**What Does Kate Chopin Mean When She Says “Creole?”**

You’ve probably heard the term “Creole” before, used in one way or another. Perhaps someone you know speaks Haitian Creole (aka Kreyol), or maybe you’ve tasted Creole cuisine on a trip down to the Crescent City. If you’ve read Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, though, then you’ve definitely seen this word, and seen it used in a very specific context.

When people hear the word “Creole” used to describe someone’s race, they take it to mean “mixed-race.” That certainly isn’t an incorrect definition, but the Creoles referred to in *The Awakening*, the French Creoles, are a particular mix of nationalities.

According to the *Huffington Post*, “The term Creole describes the population of people who were born to settlers in French colonial Louisiana, specifically in New Orleans. In the 18th century, Creoles consisted of the descendants of the French and Spanish upper-class that ruled the city. Over the years, the term grew to include native-born slaves of African descent, as well as free people of color. Typically, the term French Creole described someone of European ancestry born in the colony, and the term Louisiana Creole described someone of mixed racial ancestry.”

Knowing this information is crucial to understanding *The Awakening*. The characters in the novella are not freed slaves or anything like that; rather, they are truly aristocrats whose ancestors hail from Western Europe. This is what allows them to live their lavish lifestyles (throwing parties, having afternoon tea with friends, spending the entire summer at the beach, etc.). Creoles “were considered elite members of society, and they celebrated their French culture and lived according to the mannerisms and traditions of European society” (Loyola).

On [the Loyola University website for Kate Chopin](http://www.loyno.edu/~kchopin/new/culture/creoles2.html),