

Cajuns - Part I

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Cajuns are the descendants of Acadian exiles from the Maritime provinces of Canada—Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island—who migrated to southern Louisiana. Today they reside primarily in a twenty-two-parish region of southern Louisiana known as Acadiana. Significant numbers of Cajuns also reside in border parishes, such as Allen and Jefferson, as well as in southeastern Texas, particularly around Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Orange. Although best known outside Louisiana for their spicy food and music, Cajuns have made many important contributions to Louisiana's history and culture.

Le Grand Dérangement - The Acadian Exile

In the early 1700's, the British took Acadia from France. After the British took over Acadia, they renamed it Nova Scotia. Then, they pressured the Acadians to swear an unconditional oath of allegiance to the British crown. The Acadians refused to swear this oath unconditionally, but did offer their allegiance under one condition: the British must grant them neutral status during wartime. The colonists viewed wartime neutrality as vital to their safety, since siding with the British would invite attacks from French and Indian marauders.

For decades the British continued to press the Acadians to swear the oath of allegiance unconditionally. Finally, the colony's lieutenant governor, Colonel Charles Lawrence—the governor had returned to Great Britain because of illness—used the issue as a pretext for expelling every Acadian man, woman, and child from Nova Scotia. Lawrence wanted to deport the French-Catholic Acadians because he feared they would rise up against him if a war with France ever erupted. He also coveted the Acadians' valuable farmlands, which he planned to give to loyal [Anglo](#)-Protestant colonists.

Lawrence planned the expulsion with William Shirley, governor of the Massachusetts colony, which provided British troops and ships for the operation. Supported by the Colonial Council, which administered the colony in the name of the British crown, Lawrence launched the expulsion in summer 1755. He summoned Acadian men to the capital at Halifax allegedly to discuss the return of their firearms, which British troops had earlier seized. It was a ruse, however, and British troops arrested the Acadian men. Meanwhile, other British soldiers fanned out across the colony, using similar deceptions to round up the remaining Acadians. At Grand Pré, for example, British troops lured more than four hundred Acadian men into the local church. The church became their prison while other soldiers prepared Acadian women and children for deportation.

British soldiers under Lawrence's command ensnared Acadians throughout the colony, marching them at gunpoint to the coast, dividing them according to age and sex, and loading them aboard overcrowded transport ships. Lawrence sent these ships to distant lands, scattering the Acadians throughout the British colonies of North America and beyond. Because it was a deliberate attempt to destroy an ethnic group, historians consider the expulsion—known as *Le Grand Dérangement*, or the Great Disturbance—an instance of genocide and ethnic cleansing. Some historians estimate that as many as half of the approximately fifteen thousand Acadians died from exposure, disease, starvation, and violence related to their deportation.