



# Cajun Women and Mardi Gras: **READING THE RULES BACKWARD**

*Carolyn E. Ware*

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Cajun Women and Mardi Gras is the first book to explore the importance of women's contributions to the country Cajun Mardi Gras tradition, or Mardi Gras "run." Most Mardi Gras runs--masked begging processions through the countryside, led by unmasked capitaines--have customarily excluded women. Male organizers explain that this rule protects not only the tradition's integrity but also women themselves from the event's rowdy, often drunken, play.

Throughout the last century, and especially in the last fifty years, women in some prairie communities have insisted on taking more active and public roles in the festivities. Carolyn E. Ware traces the history of women's participation as it has expanded from supportive roles as cooks and costume makers to increasingly public performances as Mardi Gras clowns and (in at least one community) capitaines. Drawing on more than a decade of fieldwork interviews and observation in Mardi Gras communities, Ware focuses on the festive actions in Tee Mamou and Basile to reveal how women are reshaping the celebration as creative artists and innovative performers.

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