



Transatlantica

Revue d'études américaines. American Studies Journal

1 | 2015

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/7586>

DOI: 10.4000/transatlantica.7586

ISSN: 1765-2766

Publisher

Association française d'Etudes Américaines (AFEA)

Electronic reference

Marie Demars, "'On A Mission": Preserving Creole Culture One Tweet at a Time. Keith Frank, Zydeco, and the Use of Social Media", *Transatlantica* [Online], 1 | 2015, Online since 12 January 2016, connection on 04 February 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/7586> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/transatlantica.7586>

This text was automatically generated on 4 February 2023.



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"On A Mission": Preserving Creole Culture One Tweet at a Time. Keith Frank, Zydeco, and the Use of Social Media

Marie Demars

Introduction

- 1 Using the word *Creole* correctly is often a thorny problem since it can take on several meanings according to the geographical region or field of research you are referring to –so much so that according to some people, “a Creole is anyone who says he is one.”¹ When applied to colonial Louisiana, the word Creole first referred to (white) people of European descent (mostly French and Spanish) who were born on the American soil; the term then evolved to include black slaves born in Louisiana as well as the free people of color, also known as *gens de couleur libres*, mixed-race persons from the local bourgeoisie who were not enslaved.² In southwest Louisiana, the word Creole refers today to the French, Catholic African-Americans living in the rural region called *Acadiana*, or who are part of the Creole Diasporas of East Texas (Beaumont, Port Arthur, Houston) and Northern California.³
- 2 Popularized by Clifton Chenier, zydeco as we know it was technically born in the aftermath of World War II in the urban area of Houston, Texas, but it nevertheless remains closely tied to the rural Creole culture of Southwest Louisiana.⁴ Described by Barry Ancelet as “the result of a typically American experience that blended European [...], Native American and Afro-Caribbean musical traditions,”⁵ zydeco is the accordion-based, fast-paced dance music of Louisiana Creoles. It has become one of the cultural markers of Creole identity (along with the French language and the Catholic faith), and most importantly the marker of a newfound pride. Since Reconstruction and the institution of Jim Crow laws, Creoles had been despised for bearing the double stigma of

being Black and speaking French, which relegated them to the lowest level of the social ladder; more recently, they felt left aside from the Cajun revival of the 1970s-1980s and saw zydeco as the best tool to promote and preserve their culture.⁶ Young zydeco musicians such as Keith Frank have taken back the fight and encourage new generations of Creoles to celebrate their rural, French heritage to the sound of the rubboard and the accordion, but they are doing so the modern way.

- 3 Media have always been used to spread zydeco nationally and internationally,⁷ but today, young artists are massively using new media and social networking websites to easily circulate their music to an ever bigger audience. While this facilitates the diffusion of their work, global competition is raging and tends to water-down strong specificities to fit in a cultural mainstream. With seven accounts on various social networking websites, Keith Frank is by far the quintessential 2.0 zydeco artist, but this somewhat schizophrenic overrepresentation has us wondering: are new media a threat to traditional Creole cultural expressions or a tool to preserve its rich, diverse heritage?
- 4 With a musical heritage dating as far back as the mid 19th century, Keith Frank can boast to come from one of the oldest musical families in Louisiana. Born in 1972, raised and still living in the heart of Acadiana, Frank could hardly escape the family tradition and become something other than a musician: he started to play in his father's band, The Preston Frank Swallow Band, at only three years old and then formed his own group in his late teens. When his father became unable to cope with both his full-time job and his zydeco playing, Keith Frank went on to keep the family name and tradition alive by becoming a professional musician with his Soileau Zydeco Band alongside his brother Brad on drums, and his sister Jennifer on bass. Yet, where his father and uncle played traditional waltzes and two-steps and sang in both French and English, Keith Frank became famous in the 1990s as the spearhead of the "new zydeco" movement characterized by a heavy bass drum and by the introduction of R&B, hip-hop or reggae influences. This shift has been criticized by some preservationists who feared that the tradition might die, but this did not prevent Keith Frank from becoming the "undisputed ruler of the local scene", playing at least three times a week to regularly sold out venues throughout Southwest Louisiana and East Texas, and being awarded the title of Zydeco Boss.⁸ If the music changed—or rather evolved—the tradition did not die, but was instead revitalized: the introduction of R&B and hip-hop sounds attracted young crowds and modernized the old French music, often stigmatized as being too rural, as Frank recalled: "On the way [to marching band contests], I would play [accordion] on the bus, play on the band room. People would laugh, say it was hilarious. I didn't think it was funny. But back then, if you played accordion, they laughed at you and called it country music."⁹ A stark contrast with the ever-increasing number of young zydeco players who can be heard today (Andre Thierry, Rusty Metoyer, Dexter and Chris Ardoin, J. Paul...) and who are neither afraid nor ashamed to express their Creole heritage.
- 5 Not only a successful musician, Keith Frank is also an accomplished producer and entrepreneur. His mastery of the sound-mixing and recording techniques (acquired thanks to the Electronics degree he got from McNeese University in the late 1990s) enabled him to open his own recording studio and music label, Soulwood Records, in his family's basement.¹⁰ His last four albums were released on this label which gives him an absolute control over his work since he is at the same time creating, recording,

distributing and promoting all the Soileau Zydeco Band's music. As a shrewd young entrepreneur, Keith Frank perfectly understands the importance of a well-rounded marketing arsenal to conquer the musical industry and he did not hesitate to join powerful social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter to broaden his audience and strengthen his fan base.¹¹

Keith Frank and social media

- 6 In the last few years, social networking websites have become an essential marketing tool for artists who can now easily connect and interact with their fans as well as share and promote their work on the same platform. Keith Frank naturally integrated social media to his marketing plan and is now present on all major networking websites: on MySpace, the father of all social networks; on Facebook (where he has two accounts, a personal profile and a fan page) and Twitter, the undisputed leaders of the field; but also on the photo-sharing website Instagram¹² (owned by Facebook), on Youtube, where he has his own channel, and on the professional, multifaceted, independent music-oriented ReverbNation. To this list must be added his personal website as well as a mobile application for iPhone and Android, a first in the zydeco world. This overrepresentation is something quite common for top selling artists and big names of the musical industry, but it is rather unusual for a "regional roots music"¹³ artist such as Keith Frank.
- 7 If we take a closer look at Frank's activity on these different websites, we can see that they all serve a specific purpose but that they are not strictly separated: there is a certain fluidity in the circulation of information and digital data shared on the websites. The ReverbNation, Facebook and Twitter accounts are thus interconnected, and so is the mobile application with Twitter and Facebook. Yet, all the websites are not used in the same way or with the same frequency.
- 8 Between 2003 and 2009, Myspace used to be a fixture for musicians who wanted to share their music and build a strong fan base but the site has been steadily declining since 2009, partly because of the growing popularity of Facebook and its neat, easy to use and (then) ad-free interface. After tens of millions of users gone and a drastic reduction of employees, Myspace was acquired by Specific Media and launched (with the help of Myspace co-owner and pop superstar Justin Timberlake) a fully revamped version of the site in late 2012 specifically targeting professional musicians and artists. Yet, with this new version, artists formerly on Myspace had to start from scratch again: their info had been kept but all their connections (to fans and other professionals) had been erased.¹⁴ Keith Frank is part of the old Myspace users and he clearly chose not to rebuild his old profile: his page is minimal, only showing a profile picture, one uploaded song and seven connections.
- 9 The same low-key profile appears on his Youtube channel which was created on March 26th, 2012. In almost four years, Frank only posted ten videos which totaled 181,136 views, he has 524 subscribers and only one subscribed channel—Creole radio host Lola Love, also known as "the Zydeco Lady." Keith Frank rather chose to engage in highly interactive social media such as Twitter and Facebook; this seems to be the most effective choice since his combined number of followers on both sites reaches more than 23,200 and is regularly growing.

- 10 With more than 200 million active users, Twitter is one of the giants of the social media industry. The microblogging website enables people to send and read short messages (tweets) of 140 characters or less to a group of people called followers; fast and easy to use, Twitter permits a high-speed circulation of information thanks to its *retweet* (meaning repost or share, abbreviated as RT) function. This characteristic makes Twitter a favorite among journalists but also among artists and companies: the more followers you have, the more retweets you get, which allows you to reach a bigger audience—and thus potential bigger profits. Yet, despite its undisputed popularity and influence, Twitter is not that big of a place: according to a 2012 study made by the social media monitoring platform Beevolve, the average Twitter user has fifty followers or less, follows 102 people and has 588 tweets. How does Keith Frank position himself compared to these numbers and how does he use the microblogging site?
- 11 Frank's Twitter account is way above average statistics in terms of followers (4517), followed people (406) and number of tweets (1598) which makes him part of the 3.4% most followed people on Twitter. Despite this high number of followers, Frank's number of retweets remains pretty low with an average of two retweets per post, even when the mention "RT" is added.¹⁵ This can be seen as a liability in terms of visibility and market expansion but it is actually compensated by the comments left under his tweets and by the numerous messages received to which Frank personally answers, as shown in these two examples:
- "@ZydecoBoss Where are you playing this Friday, May 25th?" / "@wannabee_s*** I am giving the band Friday off because I've been pushing them pretty hard. We play Sat. and Sun. Aren't I nice? Lol" (May 23rd, 2012)
- "Sitting under the dryer jamming @ZydecoBoss" / "@sjra*** Some 'Keith Frank' while doing your hair? Shhh...I've made it! #Certified lol" (October 5th, 2012)
- 12 These direct interactions are exclusive to Twitter and do not appear on Frank's Facebook account; they establish a feeling of proximity between Frank and his followers and what is lost in terms of quantity (audience expansion) is gained in quality since the friendly tone he adopts helps strengthen his fan base by creating a feeling of intimacy between him and them. So much so that a lot of his female followers do not hesitate to openly flirt with him:
- "Boss man, I have appointed you as my Valentine Interim... So get ready we've got a date tonight at the Silver Eagle! LOL!" (February 14th)
- "@ZydecoBoss can you take a guess where my Twitter name come from?! Lol" / "@281cognacbeauty you can tell me... it's my Bday week and I don't wanna guess wrong and look foolish...lol" / "@ZydecoBoss it's my own version of '337 Caramel Cutie' [title of a Keith Frank's song]... 281 Cognac Beauty..." / "@281cognacbeauty I get so much love in Texas, I should have included 409, 281, 936 etc..." (October 4th, 2011)
- 13 In terms of content, Keith Frank's Twitter account remains above all a marketing tool and ninety-five percent of his tweets are pure self-promotion: most of his posts are concert announcements, often accompanied by a digital flyer and/or a link to a YouTube video, but Frank also advertises new releases on his other social networking sites, as shown in this May 2012 series:
- "Check me out on Instagram @ZydecoBoss"
- "Subscribe to my YouTube Channel more Zydeco Music on the way! http://www.youtube.com/user/ZydecoBoss?ob=0&feature=results_main"
- "LIKE" this on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Creole-Renaissance-Festival/225701904206347> #StillZydecoForMe!!!"

- 14 The remaining five percent are posts related to the promotion of Creole culture, a cause dear to Frank—as shown below—and to his fans: one of his most popular tweets was a quotation from his song “Still Zydeco For Me” posted on March 28th, 2012 which was retweeted nine times:

“Don’t be ashamed, and deny your name, Creole is a lifestyle, and Zydeco is not a game. I wanna go back... #StillZydecoforme”
- 15 Celebrating its tenth anniversary in 2014, Facebook can boast to be the most popular of all social networking websites with more than 1.55 billion monthly active users identified in the third quarter of 2015 by Facebook annual report. With such an important audience, Facebook is clearly the place to be for anyone who wants to share and connect with the world and especially for companies, brands or artists. Facebook pages, also known as fan pages, were created in 2007 as a specific marketing tool: pages allow an unlimited number of followers—unlike the personal Facebook profile, limited to 5,000 friends—administrators (admins) can control who posts on their page as well as the content of the posts, and most importantly, they have access to an analytical tool call Insights that helps them adjust their marketing strategy by anonymously monitoring fans activity on the page.¹⁶
- 16 Keith Frank’s fan page (Roll with me – Keith Frank & the Soileau Zydeco Band Fans and Friends Page) was created on September 2010 and topped 2,753 “likes” as of February 2014. Managed by Frank himself and by his Public Relations manager, Adron Marcus Washington, the page was closed in the summer of 2015; it was mainly used for concert announcements (with ¾ of the posts coming from Frank’s personal Facebook profile) and only had a few posts made by fans asking details about performances or showing their appreciation. The most interesting feature of this page was the Band Profile application that integrated the band’s ReverbNation profile directly on Facebook: followers had access to songs, links to Keith Frank’s other networking websites, pictures, schedule and to Frank’s latest posts, all in a single page. Apart from this highly interactive feature, Keith Frank’s fan page was a redundant duplicate of his other profiles; closing it was a smart PR decision that gave more visibility to his professional page: in less than a year Keith Frank was able to almost double his number of followers on Facebook.
- 17 With nearly 15,000 followers (almost exclusively young adults from South Louisiana and East Texas), posts reaching hundreds of “likes” and numerous shares, Keith Frank’s Facebook profile is the most popular of all his social networking accounts and is consequently the most updated (several times a day) but also the most interesting in terms of content. The weekly concert announcements also advertised on his Facebook fan page and on Twitter get an even bigger audience here with the tag feature: when you tag someone on Facebook, your post appears on their wall and newsfeed and is thus visible to all their friends; with an average of 388 friends per user,¹⁷ tagging your friends surely helps your posts become viral—and Frank makes no mistake about it since he is always tagging an average of ten people on concert announcement posts. Of course, the usual self-promotional posts about new releases, merchandising, media appearances and the mobile application are found on this account, but Frank also gets more personal on his profile.

Public/Private

- 18 Unlike Twitter, Facebook posts are not character-limited and Frank takes advantage of this to regularly share messages on topics important to him, such as the support of Creole culture, the support of the military,¹⁸ political engagement, charity giving and raising awareness on several diseases, as this post from October 1st, 2012 shows:

Good morning and welcome to the month of October! There are some minor things going on (my bday, etc) and some things that I consider major and hope you acknowledge as well. First is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Ladies, this is a time to really be mindful to visit your doctor and "do what you gotta do to take care of YOU"! Get checked! Also, something you all know is near and dear to my heart. October is Creole Heritage Month. This is a time for all of us to reflect on our Creole roots, and make concerted efforts to remain connected to where we are from, and to pass on that same appreciation to our children. If we don't water our roots, the tree will die. The last thing I want everyone to remember is that the deadline to register to vote is rapidly approaching. Take some ownership of your future and be responsible. Register AND vote! That's about it. I'll be posting the weekend's schedule soon. This has been today's public service announcement from the Boss!

- 19 His most popular post was actually about the birthday of his nephew Zion who is suffering from leukemia; the message was illustrated by four pictures of the little boy, two in which he looks healthy and happy and two during chemo:

I want to wish a very special Happy Birthday to one of the strongest people I know, my nephew Zion, who turns 13 today. Despite his ongoing medical challenges, he still manages to have one of the greatest spirits known to man with such a powerful, unwavering faith. Thanks to everyone for keeping him and the rest of my family in your prayers and please continue to do so because his medical battle is continuous. Happy Birthday, Zion. I hope you have a wonderful day. We love you!!
Keith Frank & the Soileau Zydeco Band (August 15th, 2013)

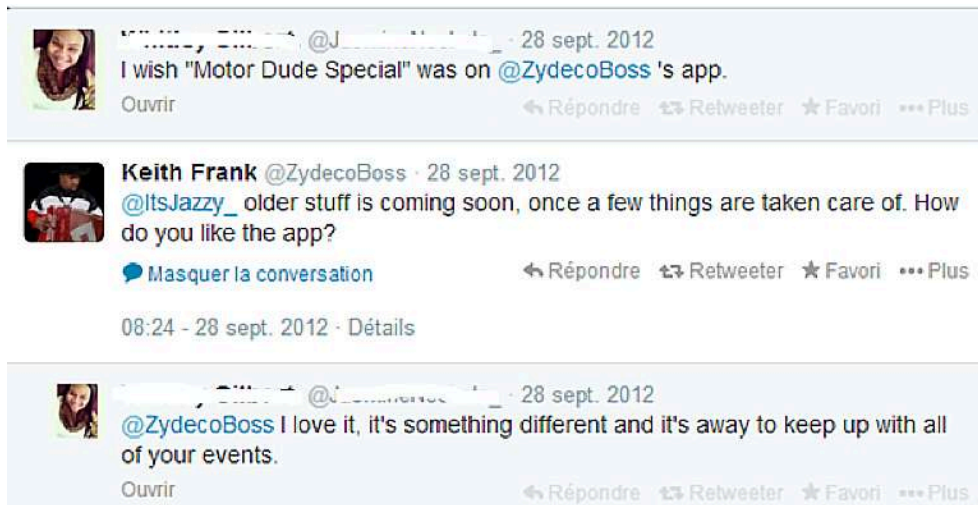
- 20 As questionable as putting these pictures on a public Facebook profile might be, this post full of pathos collected 2,885 likes, 278 comments and 29 shares and the same reception was given to Frank's post announcing the accidental death of his mother on September 2012. What is interesting about these posts is that they blur the lines of the intimate and that they ultimately reveal the different personalities Frank adopts according to the social network he is using.¹⁹ His Facebook profile is logically the place to share intimate things but with almost ten thousand people connected to him barriers have to be set up and if Frank is more personal in his Facebook posts, he is at the same time more distant with his fans on Facebook than on Twitter: there is no wall on his profile (the place where friends and followers can write on someone's profile) and there is almost no direct interactions (i.e., comments) between him and his fans—only likes on posts and comments. The difficulty of maintaining a clear separation between his personal and professional lives is emphasized by the hybrid nature of his Facebook account induced by the introduction in 2011 of the "subscribe" (now "follow") button on personal profiles which allows an unlimited number of followers.
- 21 However, this self-imposed distance does not entirely suppress the interaction with his fans. Keith Frank is indeed often giving away concert tickets or merchandising (mostly t-shirts and CDs) through contests and games such as trivia quizzes based on zydeco or his personal life, dance competition or photo contest, as this post cleverly mixing advertising and fan participation shows:

****CONTEST**** We have a new DIGITAL billboard up in Lafayette, LA, at the intersection of Ambassador Caffrey and Johnston St. We're asking all of our fans to take photos of the billboard and tag it to this page. We'll select the best, most creative picture and give the winner a great New Year's Eve package: tickets to the New Year's Eve Battle of the Bands, dinner and a hotel room for the night. Start posting your pics NOW! (December 10th, 2012)

- 22 More interestingly, Keith Frank is also integrating his fans to some of his creative processes by regularly soliciting their opinion on goodies designs or on new songs. On July 2011 Frank even organized an exclusive sneak peek listening party with free food and drinks for a limited number of fans who had to give their impressions on the band's new album. This was a great opportunity for Frank to live test their new songs, especially as the double album *Follow the Leader* (released in February 2012) marked Frank's return to a somewhat more traditional sound, which might have estranged some of his core fans.

The ZydecoBoss App

- 23 It is precisely for them that the mobile application was launched in 2012, first for Android phones, and a couple of months later for iPhones. Designed as a highly interactive mini social network, this free application allows users to create their own profile and link it to their Facebook and Twitter accounts so that they can share and comment in real time on three different networks from one single platform. The Fan Wall also permits direct interaction between the users and the band members and an interactive map showing the users' location is provided thanks to the data collected by their mobile phones. The application has several other features: almost all songs from Keith Frank and the Soileau Zydeco Band are available on the application and users can either play the songs on their phones—thanks to the integrated music player—or buy them through iTunes; the application is also the most popular place to share visual content: Frank regularly uploads exclusive photos and videos of the band and fans live-post their concert pictures every weekend; users also have access to turn by turn directions (with maps and all) to all concert venues and a point-earning system is integrated to reward the most active users with concert tickets, CDs and other goodies.
- 24 Keith Frank takes great care in making sure that his most devoted fans are satisfied with the application: he is regularly sending out posts on Twitter and Facebook to enquire about its quality or to know what improvements fans would like to see and they do not hesitate to voice their requests, as shown in this snapshot from September 28th, 2012:



- 25 By actively involving his fans in the development of the application, Frank ensures both its success and their loyalty, something essential in terms of image but also in terms of economic impact. Launching a mobile application is indeed a risky bet for a musician with little national or international exposure and the creative process is often time and money consuming for non tech-savvy people. The ZydecoBoss application was created by Adron Marcus Washington (Frank's PR manager) through Mobile Roadie, a self-service application creator tool used by many superstars or companies—such as British pop singer Adele, Cirque du Soleil or the NFL. With no technical skills required and for \$149 a month, Mobile Roadie provides users with basic tools to build and customize an app (template, icons, features, analytics, etc) and it most importantly takes care of the App Store's complex approval process.²⁰ Even if Mobile Roadie's entry package (\$149 a month; the pro version, with unlimited features and a personal account manager is \$799 a month) is affordable, it still represents a substantial investment for Frank and this is why the application is heavily advertised on his social networking accounts with several Facebook posts a month luring the fans to download the app with the promise of exclusive content and gifts:

Got that ZydecoBoss App? Download the FREE ZydecoBoss mobile app to your iPhone or Android phone by searching the app store for "Keith Frank". Get detailed schedule information, with directions to your smartphone, IN ADVANCE, and also have the opportunity to get reduced admission to our events AND the chance to earn prizes (December 2nd, 2012)

- 26 The heavy advertising about the application is also explained by Frank's bold marketing move. The ZydecoBoss application is indeed the first (and actually only) mobile application ever released in the zydeco world, and as such, it was launched with great fanfare with a special release party taking place at El Sido's Zydeco and Blues Club in Lafayette, LA, one of the landmarks of zydeco music and dancing:

This Saturday night, at El Sido's in Lafayette, we'll be having the Launch Party for our ZydecoBoss mobile app for iPhone and Android phones. To commemorate the event, we will have a special admission of \$5 before 10 pm if you have the app installed on your phone. This is a pretty special occasion in Zydeco, so pass the word to your friends, and let's party Saturday at El Sido's. "Hey Sid!" (Facebook, November 12th, 2012)

- 27 The launching of the application and its well-rounded advertising campaign shows Frank's great entrepreneurial and marketing skills but it also reveals his fierce desire to anchor zydeco music and Creole culture in the 21st century.

Modernity and tradition

- 28 Many criticisms have been directed at Frank's musical style, stating that it was too R&B oriented, too loud, too urban—in short, that it was not zydeco, that he was casting away his Creole roots. True, Frank has incorporated hip-hop, reggae and even Latin elements to his music; true also, he sings almost exclusively in English. All these are signs of the non negligible impact of mainstream American culture among Creole youth²¹ but this does not mean that Frank is sweeping away his family's long-standing musical heritage, nor that he is denying his Creole identity: his accordion and heavy bass are blasting every weekend throughout South Louisiana and East Texas, drawing large crowds of young Creoles two-stepping their night away in an attempt to bring old traditions and modern sounds together.
- 29 Likewise, Frank never fails to acknowledge the influence that the masters of the genre had on his music and to pay tribute to them any time he can. One of the most telling examples of this recognition is found on the Soileau Zydeco Band's latest release, *Follow the Leader*. This double album set is composed of two very different discs summarizing Frank's musical influences throughout his career: album number one, *Follow the Leader*, encompasses the modern urban sounds of hip-hop and R&B and even includes featuring with rappers; album number two, called *Boot Up*, emphasizes the importance of his musical roots and displays a more traditional sound, as heard in "Adam 3-Step", sung in French. Interestingly, the second disc is placed under the patronage of Frank's favorite zydeco musicians—Boozoo Chavis, who had a great influence on modern zydeco, and Buckwheat Zydeco, known for blending zydeco with soul and funk elements. The disc thus opens with a 1:16 minute-long track called "Lessons from the Master Boozoo Chavis", a live recording on which Boozoo is urging the young generation to "keep the tradition up and play them zydeco" and closes with "That's Why They Call Him the Boss", both a tribute to Buckwheat ("the real king of zydeco"²²) and a criticism of wannabe zydeco players ignorant of their roots or foreign to Creole culture: "So you can't run this / Because you're not from this / Go sit back on the bench / And work on your French."²³
- 30 Music is a great way to convey messages, but social networking websites are just as efficient –if not more– to share information with a large audience; Keith Frank perfectly understood it and he does not hesitate to promote Creole culture among his 15,000 followers and their friends. Indeed, Frank regularly promotes local cultural activists by sharing links to various local radio stations and programs such as 107JAMZ, "the people station", located in Lake Charles, Z105.9-KFXZ²⁴ "Louisiana Soul" broadcasting from Carencro, or "The Zydeco Workout," a Southern soul and zydeco musical program hosted by Zydeco Lady Lola Love and broadcasted both in Louisiana (on KPCP 88.3 FM) and California (on KZSU-Stanford 90.1 FM).²⁵ Often shared through his Facebook account can be found posts from many trail ride groups but also from the We R Creole forum, a Facebook group uniting Creoles worldwide, from the Northwestern State University-based Creole Heritage Center, or from the Zydeco

Historical & Preservation Society, a non-profit organization directed by Clifton Chenier's nephew Rod Sias.

- 31 Singing about keeping the traditions alive and digitally promoting Creole culture is one thing, but Frank is also personally involved in several real-life actions to support and preserve South Louisiana's Creole heritage. For example, he is a regular participant at the Annual Acadiana Coup de Main Benefit Concert²⁶ and he is often invited to speak about Creole culture and traditions at various schools throughout the state. One of his interventions took place at Lawtell Elementary School during their Black History Program on February 29th, 2012; along with Dustin Cravins and musicians Chris Ardoin and Leon Chavis, Frank told kids about zydeco and the musical traditions of Louisiana and ended the day by a mini concert. The event was of course the subject of an illustrated Facebook post and of several (three) tweets:

"Had a great time at Lawtell Elem's Black History Program w/ @DRCthePrince, @Iam_mrvip & @LeonChavis"

"Nothing so gratifying than to see big smiles on little children, after playing that good Zydeco music. #gratifying"

"Support our kids and music in the school programs... Keep that Zydeco Music going for generations to come"

- 32 Yet, Frank's most visible contribution to the diffusion of Creole culture is probably the Creole Renaissance Festival, a musical event he created in 2012 which takes place in Opelousas on Labor Day weekend. According to its website, the festival was conceived as "a celebration of Creole culture and its deep and vibrant history [including] the food, the music, the language, and most of all the fellowship." The festival thus includes twelve concerts by young zydeco artists (Rusty Metoyer, Dexter and Chris Ardoin, Andre Thierry, Brian Jack, and of course Keith Frank and the Soileau Zydeco Band), a \$1,000 dance contest, a marketplace selling Creole arts and crafts, and homemade Creole food –features found in almost every other Creole festivals.
- 33 Louisiana and Texas can boast to have tens of festivals dedicated to zydeco and/or Creole culture (The Original Southwest Louisiana Zydeco Music Festival in Opelousas, New Orleans-based Louisiana Cajun-Zydeco Festival, Festivals Acadiens et Créoles in Lafayette, Creole Heritage Zydeco and Crawfish Festival in Texas, among others) so we can wonder what prompted Frank to organize his own. Ego was probably involved at some point but the main reason for the festival lies in its name: Renaissance. As we can see with the festival's line-up, Frank's objective is to rejuvenate the genre in order to attract young Creoles and to pass traditions on to them. This emphasis on younger generations and on the "know your roots" message is also illustrated with the festival's logo: a young dark-skinned boy wearing jeans and a t-shirt is leaning against a tree, playing the accordion; on his side are a cowboy hat and a pair of boots, symbols of South Louisiana's rural culture. Elements of the Louisiana Creole flag also appear on the boots: the fleur de lys, representing the State's French heritage, the five-branch star, referring to Senegal's flag and thus acknowledging Creoles' West-African descent, and the tower of Castille, recalling Louisiana's Spanish heritage. The logo comes complete with the caption "Still Zydeco for me..." taken from Keith Frank's eponymous song, in which he explains the importance of zydeco for Creole culture and thus the necessity for young people to keep the traditions alive despite the prevalence of mainstream (African-)American culture in the music industry and the media:

It seems that everybody wants to rap or do R&B / Where I come from, still zydeco for me / Now what I've learned came from what I've lost / If you take away the

zydeco / It's our culture that pays the cost / (...) I wanna go back to what we used to have and what we used to play / Don't be ashamed and deny your name / Creole is a lifestyle and zydeco is not a game / I wanna go back, so come on back with me.

- 34 In agreement with Frank's desire to target young crowds, the first three editions of the Creole Renaissance Festival were heavily advertised on social networking websites. A Facebook fan page for the festival was created to share the latest news and schedule information with the fans but so far the page only records a modest 176 likes. However, this small number is of no consequence for the visibility of the festival since Keith Frank fills his Facebook and Twitter accounts with posts about the event: for the first edition, Frank sent 31 tweets during the two days of the festival and no less than 36 posts on Facebook, all of which were shared at least once. This seems to indicate a strong support for Frank's project, but we will still have to see how the festival evolves in the next few years and be on the lookout for new talented young zydeco artists in the clubs and on the airwaves.

Conclusion

- 35 With his different accounts on social networking websites and his successful mobile application, Keith Frank proves that he masters all the codes of modern marketing and his growing number of followers helps him secure his title of "Zydeco Boss" and ruler of the local scene. Yet, he is not the only zydeco artist with a strong online presence (J Paul has an impressive 52,334 followers on his Facebook page²⁷), nor the more creative (for example, Chris Ardoin, his main "rival", engages in more personal and humorous dialogue with his fans on Facebook or with Vine,²⁸ and his brother Sean Ardoin communicates with his fans through a texting application) but his carefully crafted PR plan makes him the most followed zydeco artist on social media. If his total number of followers or his number of posts shared or retweeted might seem ridiculously low compared to highly connected, mainstream artists such as PJ Harvey or Adele, it should not be forgotten that zydeco is an extremely localized musical genre that has difficulty being known and appreciated outside of the east Texas-south Louisiana area;²⁹ in that perspective, Frank's statistics are pretty remarkable.
- 36 The specific roles played by each of the platforms mentioned and the various audience they are targeting lead Frank to constantly renegotiate his identity according to the media he is using; this coming and going is illustrated by Frank's changing personalities on his album covers where he is successively wearing baggy jeans and a baseball cap or cowboy boots and hat. This is of course telling of his refusal to choose between rural and urban, R&B and French music, or between his Creole heritage and African-American popular culture but this does not prevent him from being a staunch advocate of the protection and promotion of Creole culture, as shown by his support—virtual or in real-life—for many cultural organizations. What at first looked like a somehow excessive self-promotional operation turns out to be an effective tool to revitalize old traditions and to connect members of the young Creole community eager to share their (newfound) pride in their rich and diverse identity. Young Creoles may listen to zydeco on their mobile phones while tweeting or posting pictures on Instagram, but they are still going to the trailrides and two-stepping in the clubs on Friday and Saturday nights. "Still zydeco for them," undoubtedly.

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NOTES

1. NOTES

Personal interview with the journalist and radio host Herman Fuselier, April 14th 2014. Fuselier was quoting the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*.

2. For a thorough analysis on the evolution of the word Creole in Louisiana, see Vidal, "Usages et appropriations du terme créole en Louisiane."

3. After World War II, many Creoles left Louisiana to work in the oil fields of southeast Texas, or moved further west to find jobs in northern California. See for example Mark DeWitt, *Cajun and Zydeco Dance Music in Northern California: Modern Pleasures in a Post-Modern World*, University Press of Mississippi, 2011, and John Minton, "Houston Creoles and Zydeco. The Emergence of an African-American Urban Popular Style", *American Music*, vol. 14 n° 4 (Winter 1996), 480-526.

4. Minton, John, *ibid*.

5. Ancelet, Barry Jean, "Zydeco/Zarico: Beans, Blues and Beyond", *Black Music Research Journal* Vol. 8, n° 1 (1988), 33, accessed February 2nd, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/779502>

6. See for example Sara Le Menestrel, "French music, Cajun, Creole, Zydeco. Ligne de couleur et hiérarchies sociales dans la musique franco-louisianaise," *Civilisations*, n° 53 (2005), 119-147, and Mark Mattern, "Let the Good Times Unroll: Music and Race Relations in Southwest Louisiana," *Black Music Research Journal*, vol. 17, n° 2 (automne 1997), pp. 159-168.

7. Radio and print media were of course the first to talk about and circulate zydeco, but television was probably the most effective tool in the promotion of this musical genre: the 1980s saw a "zydeco craze" taking over the United States after the successes of *The Big Easy* movie and Paul Simon's *Graceland* album—both featuring zydeco and Creole influences—so much so that zydeco songs were heavily used in several TV commercials of the time.

8. Tisserand, Michael, *The Kingdom of Zydeco* (New York, Spike, 1998), 341-54.

9. Tisserand, 345.

10. Tisserand, 341-54.

11. Personal interview with the artist, April 19th 2014.

12. With the catchphrase "100% Authentic Creole Zydeco Music – Accept No Substitutes", Keith Frank's Instagram account topped 7679 followers in December 2015, making it his second most effective platform in terms of audience reach. However, Frank only uses it to post flyers and doesn't seem to see the possibilities and potential of the platform.
13. The *Best Zydeco or Cajun Music Album*, *Best Hawaiian Music Album* and *Best Native American Music Album* categories of the Grammy Awards have been merged into one single category in 2012, the *Best Regional Roots Music Album*.
14. Gillette, Felix, "The Rise and Inglorious Fall of Myspace," *Bloomberg Business Week*. Accessed January 27th, 2014. http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/11_27/b4235053917570.htm#p1
15. His most popular post (May 9th, 2012) got 23 retweets and was not even about him but was a call to vote for his sister's brother-in-law, Louisiana-born singer Joshua Ledet on the eleventh season of American Idol.
16. Peters, Meghan, "Facebook Subscribe Button: What it Means for Each Type of Users," *Mashable*. Accessed February 16th, 2014. <http://mashable.com/2011/09/15/facebook-subscribe-users/>
17. Sedghi, Ami, "Facebook: 10 Years of Social Networking, in Numbers," *The Guardian*. Accessed February 16th, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/feb/04/facebook-in-numbers-statistics>
18. "Happy Memorial Day to all (...). Remember to grab a soldier today and thank them for putting their lives at risk and leaving their families to go out and protect the freedoms we take for granted so often. #Salute." This post from May 28th, 2012, is one of the many messages referring to the military that can be found on Frank's Facebook profile.
19. See Meghan Casserly's article ("Multiple Personalities and Social Media: The Many Faces of Me") published on Forbes.com on January 26th, 2011 for an interesting study on the schizophrenic behavior induced by the use of several social networking websites. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/meghancasserly/2011/01/26/multiple-personalities-and-social-media-the-many-faces-of-me/>
20. Even with Mobile Roadie's help, Frank and Washington had a hard time having the application approved by Apple. Submitted to both platforms at the same time, the app was released on the Android market on July 26th, 2012 and iPhone users had to wait until September 2012 to have the app available on the AppStore (Facebook posts).
21. See Trépanier, Cécy, "The Cajunization of French Louisiana: Forging a Regional Identity," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 157, n° 2 (1991), 161-171 and Barry Ancelet, "Negotiating the Mainstream: The Creoles and Cajuns in Louisiana," *The French Review*, vol. 80, n° 8 (2007), 1235-1255.
22. Crowning a "zydeco king" is part of the zydeco folklore ever since Clifton Chenier was self-crowned in the 1970s. Musicians regularly competed for the title, as was shown by Robert Mugge in his movie *The Kingdom of Zydeco*, depicting the battle that happened between Beau Jacques and Boozoo Chavis in the early 1990s.
23. A pretty ironic line, considering that Frank sings almost exclusively in English.
24. On November 2013 and after a year off the waves, the station welcomed back the Cravins Brothers Zydeco Show. For more than twenty-five years, Opelousas' Mayor Donald Cravins and his brother Charles delivered local news and played zydeco music on their radio show geared towards South Louisiana's Creole community. As mayor Cravins' close friend, Frank naturally relayed his call to see the show back on the waves on his Facebook profile.
25. Lola Love is also instrumental in Frank's public relations plan since she partly manages some of his social network accounts (personal interviews with Lola Love and Keith Frank, April 2014).
26. Created by the Cravins family, the Acadiana Coup de Main Benefit Concert has been helping the Creole community since 2009 by donating 100% of the proceeds to local charities.

27. Paul's number of followers is actually quite intriguing. Even if he plays mostly large, crowded Texas venues and is really popular among teens and young adults, this number sharply contrasts with that of other artists that he might have used a paid service to get "false likes."

28. Vine can be described as the video equivalent of Twitter: users communicate by uploading and sharing extremely short clips (6 seconds).

29. It should be noted however, that zydeco is quite popular in Germany, the Netherlands and Japan, where zydeco and Cajun music festivals are held each year. Japanese accordion player Yoshi-take Nakabayashi even perform during the 2015 Creole United festival in Sausalito, a noteworthy achievement in this somehow exclusive musical community.

ABSTRACTS

Appearing approximately sixty years ago among the Creole community of urban Houston, zydeco is a relatively new musical genre that is however still associated to rurality, folklore and old-fashioned ways. In this unfavorable context, it might seem difficult to link zydeco with modernity or high-profile communication tools and technologies, yet more and more young Creole musicians are bridging the gap by heavily using social media to promote their music as well as their south Louisiana cultural heritage.

Apparu il y a environ soixante ans au sein de la communauté des Créole de couleur de Houston, le zydeco est un genre musical relativement récent qui reste paradoxalement associé à l'idée de ruralité, de folklore et de traditions passéistes. Dans ce contexte peu favorable, il peut sembler difficile d'établir un lien entre le zydeco et les outils de communication les plus récents impliquant l'utilisation d'une technologie de pointe. Néanmoins, un nombre croissant de jeunes musiciens créoles franchissent le pas et font entrer le zydeco dans la modernité en utilisant de façon intensive les réseaux sociaux pour promouvoir leur musique ainsi que l'héritage culturel du sud de la Louisiane.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Zydeco, Créole de couleur, identité, préservation culturelle, réseaux sociaux

Keywords: Zydeco, social media, Creoles of color, identity, cultural preservation

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