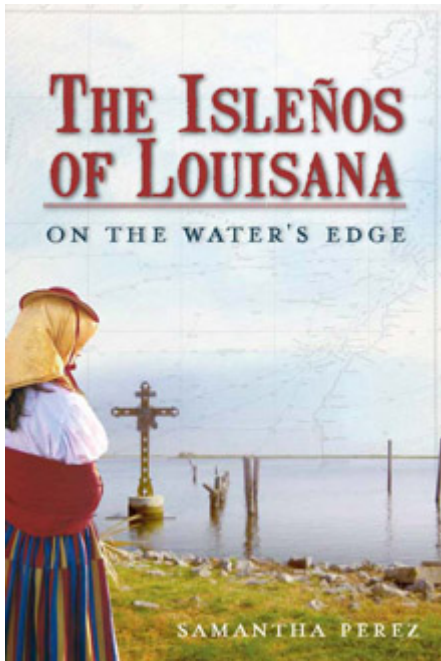


## Treasuring Islenos Culture in Louisiana

March 14, 2011 11:30 AM Fran Simon  
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Samantha Perez is in her second semester in the PhD program in the Tulane history department, and she has already done some outstanding research. Perez, who is studying late medieval and early modern European history, has turned to her own roots ? Canary Islands immigrants whose descendents still populate low-lying parishes of Louisiana.



Graduate student Samantha Perez celebrates publication of her first book that focuses on her own roots as an Isleño. (Photos for the book jacket by Samantha Perez)

She will have her first author presentation and book signing to celebrate the release of her book, *The Isleños of Louisiana: On the Water's Edge*, on Wednesday (March 16) at 6 p.m. at Octavia Books, 513 Octavia St., New Orleans.

In the late 1700s, when Louisiana fell under Spanish control, thousands of immigrants of Spanish descent relocated to Louisiana from the Canary Islands archipelago located off the northwest coast of Africa.

“Spain needed to bring in a population, so they put the Isleños at four strategic settlements positioned along the Mississippi River, so they would form a barrier as New Orleans' first line of defense against the British and other enemies,” Perez says.

Generations of Isleños have preserved their unique traditions and culture for more than two centuries. But, in 2005, as a senior in high school, Perez lost her home in St. Bernard Parish after Hurricane Katrina, and she began to realize the tenuous hold the Isleños have on their heritage. As a junior at Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, she and communication major Joshua Robin, her fiancé who is also of Isleño descent, created an hour-long documentary, *Louisiana's Lost Treasure: The Isleños*.

There are thousands of Isleños remaining in Louisiana, Perez says, but “only a handful” recognize their Spanish roots and the importance of preserving their heritage.

“These people are still here, helping the course of history,” Perez says. “They fought in the Battle of New Orleans, in the American Revolution, and made Higgins boats during World War II. They don't like the spotlight, but they're integral to Louisiana history.”

The Los Isleños Heritage and Cultural Society is holding the 35th annual [Los Isleños Festival](#) March 19-20 at the Isleños Museum Complex in St. Bernard, La.