curtin 2004, Perdue and Green 2001).

History

Scholars have written extensively about Native American history, both in the Americas and specifically in the Gulf of Mexico region. The documents cover topics such as Indian life before colonization, the effects of European colonization, several significant wars and legislation, such as the Indian Removal Act, that interrupted Native American life. Since the scope of these works is too broad to adequately cover here, we will briefly outline a few of the books and articles we found particularly useful.[2]

There are two books that thoroughly document Native American history specifically in the southeastern United States. The first is *Louisiana's Native Americans: A Mournful Memory, Written in Blood*, which was written by Margot Soule in 1995. Within this book, Soule documents Native American life prior to colonization but also covers the effects of European colonization, removal, war and legislation on Native American life in Louisiana and its neighboring states. The second book we found to be particularly thorough is *The Columbia Guide to American Indians of the Southeast*, which was written by Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green in 2001. Within this vast work, Perdue and Green cover Native American culture and history prior to colonization, the effects of European diseases on Native American life, political and economic instability brought on by colonization, the role of Native Americans in struggles for control over the region, the removal of the "Five Civilized" tribes, challenges Native Americans faced in the post-removal cotton era and the persistence of those who chose to remain in the Gulf of Mexico region.

In addition to those two key works, there are a number of other books and articles we came across that also described and elaborated on Native American life in the Gulf of Mexico region, covering a variety of topics both historically and currently. A few of the works focused on Native America life prior to colonization. Robert Neuman detailed the major archaeological excavations and findings that speak to the historic presence of Louisiana Indians both prior to and after European arrival (1984). David Anderson and Christopher Gillam used archaeological data to examine the arrival and the dispersal of Native Americans throughout North America (2000), and William M. Denevan edited a volume that examines the Native American population just prior to European contact and the devastating effects of colonization (1992).

Other works focused on the effects of Spanish, French and British colonization in the region. For instance, *The Cultural Life of the American Colonies* is a book edited by Louis Booker Wright that surveyed more than 150 years of colonial history

[2] For more information, refer either to the original sources or to the supplemental document that summarizes these works more thoroughly.

in the Americas from 1607-1763 and details how Native Americans fit into that history (2002). Several of the authors were particularly interested in Spanish exploration and occupation in the region. Roland Dennis Hussey outlined the Spanish laws that governed some of the earliest interactions between Spanish explorers and Native Americans living in the region (1932). William C. Sturtevant (1962) and David J. Weber (1994) both elaborate on Spanish-Indian relations in the Gulf of Mexico region and the implications of Spanish exploration on Native American life. Gifford Waters discussed the specific effects Spanish Missions had on Native American identity in the region (2005). Finally, J. Randolf Anderson outlined the history of Spanish occupation in present-day Georgia and the British occupation of 1733 (1933).

Other scholars were concerned with how colonization affected Native American culture. Kathleen DuVal outlined the unique effects intermarriage between Native American women and European traders had on Native American life in colonial Louisiana (2008). Alan Gallay documented the once vast slave trade of the south and the effects it had on Native Americans living in the region (2002). Armstrong Starkey examined the many conflicts that occurred between Native Americans and Europeans after colonization, suggesting that not only were these wars for land but also a more fundamental conflict of cultures (1998). Finally, Halbert and Ball focused their book on the specific effects of the Creek War, especially focusing their analysis on the Native Americans' perspectives of the event (1995).

Several authors discussed the political life of Native Americans and the effects colonization and eventually American independence had for Native American sovereignty. In her book, Sharon O'Brien detailed the Native American struggle for sovereignty and the effects of European governments, as well as federal and state governments, on tribal life (1993). The Indian Removal Act of 1830 and its implications also were widely discussed by scholars. Alfred Cave (2003), Grant Foreman (1974), Michael Green (1982) and Theda Perdue (2012) all documented the contents and devastating effects of the Indian Removal Act of 1830.

In outlining these few works, it becomes evident the Native Americans living in the Gulf of Mexico region have an incredibly complex and nuanced history that dates back for thousands of years. Although we were unable to summarize this history here, these experiences undoubtedly shaped the culture, economic structure and political foundation of the region today.

Specific Tribes

The following section outlines some of the literature about a few specific tribes living in the Gulf of Mexico region. Although the tribes discussed here do not begin to cover the vast Native American culture and history in the region, our aim is to give readers a taste of the complexity and nuances of Native American history.[3]

A number of tribes have operated in the Gulf of Mexico region, both historically and today. Comparatively few tribes are federally recognized by the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, however, but many more groups still are represented in the region. Below is a list of a few of these tribes:

Much like Native American history in the region, scholars have written extensively about specific tribes and their unique histories and cultures in the Gulf of Mexico region. The works by Soule, and Perdue and Green, extensively cover specific tribes. In addition to those two works, a vast number of other articles and books have been written about tribes that lived in the region historically, many of whom remain active today. James Covington discussed the extensive struggles the Apalachee tribe had with Spanish explorers and their eventual migration to Louisiana (1972). Both Joseph Butler (1970) and Lauren Post (1962) discussed the controversial culture and history of the Atakapa tribe living in the southeastern United States. Little is known about the Bidai who lived primarily in southeastern Texas, but Sjoberg has done a great job summarizing some of what is known about their history (1951). In his dissertation, Foster Todd Smith talks about the once powerful Caddo tribe that often goes overlooked in scholarly literature (1989). Russell Thornton covers the history and culture of the Cherokee Indians, arguably one of the most important tribes historically in the southeastern United States (1984). Both Gibson (1971) and St. Jean (2004) detailed the Chickasaw history and culture of war. In 1991, the Governor's Commission on Indian Affairs report detailed the complex history of war, intermarriage and recovery among the Chitimacha tribe. This report also covers the Choctaw history of war and eventual removal. The Choctaw tribe had several smaller bands that settled throughout the Gulf of Mexico region, and their histories are discussed by Soule (1995), Rivers and Ebarb (2007) and Bushnell (1909). The Coushatta moved throughout the Gulf of Mexico region, a complex history that is discussed by Jacobson (1960), GSRI (1973), GCIA (1991) and Gregory (1988). Both Debo (1979) and Ellsworth and Dysart (1981) outline the experiences of the Creek Indians, who were devastated

[3] For more information about specific tribes, please refer to the original sources or to the supplemental report.

Table 3. Selective List of Tribes in the Southeastern United States.

Adai	Avoyel	Chakchiuma	Chocchuma	Dulac	Miccosukee	Opelousa	South Alabama Indians
Alabama-Coushatta	Bayogoula	Charenton	Choctaw	Geronimo	Mowa Choctaws	Pakana Muskogees	Tallahatchie
Alabamas	Bidai	Chawasha	Choctaw-Apache	Houma	Muskhoean	Pascagoula	Ten Milers
Apalachee	Biloxi	Cherokee	Clifton Choctaw	Jaycees	Natchez	Potawatomi	Tunica-Biloxi
Atakapa (Attakapas)	Caddo	Chickasaw	Coushattas (Koasati, Koastati, Coushatte)	Kickapoo	New Iberians	Saponi	Washa
Atchafalaya	Calusa	Chitimacha	Creek, Poarch Band of Creeks	Mescalero Apache	Ofo	Seminole	Yazoo

Tribes listed here were chosen from a database of literature that discussed American Indians. This list is not meant to be exhaustive. It is primarily to help show the vast number of tribes living in the Gulf of Mexico Region.

by the Indian Removal Act, and of those who were able to remain in the region after removal. The Houma tribe was particularly influential in the Gulf of Mexico region, and as a result, several scholars discussed their history and culture. Parenton and Pellegrin (1950), GSRI (1973), Gregory (1988), GCIA (1991), Soule (1995), Duthu (1997), Davis (2001) and D'oney (2006) all discussed the Houma history, land struggles, culture and origins. The Natchez tribe is most often remembered for several wars in which they defeated the French. The wars and other aspects of Natchez history are detailed by Mooney (1899), Brain (1971), Woods (1978) and Seyfried (2009). What little is known about the merging of the Tunica and Biloxi tribes is covered by the report issued by the GCIA (1991).

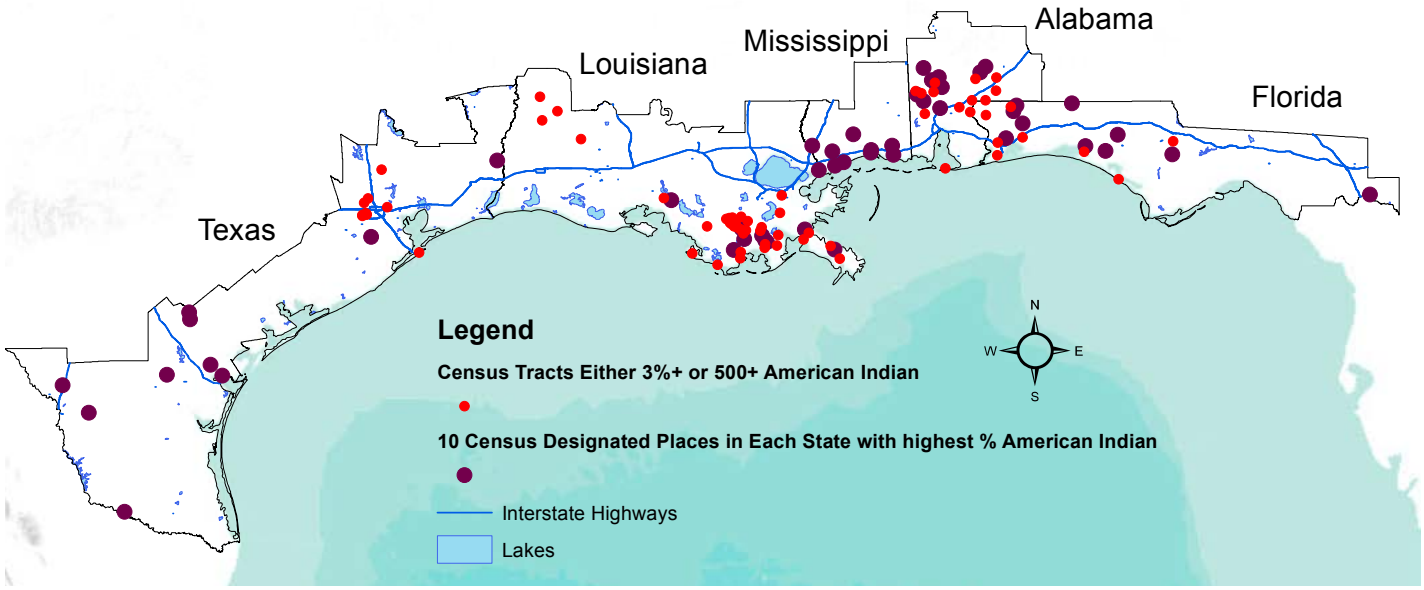
Although much could be said about each of these tribes and others that have a history in the region or remain active today, it is evident through these works that Native American history and culture is complex, vast and nuanced. Each tribe has a unique history and culture, and, more importantly, each tribe had a unique effect in the Gulf of Mexico region.

Federal and State Recognition

One of the things that distinguishes southern tribes from one another today is federal recognition status. Some tribes are recognized by the federal government and others by their state governments, but most are self-designated groups that claim to be Indian tribes. Federal recognition brings services of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and grants the tribe sovereignty over its land, but many Native Americans view the greatest benefit as simply being the admission that they are indeed Indians (Soule 1995, Duthu 1997, Perdue and Green 2001). Recognition is an extremely complex issue within the Native American community. Some tribes do not want the red tape that comes with recognition. Others are anxious for recognition and the services it brings. Tribes that already have secured recognition often hope that other tribes do not receive recognition for fear that it will compromise their own identity or potentially reduce services, since the Bureau of Indian Affairs would be forced to stretch its limited resources even further (Perdue and Green 2001).

To gain federal recognition, tribes must do one of three things – have a proven history, initiate congressional action or be acknowledged by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Prior to the 1970s, several tribes were granted federal recognition because of a history interacting with the U.S. government – the Chitimacha, Coushatta, Alabama-Coushatta, Eastern Band of Cherokees, Mississippi Choctaw, Seminoles, Miccosukkee and Catawba (Perdue and Green 2001, BIA 2012). Beginning in 1978, tribes were able to go directly to the Bureau of Indian Affairs to seek recognition and services. To obtain recognition from that federal bureau, tribes had to demonstrate they were a distinct community, as well as prove tribal processes exist, show first sustained contact with non-Indians, be identified as an Indian group by entities outside the tribe (such as the government, scholars or other tribes) and be able to trace their ancestry from a tribe throughout history (Myers 2000, Perdue and Green 2001, BIA 2012). Under these conditions, the Tunica-Biloxi, Poarch Band of Creeks and the Jena Band of Choctaw were able to gain recognition from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Today, the United States has 565 reservations that are managed by the bureau, although most tribes never achieve federal recognition, and relatively few consider it a tribal goal (Soule 1995, Myers 2000, Perdue and Green 2001, BIA 2012).

American Indians in the Gulf of Mexico Region: 2010



Data from 2010 Decennial Census. Counties selected from Fannin et al. 2011.

Until the 1970s, states did little to include Native Americans in policy decisions. Louisiana was the first southern state to establish a state Office of Indian Affairs in 1970. Other states followed suit, and in 1975 and 1992, both Alabama and Georgia opened their own offices to manage Native American affairs. The responsibility of these offices varies drastically by state, as does the criteria for state recognition. In addition to federally recognized, state recognized and self-designated tribes, there are a number of people in the Gulf of Mexico region who have native ancestry but do not belong to a tribe. Most of these people do not wish to join a tribe, but a few have been thwarted in their attempts to enroll. The U.S. Supreme Court has allowed tribes to determine their own membership requirements, and many tribes require both ancestor enrollment and proof of at least blood quantum before granting membership (Thornton 1997, Perdue and Green 2001). This makes it very difficult for many with Native American ancestry to join a tribe.

Culture

American Indians and their culture perhaps have been the most persecuted, abused and misunderstood of all the people living on the North American continent. Slowly, this image is being challenged and redefined to be a more realistic and balanced image of Native Americans. Because of the persecution and discrimination Native Americans historically faced in the southeastern United States, many of them denied their ethnicity, and much of their culture has been lost. What fragments remain within scholarship are briefly outlined below.

Family

Historically, kinship was extremely important among Native Americans and typically was traced through women (Perdue and Green 2001, Stanton 2006). As a result, nephews inherited positions from their maternal uncles, rather than fathers, and sisters assumed an exalted position in men's lives that Europeans associated with wives. This system was still intact in the 18th century and remains so in some of the southeastern Indian communities in the 21st century (Perdue and Green 2001). Clans also were prevalent among the early Native Americans (Perdue and Green 2001, Barrett and Markowitz 2006). Members of a clan often lived in multigenerational housing, helped to link towns together and to form political identities.

Religion and Spirituality

Religion and spirituality always have been a central part of Native American life and it continues to be so today. Religious beliefs often vary from tribe to tribe, however, and thus are difficult to generalize and discuss in broad terms. Historically, scholars have used common myths passed down by the Native Americans to establish religious beliefs of various tribes (Tooker 1979, Perdue and Green 2001). Some religious ceremonies among the Native Americans were persecuted and prohibited until the American Indian Religious Freedom Act was passed in 1978 and protected the Native Ameri-

can's rights to traditional beliefs, forms of worship and the possession of sacred items (AIRFA 1978, Soule 1995, Dussias 1997, Barrett and Markowitz 2006).

Art

The southeastern Indians have some of the richest artistic heritage of all North American Indians. Tools were made for the earliest occupations in the southeast, suggesting a pride in artistry that began thousands of years ago. As early as 4,000 years ago, people began making more ornate and decorative arts, and many tribes became known for their crafts (Blackard 1996, Perdue and Green 2001, Barrett and Markowitz 2006, Press 2006). The Southeast also produced a number of accomplished 20th century American Indian artists (Perdue and Green 2001, Saradell et. al 2012). After contact with the Europeans, Native Americans continued to make pottery and baskets, but much of their material culture was lost or altered by European goods.

Architecture

Southeastern tribal architecture was unique from other regions in that it relied on mound building (Barrett and Markowitz 2006). Mounds created trade routes and marked territories, likely originating as early as 1200 B.C. (Barrett and Markowitz 2006). Although mound purpose and shape transformed throughout the Indian cultural eras, the greatest change occurred with European contact as Native Americans began adopting the European-style buildings (Barrett and Markowitz 2006).

Music and Dance

Southeastern Native Americans often used music and dance to enhance their rituals and ceremonies. Songs told stories and carried messages to spiritual forces. Often, dancing accompanied music to evoke the spirits to bless the hunt and harvest. In the Aoutheast, Indians used rattles, flutes and drums to accompany their dances (Barrett and Markowitz 2006). Men and women typically danced separately in a stomping step and always danced counterclockwise in a circle around a ceremonial fire (Perdue and Green 2001).

Clothing

Clothing served a practical purpose among the early Native Americans but also was a source of expression. Historically, men most often wore breechcloth or flaps made of deerskin drawn between their legs and belted around the waist. Women typically wore knee-length deerskin skirts. Children typically went naked until they reached puberty. When travelling, moccasins were worn, and during winter men wore leggings made of skins and sashes or robes (Perdue and Green 2001, Barrett and Markowitz 2006). Extra adornment, such as unique hair styles, jewelry, body paint, tattoos and headdresses, often were used to communicate beliefs, values and intentions of the wearer (Barrett and Markowitz 2006). With time, American Indians adopted the European style of dress.

Health

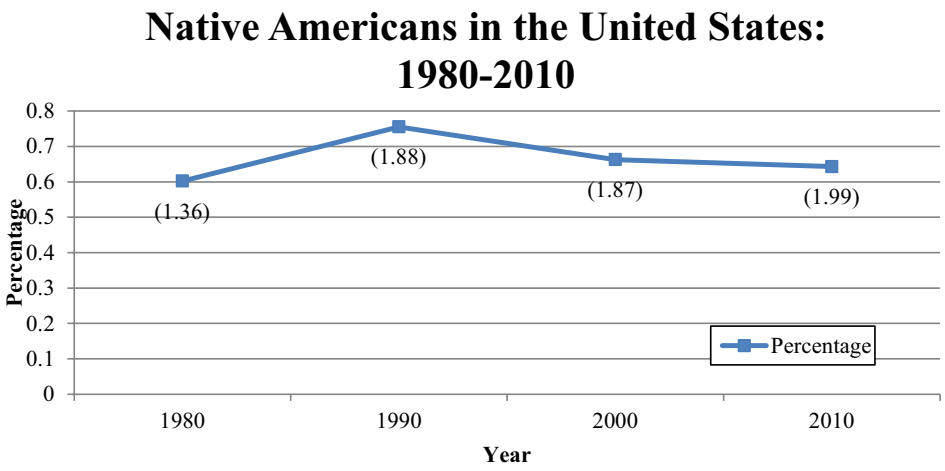
Native Americans believed sickness was the direct result of body, mind and spirit disharmony. As a result of this belief, Native Americans were the first holistic practitioners and used advanced medical procedures such as aromatherapy, relaxation, massage, support groups and sweats, along with intense and sacred prayer rituals, to treat disease (Soule 1995). Prior to contact with the European explorers and settlers, southeastern Native Americans suffered few epidemic or endemic diseases. During that time, malnutrition and poor dental hygiene were more common because of their corn heavy diet (Perdue and Green 2001, Barrett and Markowitz 2006). After European contact, disease devastated the Native Americans. Some estimate that as many as 95 percent of Native Americans died in some tribes. Sedentary cultures suffered the most, and the flu, small pox, malaria, cholera and yellow fever were the most deadly diseases (Barrett and Markowitz 2006).

Language

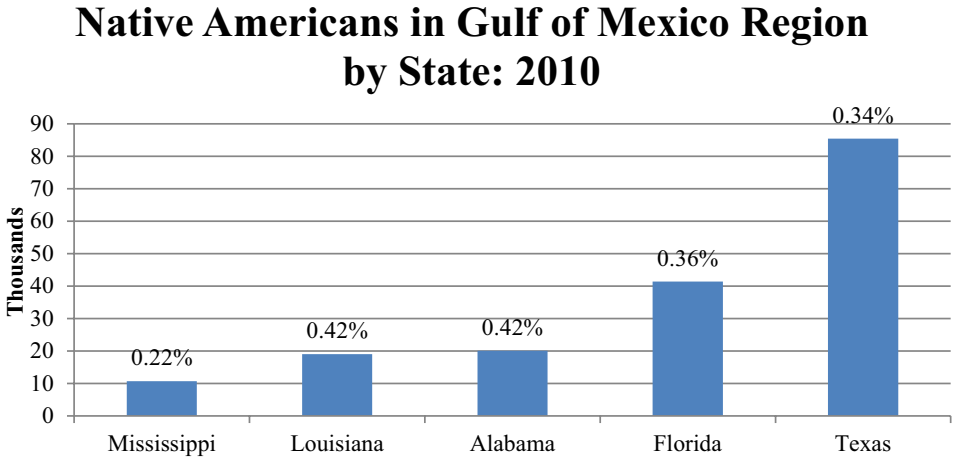
Most tribes in the region, although not all, descended from one of six linguistic families – Chitimachan, Attacapan, Karankawan, Tonkawan, Coahuiltecan or Pakawan and Tamaulipecan (Swanton 1907). Native Americans used descriptive words long before the Europeans arrived to describe plants, animals, bayous, rivers or lakes. There are thousands of states, rivers, cities, counties, parishes and streets across America that bear Native American names (Soule 1995, Bright 2003). In addition to naming much of the southeastern United States, Native American languages also were used in wartime as code. For instance, during WWI the Choctaw language was used as a code our enemies couldn't break. The same practice was done in WWII against the Japanese with the Navajo language (Soule 1995).

Mythology

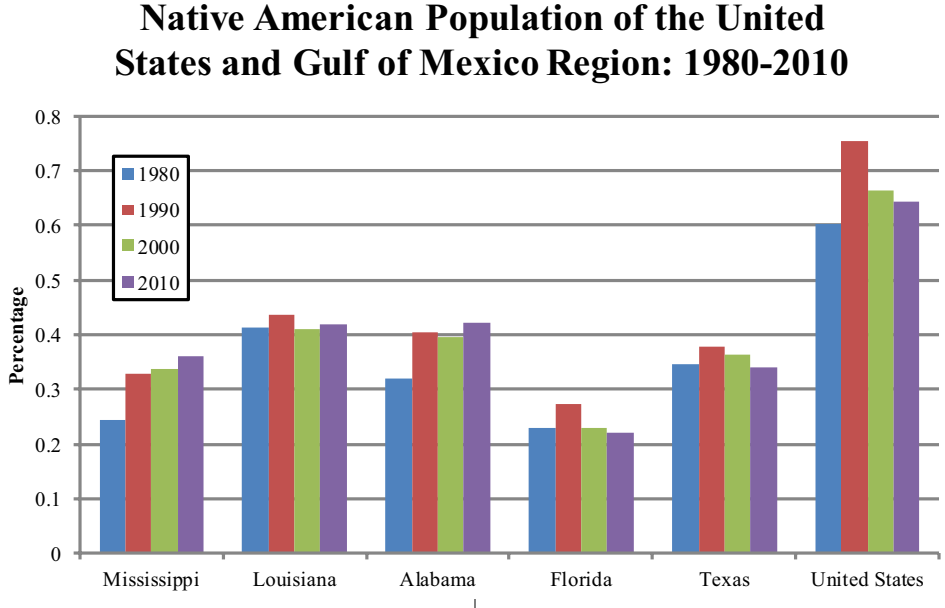
Folktales, legends and myths were handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation, but only a few are known by the public (Swanton 1907, Soule 1995). Folktales typically centered on the adventures and misadventures of both animals and people. They were for entertainment, but also were used for teaching important lessons. For instance, the tortoise and the hare originally was a Native American folktale (Soule 1995). There are several types of folktales: Porquoi tales explain something. Cumulative tales repeat each previous episode. Beast tales involve animal characters with human traits. Trickster tales involve an underdog hero. Tall tales involve



Data from United States Decennial Census. (Native American population in millions in parenthases).



Data form 2010 United States Decennial Census. Percent of total population as data label.



Data from 2010 United States Decennial Census. One race, specified American Indian.

great exaggeration, and fairy tales include wonder and magic (Soule 1995). Myths are believed to be fairly true stories about human and the world origins. Legends are stories handed down about a tribe's ancestors, heroes, famous deeds and history. Legends originate with and are based on real events and characters, but those eventually become larger than life. Each tribe has a unique legend (Soule 1995). Unfortunately, knowledge of the folklore and mythology of the Gulf Natives is deficient at best (Swanton 1907). One of the commonly shared myths across tribes in the Gulf of Mexico region resembles the flood story of the Bible. Overall, the mythology among the Native Americans of Louisiana is not strikingly different from the mythology found elsewhere in North America (Swanton 1907).

Occupations

Historically, American Indians worked within their tribes as hunters, farmers and fishers to sustain their families and their tribes. As European colonization expanded, Native Americans entered trade occupations with goods such as furs, animal skins and arts. With time, Native Americans began leaving their tribes to seek middle income occupations working on oil rigs, in timber yards and as commercial fishers. Others used their national sovereignty to establish casinos and smoke shops on their reservations that created a number of jobs for tribal members. As educational opportunities have expanded for tribal members, they also have established themselves in various white collar industries.

Oil and Gas

When oil began being actively explored and refined in the southeastern United States in the mid-20th century, many American Indians were able to obtain work on the offshore rigs and in support industries on shore. In addition to direct

involvement, many relied on fishing or the coastal waters for their livelihood, making them vulnerable to the decisions and actions of oil companies in the Gulf of Mexico.

Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

Although scholars have yet to examine the full effects of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on Native Americans living in the Gulf of Mexico region, the media has begun to cover and speculate about the specific effects this disaster will have on American Indians. Many of the coastal tribes rely on fishing for their livelihood, and without access to the waters many will struggle to recover (Oppmann 2010, Faerber 2010). Without federal recognition, many of the tribes in Louisiana were left to fend for themselves, often unsure of how to proceed with British Petroleum's claims process (Oppmann 2010). For some, this disaster was particularly troubling because it was manmade. An Atakapa named Ruby living near the Gulf put it this way: "Nature, you can't control. You can't control a hurricane; you can't control a tornado. But when you have things that are manmade that destroy a person's life or an entire village or an entire community, I mean, that's uncalled for." (Faerber 2010)

Politics

Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, Native Americans already had complex political and social orders. In many ways, this political history was the basis of our constitutional form of government (Perdue and Green 2001). More than 9,000 years ago, small groups of Native Americans governed themselves by consensus under the leadership of proven family members. Clans performed many of the functions we associate with governments, such as retribution for crime. As Native Americans began to settle in villages around 800 A.D. and populations grew, individuals began to exert more power and chiefdoms emerged (Perdue and Green 2001). Chiefs rarely had as much power as outsiders assumed they had. Instead, chiefs typically executed decisions councils or clans already had reached consensus on (Perdue and Green 2001).

When the Europeans arrived and began trading with Native Americans in the mid-16th century, a political shift began. Although trade relations began amicably, eventually there was competition among the colonists to gain tribal loyalty, which resulted in a series of conflicts and bribery. Eventually, the demand for Native American goods declined, and many tribes were left unable to survive economically. While trade was diminishing, the demand for Native American land was increasing, and conflicts escalated (Cornell 1988). Having little success in acquiring the land they desired, the 19th century marked an era of a U.S. effort to remove Native Americans, control reservations and force assimilation. A series of treaties were negotiated and eventually many of the Native Americans living in the southeastern United States were forced west, leaving relative few Native Americans in their homes in the Southeast.

Throughout this time, the tension between sovereignty and assimilation built. Most of the federal government understood reservations as dependent groups of citizens, while Congress and state level governments often treated reservations as if they were sovereign and independent (Ericson and Snow 1970). Further complicating the already unstable and uncertain rights of tribes, in 1924 all Native Americans were granted U.S. citizenship, suggesting they were under the jurisdiction of the U.S. government. This trend toward assimilation was halted in 1934 when the Indian Reorganization Act was passed. It allowed for the formation of tribal governments and encouraged reservations to actively improve their own economies with the help of the government (Ericson and Snow 1970, Cornell 1988).

During the 1940s and 1950s, however, the government worked to reduce the impact of the Indian Reorganization Act and once again pushed Native Americans to assimilate into broader society by extending state laws into reservations and by terminating several tribes' memberships in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Ericson and Snow 1970, Cornell 1988). During the 1960s, Native Americans rose up and advocated for their right to form and sustain independence and to act in what they saw as their own best interests. As a result, in 1968, the Indian Civil Rights Act was passed and it once again allowed for self-government and also gave Native Americans some of the most basic rights U.S. citizens enjoy – such as freedom of religion, protection from unreasonable search and seizure, double jeopardy protection, freedom of speech, freedom to assemble and the right to petition the tribal government (Ericson and Snow 1970). In other words, this act worked to allow for sovereignty but also to assimilate Native Americans into the broader American culture.

The tension between sovereignty and assimilation continued in the late 21st century as sovereignty of Native American nations came under attack from a myriad of sources. States want to control smoke shops and gambling facilities, Congress wants to reduce federal aid and non-natives with native ancestry want to be included (Perdue and Green 2001). It is likely the Native American form of government will continue to be challenged, disempowered and transformed and that the tension between assimilation and sovereignty will continue.

Ecology

Historically, the land has been very important to the Native Americans, and living in the southeastern United States was particularly suited to supporting their agricultural societies (Perdue and Green 2001, Scarry and Scarry 2005). The cultivation of crops allowed NativeAmericans to settle in relatively permanent villages and support larger populations than they ever had been able to support before. Not only did the land provide sustenance, it also was through the cultivation of corn, squash and beans that Native Americans were able to establish chiefdoms with a hierarchical social structure, complex ritual life and monumental architecture in the form of temple mounds (Perdue and Green 2001, Scarry and Scarry 2005).

As many as 3,000 years ago Native Americans were cultivating local plants. By 300 A.D. they grew corn, and approximately 60 percent of their calories came from this one crop (Perdue and Green 2001). In about 1,000 A.D., beans appeared in the Southeast, and after contact with the Europeans other plants such as watermelons and peaches were grown actively (Perdue and Green 2001). Farming typically was done by women and was regarded as a high honor (Scarry and Scarry 2005).

Not only did Native Americans in the region rely on the land, they also relied on the Gulf. Late archaic southern natives began exploring freshwater shellfish as early as 4,000 years ago. As time progressed, coastal resources became more important among the Native Americans in the region, and those resources remain important today (Perdue and Green 2001).

Economics

Historically, trade among Native Americans and European settlers was important to the survival of both the Native Americans and the settlers (Usner 1985, Cornell 1988, Sweet 2002). Neither side could completely prevail over the other, forcing them to cooperate to survive. Most non-native traders did not bring new technologies to the Indians but instead provided them with goods and tools that made their existing technologies more efficient. For instance, knives, hatchets and hoes made of iron were popular because they remained sharp longer, were harder to break and did not have to be chipped out of stone (Perdue and Green 2001).

Trade typically was closely supervised by chiefs and was only allowed between kin (Perdue and Green 2001, Sweet 2002). In other words, European traders often had to marry into a clan to become part of the social system and be allowed to trade. Native Americans believed this would result in non-native traders being more generous and fair in their trade practices (Perdue and Green 2001, DuVal 2008). Likewise, non-native traders saw this arrangement as beneficial because wives were able to explain the Native American culture and often turned out to be loving companions. Should traders fail to understand or honor the kinship rules, however, they were either expelled from the tribe or killed (Perdue and Green 2001).

In addition to introducing goods Native Americans would have lacked access to, trade also affected other areas of Native American life. For instance, men spent more time hunting to have more furs and skins available to trade. Similarly, as women came to rely on imported tools instead of the ones they were once responsible for making, their status declined since they came to be viewed as less "skilled" (Perdue and Green 2001). Dependence on foreign goods also meant Native Americans became vulnerable to the demands of colonial governments, and by the 1760s it was not uncommon for the colonial governments to threaten to withhold trade if tribes did not comply with their demands for land (Perdue and Green 2001).

As the demand for Native American goods declined and the price of European goods increased, the Native Americans acquired significant debts at trading posts (Usner 1985). As a result, even when the Native Americans negotiated reasonable land sales, much of the money made from the sales went toward paying their debts. leaving the tribe with very little. For example, when the Choctaw agreed to cede their land, they settled on a price of $50,500, but $48,000 of that price went to settling their debts (Usner 1985). In 1773, the Creeks and Cherokees gave away 2.5 million acres of land to Georgia to pay debts they owed to traders (Perdue and Green 2001).

Despite these struggles, Native Americans should be credited for discovering, cultivating and sustaining some of our most common and profitable goods (Soule 1995). Rubber, tobacco, toothpaste, petroleum jelly, deodorant, cacao, peanuts, sunflower seeds, cotton, maple syrup, beans, pumpkins, turkeys, sweet potatoes, popcorn, squash, many varieties of nuts and berries, corn, ginseng, sassafras, skin ointments and more than 60 other medicinal drugs are just some of the items that Native Americans discovered or developed (Soule 1995). In addition to those goods, Native Americans also taught settlers new fishing techniques and new ways to cure animal skins. Other crafts such as pottery making and basket weaving, along with canoe building, snowshoes, dog sleds, ponchos and kayaks, also were developed by the Native Americans (Soule 1995). These economic prac-

tices undoubtedly contributed to the economic history and current status of the southeastern United States.

In the past century, many tribes have been able to recover economically with increasing access to middle income jobs and education. Others have used their sovereignty to open lucrative businesses, such as casinos and smoke shops, on their reservations. Those businesseses have created jobs and generated income for the tribes. Despite great progress, however, many Native Americans still live in extreme poverty; face malnourishment; live without heat, electricity, running water or plumbing; have barriers to education; and struggle with unemployment as high as 75 percent (GSRI 1973, Soule 1995).

Hurricanes

Some of the victims of hurricanes Katrina and Rita were Native Americans who had settled along the Gulf Coast. An estimated 4,500 Native Americans living in St. Bernard Parish lost everything to Katrina. Rita resulted in some 6,000 Native Americans losing everything in Terrebonne, Lafourche and Jefferson parishes (Solet 2005).

Because many of these groups lived in marshy areas along the coast, they were virtually forgotten by the federal government and relief organizations. Those tribes that lacked federal recognition at the time were essentially left to fend for themselves (Solet 2005). In addition to the structural damage, Katrina and Rita also polluted many of the waters Native Americans relied on for shrimp and oyster fishing. Despite this devastation, however, many Native Americans in the area were determined to rebuild – if not for themselves, then as a tribute to their elders who endured painstaking trials to secure the land they had (Solet 2005).

Conclusion

Native Americans are no longer regarded as the forgotten victims of greed and racism and are being more readily portrayed as an important force in the Gulf of Mexico region. They have a complex and nuanced history in the southeastern United States, much of which has only been recognized during the previous 50 years as more complete and reliable data sources and methodologies were discovered and developed.

As a result of this new information, Native Americans are being more readily portrayed as active agents in their own history, able to overcome great adversity. Despite great progress in the past century, many Native Americans still face issues of poverty, lack of access to education and attacks on their sovereignty and identity. In other words, there is still more to be done, and scholars should continue to examine the unique challenges Native Americans face as a result of their history, culture and experiences in the Gulf of Mexico region.

Appendix

Table 4. Overview

Overview of Native Americans in the Gulf of Mexico Region

Section	Broad Conclusions
Origins and History	Native Americans have a long, rich, complex and nuanced history in the Gulf of Mexico region. Unfortunately, much of this history has been lost or fragmented through displacement, destruction and misinterpretation by "outsiders."
Migration	While American Indians lived throughout the Gulf region for some time, as a result of removal legislation and racial discrimination, many eventually migrated west of the Mississippi River or north to the Oklahoma region.
Culture	Cultural elements such as music, crafts, food, religious beliefs, language, festivals and folklore can be seen throughout the Gulf Coast region but often vary by tribe.
Occupations	Historically, American Indians worked within their tribes to sustain themselves. Many were hunters and fishermen. As America was colonized, Native Americans adapted their occupations to the new cotton economy – often working on plantations or as cotton pickers. Upon desegregation and the growth of the oil industry along the Gulf Coast during the 20th century, many Native Americans began seeking middle income jobs on oil rigs, in the lumber industry or in white collar professions.
Oil and Gas Industry	When the oil industry expanded in the Gulf of Mexico region, many American Indians found work on rigs. Others were indirectly affected by the oil industry as they were cultivating oysters or fishing in the Gulf.
Economy	Although many Native Americans face high poverty levels today, they should be credited with discovering, developing and cultivating some of the region's most profitable goods such as tobacco, cotton and many common food sources. Historically, trade was extremely important for the Native Americans, as well.
Ecology	American Indians always have had strong ties to the land through their farming, hunting and fishing.
Politics	Tribes often have complex political systems, many with their own constitutions and sovereignty over their land. Despite this, the group historically has often been politically disenfranchised or left powerless by the American government.

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