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Colonial Louisiana

Reader



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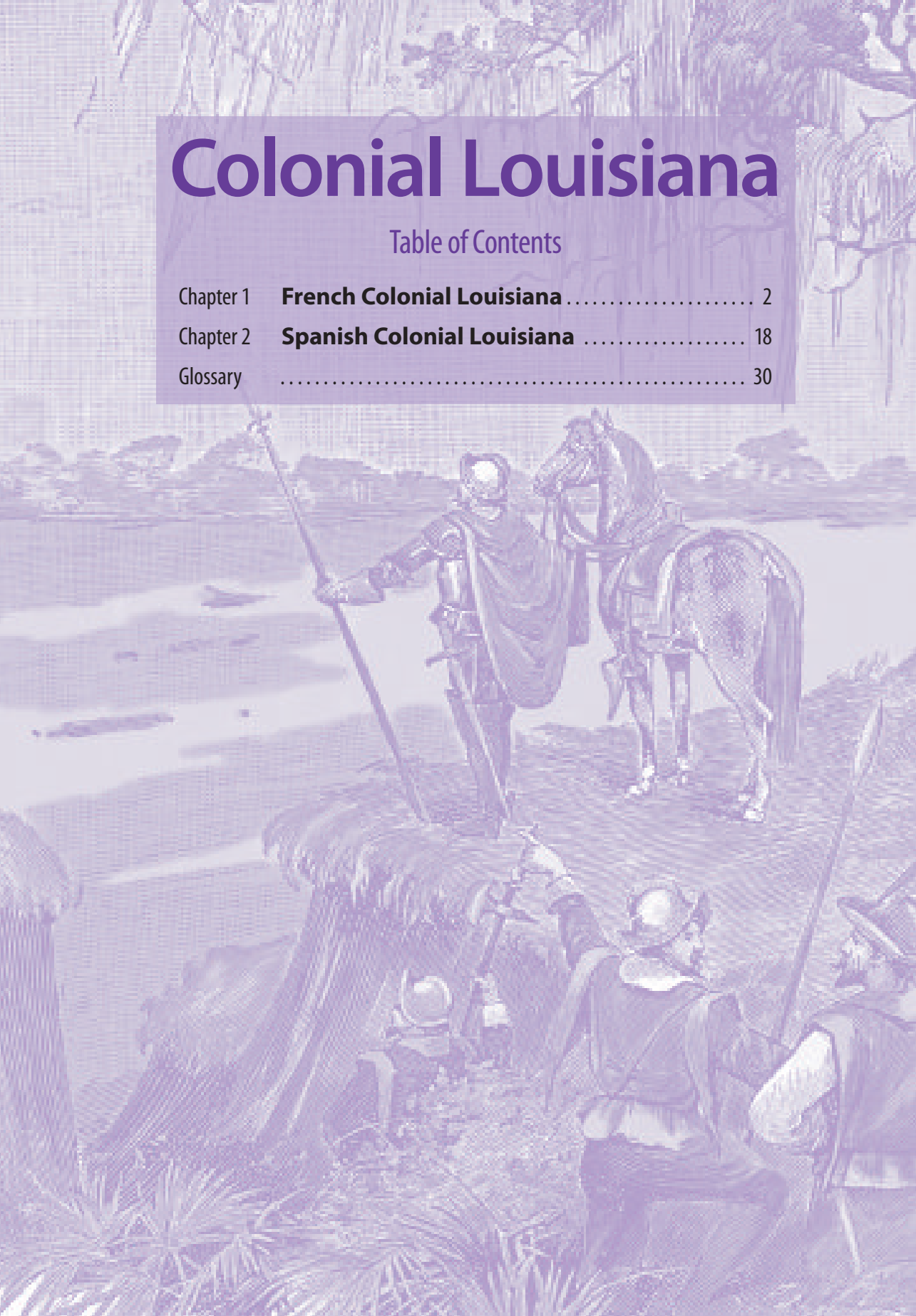
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Colonial Louisiana

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Chapter 1

French Colonial Louisiana

Precolonial Louisiana In the spring of 1674 CE, Louis Jolliet was returning home after a yearlong expedition. He and Father Jacques Marquette, his partner for the journey, had traveled and explored thousands of miles from the Great Lakes area and along the Mississippi River.

Jolliet was returning with news that the mighty Mississippi reached from Lake Itasca in present-day northern Minnesota to the Gulf of America. His fellow fur traders would eagerly welcome news of a water route that would take them almost the entire length of the American interior. Jolliet and Marquette had also made other important discoveries during their exploration. In particular, they learned that there was no Northwest Passage, a hypothetical water route that would have served as a shortcut to China.

Jolliet took careful notes at every stage of his trip. He recorded places and people he encountered as well as animals and plants that lived along the river. As Jolliet neared Montreal on his return trip, his canoe tipped over in the rapids. Months of notes and the map that he had sketched of the Mississippi River were lost. Luckily, Jolliet was rescued, and he was able to rewrite most of the diary and draw another map.

The Framing Question

How did the Louisiana colony change under French rule?



The Mississippi River is still an important waterway for American commerce.

The Mississippi River would have a tremendous effect on future settlements in North America. During French rule, it became an important route for **commerce** between settlements along the Gulf of America and in Canada. But this mighty river was known to the Native Americans for centuries before Europeans came upon it.

Vocabulary

commerce, n. the buying and selling of goods and services; trade

Native American history in Louisiana stretches back thousands of years and includes many different groups. In the years leading up to the arrival of European explorers, there were three distinct groups of Native Americans living in Louisiana. These were the Caddo, Plaquemine, and Mississippian cultures. The Mississippian culture dates back to around 700 CE. It got its name because it began in the Mississippi River valley. Over time, the Mississippian culture came to rely heavily on growing corn. Because they needed to be near sources of water for their crops, their villages sprang up along the Mississippi and other nearby rivers. They had moved into the Louisiana area by 1050 CE.

The waterways of the Southeast also made Louisiana appealing to European explorers. Jolliet was familiar with the well-established trade networks that existed with Native Americans near the St. Lawrence River in Canada. When Jolliet set out from Canada to explore the Mississippi River, the trip was financed by a group of businessmen. They intended to receive a return on their **investment** by way of the fur trade they hoped would develop along the river.

Vocabulary

investment, n. money that is spent in order to make a profit

Establishment of French Colonial Louisiana

Equipped with the information gathered by Jolliet and Marquette, in 1682, French explorer René-Robert Cavalier, sieur de La Salle, led a team down the Mississippi River. When he reached the mouth of the river, La Salle claimed all

The Mississippi River Basin



La Salle claimed all the lands drained by the Mississippi River for France.

of the river basin for French king Louis XIV, naming it *La Louisiane*. This claim began the French colonial period in Louisiana. Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans all played a role in shaping this new society.

La Salle wanted to establish a permanent settlement and a port city that would become a commercial hub for Louisiana. He also wanted to discourage the English and Spanish from intruding on the land he had claimed for France. However, La Salle failed to build a lasting settlement at the mouth of the Mississippi River. He was in fact killed during an ill-fated attempt to create a permanent French colony on the Gulf of America. He had sailed to North America from France with four ships, only to lose one to pirates. The remaining ships arrived hundreds of miles from their actual destination. La Salle set off in search of the Mississippi River and was eventually killed as a result of a mutiny.

While it was a French colony, Louisiana was governed alternately by the French king and by businessmen and investors who were appointed to oversee it. These people signed **contracts** with the French government. The contracts bound them to take care of the colony and gave them a **monopoly** on trade. Louisiana would prove to be a difficult colony to manage. Control of it was passed around several times between these appointees and the French government.



La Salle claimed the Mississippi basin for France.

Vocabulary

contract, n. a written or spoken agreement, usually about business

monopoly, n. the complete ownership or control of a resource or industry

The First French Settlements

Years after La Salle sailed the Mississippi River, Pierre Le Moyne, sieur d'Iberville, and his brother Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, sieur de Bienville, returned with a plan in 1699 to establish a permanent settlement that would give the French an advantage over the English and Spanish. In fact, today Iberville is credited as being the founder of the first permanent French settlement in Louisiana. The brothers arrived near present-day Biloxi, Mississippi. Here, they built Fort Maurepas, on Biloxi Bay. The brothers intended the new French settlement to be an economic success. Although Fort Maurepas served as the first French capital, the settlers discovered that the sandy soil there made farming difficult.

The decision was made to move the colonists to Mobile, thus placing this new French settlement closer to their Spanish allies in Florida. Though today Mobile is in Alabama, it was once the capital of French Louisiana. Iberville called the new colony Fort Louis. It was farther inland, and colonists had better success with farming there. The Louisiana climate was hot and rainy but with mild conditions in the winter. It eventually allowed plantation owners to cultivate

large cotton, tobacco, and sugar crops. There was a profitable fur trade in the region as well. The move to present-day Alabama brought with it the hope of creating closer trade ties with Native Americans. The French also hoped that the settlement would discourage the English from moving into the area.

A New Governor

Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac was appointed the new governor of Louisiana by King Louis XIV in 1710. However, he did not arrive in Louisiana until 1713. Before going to Louisiana, Cadillac tried to gather investors for the new colony. He needed investors because the French government was distracted by wars in Europe and was not sending needed supplies to Louisiana. The colonists depended on slave labor as well as Native Americans' knowledge of farming to establish the early settlements. Native American women, in particular, taught the settlers how to survive. They sold the settlers goods and translated messages between chiefs and French officials. In Louisiana, enslaved workers were initially Native American but soon came to be overwhelmingly African or the descendents of people from Africa.

Cadillac was able to convince Antoine Crozat, a wealthy French businessman, to oversee commerce in the colony. Ultimately, the French king offered Crozat a contract to organize Louisiana's government and take control of agriculture and manufacturing. Crozat sent ships full of supplies to the colony each year. He also created a court system called the Superior Council.

Under Crozat, the European population in Louisiana temporarily increased. Fur trading generated



The French government put Antoine Crozat in charge of Louisiana for a time.

most of the colony's income. During this time, French Canadian trader Louis Juchereau de Saint-Denis was determined to set up trade with Mexico. He traveled west along the Red River and established Fort St. Jean Baptiste and the town of Natchitoches in present-day northwestern Louisiana. The fort was a successful trading post, especially with regard to trade with Native Americans as well as Spanish-controlled Mexico, until the death of Saint-Denis in 1744. Today, Natchitoches is the oldest permanent European settlement in the state of Louisiana.

Despite his efforts, Crozat was unable to make a success of the Louisiana colony. He was also unimpressed with Cadillac's leadership and wanted him removed as governor. Eventually, Cadillac was sent back to France. Bienville had continued to be a strong influence during this time and took over again as governor. In the end, though, Crozat left Louisiana in 1717, ten years before his contract with the French government ended.

New Orleans

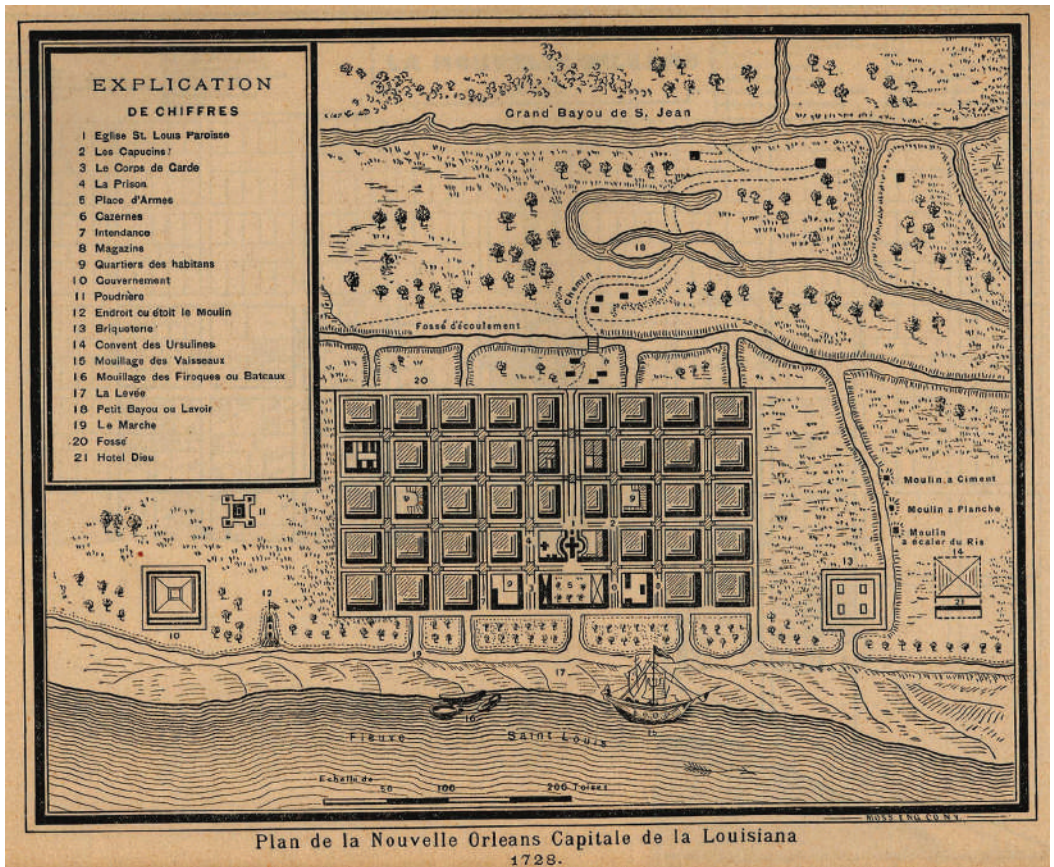
In 1718, Bienville made another important contribution to the new colony of Louisiana. He founded a town at the mouth of the Mississippi River and named it after the French duke of Orléans. Philippe II, duc d'Orléans, served as the

regent of France. When King Louis XIV passed away, his great-grandson Louis XV was only five years old and too young to govern France. Orléans ruled until the young king came of age. The settlement of New Orleans became the capital of Louisiana. It is called the Crescent City because it sits on a bend, or crescent, in the Mississippi River. Bienville chose an area of high ground to build on, but in general, present-day southeast Louisiana has the lowest points of elevation in Louisiana. The original town founded by Bienville was an outpost for French officials, soldiers, and merchants.

Vocabulary

regent, n. a person who governs a kingdom when the monarch is unable to

New Orleans eventually became a center of regional trade as well as a blend of cultural influences. Over time, colonists began to manufacture



Plan for New Orleans, 1728

a limited amount of goods within the city. These were often made with local resources and were items people used in their homes, such as furniture, utensils, leather goods, and clothing. This rise in manufacturing brought the need for skilled craftspeople. Soon, New Orleans was home to carpenters, shoemakers, silversmiths, and tailors. The work of some of these craftspeople is recognized even today. For example, the furniture made in French colonial Louisiana is still considered distinctive because of its French influences.



Furniture made during the French colonial period has graceful curves and ornate embellishments.

The Slave Trade and the Code Noir

The population of New Orleans increased as it became a hub for business and politics. This growth brought the need for more laborers, and Louisiana's colonists began importing enslaved persons from Africa in 1719. An enslaved labor force was used on the nearby sugar and cotton plantations, thereby fueling the need for more and more enslaved workers, as well as the desire to sell the sugar and cotton crops produced on the plantations. Louisiana became a part of the *triangular trade* network that had been created by Europeans. As you have learned, the triangular trade refers to the shipping routes between the Americas, Europe, and Africa. This trade triangle continued in Louisiana through French, Spanish, and American rule. Up to two million Africans died onboard the slave-trade ships that sailed from Africa to the Americas.

Many of the slaves brought to Louisiana during this period came from Senegambia, a region of West Africa. This shared heritage led to the distinct Creole culture—and its influences—that developed in Louisiana. While some Africans worked on plantations, others were enslaved by the government of the city of New Orleans. Enslaved people were used to build the city's infrastructure that helped the city thrive as a commercial port.

Influenced by codes of conduct developed in the French Caribbean colonies, in 1724, the French government added fifty-five new articles to the existing Code Noir, specifically for the Louisiana colony. The rules were used to control the lives of enslaved persons and people of African descent. Enslaved people had few rights and little freedoms. The Code Noir aimed to protect the interests of slaveholders, making slavery even harsher.

The code also recognized a group called free people of color. This was a distinct group in Louisiana, known in French as *les gens de couleur libres*. Many lived in New Orleans and spoke French. Under the Code Noir, this group had certain rights that enslaved Africans did not, such as the ability to own property and to marry freely. However, they still had various limits on their

rights and freedom. Some free people of color held this status because of **manumission**, a practice included in the code. A slaveholder could free an enslaved person if approved by the Superior Council. In spite of their uncertain place within society, free people of color made significant contributions to the economy and culture of Louisiana as artisans, merchants, and landowners.

Vocabulary
.....
manumission, n.
release from enslavement

The Creole Culture

Besides free people of color, the Louisiana colony was home to another unique cultural population. Those people belonging to the first generation of both French and Spanish colonial Louisiana were called *Creole*. This term referred to either free or enslaved people who had been born in the Americas. Some Creole people were descendants of plantation owners, and some were descendants of enslaved people. While most people living in Louisiana in the later 1700s were Creole, they often did not refer to



This is a traditional Creole cottage on St. Ann Street in New Orleans.

themselves that way. It was when an **influx** of new English-speaking settlers arrived in the 1800s that Creole people began identifying themselves as having been born in Louisiana.

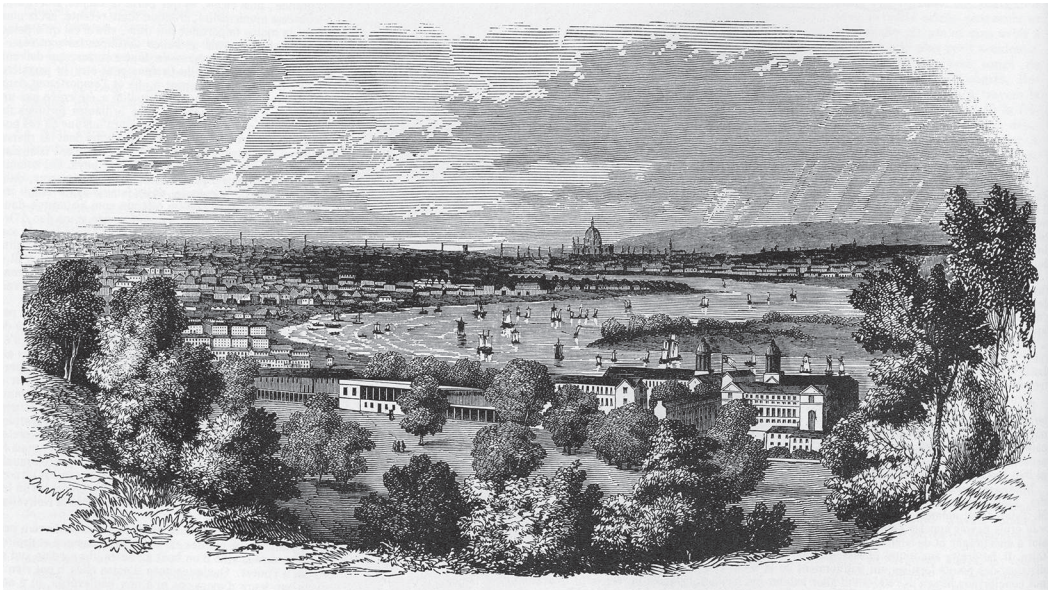
Vocabulary

influx, n. the arrival of a large number of people

German Settlers in Louisiana

As you have read, Crozat abandoned his contract with the French government not long after Cadillac was removed as governor. In Crozat's absence, the French king turned the colony over to a Scottish investment banker named John Law. Law's company granted land to settlers from Germany and neighboring countries in an attempt to populate the colony and make it a success. Many of them were indentured servants and farmers with hopes of a better future.

A particular group of German settlers, led by a man named Charles Frederick D'Arensbourg, had a significant impact on New Orleans. In 1721, this group settled along the coast of the Mississippi about twenty-five miles (40 km) from New Orleans, in an area that would become known as the German Coast. This area proved to be good for farming. In just a few years, the settlers began to supply much-needed resources and food to New Orleans.



This illustration shows New Orleans in 1720, two years after it was founded.

These resources became so valuable that the French Superior Council issued a decree that promised protection for settlers on their way to and from New Orleans to deliver goods. The German Coast community continued to contribute to the growth of the city throughout the eighteenth century.

The German settlements succeeded in part because there were so many families among them. At that time, there were many more men than women living in the French colony. Officials began to encourage women from France to move to Louisiana to help support the colony's growth. They also hoped that this strategy would increase French influence in the settlements. But even as more women arrived, Louisiana remained difficult to manage.

Louisiana Grows

As the population of French Louisiana grew, so did conflict. Settlements began to extend beyond the area of the Gulf. As more settlers arrived in new areas along the Mississippi River, they met groups of Native Americans who had lived on the land for centuries.

Throughout the 1700s, Native American groups were a large part of the population in the colony. They shared their knowledge of not only agriculture but also medicines, resources, and building practices. But many Native Americans felt threatened by the influx of European settlers and enslaved people and the loss of their land. They eventually began to wage war. One of the deadliest conflicts was the Natchez Massacre. Natchez warriors attacked a French settlement. More than two hundred colonial men were killed. Women, children, and enslaved people were taken prisoner by the Natchez. As a result, Bienville, who had been asked to leave France and return to the colony, sent soldiers as well as Choctaw warriors allied with the French to attack Natchez settlements. This retaliation was devastating for the Natchez and greatly reduced their population.

French Colonial Louisiana and the British Colonies

Not far to the northeast of French Louisiana were the thirteen British colonies. The British colonies were like Louisiana in that they were ruled by a foreign

power across the ocean. But they were different in many ways. The British colonies were self-contained areas that had formed their own cultures and customs. Still, they were united by their common language and experiences with representative government.

Control of colonial Louisiana passed through many hands. This created a unique legal system. Louisiana followed **civil law**, as opposed to other colonies in America, which had systems of **common law**. The Louisiana Civil Code, still in place today, was developed by French colonial officials.



The 1729 Natchez Massacre was a result of increasing tensions between the Natchez people and French colonial settlers.

The End of French Colonial Louisiana

The Seven Years' War (1756–63) was a global conflict that involved many European countries. In North America, Great Britain and France had been fighting since 1754 in a conflict known as the French and Indian War. In these wars, American colonies became **assets** that would be won or lost based on the outcome of the conflict. The Treaty of Fontainebleau, signed in secret in 1762, was a step toward ending the warfare. It **ceded** much of colonial Louisiana to Spain. As part of the treaty, French king Louis XV gave western Louisiana and New Orleans to Spain in return for its help during the war. This was also a way to keep Louisiana from being taken by the British. The treaty was kept secret until France **negotiated** a formal peace treaty with the British.

Vocabulary

civil law, n. a system of law in which codes and statutes carry greater weight than prior court decisions

common law, n. a system of law in which prior court decisions carry greater weight than codes and statutes

asset, n. something that is owned by a person, company, or country

cede, v. to grant or transfer

negotiate, v. to discuss the terms of an agreement

The Treaty of Paris was signed in 1763 by France, Spain, and Great Britain, and it formally ended the Seven Years' War. For the Spanish, Louisiana was a buffer zone between the British colonies and Spain's mining interests in Mexico. As part of the treaty, France gave its Canadian territory and eastern Louisiana to the British. Great Britain then officially ceded eastern Louisiana to Spain. Louisiana remained a Spanish colony for almost four decades. But the area outside of New Orleans never became very populated.

After 1783, expansion of the United States began to threaten Spanish rule in Louisiana. By 1800, Spain was involved in wars in Europe and was feeling financial strain. The Spanish king sold Louisiana back to France as part of the Third Treaty of San Ildefonso. In the treaty, France made a promise not to sell Louisiana or trade it. But as history will show, promises can be broken.

French colonial Louisiana has a complicated history. It was passed back and forth through many hands while under French rule. It was also used as a political pawn among European countries.

Although France never saw it become a lucrative colony encompassing the Mississippi Valley and Great Lakes region, Louisiana did become a cultural center with European, African, and Native American influences.

The Napoleonic Code

The Napoleonic Code, instituted in France in 1804, came to influence Louisiana law as well. The Napoleonic Code is a combination of revolutionary ideas that were popular in France at the time and customary laws that existed throughout other parts of Europe.



In the Treaty of San Ildefonso of 1800, Spain sold Louisiana back to France.

PRIMARY SOURCE: THE CODE NOIR

The Code Noir, also known as the Black Code, was a set of laws enacted in France in 1685, under the reign of King Louis XIV. In 1724, the French government issued fifty-five articles of the Code Noir specifically for the Louisiana colony. These laws primarily regulated the lives of enslaved people in Louisiana, outlining their rights and restrictions and the obligations of their owners.

X. If the husband be a slave, and the wife a free woman, it is our will that their children . . . shall share the condition of their mother, and be as free as she, notwithstanding the servitude of their father; and if the father be free and the mother a slave, the children shall all be slaves. . . .

XIII. We forbid slaves belonging to different masters to gather in crowds either by day or by night, under the pretext of a wedding, or for any other cause, either at the dwelling or on the grounds of one of their masters, or elsewhere, and much less on the highways or in secluded places, under the penalty of corporal [physical] punishment. . . .

XXI. Slaves who are disabled from working, either by old age, disease, or otherwise, be the disease incurable or not, shall be fed and provided for by their masters; and in case they should have been abandoned by said masters, said slaves shall be adjudged to the nearest hospital, to which said masters shall be obliged to pay eight cents a day for the food and maintenance of each one of these slaves. . . .

XXII. We declare that slaves can have no right to any kind of property, and that all that they acquire, either by their own industry or by the liberality of others, or by any other means or title whatever, shall be the full property of their masters. . . .

XLIII. Husbands and wives shall not be seized and sold separately when belonging to the same master: and their children, when under fourteen years of age, shall not be separated from their parents, and such seizures and sales shall be null and void.

Source: French, B. F., ed. *Historical Collections of Louisiana, Embracing Translations of Many Rare and Valuable Documents Relating to the Natural, Civil, and Political History of that State*. Vol. 3. New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1851. Reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1976, pp. 90–94.

PRIMARY SOURCE: THE COMPANY OF MISSISSIPPI

Louisiana is bordered to the east by Florida and Carolina. To the northeast, it is bordered by Virginia and Canada. It is bordered on the west by Mexico, but its boundaries to the northwest are not well known. It is bound by the sea to the south. The Missouri River empties itself into the Mississippi River, which the Indians say flows into a large lake.

The French who trade with the Indians of the Missouri River claim that it is a very good and fruitful country. They do not doubt that they will find several gold and silver mines. The Indians have even shown them some of the ore.

The Illinois, the Apaches, and the Choctaw have all embraced the Christian religion. The Illinois are in some measure civilized by the care of the Jesuit priests and the assistance of some French travelers. There are many French who have settled among them. The French have also built a fort there. The Indians grow crops as well as the French. Corn, vines, and almost all the fruits of France grow there perfectly well. It is one of the finest countries in the world, abundant with lead, copper, and silver mines. The climate is very pleasant and temperate.

It is plentiful in oaks, walnut trees, beech trees, cypresses, and cedars. There have been found some kinds of silkworms that live there. They cultivated some in 1717 that succeeded very well. The silk that was sent to Paris from Louisiana proved very good. Those that understand them there believe that the worms will not be in danger of sickness as they are in Europe.

The French have built a settlement among the Natchitoches, a nation near St. Bernard's Bay. They hope to find silver mines there.

The soil of Louisiana is very proper for vines and indigo. It produces a variety of foods. The wild bulls are plenty. There are large numbers of deer, and there are some bears that do not attack. There are many turkeys, ducks, and birds different from ours.

The Mississippi River overflows every year. But the flood does not reach that far. The river can carry large ships seventeen miles [27 km] from its mouth.

Source: Adapted from Law, John. *A Full and Impartial Account of the Company of Mississippi, Otherwise Called the French East-India Company, Projected and Settled by Mister Law*. London: R. Francklin, 1720, pp. 53–57, 75–79.

Chapter 2

Spanish Colonial Louisiana

Spanish Exploration of Louisiana

Hernando de Soto and his fellow explorers were the first people from Europe to explore the lower part of the Mississippi River. His expedition had begun in 1538 CE. De Soto first arrived in Florida. He explored the nearby inland areas in search of gold and other precious metals but did not find any. De Soto and the others then began moving west, encountering conflicts with Native Americans on the way. In 1541 CE, they reached the Mississippi River. After de Soto died from illness, his crew continued west. They eventually returned to the river and sailed south to reach the Gulf. This was the first time that Europeans had sailed through Louisiana by way of the Mississippi. The French would not arrive in the area for more than a century.

The Framing Question

How did the Louisiana colony change under Spanish rule?



Hernando de Soto was one of the first Europeans to cross the Mississippi River.

Then, after almost one hundred years of French rule, Louisiana became a Spanish colony when the Treaty of Fontainebleau was signed in 1762. At the time, the Louisiana colony was large but not very populated. It encompassed the French fur-trading settlements along the upper part of the Mississippi River to the north and the land bordering Texas to the west. The western area included the Natchitoches settlement, an important post for trade with Mexico and Native Americans. About 7,500 colonists lived in the colony, most near the lower Mississippi River and the Gulf. The French had envisioned Louisiana becoming a busy port colony. However, it was considered too remote at the time for steady trade with European countries.

The Spanish Slowly Take Control

The Spanish did not take control of their new land right away. French colonists were hostile toward their new government. Like France before it, Spain was hesitant to spend a great deal of money maintaining its new colony. As you have read, Louisiana had many different **ethnic** groups. It was home to French people, enslaved and free Africans, and many groups of Native Americans. This made management of the colony challenging for the Spanish. Compounding these problems, the Spanish colonial governor, Antonio de Ulloa, did not make an appearance in Louisiana until it had been a Spanish colony for four years. In an effort to limit some of these challenges, Spanish officials continued the use of the French language and many French customs.

Vocabulary

ethnic, adj. referring to a group of people who share a similar culture that is often handed down from one generation to the next

When Ulloa finally arrived in New Orleans, it was in financial and administrative turmoil. He did not have military reinforcements, so he was unable to effectively declare Spanish control in the colony. The new governor made several missteps that only worsened the problems. He did not have the French flag that flew in the center of the city taken down, thus confusing the colonists even more as to who was in charge. Trade restrictions meant

to increase Spanish influence only crippled the small amount of trade that existed to and from Louisiana.

The Creole Revolt of 1768

Soon, a group of French Creole citizens from New Orleans began a rebellion meant to drive Ulloa out of the colony. They held a convention to publicly discuss the problems that they had with Spanish rule in Louisiana. They requested that the Superior Council, the governing body of Louisiana, revert back to French rule and force Ulloa out of the colony. The Superior Council ordered Ulloa to leave and petitioned the French minister of foreign affairs to restore French rule.

Spain responded with a show of force. King Charles III of Spain sent a fleet of ships to the colony under the command of General Alejandro O'Reilly. O'Reilly took control as governor of Louisiana in August of 1769. He arrested the leaders of the rebellion. They were charged with treason, and some of the men were executed, while others were imprisoned.

After the rebellion was quashed, O'Reilly put reforms in place to enforce Spanish authority. He adapted the colony's French laws to align them with Spanish laws. This resulted in the Code O'Reilly, which was the foundation for the Spanish colony's legal system. He also did away with



General Alejandro O'Reilly reorganized and strengthened Spanish rule in Louisiana.



Built under Spanish rule, the Cabildo building became the center of the new Spanish government. The building now serves as a museum.

the Superior Council that had been instituted by the French. It was replaced with a cabildo. This was a form of local government that was common throughout Spain's territories in North America. O'Reilly also stabilized Louisiana's finances and improved colonial relations with Native Americans. Peaceful relations with Native Americans continued during Spanish rule in Louisiana.

Slavery in Spanish Louisiana

Under Spanish rule, New Orleans slowly became the important port city and center for trade that the French government had tried to create. This happened mostly because of the thriving cash crops that eventually grew in the colony. The growing number of plantations created a higher demand for enslaved workers to tend the crops. And so slavery expanded proportionally under Spanish rule as the plantation economy grew. Now enslaved people did not only come from Africa. British slave traders based in the Caribbean also began sending enslaved people from Jamaica to Louisiana. Spain had control of Louisiana for thirty-seven years. In that time, the colony continued to be part of the triangular trade, and the number of enslaved people in the colony grew by many thousands of men, women, and children.

This increase in the enslaved population changed the economy of the colony. The customs and traditions that enslaved people brought with them also changed Louisiana's culture. While under French rule, enslaved people in Louisiana had adopted the Creole way of life, including the French language. Now, as the numbers of enslaved people increased under the Spanish, there was a reemergence of African customs. Enslaved African people increasingly played traditional music and spoke native languages.

Vocabulary

lenient, adj. mild or tolerant

The lives of some enslaved people improved in certain ways under Spanish rule. More **lenient** laws regarding slavery created social changes in colonial Louisiana. It was easier for an enslaved person to

become free, and the population of free people of color increased. This occurred for a few reasons. The practice of manumission was more available

than it had been under French rule. Government approval was no longer required to free an enslaved person. Also, Spanish law allowed enslaved people to have their own property and to keep the money they earned when they worked outside of their duties as enslaved people. For example, they could sell crafts or food that they made and keep their money. Another practice, called *coartación*, began. This allowed enslaved persons to buy their freedom once they had saved enough money. About two thousand formerly enslaved people became free through manumission and *coartación* in New Orleans under Spanish rule.

Two terrible fires that ravaged New Orleans may have indirectly improved the lives of some free people of color. Widespread fires occurred in the city in 1788 and 1794, requiring the entire city to be rebuilt. In fact, the fires



Many enslaved Africans lived and worked on plantations in Spanish Louisiana. They lived in small, simple wooden cabins. An enslaved family often had a small garden behind their cabin.

led to the passage of new laws prohibiting wooden structures. Many enslaved people made enough money as builders during this time to buy their freedom. It became common for free people of color to become carpenters, ironworkers, or shoemakers, or go into the textile industry. Women became retailers, boardinghouse keepers, and seamstresses. They often invested the money that they made in property. This provided financial security for generations of free people of color. A small number became slaveholders themselves.

Migrations to Spanish Colonial Louisiana

The rebuilding of New Orleans after the fires allowed for the city to expand outside its original borders. Under Spanish rule, the colony embarked on

ambitious new projects—most notably the construction of a one-and-a-half-mile (2.4 km) canal to link the Mississippi River with Bayou St. John and Lake Pontchartrain. Part of the growth in New Orleans and in the Spanish colony in general was due to a steady influx of immigrants into Louisiana. The biggest group of immigrants in Spanish Louisiana were the Acadians. Cajun people are the descendants of Acadians. These French settlers were forced out of Canada by the British during the French and Indian War. Between 1765 and 1770, thousands of Acadians settled on land south and west of New Orleans. Many of them remained small farmers, like their ancestors. However, after a few generations in Louisiana, some Acadians became wealthy plantation owners.

Acadian Settlements in Louisiana, 1800s.



By the early 1800s, nearly four thousand Acadians had arrived and settled in Louisiana.

Today, Cajuns might be best known for their flavorful food and unique music, but they made many other important contributions to Louisiana's history and culture as well.

The Spanish government also encouraged settlement by people from the Canary Islands, who began to arrive in the 1770s. The Canary Islands are located off the coast of Africa. Early on during the Spanish rule of Louisiana, the Spanish government enlisted immigrants from the Canary Islands, or

Isleños, to move to Louisiana in an effort to protect the colony from British invasion. The settlement in St. Bernard Parish, five miles (8 km) from New Orleans, found the most success. Even today, this area has a distinct Spanish culture.

The Acadians and the Isleños often arrived in Louisiana with their families. The Spanish never made formal attempts to bring women to the colony as the French had. However, these immigrant families helped stabilize the Louisiana population. Life was difficult for women who came to the Louisiana colony, but they made great contributions to its development. Only the women at the top of the social structure were not expected to take part in hard labor. Some women arrived with occupations or trades, but most were expected to share the physical labor of building and farming as well as take care of the home. They also passed on the rich and varied culture of Louisiana to their children through food, religious customs, and music.



The influence of Louisiana's immigrants is still apparent in the culture, food, and traditions of the state.

Louisiana Industry

In late 1700s Louisiana, there was plenty of farmland. There were also craftspeople who populated the larger cities, such as New Orleans. But there was no thriving manufacturing hub. This meant that many Louisianans had to import the most basic necessities, such as clothing, shoes, and soap. Some of the restrictions on trade that were instituted by Ulloa were still in effect. These stopped the free flow of imports and exports.

According to the law, British and American traders were not allowed to do business in Spanish New Orleans. As a result, the governors of Louisiana unofficially allowed goods to be **smuggled** into and out of the colony. The colony relied on the goods that these traders brought in.

Vocabulary

smuggle, v. to move goods illegally

Then, in 1795, the United States was given Spanish territory in present-day Alabama and Mississippi as part of a treaty known as the Treaty of San Lorenzo, or Pinckney's Treaty. Americans could now openly travel along the Mississippi River and bring goods into New Orleans. Commerce and trade flourished. More flatboats appeared on the Mississippi River, carrying goods in and out of the colony. Under the French, the city had been an isolated outpost. Now it became a strategic port city.

In that same year, Antoine Morin, a free man of color from present-day Haiti, produced sugar for the first time in Louisiana. As the French colony of Saint-Domingue, Haiti had been a large producer of sugar before the Haitian Revolution crippled the industry. Now many plantations in southern Louisiana began to invest in sugarhouses. The cotton gin had also been invented in 1794. This allowed for quick and easy cotton processing. Soon, cotton was replacing other crops at many plantations along the Red River. Along with thriving sugar and cotton production, the Louisiana slave trade grew again.

Spanish Influence on Louisiana

Today, Louisiana is divided into sixty-four parishes. These boundaries are the result of the predominantly Catholic French and Spanish colonial rule. A parish is a geographic area that has a church and is served by a certain pastor or priest. In Louisiana, these parishes are now the equivalent of counties in other states.

Although Spain ruled Louisiana for thirty-seven years, few Spanish people came to the colony during that time. The Spanish officials who did come to the colony often spoke French. They adopted French Creole customs. One remnant of Spanish cultural influence in Louisiana, especially in New Orleans, is architectural. Many buildings constructed during Spanish rule still stand. Their distinctive look is the result of the building codes that were enacted after the widespread fires in the city.

The End of Spanish Rule in Louisiana

Just as Spanish Louisiana began to thrive, the thirteen British colonies along the Atlantic coast declared their independence and escalated their war with Great Britain in 1776. Similar to Spanish Louisiana, these colonies were ruled by a government that resided across the ocean. But the Spanish government did not face a colony demanding independence, as Great Britain did. The Spanish king instead saw an opportunity to take back Florida from Great Britain while the British fought a war with their colonies. So Spain entered the Revolutionary War on the American side as an informal ally.

The governor of Louisiana, a nobleman named Bernardo de Gálvez, allowed much-needed supplies to be transported up the Mississippi River so that they could be delivered to the American soldiers fighting the British. Once Spain officially joined the war, Gálvez went into battle with a fighting force as diverse as the colony itself. It included Creole people, Spanish people, and free people of color. The Spanish won battles at Manchac and Baton Rouge. They also claimed Mobile in present-day Alabama and Pensacola in Florida. Spain controlled all the land around the Gulf, and it looked like the Spanish

would remain in North America for the foreseeable future. However, this was not meant to be.

In the 1790s, Napoleon Bonaparte, the new French leader, wanted to establish a new French empire in North America. He set his sights on Louisiana as the center of this empire. In 1800, he negotiated the return of Louisiana to France from Spain. This was part of the secret Treaty of San Ildefonso, which you have read about. In return for this



Napoleon Bonaparte agreed to the Louisiana Purchase even though it violated an agreement he had made with the Spanish.

agreement, Spain was given some land in Europe. The treaty was a secret because Bonaparte wanted peace with Great Britain before embarking on his plan in America. When his plan ultimately failed, Bonaparte decided to sell Louisiana to the United States. By doing so, Bonaparte disregarded his agreement with Spain not to sell or trade Louisiana to another country.

When the Spanish took over the Louisiana colony from the French in 1762, it was unwieldy and difficult to govern. Rebellion struck the colony not long into Spain's rule. But just a few short decades later, Spanish Louisiana was prosperous. New Orleans had become a center of trade, and a large plantation system existed throughout the colony that produced valuable cash crops of cotton and sugar. Under Spanish rule, the Louisiana colony was home to a diverse group of people, including wealthy Creole plantation owners, Native Americans, enslaved Africans, free people of color, Acadians, and immigrants from the Mediterranean and the Caribbean. When the United States purchased Louisiana in 1803, it was far different from the other places in the new country. Unlike the rest of the United States, the political and social systems in Louisiana had French and Spanish roots. While it became American in most ways, the state of Louisiana still retains many of its unique aspects from its time as a colony.

PRIMARY SOURCE: THE PROCLAMATION OF ALEJANDRO O'REILLY (1769)

In 1768, a group of French Creole colonists ousted Spanish governor Antonio de Ulloa in a rebellion. In response, the Spanish king sent a fleet of ships to the colony under the command of General Alejandro O'Reilly. O'Reilly arrested the leaders of the rebellion.

In the name of the King.—Don Alejandro O'Reilly, Commander of Benfayan in the Order of Alcantara, Lieutenant-General and Inspector-General of the armies of His Catholic Majesty, Captain-General and Governor of the province of Louisiana.

By virtue of the orders and powers which we possess from His Majesty, we declare to all the inhabitants of the province of Louisiana that, whatever just cause the past events may have given His Catholic Majesty to make them feel his indignation, he wishes to listen to-day only to his clemency toward the public, persuaded that it has sinned only by allowing itself to be led astray by the intrigues of a few ambitious and fanatic men, of evil intent, who have rashly abused its ignorance and its too great credulity. The latter alone will answer for their crimes, and will be judged according to the laws.

An act so generous should assure His Majesty that his new subjects will endeavor to merit, by their fidelity, zeal, and obedience, the favor which he does to them and the protection which he grants them from this moment.

Source: Fortier, Alcée. *A History of Louisiana*. New York: Goupil & Co. of Paris, 1904, p. 217.

Glossary

A

asset, n. something that is owned by a person, company, or country (14)

C

cede, v. to grant or transfer (14)

civil law, n. a system of law in which codes and statutes carry greater weight than prior court decisions (14)

commerce, n. the buying and selling of goods and services; trade (4)

common law, n. a system of law in which prior court decisions carry greater weight than codes and statutes (14)

contract, n. a written or spoken agreement, usually about business (6)

E

ethnic, adj. referring to a group of people who share a similar culture that is often handed down from one generation to the next (20)

I

influx, n. the arrival of a large number of people (12)

investment, n. money that is spent in order to make a profit (4)

L

lenient, adj. mild or tolerant (22)

M

manumission, n. release from enslavement (11)

monopoly, n. the complete ownership or control of a resource or industry (6)

N

negotiate, v. to discuss the terms of an agreement (14)

R

regent, n. a person who governs a kingdom when the monarch is unable to (8)

S

smuggle, v. to move goods illegally (26)



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