

Part One

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CHAPTER ONE

Native Peoples and European Contact

- **8,000–10,000 years ago** Paleo-Amerindians first inhabit the future “Louisiana.”
- **8,500–4,000 years ago** Period of Meso-Amerindian culture.
- **1492** Christopher Columbus discovers New World.
- **1519** Pineda expedition maps entire Gulf of Mexico, including Louisiana coast.
- **1539–43** De Soto expedition explores future southeastern United States, including Mississippi River and Louisiana (De Soto dies May 1542).
- **1534** Jacques Cartier explores and claims St. Lawrence River (Canada) for France.
- **1608** Québec City founded.
- **1672–73** Marquette and Joliet explore Mississippi River and confirm it flows to Gulf of Mexico.
- **April 9, 1682** La Salle reaches mouth of Mississippi River and claims “Louisiana” for France.
- **1684–87** La Salle’s failed attempt to establish settlement near mouth of Mississippi River.

Perspectives on Colonial Louisiana History

Much of present-day Louisiana existed as a colony of France, and then Spain, before becoming part of the United States. In addition, other areas of the state were a colony of Great Britain. First settled by the French in the late 1690s, Louisiana became a Spanish possession in 1763, at the conclusion of the Seven Years War. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 joined New Orleans and the lands west of the Mississippi River to the young United States. The United States assumed jurisdiction of the areas east of the river, now known as the “Florida parishes,” during the War of 1812. The Pelican State, therefore, enjoys a colonial heritage that is French, Spanish, and English. For that reason, colonial Louisiana attracted a wide variety of French-, English-, and Spanish-speaking peoples along with the Native Americans who had long dwelled on its land. As an agricultural colonial province based on the production of cash crops such as sugar and cotton, the colony also attracted large numbers of unwilling immigrants from Africa. The African American influence also contributed in essential ways to its cultural development. Colonial Louisiana thus became a true “melting pot” of peoples, languages, customs, and cultures, which made it from the start a diverse place, a quality the state of Louisiana still retains. The existence of a major port at New Orleans also made colonial Louisiana a vital trade center, one in touch with world rhythms and markets from the time of the city’s founding in 1718. The part it played in trade and commerce gave the Crescent City and its environs a cosmopolitan air. At the same time, the agricultural areas of the colony’s interior and its remote rural hinterlands held pockets of insular, isolated communities. This dichotomy between urban and rural culture remains characteristic of the modern state.

As well, colonial Louisiana encompassed a far greater geographical area than does the state today. Louisiana during the colonial era comprised almost half the interior of the present United States, from the Gulf of Mexico to French Canada. Most of this vast territory, however, was never settled by Europeans and remained the domain of Native peoples. The rich diversity of colonial Louisiana and its geographical extent have long attracted the interest of historians, not only because the history of the colony involves those of other present-day states – Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, and parts of several others – but also because the history of colonial Louisiana touches on many central themes in the history of the nation, including the American Revolution, and the westward expansion of the United States. The historical studies written by historians of colonial Louisiana over the years, which tell the story of the province from diverse perspectives, bear this out. Some historians have written about the history of early Louisiana from the perspective of French

colonial history, while others have considered it in the context of the Spanish New World empire. Both the French colonialists and Spanish Borderlanders, as the latter group is popularly known, see the colonial era of Louisiana from viewpoints outside of U.S. history. In addition, historians concerned with Native Americans and their history, along with those interested in African Americans and their contributions to our past, have also found colonial Louisiana a rich and significant place to study. Even historians of the environment flock to the study of early Louisiana, intrigued by its wetlands, numerous river and bayou systems, and varied uplands topography, factors that made – and still make – the state environmentally unique.

All of this gives the historical literature of colonial Louisiana a multicultural diversity and variety perhaps unequaled in telling the story of any other state in the nation. Many of the events that contribute to the history of colonial Louisiana did not, however, take place inside the geographical confines of the modern state, but in locations that exist today as parts of other states in the Mississippi River valley. The following chapters therefore attempt to balance the colony's great geographical and historical diversity with a primary focus on important historical events that took place inside the boundaries of the present-day state. At the same time, an attempt is made to place this history within the context of the larger geographic region covered by the greater colony during its existence as part of the French and Spanish empires.

The Geography of Modern Louisiana

The natural environment has always been crucial to understanding the Louisiana historical experience. The great river that bisects the state forms the central corridor of a complex series of smaller streams, bayous, and other sorts of watercourses that have provided the stage upon which the history of the state has been played. The peoples of Louisiana, who parade through the past as players on this stage, have always done so with one of the many waterways as their backdrop. Native American hunters, intrepid French explorers and trappers, swashbuckling Spaniards, Acadian fishermen and herdsmen, and Anglo-American planters, along with modern-day stevedores, refinery workers, and urban office clerks, have all had the rhythms of their historical existence in Louisiana influenced by the mighty rivers and widespread bayous. Beyond the waterways, the existence of vast wetlands in the southern regions of Louisiana, the fertile prairies in the southwestern part of the state, combined with the forested uplands to the north and the deep delta flatlands along the Mississippi, have helped to create a distinctive history, from colonial times to the present. The extremes

of weather, coupled with the state having a coastal location along the northern shore of the Gulf of Mexico, also have given a distinct cast to that history. Unusually hot and wet in the spring and summer, Louisiana can be frigid in the winter, while the long fair-weather seasons make for a fertile agriculture. Louisiana's weather can also be violent. Destructive tornados, driving rainstorms, and devastating hurricanes constitute a regular feature of its history.

Today, Louisiana ranks thirty-first in size among the nation's fifty states. From its eastern to its western boundaries, it measures about 290 miles; from north to south, the distance is a bit less, nearly 280 miles. New Orleans, the most populous city, lies at about the same latitude as Cairo, Egypt, located along the 30th parallel. (Parallels of latitude are the imaginary circles of the earth that parallel the equator.) The state's location along the Gulf of Mexico makes for relatively low elevations throughout all of Louisiana, with the highest point being the 535-foot-high Mount Driskill in Bienville Parish. Numerous points lie right at sea level and notable others, such as suburban districts of New Orleans, lie below the level of contiguous bodies of water.

The fertility of Louisiana's soil is supported by a climate well suited to agriculture. Most of the state is semitropical, with rainfall averaging 57 inches per year. Although annual rainfall levels tend to be higher in the southern parts of the state, in most years they are well distributed throughout the state. The average annual temperature ranges from 60 to 72 degrees Fahrenheit, although during the winter and summer months daily extremes vary from freezing conditions to well over 100 degrees. The lowest officially recorded temperature dipped down to 16 degrees, in Webster Parish, while the highest climbed up to 114 degrees, in Bossier Parish. All of this makes for one of the longest growing seasons in the nation, officially lasting from 220 days per year in north Louisiana to 350 days in the south.

In addition to fertile land, Louisiana has a great many rivers, streams, bays, and bayous, some of them navigable for boats of all sizes. Preeminent among them is the Mississippi River. Rising in the interior of North America several thousand miles north of the Gulf of Mexico, the Mississippi is the fourth-longest river in the world. Along with the immense amount of water carried by the river come mud and sediment, the deposits of which over the centuries have made the soil of Louisiana among the most fertile in the nation. Also important is the Red River, rising on the high plains of New Mexico and Texas. It cuts through northwestern Louisiana and provides some 370 miles of navigable water. The Red River has also served as a major water route in the development of the state.

The drainage of Louisiana's numerous rivers, streams, and bayous into the Gulf of Mexico has created along the Louisiana coastline some of the largest wetlands

in the world. This zone of coastal marshes accounts for about 40 percent of the total saltwater wetlands of the entire United States. The preponderance of water in Louisiana makes for interesting statistical comparisons: the total area of the state is approximately 48,500 square miles, with some 4,000 of these consisting of marshland, 2,800 of lakes and ponds, and 3,400 of bays and tidal flow areas. Hence, almost one-quarter of Louisiana's surface is covered by water. From the time of its first human inhabitants to the present, residents of Louisiana have never been far from the water's edge.

The Earliest Inhabitants

The first people to inhabit the land now known as Louisiana lived as nomadic hunters who appeared in the area some 8,000 to 10,000 years ago, during the last Ice Age. Little is known about these prehistoric inhabitants beyond what the science of archeology can provide. They lived in small family units and survived as hunter-gatherers. The land they knew had little in common with the present-day state, which took on its modern topography at the end of the Ice Age. These groups survived by hunting giant mammoths, ground sloths, and other species of large mammals then native to the region. To bring down their prey, they made numerous projectile points to tip their spears, the remains of many of which are today widely scattered across Louisiana.

As time went on, and the great flows of ice retreated increasingly northward, these early hunters adapted their folkways to the changing flora and fauna of the land, which became heavily forested. The peoples grew to be less nomadic and their numbers increased. The nature of their projectile points also became more sophisticated and elaborate. In addition to spear tips, they began to make axe heads, mortars, and knife blades. As the larger Pleistocene-era mammals became extinct, the peoples adapted their hunting practices to pursue smaller woodland varieties of animals, including deer, bears, panthers, and various types of birds. They also turned to Louisiana's waterways and swamps to feast on fish and shellfish. Indeed, they disposed of the shells of the oysters, mussels, and clams they consumed by making great mounds of them, known as middens. Many of these middens can still be found along the coastal areas and river banks of Louisiana and are thought to mark sites where these early folk and their descendants gathered to garner shellfish, a main staple of their diet.

Eventually these people learned to construct crude canoes made from dug-out logs. They also had established a rudimentary trade network with other groups as far away as present-day Tennessee and Georgia. These changes seem to have been so pronounced that some anthropologists use these developments



Figure 1.1 Poverty Point, in northwest Louisiana, is a popular site for archeologists as well as tourists. *Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism.*

to mark the appearance of a new culture, the Meso-Amerindian, which dominated the region from approximately 6500 B.C. to 2000 B.C. These peoples lived at permanent sites of regular habitation, although these locations could by no means be called towns. Places such as Catahoula Lake in central Louisiana, Saline Bayou near Natchitoches, the Marksville mounds, and the Jonesville Temple mounds in Catahoula Parish nonetheless provide ample archeological evidence of this developing Native American culture. The Poverty Point National Monument, located in West Carroll Parish, is the best-known such site in Louisiana. The area features earthen mounds that date back to twelve centuries before the birth of Christ.

It is clear to those who study these important cultural developments that contact with the larger, relatively more sophisticated, and culturally complex native civilizations to the south in modern Mexico influenced the early Native peoples of the lower Mississippi. So too did regular communication with those groups living to the southeast in the Caribbean, and also to the east in the heavily forested areas of the upland and coastal south of the present-day United States. Added to these influences came contact with Native groups to the north, up the great river system into the interior of the middle continent. For that

reason, Louisiana during its pre-European period existed as what anthropologists term a “cultural sink,” an area that served as a crossroads attracting into it diverse groups from outside its boundaries.

Although the Meso-Amerindians had such a simple culture and lived so long ago that few tangible clues about their culture and lifestyle exist, modern archeologists have studied what artifacts they have to offer some conclusions about the nature of their existence. Evidence indicates that these early inhabitants lived in every part of present-day Louisiana. Their forms of social organization became increasingly more complex as time went on. They enjoyed food rich in both its nourishment and variety: waterfowl, fish, alligators, turtles, venison, fruits, and nuts constituted regular parts of their diet. Given this abundance, they had little cause to engage in extensive agriculture, although they appear to have cultivated some items, including an early strain of corn along with beans and squash.

Their habitation sites reveal that they fired pottery, making cooking utensils and storage containers. During later stages of development, Louisiana's Meso-Amerindians also worked copper into bracelets and other types of personal jewelry. The religious beliefs of these early folk had a relatively high level of sophistication since their burial sites indicate complex rituals. Native craftsmen made special pottery burial vessels while, at least in some areas of the region, burials took place in specialized cemetery plots. In some of these, graves indicate the joint burial of families, occasionally in raised burial mounds whose interiors contained wood-reinforced tombs. The ornamentation on the objects found in these burials includes artistic representations of flying serpents, rattlesnakes, eagles, hawks, human hands and eyes, and clouds. Embossed copper plates that appear to have the likenesses of “gods” carved in them have been found at some sites. Many of these symbols shared common characteristics with those of other Native American groups living as far to the east as the Atlantic coast and as a far south as Mexico.

By the time of the European Middle Ages, Louisiana's Native peoples had made great progress in becoming the highly organized tribes that greeted the first explorers who came to the region from Spain and France. It is clear to anthropologists that the development of Native cultures in the lower Mississippi exhibited heavy influence from groups living elsewhere to the east, west, and southwest. Indeed, even at this early juncture of human habitation, the extensive river systems that passed into the Mississippi delta made the region a crossroads of culture. From the east, the dominant linguistic strains of southern Native Americans made their influence felt as they brought vestiges of their woodland society to the area. Archeological evidence also indicates trade contact with the relatively more highly developed cultures of Mexico and the

Southwest. Additional cultural influences from parts of the Great Plains came by way of the Red River. Taken together, all of these contacts brought to the area of present-day Louisiana a dynamic Native American presence that continued to develop after the time of European contact.

In considering the Native groups of Louisiana, it must be understood that their tribal structures did not continue unchanged from the time of first European contact until the present. Many and disparate factors in history worked to change, alter, destroy, and rebuild the tribal organizations of Louisiana's Native peoples across the last several centuries. New diseases brought to the Americas by European arrivals during the early colonial period ravaged indigenous populations everywhere on the continent, including the lands that would become Louisiana. Military actions against Native peoples as Europeans expanded into new settlement areas also realigned the tribes, as did the disappearance of traditional hunting and gathering grounds when agriculture moved in to take their place. The tribes of Louisiana also found themselves caught up in European colonial rivalries, often playing one European group off another, as the lower Mississippi valley became the site of a contest between empires in the eighteenth century. Some tribes allied with the French, others with the Spanish or the British. Over time, this too tended to destabilize tribal organizations. The arrival of other native peoples from the east, groups pushed westward into the area by the spread into the interior of European settlement based along the Atlantic coast, also changed tribal structures. Most scholars today prefer to classify Native Americans by means of their linguistic groupings, for languages remain much more constant over long periods of time than do political constructs. What follows, then, will survey the major linguistic or cultural groups of Native peoples as they existed in eighteenth-century Louisiana, the major century of its colonial existence.

The Native American peoples living in Louisiana in the eighteenth century can be grouped into six important linguistic or cultural groupings: the Attakapa, the Caddo, the Tunica, the Natchez, the Muskogean, and the Chitimacha. Each of these groups included particular tribes that had their own names and self-identities. Many of them had their own distinct language dialects, traditions, cultural patterns, and geographic areas of habitation. Some of them did not long survive the European encounter with their particular folkways and traditions intact, especially the Natchez, whom the French eventually conquered. Others, such as the Caddo, continued for centuries with their culture unbroken. Nonetheless, all of them had an important impact on the colonization and settlement of colonial Louisiana.

The Attakapan groups, living in the far southwest of the present-day state, included four major tribes along with the distantly related Opelousas. The name "attakapa" comes from Choctaw origins and means "human flesh eater."



Figure 1.2 Indians of several nations, New Orleans, 1735, as pictured by Alexandre de Batz. *The Louisiana Collection, State Library of Louisiana, Baton Rouge, Louisiana* (hp001174).

Indeed, some instances of ritual cannibalism existed among these tribes, but they generally confined such activities to eating enemies slain in battle as part of ceremony. One of the Attakapan tribes, the Sunset People, lived along the Sabine River and around the area of Lake Charles. An eastern group of Attakapans inhabited the major portion of the southwestern prairie along the Mermentau and Vermillion rivers, while the Opelousas lived immediately to their north. The first Europeans to encounter the Attakapa commented on their lack of cultural development. Their timidity in the face of European contact ensured that they did not last long into the colonial era, except for a few isolated villages which endured into the nineteenth century. In particular, historians believe that European diseases struck them very hard and constituted a major factor in their demise.

To their north, along the modern Texas–Louisiana border into Arkansas, lived the Caddoan groups. They constituted the westernmost extension of the Muskogean peoples that included groups such as the Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw centered farther east in the American South. The Caddoans lived in permanent habitation sites. The fertile floodplains of the Red River and its tributaries provided lands for agriculture. They also hunted a wide variety of game as a steady part of their diet. Most of the Caddoan tribes lived in small villages comprising large houses made of timber with thatched roofs. The houses

contained furnishings that reflected a high order of craftsmanship: colored rugs, baskets, jewelry, and decorated pottery.

All of the Caddoan tribes existed as part of three informal political confederacies: the Hasinai centered to the west in present-day Texas; the Kadohadacho in northwestern Louisiana and southern Arkansas; and the Natchitoches, who lived in the Red River valley near the present-day town of the same name. Each confederacy had a simple form of bureaucratic organization with minor officials, sub-leaders, tribal chiefs, and an overlord of all the tribes known as the Grand Caddi. They had a structured religion with a priesthood class. The confederacies in fact had a high priest, called the Xinesi, who kept an eternal flame from which all lesser temple fires of the various Caddoan tribes had to be lit. Although they fought their enemies, they attempted to coexist peacefully with their neighbors, including the Europeans.

The Tunica groups lived to the east of the Caddoans, with their territory running in a northward direction into the modern states of Arkansas and Mississippi. Originally centered in present-day Vicksburg, they seldom entered Louisiana except on hunting expeditions that took them into the southern regions of their tribal lands. Like the Caddoans, the Tunican peoples had a highly developed economy. They hunted, fished, and engaged in subsistence agriculture. In addition, they maintained active commercial networks in the region, specializing in trading salt with their neighbors. They, too, had villages, although they tended to be more nomadic than the neighboring Caddoans.

European contact greatly altered the Tunicans as they changed the location of their settlements and amalgamated with neighboring linguistic groups. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Tunica and Ofo tribes had moved southward to inhabit the banks of the Mississippi River north of Baton Rouge. In so doing, they blended with the Natchez-speaking Avoyles, who had been living in the Pointe Coupee region. The Tunica Hills of West Feliciana Parish became a major center for them and, in recent decades, important archeological discoveries there have provided great insight into their historical existence. These discoveries, widely reported in Louisiana's press during the 1980s, have been popularly called the "Tunica Treasure," although most of the artifacts are workaday items of cultural importance rather than gold, silver, or jewels.

At the time of European contact, present-day northeast Louisiana and southern Mississippi south of the Tunica region served as home to three Natchez groups: the Taensa, Avoyle, and the Natchez tribe proper. The Taensa, living west of the Mississippi, existed as traditional enemies of their cultural and linguistic cousins, the Natchez, who lived along the east bank. The Avoyle, as the weakest of the tribes, eventually disappeared into the Tunicas after the latter tribe moved south.

The Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto, who passed through the region in the 1540s, first came into contact with these Natchez linguistic groups and recorded that they lived as a noble people, large in population. By the time the French arrived at the end of the 1600s, however, their numbers had declined, perhaps because of fighting or disease. The Natchez seemed especially warlike and had highly developed rituals by which they fought. These ceremonies included an event at which the participants feasted, made pompous war speeches, drank bitter potions, and engaged in frenetic dancing. Organized Natchez attacks usually took place three days later. The war parties seemed well organized, traveling quietly in single file, avoiding fires at nights, and hoping to surprise their unsuspecting enemies.

The Natchez fought fiercely with bows and arrows, clubs, and copper knives. During their raids they sought to intimidate their opponents by doing as much physical damage as possible. They also reveled in the taking of scalps. Once home from a victory, the Natchez engaged in more celebration. They made captives sing and dance, while they smoked the peace calumet once more. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Natchez constituted a major problem for the French during the early colonial era. In the 1720s and 1730s, French military troops fought several wars with this tribe before they finally subdued the Indians.

To the south of the Natchez region, from the Florida parishes to the river delta below New Orleans, there lived at the time of European contact some seven different tribes of the Muskhogean linguistic family. These tribes had a cultural relationship to the Choctaw, whose homelands could be found farther east in Mississippi and Alabama. Among them, the Houma constituted the most significant of the Louisiana Muskhogean tribes. They lived on the east bank of the Mississippi downriver from the Natchez tribal areas.

The Houma had a large village, which the Sieur d'Iberville observed early in the eighteenth century. The Frenchman noted some 140 cabins arranged in a circle, the town home to some 350 warriors and their families. These natives worked the gravel deposits in the modern-day Florida parishes in order to fashion weapons and high-quality stone implements. The Bayougoula, another related tribe living to the southwest of the Houmas, shared many of their characteristics and traits. They lived along the north shores of Lake Pontchartrain near the present-day Louisiana town that bears their name. More so than the Houma, the Bayougoula lived on the bounteous marine life in their district. They adopted the alligator as their totem symbol.

Little is known of the other Muskhogean tribes since they did not long survive into the European era. Evidence indicates that they sometimes engaged in war with one another. Their warlike tendencies showed at one of the earliest moments of European exploration, when the Quniapisa attacked the Sieur de la Salle's expedition in the 1680s. The Acloapissa appeared to have lived along the

Pearl River and, because of that location, became one of the first tribes to come into regular contact with the French. They moved farther west to avoid the French and eventually amalgamated into the other tribes of the delta country.

Another of the six major groups, the tribes of the Chitimacha, lived in southern part of the state in the deep delta country and swamp areas west of the Mississippi River, their major settlements situated along Bayou Plaquemine, Grand River, and Bayou Teche. This group contained three tribes: the Washa, the Chawasha, and the Chitimacha proper. Early French settlers in the area estimated that the three tribes comprised some 4,000 persons, making them a very large population group for the era. These three tribes, however, could not coexist peacefully with each other. The Chawasha, for example, allied with the French in 1707 in attacking the Chitimacha. The Washa, although the smallest of the three in numbers, eventually disappeared as a tribe because of their inability to coexist with their neighbors.



Figure 1.3 Chitimacha basketmaker, Christine Paul. The complex weaving techniques of the Chitimacha have changed little from traditional methods for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. At the present time, few descendants of this group still practice the art. *McIlhenny Company Archives, Avery Island, Louisiana.*

The Chitimacha nevertheless exhibited some of the highest cultural attainments of any group in the lower Mississippi valley. They had elaborate crafts, a highly developed form of social organization with an elite class, and a relatively advanced religion. Their villages had substantial houses built of wood with thatched roofs. Many villages also had sweat houses, similar to modern-day sauna baths, in which water heated on fires produced steam for healing purposes. These tribes carved wooden objects, made toys for their children, and worked metal such as copper into tools.

Late-Arriving Native Americans

The arrival of Europeans as permanent settlers during the 1700s had two important effects on the Native American groups of the lower Mississippi valley. First, the European arrivals upset the previously well-established relationships between the tribes of the present-day state of Louisiana. Second, and most important, other tribes from elsewhere (especially from the interior of the modern states of Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee) moved into Louisiana in response to the arrival of the British and French in North America. The colonial period of Louisiana history therefore witnessed new Native American tribes that arrived to make their homes in the delta country of the Mississippi River and, although not historically related to the area, they became Louisiana tribes. The Biloxi, the Koasati, the Lipan, and the Choctaw constituted the most important of these.

The Biloxi initially lived along the Gulf Coast in the area between present-day New Orleans and Mobile, Alabama. Along with other Mobile Bay groups, the Biloxi became the first to meet the French when Iberville founded settlements along the coastline of the modern state of Mississippi. The Biloxi later moved to the Mississippi River above Baton Rouge, where they blended with the Tunica, although neither tribe lost its separate historical identification. The Koasati also moved eastward into the region, initially settling along the bluff lands of the Florida parishes near Baton Rouge and in the Red River region of Rapides Parish. The Spanish colonial government welcomed the Koasati during the late eighteenth century as a buffer between Louisiana and the British in West Florida. The Lipans (sometimes called Connechi) also migrated into Louisiana during the period of Spanish domination, although they moved into the area from Texas. These tribes constituted a subgroup of the Apache linguistic family traditionally found on the high plains of the American Southwest. The Lipans settled in present-day De Soto, Sabine, and Red River parishes.

The Choctaw, however, constitute the most significant Native American group to move into Louisiana during the European period. Starting in the 1760s, and lasting for the rest of the eighteenth century, the Choctaws made a

major migration from the east. British colonization along the Atlantic coast pushed this tribe westward into Louisiana. The Choctaw settled all along the west bank of the Mississippi River north of Pointe Coupee, completely dominating the lower reaches of the Ouachita, Boeuf, and Tensas rivers as well. Smaller Choctaw groups established themselves in the Pearl River region and in Evangeline Parish. By the end of the 1700s, they had scattered all the way to the Sabine River. This tribe grew and prospered to become one of the largest in Louisiana. By the nineteenth century they had become the state's most widespread Native American group.

The Choctaw lived in small family groups clustered in villages of rude huts, sometimes in the vicinity of European settlements. The Choctaw peacefully supported themselves as hunters, often supplying wild game to the Europeans for a fee. They regularly planted pumpkins, corn, and potatoes, and kept chickens. They also gathered medicinal plants from Louisiana's forests, selling home remedies made from snake-root, sage, plantain, tarragon, and wild fruits. The women made baskets out of cane. The fine craftsmanship of these woven items made them prize possessions among Louisiana consumers.

In recent decades, historians have spent much time and effort examining Native American society and culture in colonial Louisiana. These efforts have brought them to the conclusion that women played a much larger and more important role in their indigenous society, especially in the public sphere, than European women did in theirs. This was partially motivated by the fact that Muskhogean groups to the east were matrilineal, meaning their familial descent was traced through the mother instead of the father as was the case for Europeans. Women of course maintained much of the culture, foodways, and social organization of the groups. They also played an important role in intertribal relations. Marriages between neighboring groups often solidified bonds of peace, while women played a role in intertribal diplomacy. They also played a role in maintaining relations with French and Spanish authorities in both Louisiana and Texas, the neighboring European colony to the west. In this regard, the writings of historian Juliana Barr have been particularly significant in highlighting the role women played in the groups of the lower Mississippi River and Gulf Coast.

Additional recent research by Sophie White has shown very clearly a subtle and complicated interplay between Europeans and Native Americans during the colonial period of Louisiana history. Up until recent decades, most histories written of the colony concentrated on the ways in which the French, Spanish, and English arrivals in the province attempted to dominate the Indians over time, hoping to make them more like Europeans. New research proves that the relationship between Europeans, especially the French, and

the indigenous populations of Louisiana was more complicated. To a considerable extent, Native Americans influenced all of the groups who arrived in the area. Early in the colonial era, the French, for example, adopted many Native American ways. This involved much more than Europeans adopting Indian foods, styles of dress, and ways of dealing with the frontier. It also included intermarriage between groups that created new identities and ways of looking at race in the colony. In short, the dividing line between European and Native American in early Louisiana history was not as distinct as formerly assumed.

Native Americans Today in Louisiana

By the late 1800s, the Choctaws, along with Louisiana's other Native American tribes, had become an "invisible people." Many assimilated into other ethnic populations. The European populations of the state ignored them and even where these tribes maintained their culture, they did so largely in privacy. Not until the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s did these groups convince other Louisianians to look with pride upon the Native American heritage of the state. The United States Census of 1990 indicated that Louisiana had the third-largest Native American population in the eastern United States. That census sets the official Native American population of the state at over 16,000 persons.

The tribes today fall into three classifications: those who are formally members of federally recognized tribes; persons who officially belong to one of the state of Louisiana-recognized tribes; and individuals of Native American blood who live scattered about Louisiana and personally maintain their cultural identification as such. There are, of course, numerous other Louisianians of diluted Native American bloodline who have lost such identifications and, for this reason, are not counted as official members of Native groups.

Since the 1920s, the United States government has formally recognized those Native American tribes that can demonstrate they have been organized, political units over long periods of time. The Chitimacha in St. Mary's Parish became the first such Louisiana tribe to receive this recognition, in 1925. Since then two other tribes within the state have received federal recognition: the Koasati and the Tunica-Biloxi. Following the provisions of a 1934 federal law, these three tribes are accorded a measure of self-government. Each elects a tribal chairperson and a council that works with the federal government in administrating tribal lands, communal property, federal programs, and cemeteries. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the state of Louisiana also developed programs for tribes that maintain their cultural identities.

In recent years, the Louisiana Choctaw, the Tunica-Biloxi, the Koasati, the Chitimacha, and the Houma have been especially active in advocating Native American rights and the improvement of social, economic, and political conditions for Native Americans in the state. The Jena band of the Choctaw has a tribal center supported by the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department, along with a recreation facility. The Ebarb Choctaw community operates a special state-supported school for its tribe and actively celebrates its heritage with an annual festival held at the small community of Zwolle. The Chitimacha maintain a school, council house, community grocery, and a meat-processing cooperative on their reservation at Charenton. The Koasati have a modern center in Allen Parish, while the Houma (currently the state's largest) have organized into the United Houma Tribe. The Tunica-Biloxi, now located predominantly in Avoyelles Parish, have built a tribal housing development, established a job program for members, and undertaken a crafts program. They also maintain a tribal museum at Marksville, which displays part of the "Tunica Treasure" unearthed north of St. Francisville in the 1980s.

In spite of these recent developments, the impact of Native Americans on Louisiana has largely been historical. They existed as the first inhabitants of the land and, as such, had much to teach the Europeans colonists who arrived in the area that eventually became Louisiana. Their vast knowledge of topography, flora and fauna, and frontier lifestyles is today reflected in the many Native American place names and words that have become part of the everyday language of Louisianians. In addition, Europeans adopted many of the agricultural and hunting techniques mastered by Native Americans and these have forever influenced Louisiana culture. Not all of these exchanges, however, constituted peaceful encounters, and this fact constitutes one of the major impacts of Native Americans on the subsequent history of Louisiana. Native American-European conflict permeated the entire colonial period, lasting into the nineteenth century, giving a special character of frontier violence to these eras of history. Few could deny that without the Native American heritage of Louisiana, the state would today be a very different place.

Early Spanish Explorations

Christopher Columbus opened a new era in the history of the European world when he made his great discovery of 1492. Two decades of Spanish expansion followed, as Spain dominated most of the western hemisphere. In 1519, the governor of Spanish Jamaica commissioned Alonso Álvarez de Pineda to lead an expedition to map the entire coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Pineda's expedition

sailed the shoreline, making a fairly accurate map. En route, the Spaniards camped at the mouth of a great river that emptied a massive volume of water into the Gulf. Pineda called this the “Rio de las Palmas” (or River of Palms). Some historians today debate whether he actually saw the Mississippi, instead believing the river he noted might have been the Mobile, Rio Grande, or Soto de Marina rivers. Still, none can dispute Pineda’s claim to be the first European to gaze upon the coast of Louisiana.

The Spanish Crown failed to pursue Pineda’s recommendations for settlement and, for the rest of the 1500s, relatively few Spaniards came to the region compared to the numbers that went to other parts of the Americas. Those Spaniards who did visit usually did so on their way someplace else. Álvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca and Hernando de Soto, the first two Spaniards in the area, had passed through it on their way elsewhere. Each of them arrived in separate expeditions. Cabeza de Vaca and several of his men lost their boats on the Gulf Coast in 1528 while attempting to reach Spanish settlements in Mexico. Captured by hostile natives, Cabeza de Vaca and three other surviving members of his failed expedition escaped and fled inland, where he took up residence with a more hospitable tribe. He wandered through the region for almost six years, learning Native American languages and plotting a return to Mexico. He finally reached the northern outposts of Mexico in 1536. Once in Mexico City, Cabeza de Vaca prepared a long report on all he had seen and done. Although historians question if he actually traversed land within the modern boundaries of Louisiana, the narrative history of his adventures sparked a temporary Spanish interest in the lands bordering on the northern Gulf of Mexico.

Hernando de Soto arrived shortly thereafter and explored the present-day American South. He and his 600 men left Cuba in May of 1539, landed on the east coast of Florida, and marched across modern Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana on a journey that took over three years. In the process, De Soto came upon the Mississippi River near Natchez. There the stream became his grave when he died of a fever on its banks in May 1542. His men, before turning homeward, placed the explorer’s body in the waters of the river in hopes of saving it from defilement by hostile natives, perhaps the Natchez. The survivors of the De Soto expedition, led by Luis de Moscoso, constructed seven small boats on the banks of the Mississippi. They began their journey downstream on July 3, 1543, exiting the mouth of the river several weeks later. They eventually reached Mexico after becoming the first Europeans to traverse a major section of the river through Louisiana.

De Soto’s followers recorded in detail much of what they saw, including observations of the flora and fauna along with their impressions of Native



Figure 1.4 To protect his body from enemies, Hernando de Soto’s men placed their dead leader’s body during the night in the Mississippi River, which he may have been the first European to discover. *Architect of the Capitol*, www.aoc.gov.

Americans. Reports they made, valuable for the historian, had the effect of delaying for decades Spanish settlement of the region since the area held little of interest. Hence, Spain’s political rival, France, would be the first European nation to plant a lasting settlement in Louisiana.

The Expansion of French Canada

The European colonization of Louisiana grew from the expansion of French Canada. Jacques Cartier first explored the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1534, claiming Canada’s shores and the lands drained by the river for the French king. Although he founded settlements, his failure to find gold and silver temporarily dampened France’s excitement about establishing a colony there. But the gradual realization that profits could be made from the fur business rekindled France’s desire for a colony in Canada. By the 1630s, New France (the colony’s official name) had become an important center for the fur trade, as well as a source of marine products and naval stores such as tar, pitch, and turpentine.

The Canadian fur industry proved to be very profitable. Starting in 1647, the French business monopoly that controlled the commerce began leasing its rights to private individuals and smaller business concerns. Only licensed traders could trap legally. Large profits came to these fur contractors, especially when beaver-pelt hats became fashionable wear in Europe. French merchants and trappers penetrated the wilderness and made agreements with native tribes to supply furs. Because of growing demand for skins, trapping gradually reduced the population of beavers as well as many other fur-bearing animals

of North America. The more successful the trade, the greater the need for previously untrapped lands. The geographical territory of New France thus grew at a furious rate, although the population always remained small.

Marquette and Joliet

In French Canada, word circulated by the 1670s of a large river lying to the west. A wealthy merchant hired the explorer Louis Joliet to find it. Joliet turned to a member of the Jesuit order for assistance on this journey. Father (or "Père" in French) Jacques Marquette had great experience in the wilderness. In May 1672 the party of seven Frenchmen led by Marquette and Joliet left Canada, passing along the shore of Lake Michigan, through Green Bay, and by portage into the Wisconsin River.

They floated down that stream for more than a week, finally emerging onto the great river that the native tribes called *Mississippi*. Joliet and Marquette therefore became the first Europeans to use that name. As they continued down-river, Joliet's compass revealed that the waterway went south toward the Gulf of



Figure 1.5 Marquette and Joliet and their men descending the Mississippi. *Library of Congress, Lot 4409 (R) (G), LC-USZ62-1164988.*

Mexico rather than west to the Great South Sea, as Europeans then called the Pacific. They eventually reached the point where the Arkansas River joined the Mississippi. There, the explorers met the Arkansas Indians, who warned them that a tribe further downstream had firearms. The Frenchmen assumed these weapons had been supplied by the Spanish, whose colonies lay to the southwest. Upset by this news, the explorers decided to return home, retracing their route. Joliet and Marquette chose not to make another voyage down the Mississippi, but their report attracted the attention of others interested in furs.

La Salle Claims Louisiana

René-Robert Cavelier, better known by his noble title Sieur de La Salle, indicated a great interest in the travels of Joliet and Marquette. (The term *Sieur* denoted the French equivalent to the British rank of knighthood designated by the title of *Sir*.) La Salle was born in the small town of Rouen, France, on November 21, 1643. He came from a locally prominent family that was very religious. His older brother Jean became a priest in the Sulpician order. Not much is known about La Salle's youth except that he had a studious vein. His first vocation was that of the Catholic Church. He studied with the Jesuits at their school in Rouen, becoming a postulant on his way to full-scale membership in the order.

As a young man in his twenties, however, La Salle decided to leave the Jesuits in pursuit of another career. Because he had never taken his final vows as a Jesuit, the officials of the order released him from membership for his inability to conform to monastic life. La Salle's elder brother, the priest now known as Abbé Cavelier, had migrated to Canada the year before the young man had left the Jesuits. The La Salle family had long been involved in the development of New France, as the colony was officially known. La Salle's uncle had been a member of the company of One Hundred Associates that had invested heavily all along the St. Lawrence in an effort to make New France profitable. It therefore seemed logical that La Salle would go to Canada in an effort to find his fortune.

In 1667 an eager La Salle migrated in to Canada, where he had good connections: as mentioned, a brother already lived in New France and his uncle was a wealthy investor in the fur trade. La Salle ascertained that trading in furs with western Native American tribes offered the fastest way to secure wealth. He, too, had heard stories of the Mississippi River, and he eventually managed to talk to none other than Louis Joliet about it. Now La Salle decided to seek permission to explore the great river from the French king, Louis XIV.

La Salle's activities constituted a significant turning point that moved the European frame of reference from the Atlantic coast to the interior of the continent

and the Gulf of Mexico. His activities opened the vast interior of North America to European expansion, even as they ushered in the dawn of a long period of intense inter-colonial rivalry between France and Spain, eventually spilling over to England. La Salle's considerable efforts unfolded in three waves: first, his attempt to dominate the fur trade on the western Great Lakes during the mid- to late 1670s; second, his trip down the Mississippi River all the way to its mouth in the early 1680s; and third, his unsuccessful attempt to establish a French post on the western Gulf of Mexico in Spanish territory (within the modern boundaries of the state of Texas). An almost single-mindedness of purpose underlay all of these activities: to locate a water route to the Indies while simultaneously weakening King Louis XIV's great international rival in the Americas. In the process, La Salle naturally hoped to garner a great personal fortune.

In 1677, La Salle sailed to France with his faithful lieutenant, Henri de Tonti, to ask royal approval for this venture. Tonti, a colorful frontier character, went by the nickname "Iron Hand." As a young soldier, he had lost his right hand in a grenade explosion, after which he hired a blacksmith to fashion an iron hook as a replacement. Wearing it ever thereafter, the imposing sight of Tonti wielding his artificial hand as a weapon gave him great stature with the tribes of the Mississippi valley. After receiving royal permission for their proposed explorations, La Salle and Tonti returned to Canada in 1678 to organize the expedition. Various financial reverses delayed these efforts; not until 1682 did La Salle begin his trip.

Early in February of 1682 La Salle and his men, roughly following the route traced by Joliet and Marquette, reached the Mississippi. Here they rested a bit "and at daylight, embarking anew on the dark and mighty stream, drifted swiftly down toward unknown destinies." They coursed downstream for over two months, carefully noting the tribes in the region and observing the landscape. "The great river Mississippi is very beautiful in all places," one of La Salle's men noted, "without any fall or rapid from the Arkansas to the sea." La Salle passed the site of present-day New Orleans sometime in early April. The expedition continued south, and excitement grew among the men when the flattening of the land and the swampy banks indicated to them that they must be nearing the river's mouth. La Salle held formal ceremonies on April 9 (somewhere in modern Plaquemines Parish) for the purpose of taking possession for France of all lands drained by the river. During a solemn Mass of celebration, La Salle named the territory Louisiana in honor of Louis XIV. The expedition laboriously retraced its route back to Canada after reaching the Gulf of Mexico.

This success convinced La Salle that France needed a settlement on the lower reaches of the Mississippi. Such an establishment would provide a base for fur traders, become a commercial center, and protect the lower Mississippi River valley from Spanish encroachments. La Salle again went to the French court



Figure 1.6 René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, depicted on the shore with crew members and priests, upon landing on the Gulf Coast. From “A New Discovery of a Vast Country in America,” by Father Louis Hennepin, 1698. Library of Congress, #LC-USZ62-3283.

and secured permission from the king to plant such a colony. La Salle and his colonizing expedition, including soldiers and families of settlers, left France in 1684 bound for the Mississippi. The progress of this group, however, did not go smoothly. La Salle developed a fever on the voyage across the Atlantic, while the hardships of the journey lowered morale. By the time the group stopped at French Hispaniola for new supplies, La Salle and the naval commander engaged in constant quarrelling and refused to cooperate with one another.

The expedition finally left the French Caribbean bound for Louisiana, but after reaching the Gulf Coast, La Salle and company failed to locate the mouth of the Mississippi. Modern historians blame this failure on inaccurate navigational equipment. Instead the expedition continued to sail westward, past the coasts of modern Louisiana, until they landed on the shores of present-day Texas. There the colonists built a crude fortification and residences which became a base for exploring the surrounding region. A series of calamities and

disasters beset this colony, including the sinking of La Salle's last remaining ship *La Belle* in Matagorda Bay. Without a ship, La Salle decided to lead a scouting party to the northeast in an effort to locate the Mississippi River. He undertook this effort in January of 1687, departing on foot from Fort St. Louis with only a small number of his men, leaving most of his party at the settlement. En route, some members of the traveling party became frustrated with La Salle and plotted to murder him. The mutiny occurred on March 19, 1687, when several of his men ambushed and killed the French explorer at a location somewhere in present-day East Texas.

The ill-fated French colony at Fort St. Louis did not long survive the death of its leader. Most of the inhabitants died either of natural causes or at the hands of hostile Native Americans. Those who did not perish had to deal with Spaniards who shortly appeared in the region. Since Spain claimed the western Gulf Coast, Spanish officials became understandably upset when word of the French settlement reached Mexico. There, the viceroy ordered an army detachment northward to locate and destroy the French settlement. After several efforts to find it, Captain Alonso de León and his troops arrived at Fort St. Louis during 1689, having traveled from their post at San Juan Bautista on the Rio Grande. De León found the settlement in ruins, the fort in shambles, and the homes empty. He did, however, locate several survivors (mostly children) who had taken refuge with friendly Indians in the interior. The Spanish took them back to Mexico as prisoners.

In modern times, historians and archeologists have spent much time searching for the site of this settlement and the location of La Salle's lost ship. Historian Herbert Eugene Bolton, who was active in the early decades of the twentieth century, postulated as early as 1914 that the post must have been on Garcitas Creek on the north side of Matagorda Bay. In 1950, archeologists from the University of Texas excavated the site, but they were unable to ascribe the site definitively to La Salle based on the artifacts uncovered. Twenty years later, historical archeologist Kathleen Gilmore subjected these artifacts to detailed analysis, in the process proving conclusively that this was indeed the site of the post. Starting in the 1990s, this site became the location of intensive archeological investigation. Nautical archeologists thereafter discovered the underwater resting place of La Salle's ship. The site of the fort and the shipwreck became the focus of intense archeological activity that has produced thousands of artifacts, including a cache of canons that constitute a remarkable discovery. Since *La Belle* went down with most of La Salle's supplies in it, the materials raised by the archeologists comprised, as one of them said, a full kit of items needed by a seventeenth-century explorer to found a settlement. These excavations yielded weapons, foodstuffs, clothing, and various sundries useful in daily life.

CHAPTER TWO

The Founding of French Louisiana

- **1699** Iberville is first European to locate Mississippi River from the open sea; traditional date of European settlement of Louisiana.
- **1700** Forts established near Biloxi (Mississippi) and near mouth of Mississippi River.
- **1701** Bienville becomes commandant of Louisiana.
- **1702** Fort near Mobile (Alabama) established.
- **1706** Iberville dies.
- **1712** Crozat receives charter over Louisiana.
- **1714** Settlement at Natchitoches established.
- **1716** Settlement at Natchez (Mississippi) established.
- **1717** John Law's Company of the West receives charter over Louisiana.
- **1718** New Orleans founded (becomes colonial capital in 1721).
- **1719** First large importation of African slaves.
- **1720s** Major immigration of Germans.
- **1720** Crash of the “Mississippi bubble.”
- **1722** First settlement at Baton Rouge established.

Origins of French Colonization

The failure of La Salle's expedition did not end French desires to colonize Louisiana. The chancellor of France, Louis Phélypeaux de Pontchartrain, and his son, the Minister of Marine Jérôme Phélypeaux de Maurepas, believed that

France should colonize the lower Mississippi valley. They had a powerful ally at the French court in the person of Sébastien Le Prestre, the Marquis de Vauban, a renowned expert in military defense who had designed important French fortresses throughout the world. Vauban supported the idea of a French settlement in Louisiana as a potential naval base which could be used to harass Spanish shipping in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico. These three men convinced the king of France, Louis XIV, that a major colonization effort should be mounted to secure the lower Mississippi valley.

The late 1690s thus saw renewed French efforts to plant a colony near the mouth of the Mississippi River. France had three reasons for founding the colony. First, international rivalry with Great Britain and Spain provided powerful motivation. The establishment of an English colony in the Carolinas in the 1680s and a Spanish colony at Pensacola in the 1690s worried the French, who feared England or Spain might move into the lower Mississippi valley if France did not; second, they believed a military base on the Gulf Coast could serve as additional protection for France's valuable sugar colonies in the West Indies; and third, perhaps most important, the economic doctrine of mercantilism dictated the need for a colony on the lower Mississippi. Mercantilism served as the economic theory that governed the financial systems of all European nations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It postulated that national wealth came as a result of economic independence from competing European nations. The more gold or silver bullion a nation had on hand in its treasury, the wealthier and more powerful it could be. Mercantilistic nations hoped to export more than they imported in order to have a positive balance of payments. Only then could a nation build a cash surplus in its national treasury. Colonies, as sources of needed raw materials and as markets for goods manufactured by the home nation, ensured that this would be possible. The advisors to the French king, as mercantile theorists, looked with favor upon founding a colony in Louisiana for economic reasons.

Iberville and Bienville

The French king therefore decided to found a colonial outpost in Louisiana. The king chose a talented officer as leader of the venture: Pierre Le Moyne, better known by his title, Sieur d'Iberville. He had recently distinguished himself in the War of the League of Augsburg. Iberville had been born in 1661 on his family's St. Lawrence River estate in French Canada, where his father had immigrated and amassed a large fortune. The elder Le Moyne had eleven sons, each of whom, upon reaching adulthood, took the name of a place in Normandy as part of his formal title of nobility.



Figure 2.1 Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, founder of New Orleans, in ceremonial armor. *Collection of the Louisiana State Museum (01378)*.

Iberville wasted no time in organizing a colonization venture for Louisiana. He bought four boats (two frigates and two smaller supply vessels), assembled about 200 colonists, and enlisted the services of two companies of royal marines. Iberville's younger brother, Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, agreed to serve as lieutenant of the expedition. The two brothers, Iberville and Bienville, left a lasting mark on the Louisiana colony; even today their names are well known.

The French colonization fleet sailed from La Rochelle, France, on September 24, 1698, bound for the northern Gulf Coast near the mouth of the Mississippi River. It made a leisurely crossing of the Atlantic, arriving at the French settlement of St. Domingue in December. Here another ship joined the expedition as it sailed for the Gulf Coast. They stopped at Mobile Bay, finding broad beaches and a hospitable coastline. Iberville decided to scout the land and make temporary camp. Accordingly, the French expedition erected a transient village of huts on Ship Island near present-day Biloxi.

Iberville organized a small party of men and explored the coastline of the Mississippi Sound. (The Mississippi Sound is that portion of the Gulf of Mexico

between the small islands such as Ship and the coast of Mississippi.) While engaged in this venture, the Frenchmen made friends with the Indians, who "showed their pleasure by rubbing their hands on their heads and bellies and on those of their guests and then raising them toward heaven." An Indian woman also told tales of a larger river farther west. This report convinced the French that the Mississippi River lay close to their present location.

Like his predecessor La Salle, Iberville also dreamed of a great French city on the lower reaches of the Mississippi River. In late February, he decided to organize a group of about fifty men to locate the mouth of the river, go upstream, and scout the area. This expedition traveled westward from Ship Island during stormy weather, arriving at the mouth of the Mississippi on March 2, 1699, Mardi Gras Day. Iberville named his campsite near this spot Point Mardi Gras, by which name it is still known today. The Frenchmen said a Catholic Mass there before pushing up the river.

Initially they saw few Indians, eventually arriving at a relatively large settlement marked by a red pole used by the Indians for ceremonial purposes. Iberville accordingly named this spot Baton Rouge (Red Stick). The natives there appeared peaceful, so the French continued north to the present-day Pointe Coupee region. Here they met the Houma Indians. After spending several days at their village, Iberville decided to return downriver to his temporary camp at Ship Island. In so doing, the party split into two groups. Bienville led the first group down the river, past the future location of New Orleans, and out the mouth of the delta. Iberville took the second party and made a portage across Bayou Manchac south of modern Baton Rouge, eastward through Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne, and onto Mississippi Sound. Both parties arrived back at Ship Island about the same time. These expeditions constituted the first comprehensive French exploration of a portion of the lower Mississippi valley. They also marked the first substantive relations between Frenchmen and the Native Americans of the region. The peaceful nature of this contact gave the Europeans an initially misleading opinion that the Native Americans they encountered had friendly dispositions.

The First Settlements

Iberville's exploration of the lower Mississippi convinced him that permanent settlement should be made on the Gulf Coast rather than on the river. A town on the coast would be easier to defend and could provide a better site for sailing to and from France. He thus made an additional inspection of the shoreline as far east as Mobile Bay. Iberville placed the first permanent settlement at a site

on Biloxi Bay in present-day Mississippi. Here the French constructed a small wooden stockade which they called Fort Maurepas in honor of their politically powerful backer in France. The new fortification sported about a dozen cannon and housed a garrison of approximately seventy men.

Iberville decided to return to France after the successful construction of Fort Maurepas in May of 1699. He saw himself more as the organizer of the colony than its day-to-day leader. Besides, with only male settlers, the colony needed more supplies and additional colonists, preferably women and children. Iberville felt that he could best secure the supplies and new colonists by returning to France. He designated one of his lieutenants, the Ensign de Sauvole, to serve as commandant during his absence. Bienville decided to remain in Louisiana and conduct additional explorations of the lower Mississippi valley.

Soon after his brother's departure, Bienville organized a small expedition and returned to the lower reaches of the Mississippi. One of his more memorable adventures occurred during this trip. About a dozen miles south of the site of modern New Orleans, Bienville surprised a British ship he found unexpectedly sailing on the river. The London merchant Daniel Coxe had sent this ship from Carolina on the south Atlantic coast. Coxe and his backers sought to plant a colony on the Mississippi River. Those aboard the vessel had orders to investigate possible sites for such a settlement. In order to drive away the British, Bienville sternly announced that the Mississippi River and all the northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico belonged to France. He thereupon tricked the British into believing that he had a large detachment of French troops nearby, ready to attack should they refuse to leave. Not wanting to risk battle, the British fled downriver into the Gulf and back to Carolina. They never again returned to threaten French claims to the region.

Bienville's bold ruse at what became known as English Turn had an immediate impact on French policy regarding a settlement on the river itself. Ensign Sauvole and Bienville believed that they should erect a fort at the mouth of the river as soon as possible. Only then could France properly enforce her claims to this mighty waterway and its surrounding territory. At this point, Iberville returned from France, and he agreed with Sauvole and his brother. They chose a dry site some 50 miles upriver from the three passes that marked the point at which the Mississippi flowed into the Gulf. Here they constructed a low stockade, built a blockhouse, and set six cannon emplacements. Iberville named the place Fort de la Boulaye and, although its exact site is unknown today due to the ravages of time and floods, it constituted the first French settlement on the banks of the Mississippi River.

After building the fort on the lower Mississippi, Iberville decided that Louisiana could be better defended were it linked with French Canada by way of the inland rivers. France could then control the interior of North America from the Great

Lakes south to the Gulf of Mexico. Such a holding would create a giant crescent of French colonial territory running from the St. Lawrence River, westward through the Great Lakes, and all the way down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico. It would be, as modern historian Robert S. Weddle has noted, a “French thorn” in the side of both Spanish and English colonies in North America.

The French desire to hold this region from the territorial encroachments of Spain and Great Britain had roots deep in the history of European colonization of the New World. By 1700, Spain had planted colonies in present-day New Mexico, along the Gulf Coast near Pensacola, and at St. Augustine in Florida. The Spanish king continued to claim that the Gulf of Mexico and northern Caribbean existed as his private maritime domain. The British colonies on the Atlantic coast also prospered, and they looked inland to the area drained by the Mississippi as a region for potential expansion. The Mississippi valley thus served as a geographical buffer between the English and Spanish colonial empires, France’s two major international rivals.

Iberville thus encouraged attempts to unite the two French colonies, efforts that began soon after the settlement of Louisiana. Henri de Tonti, La Salle’s former lieutenant, led an expedition down the Mississippi from Canada in 1700 during the months that Bienville constructed Fort de la Boulaye. Tonti’s fifty men and ten canoes, some with cargoes of furs, received an enthusiastic welcome in Louisiana. This trade became a regular activity in French Louisiana, although it never grew to the proportions envisioned by Iberville.

Difficulties along the Gulf Coast, however, caused Iberville to move his main settlement a second time as the eighteenth century dawned. An outbreak of fever at Fort Maurepas led Iberville to relocate the settlement on a bluff above the Mobile River, about 25 miles from its mouth. He felt that this new location, higher and drier, would be a healthier place. Here the French built a much larger fortification during the spring of 1702. This fort on the Mobile River became the capital of French Louisiana, a distinction it would enjoy until the founding of New Orleans. The French called it St. Louis de la Mobile. The garrison contained a residence for the commandant, a guardhouse, a storehouse, a chapel, and quarters for the officers. Iberville planned to construct homes for the families he hoped would eventually settle the nearby lands bordering the river.

Fort St. Louis de la Mobile, however, did not prosper, for its location proved no healthier than had that of its predecessor. Finally, in 1709, the French relocated the fort several miles east to the site of modern Mobile, Alabama. In the meantime, the small settlement on the Gulf Coast also moved eastward to its present location at modern Biloxi in an effort to secure a better site. Hence, the two oldest and most enduring sites of French settlement in colonial Louisiana are today located in the states of Alabama and Mississippi.



Figure 2.2 Map of Louisiane and the course of the Mississippi by Delisle, 1718. Courtesy Louisiana State Museum (1979.074).

Problems in Government

The first decade of existence for the Louisiana colony proved difficult. France had problems in establishing a stable economy, experienced difficulty in governing the colony, and could not induce families to immigrate there. The sandy soil of the coastal region did not support good crops, and, moreover, many of the colonists originally went to the colony as soldiers and disliked farming. Even then, their small number made it difficult to establish a solid economic base. The preponderance of males in the colony continued for many decades thereafter, and early efforts by the government to promote family life in the colony resulted in the arrival of only a few women. The total population never surpassed several hundred persons during the first decade of 1700s.

The greatest problem that befell the infant Louisiana came with the unexpected death of the Sieur d'Iberville. He left the Gulf Coast settlements in April 1702 bound for France in the hopes of recruiting more families as colonists. While he was there, war broke out with Great Britain. As a proven naval commander, the French ministry assigned Iberville to military duty for the duration of the war. He commanded naval forces that operated in the Caribbean against the British. Tragically, he died of yellow fever on July 9, 1706. His untimely passing robbed Louisiana of an effective leader.

Internal discord in the government of Louisiana quickly followed the arrival of news of Iberville's death. Shortly thereafter, acting commandant Sauvole died and Bienville, although only 21 years of age, became acting commandant. He made a valiant attempt to hold the struggling colony together using his knowledge of Indians to foster trade. The French court eventually confirmed Bienville as acting commandant, although it did not give him that title or the rank of governor. Despite the slight, Bienville served as the *de facto* civil and military commander of Louisiana. In 1704, the king had appointed a commissary-commissioner, or business manager, for the colony as an additional official in the colonial government. The commissary had all financial power over the public purse of Louisiana.

This move divided authority between Bienville and the commissary. Each of them held offices of overlapping duties, which made governing difficult. Petty jealousy between Bienville and his new adversary soon escalated into major controversy. With support from the colony's leading priest, his rival filed official misconduct charges against Bienville. In 1708 a new commissary conducted a formal inquiry into the charges against Bienville. The investigation cleared Bienville, who continued to fill the post of commandant until the French king made Louisiana a proprietary colony. The dispute had, however, considerably weakened the ability of the Louisiana government to deal with

the problems it faced during the first decades of its existence. Agriculture continued to languish and trade failed to develop as Iberville had initially hoped that it would.

The Crozat Proprietary

Problems with French Louisiana worried the king and his advisors in France. The province had cost them a tremendous amount of money, and France had little to show for the effort. In fact, over its first decade, the colony amassed far more in expenses than it generated in revenues. Given the problems of government, the king investigated other ways to rule his possession in the hope that it might eventually turn a profit.

Other European powers, especially Great Britain, had enjoyed favorable financial results from proprietary colonies. That is how Pennsylvania and Carolina had been founded. The French king knew about the British proprietary model. He decided to make Louisiana such a colony and he began to search for a wealthy Frenchman to become proprietor. The king selected Antoine Crozat, the Marquis de Chatel. King Louis VI, by royal charter in September 1712, granted Louisiana to the wealthy Crozat.

Crozat, who remained in France, had complete commercial control of Louisiana. He enjoyed the right to appoint local governing officials in addition to having title to all unoccupied lands in the colony. Crozat also had full authority to import slaves, supervise relations with Native Americans, and exploit the raw materials found there. He especially hoped to stimulate immigration of families to the colony by offering liberal grants of land “to men of both large and small means; to individuals thinking in terms of thousands of acres as well as men who thought in tens and hundreds.”

Crozat personally had little interest in visiting Louisiana and he never did so, instead “preferring to manage things from Versailles with his cash box, and pay others to do the pioneering.” He did, however, appoint a talented administrator to lead the colony. This person, Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, arrived at Mobile on May 17, 1713. He enjoyed the technical distinction of being the first person to hold the title “governor of Louisiana,” since those before him had been designated only as “commandant.” Bienville speedily turned control of the colony over to Cadillac, although he continued to reside in Louisiana as military commander of the French troops stationed there.

Born in France, Cadillac had migrated in the 1680s to Canada as a young man. He rose rapidly through army ranks, eventually superintending several important posts on the frontier. In 1701, he founded the city of Detroit, an

accomplishment memorialized in the name of the luxury automobile today built in the town he established. Cadillac was, however, an individual of uneven temperament and character. A strong personality, he at times displayed a lack of tact and diplomacy. His years in Canada had been filled with controversy. There he had maintained an expensive home and engaged in opulent entertaining beyond that normally associated with public officials. Not surprisingly, rumors in New France accused him of corruption, including an unproven charge that he profited from his conduct of official business.

Crozat gave Governor Cadillac detailed instructions regarding the establishment of the proprietary government in Louisiana. Following these directions, the new governor created a Superior Council as his advisory body in setting policy. This council eventually included as members some of the province's leading citizens. Later, it became the major judicial court for French Louisiana. In addition, Cadillac promulgated a new legal code, modeling it on both the civil and criminal laws then in effect in Paris. For that reason, these rules and regulations became popularly known as the "Custom of Paris." He also established a more profitable trading base for Louisiana by encouraging commerce with nearby Spanish and British colonies. Cadillac realized that agriculture needed assistance and he recommended that Louisiana develop a plan for the production of tobacco and indigo, both profitable cash crops. Indigo eventually became an important commodity, especially in the district around Baton Rouge. This tropical plant, imported from the West Indies, produced a blue dye vital to the European textile industry. Durable cotton fabric colored with this dye became extremely popular, and its descendant exists today in the denim of the American "blue jean."

Jean-Baptiste du Clos, a new governmental official Cadillac brought with him to Louisiana as commissary, assisted in the improvement of agriculture. The two men initially worked well together and, for a while, du Clos supported Cadillac's attempts to enhance the economy of the colony. The commissary required reluctant residents to plant crops and foodstuffs that Louisiana needed. Du Clos particularly encouraged the planting of corn in an effort to increase the supply of that important grain. He also undertook efforts to establish a cattle-raising industry. Both du Clos and Cadillac hoped that the production of meat, milk, hides, and tallow would expand the domestic economy.

For a time Cadillac also worked effectively with Bienville. In 1714, he dispatched Bienville in command of a military force to punish the Natchez Indians for having killed a small band of French fur traders. Bienville, in demanding justice, faced a tribe much larger in numbers than his small detachment. Using a ruse, he wisely avoided open fighting by kidnapping a delegation of the Natchez whom he used as hostages to force payment for the murder of the

French. Perhaps not surprisingly, Bienville and Cadillac eventually came to dislike each other intensely. Bienville always claimed that his refusal to marry Cadillac's daughter had ignited their feud. In addition, Bienville later believed that the governor had purposely endangered him in his campaigns against the Indians by refusing to assign an adequate number of soldiers to his command.

The Natchitoches Settlement

In spite of his faults, Cadillac proved a decisive leader who possessed great energy as well as the determination to succeed. This made him ideally suited to govern the colony, even if his actions did not render him universally popular. His greatest success came in expanding the geographical area of settlement in Louisiana. His desire to increase trade and commerce resulted in the exploration and settlement of frontier areas inland from the Gulf Coast. New trading posts established in these areas could be used for additional trade with the Indians of the region. Also, such places might serve as points of commercial contact with British and Spanish traders on the fringes of the Louisiana territory. Cadillac first turned his attention to the western areas of Louisiana on the boundary of the rich colony of New Spain, which extended from central Mexico northward along the coast Gulf of Mexico into Texas.

On Cadillac's orders, Louis Juchereau de Saint-Denis established a military post called St. Jean Baptiste on the Red River in 1714. Since Saint-Denis located this post near the Natchitoches tribe of the Caddo, the French settlement that quickly developed around it became known as Natchitoches, still existing today as the oldest European town within the boundaries of the modern state of Louisiana. Its founder, Saint-Denis, had a deserved reputation as one of the most intrepid and energetic commanders in the colony. A native of Canada, he had married into Iberville's family and gone to Louisiana in 1699 to seek his fortune. Like Cadillac, Saint-Denis believed large profits could be made by developing an overland trade route with the Spanish in northern Mexico. Although Spanish law made such traffic illegal, Saint-Denis probably anticipated this trade when he founded Natchitoches. This post served as a base for his exploration of the region and as a place for launching a profitable trade with the Spaniards.

Saint-Denis wasted little time after founding Natchitoches in putting his plans for trade with New Spain into execution. The Frenchman decided to present his proposals directly to officials at San Juan Bautista on the Rio Grande, the nearest Spanish outpost to Louisiana. He loaded a pack train with trade goods, took a detachment of his men, and embarked on the hard journey

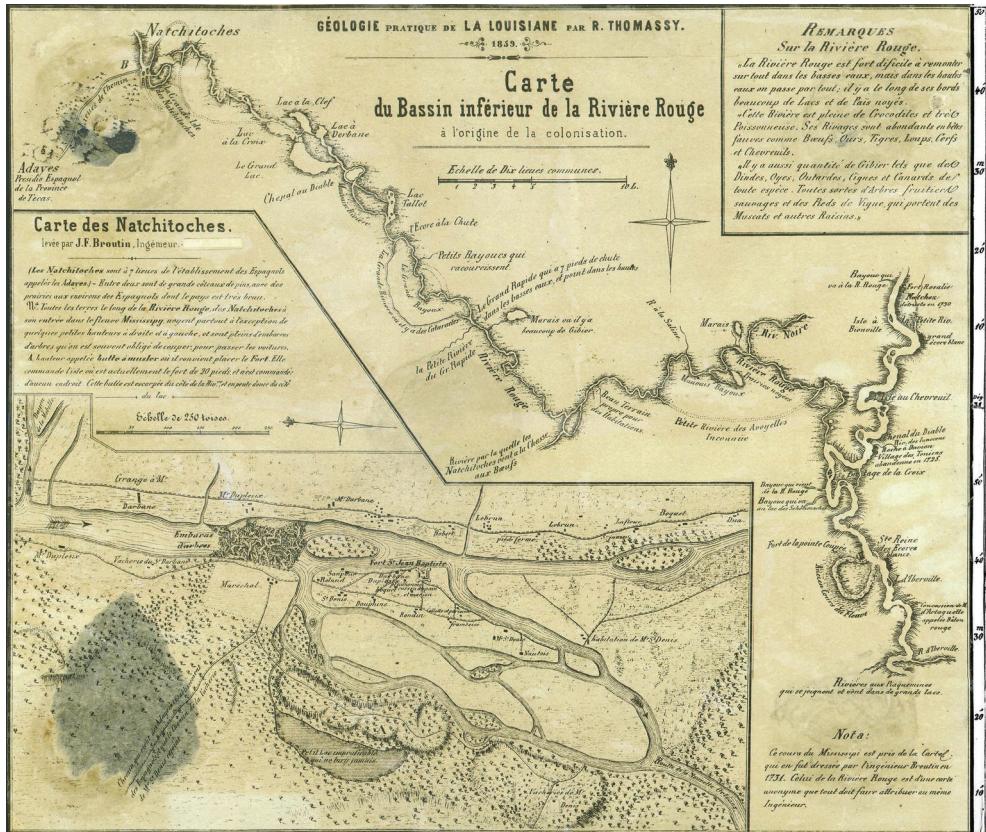


Figure 2.3 Map of Natchitoches, 1722, in R. Thomassy, *Géologie pratique de la Louisiane* (New Orleans: Chez L'Auteur; Paris: Librairie Scientifique, Industrielle et Agricole, 1860), 226–27. Thomassy combined two J. F. Broutin maps, *Carte de la Louisiane par le St. D'Anville, dressée en mai 1732* (1752) and *Carte particulière de Natchitoches* (1722 or 1732), into one lithograph. Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Watson Memorial Library, Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Map Collection.

through the unexplored reaches of Texas. The Spanish commandant on the Rio Grande, Don Diego Ramón, had little idea what to do with the party of Frenchmen when they arrived at his fort on the Rio Grande, so he held them prisoner until he could receive instructions on the matter from his superiors in Mexico City.

Saint-Denis won the friendship of the Ramón family during the passing months while he waited under house arrest at San Juan de Bautista. A regular guest in the commandant's home, the Frenchman noticed the charms of Manuela de Sanchez y Ramón, the granddaughter of Don Diego. Saint-Denis married her after a whirlwind courtship and, by the time instructions arrived from Mexico City about the French interlopers, their leader had become a member of the commandant's family.

Saint-Denis decided not pass up the opportunity that his new marital status gave him. He traveled to Mexico City and presented his schemes for trade and development to the viceroy of New Spain. The Frenchman made an impassioned argument about the benefits of commerce between Mexico and Louisiana. The viceroy had reservations, especially since Spain's mercantile laws specifically forbade trade with foreign colonies. Saint-Denis' arguments, however, did convince the viceroy that Spain had to begin colonization of east Texas as a buffer between French Louisiana and Mexico. The official therefore decided to found permanent settlements in Texas. He commissioned Saint-Denis to serve as co-commander (along with Don Diego Ramón) of an expedition to organize this effort. In 1716, Saint-Denis, the Ramóns, and a party of priests, soldiers, and settlers marched into east Texas, where they founded four missions. These settlements marked the boundary between Texas and Louisiana. Saint-Denis, an employee of Louisiana proprietor Crozat, thus became one of the founders of permanent settlement in Spanish Texas.

A clandestine trade at Natchitoches with Texas and New Spain became one of the chief economic realities of French Louisiana. Although technically illegal under the laws of both nations, this commerce continued because of its profits. Saint-Denis became one of the chief figures in this trade. He lived a long life at Natchitoches and enjoyed considerable wealth, serving as post commandant for many years. His Spanish wife proved to be a great asset in maintaining good relations with the posts in east Texas. Saint-Denis died peacefully in 1744 after having lived in French colonial Louisiana almost forty-five years. His descendants became one of the "first families" of the Natchitoches region, with some of them remaining influential for decades after their patriarch's passing.

Recent historical research on colonial Natchitoches by the historian Sophie Burton has substantiated that it was one of the earliest, most viable Creole communities (meaning one of native-born French speakers) in Louisiana. Through

intermarriages, the population there soon had a very diverse racial background that blended together African, European, and indigenous native cultures into a unique polyglot of social practices, foodways, material culture, and local traditions. The population of the town grew steadily and consistently throughout the colonial period of Louisiana history. The town also enjoyed great prosperity during the entire colonial period as a regional trading center, especially with Native American populations to the west. As such, it was an outpost of a larger commercial network that included the entire Atlantic world. Goods from Europe routinely found their way to traders at Natchitoches while goods produced there, such as pelts, spread all across European trading zones.

The End of Proprietary Government

Cadillac made no secret of the fact that he despised his assignment as governor of Louisiana in spite of his desire to make it a successful colony. He had no respect for Louisiana's inhabitants, and found little to admire about the colony. As well, he disliked the settlers' obvious attachment to his rival Bienville. Cadillac began quarreling openly with Bienville and Commissary du Clos. He argued with both men about food and supplies for the troops stationed at New Orleans. Cadillac wanted to save money by giving the soldiers inexpensive rations, while his two adversaries felt that the garrison should receive better food. The governor also acted precipitously when he attempted to end what he perceived as public drunkenness among the populace. His regulations in this matter proved so unpopular that the colonists began to criticize him openly. To demonstrate their opinion of his attitudes, the settlers of Louisiana mocked him and poked fun at his aristocratic manners. Some residents complained about him in their correspondence with proprietor Crozat.

As regular denunciations of Cadillac arrived at the French court from Louisiana, Crozat questioned the advisability of retaining him as governor of the colony. Finally, in early 1716, he recalled his controversial administrator. Crozat's problems with Cadillac seemed minor, however, when compared to the more serious fact that Louisiana had lost a considerable amount of money for the proprietor, who estimated that his venture had consumed well over 1 million *livres*, then the unit of French currency and a tremendous sum for that era.

At this point, King Louis XIV of France died, having ruled since 1643. The new king, his grandson Louis XV, had yet to reach adulthood. Hence, a regency led by the Duke of Orleans, a well-known gambler, governed the nation in the name of the child king until the new monarch became an adult. As part of this

arrangement, a group of ministers known as the Council of Marine formulated policy on colonial matters. In consultation with proprietor Crozat, the council played an important role in picking Cadillac's successor when he left the governorship of Louisiana. They appointed Jean Michiele, Sieur de L'Epinay, as Cadillac's replacement. In the interim between Cadillac's departure and L'Epinay's arrival, Bienville again served as commandant of the colony.

The problems experienced by Louisiana and its colonial government did not end when the new governor arrived. L'Epinay also quarreled with Bienville, who refused to work with him. The colonists quickly refocused much of animosity they had for Cadillac on L'Epinay, who perhaps unwisely continued many of his predecessor's unpopular policies. Problems with L'Epinay constituted the last straw for Crozat. Weary of Louisiana, he asked the Duke of Orleans to relieve him of all responsibilities of his proprietorship. The Council of the Marine and the regency granted his request, and Louisiana ceased to be Crozat's responsibility during August 1717.

The search for a new proprietor proved a difficult task. No financiers wanted Louisiana with Crozat's failure fresh on their minds. Indeed, the Duke of Orleans could not find anyone willing to take Louisiana. In desperation, the French government found another solution. It awarded the colony to a joint stock company known as the Company of the West. The company had been specifically organized to serve as the proprietor of Louisiana.

The Company of the West assumed control of Louisiana in the latter part of 1717. Bienville continued as commandant, now as an employee of the new enterprise. He received a title of "director general," making him the working governor even though he technically did not officially have that rank. The commissary, Marc-Antoine Hubert, also remained in office, with a designation as "director of the company," meaning that he superintended business affairs in the colony. This arrangement between Bienville and Hubert maintained the split in executive power that had previously caused problems. In creating the new colonial government, the company also named a person to serve as administrator, or commander, of each of the frontier posts in the colony. These post commanders would serve on a colony-wide Council of Commerce.

John Law's Louisiana

The Company of the West did not long enjoy a period of control in Louisiana, a change that occurred independently of the situation in Louisiana. Major economic problems in France required restructuring of the Louisiana proprietary held by the company. Around 1720, as the public treasury of France teetered on the verge of bankruptcy, the Duke of Orleans desperately embraced a scheme



Figure 2.4 Political cartoon of Dutch speculator John Law, originally published in 1720. The text reads “Law loquitor. The wind is my treasure, cushion, and foundation. Master of the wind, I am master of my life, and my wind monopoly becomes straightway the subject of idolatry. Less rapidly turn the sails of the windmill on my head than the price of shares in my foolish enterprises.” Harper’s New Monthly Magazine, no. 301 (June 1875). First published in *Het Grote Tafereel der Dwaasheid* (1720).

he hoped might provide national relief. He turned to a man named John Law, “who devoted himself at an early age to games of chance and financial questions.” Law had been born in Scotland, but left his native land as a young man. For a while, he roamed Europe as a gambler and then undertook the study of

banking in Holland. Law had a great aptitude for finance and introduced important new ideas to the practice of banking. For example, he advanced the idea that state banks should issue paper money. In the process, Law moved his operations to Paris and created a great personal fortune based on speculation and business manipulation.

The Duke of Orleans became enamored of Law's radical financial ideas. With the duke's support, Law organized the General Bank of France in 1716 with himself as managing director. Shortly thereafter, the government decreed that the currency issued by the bank would be the legal tender of the nation. The plan worked initially, as many financial assets throughout the nation went as deposits into the bank's holdings. About two years later, however, it became necessary to recapitalize the bank into a larger institution known as the Royal Bank of France. If Law had stopped expanding at that point, he might today be remembered as one of the greatest financial minds in the history of modern Europe. Instead, he decided in 1718 to use the bank's assets to develop Louisiana. Law's bank created the Company of the Indies, which absorbed the charter of the Company of the West. All assets of the Company of the West became part of Law's new concern, which assumed all rights and obligations for Louisiana. This turn of events made John Law the *de facto* proprietor of Louisiana by virtue of his control of the Company of the Indies.

The Founding of New Orleans

John Law concerned himself first and foremost with investments and banking in Europe, never having much personal interest in French Louisiana except as an investment. He therefore left the administration of the province to others. Hence, while Law organized his central bank in Paris, Bienville had a free hand in governing Louisiana. In so doing, the commandant decided to implement his plans for a city on the banks of the Mississippi. Bienville had dreamed of this town since scouting the river during his first trip to the Mississippi. The directors of the company approved the plan, also suggesting the new town be named in honor of the Duke of Orleans. Since France already had a city on the Loire River which carried the duke's name, the Louisiana post would be called "Nouvelle Orléans," or New Orleans.

Bienville arrived at the selected location in early 1718. He brought with him a work party of about fifty men to clear trees and undergrowth. The task took months and the work went slowly. By the end of the year, however, settlement began. In 1720, the company sent an engineer from France, Adrien de Pauger, to oversee completion of the town. Pauger laid out the distinctive rectangular

street plan that still exists today in the Vieux Carré, or French Quarter. Construction began a levee system designed to prevent the settlement from flooding. The major earthwork of this barrier would also serve as a wharf along the river. The town centered on a public square fronting the river, which served as the location of the government buildings and main church. Bienville chose an area to the east of the river that had a relatively high elevation, thus helping to ensure the city would not flood, something that has proven true for the French Quarter since then.

New Orleans prospered after its founding. It became the capital of French Louisiana in 1721 and quickly took on its enduring role as the colony's commercial center. The new city had over 300 inhabitants within two years of its founding. This growth occurred in spite of the devastation done by several hurricanes that struck the city during its early years. In particular, a 1723 storm "did great harm to the crops of rice, peas, and corn, and destroyed the greater part of the houses at New Orleans." Despite this, New Orleans had a population of about 1,000 persons by 1728. That year saw construction of a wall around the city, with a small blockhouse to protect each corner. This progress moved an early resident to speculate with some hopefulness that "perhaps the day is not distant" when New Orleans would be "an opulent city and the metropolis of a great and rich colony."

Louisiana as a Company Colony

Louisiana enjoyed its first flush of prosperity during the years it existed under the auspices of the Company of the Indies. More ships arrived than had previously come to the colony from its founding until the company took control. They brought badly needed supplies and new settlers. By 1720 settlements had been established at New Orleans, Biloxi, Dauphin Island, Mobile, Natchez, and Natchitoches. The banks of the Mississippi River had also been settled as far north as the Pointe Coupee area. In 1721, the company divided Louisiana into nine governmental districts, each under the charge of a district commandant and a judge. As well, the company established two new posts: Baton Rouge in 1722 and Poste de Rapides (modern Alexandria) on the Red River in 1723.

The Company of the Indies and its successor particularly encouraged French migration. For three years starting in 1717, the company undertook the shipment of French convicts, both male and female, to Louisiana. A few hardened, authentic criminals did migrate to the colony, where they gave a seamy flavor to the dockside life of New Orleans. On the other hand, many of these persons had committed crimes of relatively minor consequence such as petty thievery,

vagrancy, and disorderly conduct, while others of them had been consigned to debtors' prisons since indebtedness constituted criminal activity in the harsh legal system of the era. Nonetheless, Louisiana quickly gained an undeserved reputation in France as a penal colony, one it retained in some quarters for the remainder of the French era.

In reality, most of the people who immigrated to Louisiana at the time lived as sturdy, respectable folk seeking to better their condition. Many of them did just that. New Orleans, as the province's major city, evidenced a strong French influence. As the seat of government, it served as the place of residence for most of the colony's administrators and government bureaucrats, its mercantile families, the military garrison, and other colonists who had reason to maintain regular contact with France and emulate European ways.

Law's company also advertised throughout Europe for settlers willing to immigrate to Louisiana. In many ways, the colony represented one of the first "melting pots" of American history, a process that began under the Company of the Indies. The 1720s witnessed widespread German immigration to all parts of North America. Starting in 1721, John Law and his associates sponsored about 2,000 of them as colonists. Initially, most of these German immigrants landed at Biloxi and thereafter settled along the Arkansas River. Bienville, then commanding the province, later granted them large tracts of land on the Mississippi above New Orleans in present-day St. Charles and St. James parishes. This area became known as the "German Coast," a title it still possesses today.

These settlements north of New Orleans thrived as the inhabitants cleared the land and established successful farms. They grew large amounts of rice, various types of vegetables, and raised livestock, all of which went to market at New Orleans. Charles Frederick d'Arenbourg served for more than forty years as an important leader of this community. The population at this settlement grew in the 1740s when Alsace-Lorraine (two provinces on the German-French border) came under the jurisdiction of France. This opened Louisiana as a destination for immigrants from this region. As well, many Swiss Germans joined the French army, some of whom received assignments to Louisiana, where they remained once their tours of duty had ended.

Burst of the Mississippi Bubble

Although the Company of the Indies had succeeded in founding New Orleans and bringing new settlers to Louisiana, John Law's Royal Bank began to experience severe problems in the early 1720s. The company's promotion of Louisiana

created a frenzy of stock speculation, popularly called the “Mississippi Bubble.” Thousands of investors in France clamored to buy shares for the sole purpose of turning a quick profit. They cared little, if at all, about financing the development of Louisiana. As stock prices escalated, and expenses in Louisiana increased, the company found it impossible to pay dividends on all of the stock sold to finance its activities.

Rumors of company’s insolvency began to fly about Paris. These precipitated a run on the Royal Bank, as panicked investors demanded the government redeem their shares in cash. This the government could not do. In the ensuing crisis, worried depositors withdrew their funds in large amounts, thereby causing the bank’s downfall. With the Royal Bank’s failure, stock in the Company of the Indies became almost worthless. John Law fled France to avoid prosecution after “he had loyally thrown his personal fortune into the system; he entered France rich, he left it ruined.” The Mississippi Bubble had burst. In the process, many persons lost fortunes, and Louisiana became a dirty word. The burst of the Mississippi Bubble in France began a new era of existence for Louisiana as a French colony.

CHAPTER THREE

Louisiana as a French Colony

- **1720s** Major importation of slaves during French period.
- **1722** Royal Military Hospital (later Charity Hospital) founded.
- **1724** Code Noir (Black Code) governing slavery adopted.
- **1725** First formal school established.
- **1727** Ursuline nuns arrive in New Orleans.
- **1729–31** Natchez War.
- **1731** Louisiana reverts to royal colony.
- **1733–43** Bienville governor of Louisiana.
- **May 1743** Bienville leaves Louisiana for last time.
- **1743–53** Vaudreuil governor of Louisiana.
- **1753–63** Kerlerec governor of Louisiana.
- **1754–63** French and Indian War (or Seven Years War, 1756–1763).
- **1763** Treaty of Paris.

Bienville and La Chaise

When the “Mississippi Bubble” burst, the French government reorganized the Company of the Indies by making it a public stock venture and appointing a commission to oversee its operations. At this point, royal officials in France again turned to the Sieur de Bienville, who had been in the colony since its

founding. He received orders from the king to govern during an interim period while the authorities in France considered options for further reorganization of the province. This time Commandant Bienville served in office until 1724. He retained the Superior Council, upon whose advice he generally relied. Finally, during the summer of 1723, the commissioners dispatched two individuals to Louisiana to serve as joint commissaries. One of them died shortly after arriving in Louisiana. The remaining officer, Jacques de La Chaise, assumed responsibility for the position, exercising the financial and economic power of government in Louisiana.

La Chaise played a significant role in the colony for several years. With Bienville, he superintended a reformulation of the local government's structure. This included appointing a royal attorney to prosecute cases that came before the Superior Council. The king also instructed the council to give greater attention to French law in its decisions.

Initially, Bienville and La Chaise cooperated; but, within a short time, differences developed between them. La Chaise questioned some of his colleague's policies and investigated his actions. Bienville reacted with indignation. The two men began bickering and feuding. Differences became so intense that most of the other officials in the colony had to side either with La Chaise or Bienville. Bienville's supporters generally came from the ranks of the military and the older, longer-established families in Louisiana. The king and his advisors, upon hearing of these disputes, recalled Bienville to France. After a quarter-century of residence in Louisiana, in 1725 Bienville returned to France, where the Crown relieved him of his command, a condition that would last only a few short years. He would return for a final tour of duty in Louisiana.

In the meantime, La Chaise consolidated his position in Louisiana once Bienville had left. Pierre de Boisbrant, the commander of the Illinois country, became acting commandant until a replacement could be sent from France. This individual, Étienne de Périer, arrived during 1727 with a commission as governor. Périer, a career naval officer, had seen distinguished service during the War of Spanish Succession in which France and Spain had fought Great Britain. After this conflict, Périer became an official of the Company of the Indies. As the new governor of Louisiana, his instructions required him to end the factional bickering that had led to the recall of Bienville. Périer indeed stopped the governmental infighting. His policy of impartiality brought an uneasy truce to the factions, who thereafter worked together in spite of the fact that La Chaise never fully trusted Périer.

The Natchez War

Louisiana felt Bienville's absence in the late 1720s when trouble developed between the French and the Natchez Indians. Governor Périer unwittingly caused these problems. He departed from long-established French policy that Indians owned their tribal lands. Lieutenant D'Echepare, his commandant at the Natchez settlement, decided in 1729 that the Natchez Indians should surrender both their cultivated crop lands and their town of White Apple to the French. Périer supported this new policy. In late November, a party of Natchez appeared at the French fort. They volunteered to hunt wild game and sell it to the garrison, an already established practice. The commandant agreed, as he had done before, and furnished them with weapons for use during the hunt. The Indians thereupon attacked without warning, killing several men. They also took as prisoners some of the soldiers' wives and children.

Settlers throughout the upriver region fled to New Orleans, where they sought protection from what they feared might be a colony-wide Indian uprising. The Natchez, however, failed to press the advantage of surprise gained by their initial attack. Governor Périer reacted swiftly. He sent an expedition to punish the Natchez for attacking the fort and to secure the release of the captives. This detachment, composed of almost 700 men, laid siege to White Apple and defeated the Indians. The French then secured from them a promise to return their captive settlers.

With this accomplished, the French embarked on a systematic extermination of the entire Natchez tribe. By 1731, it had almost ceased to exist as an organized group. In January of that year, Governor Périer led one last expedition against their remaining villages. He succeeded in this attack and captured many of the Indians, including their chief. The victorious French shipped most of these prisoners to St. Domingue, where they were enslaved. The survivors drifted away to join neighboring tribes elsewhere in Louisiana. The directors of the Company of the Indies, however, did not fully approve of Périer's prosecution of the Natchez War, even though he had won a definitive victory. They believed that the French troops had acted too savagely against the Indians.

Bienville Becomes Governor

The residents of Louisiana in the early 1730s had much about which to be discontent, especially regarding the Indian threat to their settlements. Food supplies at New Orleans remained scarce because of the large number of refugees from the Natchez War. Violent disagreements and quarreling among officials of the local

government continued periodically. The poor state of the Louisiana economy also led to periodic unemployment. Moreover, the military detachment in the colony existed at a generally ill-prepared and poorly trained level. At the end of the Natchez War, some two-thirds of the 800 regular French soldiers stationed in the province could be found on the sick or disabled list. For these reasons the Company of the Indies, unable to make a profit, began negotiating with the French government for a release from control of Louisiana. Louis XV agreed. He formally dissolved the company's charter on January 23, 1731, and Louisiana became a royal colony.

For help in these new circumstances the Crown once more turned to Bienville, then perhaps the most knowledgeable person regarding Louisiana. Although controversy had plagued much of his career, few could deny the value of his administrative experience in the lower Mississippi valley. Accordingly, the king appointed him as royal governor of the province. Bienville, then living near Paris, made preparations to return to New Orleans. Now 53 years of age, he arrived in March of 1733, hoping to direct the continued growth and expansion of the

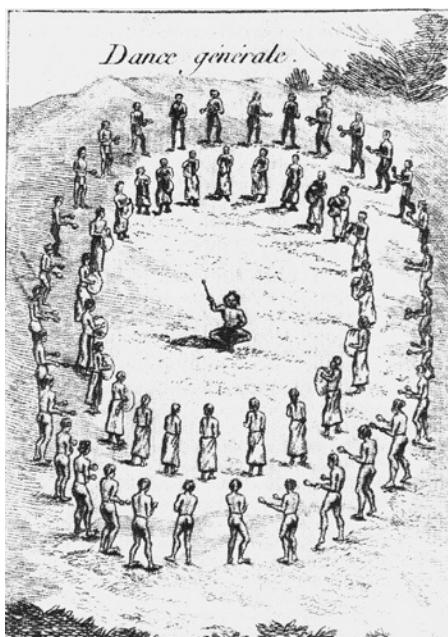


Figure 3.1 “Dance générale.” An illustration showing a dance of the Natchez Indians from a French colonist’s early history of French Louisiana. From La Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane* (1785). Collection of Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Box13/Folder66/#4).

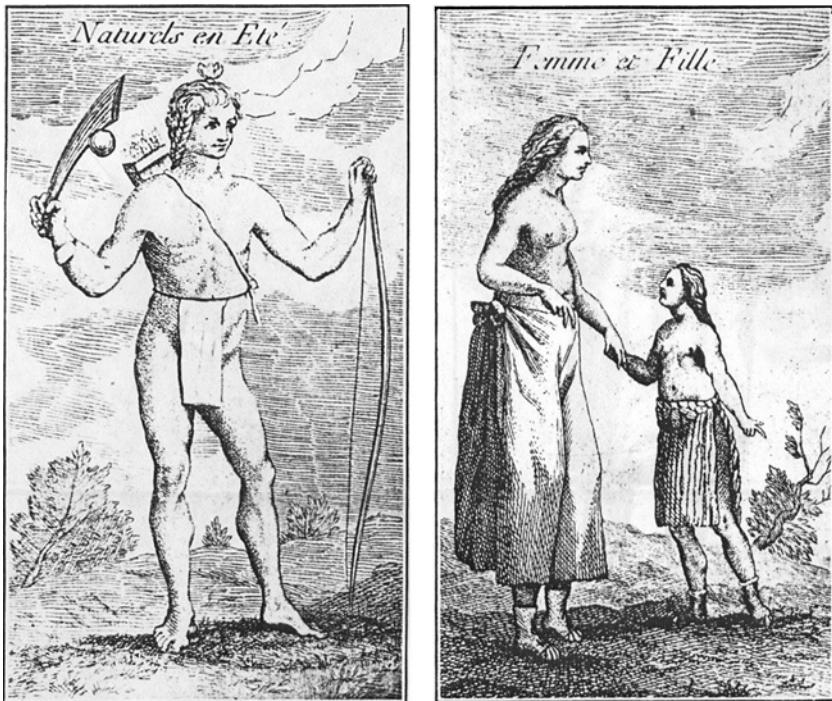


Figure 3.2 Early colonial depiction of Natchez Indian clothing. From La Page du Pratz, *Histoire de la Louisiane* (1785). Collection of Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Box13/Folder66/#27).

colony. Bienville immediately implemented a series of reforms, hoping to solve some of the more serious problems. He increased the morale and effectiveness of the military by procuring higher-quality supplies, recruiting new soldiers, and embarking on the construction of new barracks. He also built a public warehouse to serve as a central clearing house for food supplies. Bienville ordered home all of the frontier settlers who had fled to New Orleans after the Natchez massacre. And, in all cases, he strictly enforced the laws and worked closely with the Superior Council to ensure the good order of the colonial government.

Bienville turned his attention to growing problems with the Chickasaw Indians, who lived up the Mississippi River near the present-day site of Memphis. This tribe harbored some of the Natchez Indians who had earlier escaped the punitive expeditions of Governor Périer. Bienville sent word to the Chickasaw chiefs that they should deliver the Natchez warriors to the French.

The chiefs refused to do this, responding in a rude manner calculated to infuriate the French commander. Bienville, who had had earlier disputes with the Chickasaw, now felt he had little choice but to fight them. He ordered his commander in the Illinois country, Pierre d'Artaguette, to assemble a company of men, move south, and attack the main Chickasaw encampments after Bienville augmented the force with men from New Orleans.

D'Artaguette, however, became impatient while waiting for Bienville's reinforcements. On his own authority, he attacked the Chickasaw with only his small company. This attack did not go well for the French, as the Indians quickly defeated them. Bienville and his men, who arrived late, launched a second attack but, despite his efforts, the Indians also won this engagement. The French hastily retreated to New Orleans as Bienville next began elaborate preparations to resume his campaign against the Chickasaw. Now he secured men from Canada, recruited fur trappers into his force, increased the number of local militiamen, and built a fort near present-day Memphis as a base for launching the attack. He struck during the summer of 1739 with nearly 3,500 men, including Indian allies from other tribes. The French won several skirmishes, but Bienville failed to defeat the Chickasaw decisively. Nonetheless, the Indians decided to sue for peace. They signed a treaty early in 1740 that provided for the surrender of the Natchez rebels to the French and pledged future cooperation.

Creation of Stable Government

Bienville had become weary of Louisiana by the early 1740s. In his mid-sixties, he wanted to retire to his home in France. Heartsick over the losses of the French in the war against the Chickasaw, he had little desire to continue in office. The French court granted his request for retirement in 1741, but he remained in the colony until 1743, when the Marquis de Vaudreuil arrived.

The years after Bienville's final departure became a new era for the colony's progress, a time marked by stability and continued growth for Louisiana. The Marquis de Vaudreuil, a person of elegant manners and sophistication, understood colonial administration. He also had a gentle, kind manner and quickly helped reconcile Louisiana's factions into an uneasy cooperation. Unlike his predecessors as governor, the marquis maintained an impressive formal court at New Orleans, thereby adding dignity to his administration. His sponsorship of a regular series of balls, dinners, and formal social engagements increased his popularity. French officials and members of the upper class in New Orleans, all of them hungry for pomp and splendor, approved of these activities. The

governor's wife, however, took full advantage of her position, much to the disgust of many settlers. Madam Vaudreuil pressured local merchants to sell to her at discounted prices and she also incurred the ridicule of the common people, something her husband had carefully avoided, by insisting on riding about New Orleans in an elegant coach pulled by four horses. Despite her actions, Governor Vaudreuil maintained the respect of most colonists and, even today, he is referred to in Louisiana folklore as the "Grand Marquis."

Vaudreuil's problems seemed no less profound than those of his predecessors. The Louisiana economy had continued to suffer during the 1720s and 1730s. The marquis immediately acted to deal with the lack of currency. Louisiana badly needed manufactured goods purchased with hard currency, and these items had to be imported. The governor therefore increased the amount of currency circulating in the colony by convincing the Crown to authorize the use of paper money, something which had previously failed. The new issue of paper currency worked for a while, but inflation became so bad by the mid-1740s that the king ordered the paper money experiment stopped. The Crown appointed a new commissary in 1745, Sebastien Le Normant, who decreed that anyone holding paper money should surrender it to the government. Nevertheless, paper money continued to circulate in the colony throughout the French period. The short-term effect of this failed experiment further depressed the colony's economy.

Relations with Louisiana's Indians, a problem inherited from Bienville, remained a major concern for the Marquis de Vaudreuil. As early as the 1740s, traders from the British colonies of the Atlantic coast had begun to cross the Appalachian Mountains, where they came into contact with those tribes bordering on French Louisiana. Several of these tribes, especially the Chickasaw and the Choctaw, quickly learned the game of playing one European colonial power against the other. The Indians of the lower Mississippi valley developed the practice of supporting the nation whose Indian agents gave them the most gifts and trade goods. Unfortunately for the French, the economic problems Vaudreuil experienced made it difficult for him to provide the Indians with goods and trinkets in either the quantity or quality comparable to those furnished by the British.

The late 1740s, therefore, became for Louisiana a time of renewed difficulty with the Indians of the region. In 1747 and 1748, the Chickasaw instituted raids along the east bank of the Mississippi as far south as near Baton Rouge, forcing many residents to take refuge at New Orleans. The governor incurred the wrath of these settlers when he ordered his troops not to launch punitive attacks against the Indians. In 1752 the Chickasaw again raided the lower Mississippi, burning the plantations of several Louisiana settlers. Vaudreuil now acted.

He sent a military detachment to punish the Indians. This the French soldiers did with marked success, destroying several villages and burning Indian crops. The French victory resulted in a formal surrender. The peace treaty, signed by Vaudreuil, guaranteed that this tribe would cause no further trouble during French control of Louisiana.

Vaudreuil became governor of Canada in 1752 as a reward for his services. The king appointed Louis Billouart de Kerlerec as his replacement at New Orleans. A veteran naval officer, Kerlerec had a reputation for honesty and strict discipline. The bickering among members of the local government, previously held to a minimum by Vaudreuil, resurfaced during the Kerlerec administration. In 1758, the Crown recalled Commissary Le Normant to France, replacing him with Vincent de Rochemore. Unlike Le Normant, who had been a person of even temperament and mild opinion, Rochemore clashed with the governor. Although the commissary had the duty of regulating matters of private economic character in the colony, Rochemore became directly involved in commercial matters, using his governmental position to build his personal fortune. He became financially involved with several successful local merchants. Governor Kerlerec disapproved of these activities, and the two officials soon came into open conflict. Rochemore organized his merchant friends into a bloc opposing Kerlerec, while the commissary blatantly ignored the governor's orders and recommendations. Kerlerec's appeals to France for the removal of Rochemore had little effect, however, because of the latter's powerful family connections at the French court. This clash prevented the governor from accomplishing needed domestic and economic reforms in Louisiana.

Slavery in Colonial Louisiana

The scarcity of labor ranked as one of the Louisiana's most profound economic problems during the early period of its existence. Some planters made unsuccessful attempts to enslave local Indians, most of whom proved unsuited for slavery. Cadillac found the solution to the labor problem by turning to African slavery, already a profitable source of workers in the French and English colonies of the Caribbean.

Slavery seemed particularly attractive for Louisiana as early as the late 1710s, for proprietor Crozat owed much of his personal fortune to profits he had earned in the international slave trade. Hence, importation of enslaved Africans blacks began. Although a small number of Africans came to the region prior to 1716, in that year several trading ships appeared with cargoes of blacks for sale to local residents. The Company of the Indies encouraged the importation of slaves as

an incentive for economic development. Many blacks came to Louisiana directly from the African regions of Guinea, the Gold Coast, and Angola, and Senegalese, Guineans, Yorubas, and Angolans could all be found in the population. Others arrived in the colony from the French Islands of the Caribbean.

By 1724, the relatively large number of blacks in Louisiana prompted a series of laws governing slavery in the colony. These regulations brought Louisiana into conformity with other French colonies. This slave law, or *Code Noir*, quickly became the basic legal standard governing the institution of slavery in Louisiana, with parts of it continuing well into the antebellum period of U.S. history. This code had been adopted in some French colonies in the Caribbean as early as 1685. It required that all slaves be baptized in the Roman Catholic faith. In addition, slaves had to be married in the Church. In all other matters, however, slaves had no legal rights. The code also established limits on the ability of masters to free slaves from bondage. Freedom could be granted only after the Superior Council approved such an action.

Holding slaves, however, presented problems for owners in colonial Louisiana. In 1730, a slave named Samba led an abortive rebellion. This uprising resulted in the torture and execution of several of the rebels. Nonetheless, the black population of the colony grew steadily across the decades. Historians estimate that it reached approximately 10,000 in 1763. A Spanish census in 1785 placed the number of bondmen at 16,544 while estimates of the Louisiana slave population in 1803, including the Floridas and upper Louisiana, put the number at approximately 28,000. The Spanish administration issued its own slave code on two occasions, 1785 and 1789, in each case based on the earlier French laws.

Recent historical research on the importation of Africans to colonial Louisiana has suggested that once in the colony the slaves developed a distinct Afro-Creole society. This culture manifested itself with well-defined religious beliefs, knowledge of herbs, poisons, and the eventual practice of voodoo. As well, contrary to popular belief, the black Creole community of colonial Louisiana rested on the family unit as its significant base. Patterns of family kinship and lineage among Louisiana's black population persisted throughout the colonial era and beyond. The creation of a Louisiana Creole dialect also became an important distinguishing feature of evolving, common black society in the colony's African population. Historian Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, who has studied the evolution of this society, noted that after the colonial period "Creole cultural identification became a means of distinguishing that which was truly native to Louisiana from that which was Anglo." She contends that the creation of Louisiana's special and well-defined Creole culture came directly from the colony's African slaves and their unique folkways during the eighteenth century.

This culture united an otherwise diverse group of Africans into a unified, indigenous lifestyle that became a dominant norm. The development of this unique Louisiana slave culture came partially as a result of the fact that many captives imported into the colony came from the Senegambian area of West Africa, therefore providing a base for common African folkways. This process became especially strong in the Pointe Coupee region but could also be seen throughout the rest of the province.

Religion in French Louisiana

The Roman Catholic Church existed as the established state religion in France and all her colonies. French priests from the diocese and chapter houses of Canada became the first clerics to settle in Louisiana. Initially, most of them belonged to the Jesuit order or served as secular diocesan priests from the Seminary of Quebec. Some of these individuals made attempts to Christianize the Indians, although with little success. After the 1720s, most of Louisiana's Catholic clergy (never more than several dozen in number at any given time) lived at New Orleans and in the few other larger settlements of the province.

The see of the Bishop of Quebec included French Louisiana. The total area governed by this prelate proved so large that Catholics in Louisiana soon desired a bishop of their own. This they proposed to the French king several times in the 1720s. Authorities in France refused this request because of its expense. Instead, they designated two religious orders, the Jesuits and the Capuchins, as having exclusive rights to minister to the settlers in Louisiana. The Jesuits had jurisdiction in territories north of the Arkansas and Yazoo rivers, while the Capuchins established themselves south of this line, an area which included the present-day state of Louisiana.

The arrival of the Ursuline sisters at New Orleans in the 1720s marked another milestone in the religious history of the colony. A Jesuit priest, Nicolas de Beaubois, decided that Louisiana could be considerably improved if the French government established a chapter house of sisters at New Orleans. He therefore negotiated a contract with the Ursuline sisters on behalf of the Company of the Indies for the founding of a convent in the city. The Ursulines, according to the terms of their 1727 contract with the company, constructed a convent, a chapel, and a dormitory for their school at New Orleans. Soon it excelled in educating young women. At the end of the colonial period, the Ursuline Academy had eleven sisters on the teaching staff, seventy boarding, and approximately 100 day students. Several present-day schools in New Orleans can trace their lineage to the academy opened by this order.



Figure 3.3 Built by the Ursuline Sisters as a convent in 1748–52, the Ursulines donated this building in 1824 to the Archbishop of the Diocese of New Orleans, who used it as his residence. *Frank B. Moore Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.*

The Ursulines' charter also required them to open a hospital, and this they did. The colony badly needed this service since medical care remained almost nonexistent. The Ursulines took over operation of the Royal Military Hospital, founded earlier by the government in 1722. By 1736, it served as the colony's only such facility and provided free care for those who could not pay. The Ursuline sisters also cared for foundlings and orphans, along with single women. In that capacity, they chaperoned the "casket girls." The Company of the Indies decided to import unmarried French women who would be recruited as brides for the colonists. The first women in this plan arrived at New Orleans in 1727, earning for themselves the title *filles à la cassette* (casket girls,) since each of them carried a small, barrel-like chest containing their personal belongings. They lived at the Ursuline convent until they found suitable husbands. The romantic legend of these "brides for Louisiana" has been immortalized on stage and film by modern musical spectaculars and operas such as Victor Herbert's *Naughty Marietta* and Giacomo Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*.

Education and the Arts

In 1725, Father Raphael of Luxembourg, a Capuchin friar, founded the first formal school in Louisiana. Its curriculum seems simple by modern standards, concentrating on basic arithmetic, reading, writing, and Roman Catholic theology. Most Louisianians could not read or write, and their illiterate status did not bother them. Scribes and notaries public, available in the towns and posts, wrote legal documents for the illiterate, including land grants, slave transactions, mortgage loans, wills and testaments, and real-estate transactions. The large number of "X" marks as signatures on these documents in modern archives attests to many colonists' unfamiliarity with pen and paper.

Since education proved available only to a privileged minority, it is not surprising to learn that literature and the arts failed to flourish. Residents of the colony produced, nonetheless, a few notable literary and artistic accomplishments. Some of the Frenchmen who came to the colony wrote memoirs and accounts of the colony. As early as 1683, Louis Hennepin left his *Description de la Louisiane*, a memoir published in Paris. François Xavier de Charlevoix wrote his *Histoire de la Nouvelle France* during 1744, a book recounting his travels down the Mississippi. In 1758, a Louisiana planter who had lived in the colony almost two decades, La Page du Pratz, published his *Histoire de la Louisiane*. Other narrative and literary descriptions of the colony, most notably those by Andres Penecault, Jean-Bernard Bossu, Bernard LaHarpe, and Guy Dufossat de Saligny, further augmented this meager literature.

Most artistic expression, however, came at the hands of ordinary craftsmen, now unknown to history, who worked beauty into their everyday creations. Colonial artisans at New Orleans made furniture and cabinets that blended fancy French styles with the plain simplicity of a frontier existence. Stonemasons and woodcarvers made elaborate embellishments on the public buildings, churches, and cemetery tombs at New Orleans. Potters in the colony made utensils and dinnerware.

The architecture of French Louisiana is one of the few remaining tangible heritages of the period, especially at New Orleans. Early architects in the province usually had training as military engineers and came to design government construction. Pierre Le Blond de Tour and Adrien de Pauger, for example, planned many early fortifications, along with the street plan for the city of New Orleans. After them in the 1740s, Ignace François Broutin, as engineer-in-chief of Louisiana, reworked the architecture of New Orleans with an extensive public works program. In 1745 he designed the Ursuline convent, one of his few structures still standing today.

Entertainment and Amusements

For many rural residents of Louisiana, the harsh realities of life in a semi-wilderness greatly limited their opportunities for formal recreation. Like frontiersmen elsewhere, they often found pleasure and amusement in the events and necessities of their everyday lives. Hunting, fishing, and trapping provided many colonists with both a diversion and the means for survival. Women and children passed time socially by knitting, quilting, and visiting. In some areas, crude local taverns served as points of contact for the men, places where wagering, gossiping, and card-playing constituted the order of the day. Most of Louisiana's colonial families living outside New Orleans found their organized recreations in the human rites of passage: christenings, weddings, and funerals, all of which served as social functions.

While many residents of French Louisiana probably lacked strong religious conviction, the Catholic Church nonetheless played an important social role. Holy days such as Shrove Tuesday, Easter, All Saints Day, and Christmas provided the chance for holiday-making. Elaborate celebrations especially characterized Christmas and the period before Lent, popularly known as Mardi Gras. In the rural areas up the river from New Orleans, Christmas Eve became a time of parties as bonfires burned along the river, the churches celebrated midnight Mass, and party-goers attended festive breakfasts. Mardi Gras served as the occasion for unrestrained revelry. It usually began shortly after Epiphany and accelerated until Shrove Tuesday, on which the season of celebration closed with gala *crepe* suppers held in the evening. Summertime brought festivals on the feasts of the Transfiguration and of St. Louis, the colony's patron saint.

Entertainments seemed more formal and sophisticated in New Orleans, where government officials held sway and the urban elite sought to imitate their European cousins in France. Residents of the city clearly favored dancing and musical events as their most popular forms of social entertainment. New Orleanians especially loved music. Indeed, the late eighteenth century saw the performance of numerous operas in the Louisiana capital. Formal balls and cotillions marked the arrival and departure of important officials. Grand balls and elaborate dances served as the traditional festivity on New Year's Eve, while many families in the city sponsored house parties. Entertainments known as "King Balls," usually held near Epiphany, celebrated the close of the Christmas season. These entertainments featured special cakes that contained several small trinkets baked inside each one. The men who found the prizes in their portion of cake became "kings" of the ball. As in the countryside, Mardi Gras emerged as New Orleans' most distinctive social celebration. The people of the

city celebrated the carnival season with greater pomp and splendor than in the countryside, especially after the governorship of Vaudreuil.

New Orleans' nightlife developed a seamy side during the French colonial period. Next to dancing and music, gambling might be classed as the universally popular amusement in the city. Local men seemed ready to wager on almost any activity, from horse racing to the arrival times of ships in the port. And, as a seaport, New Orleans naturally attracted a cosmopolitan and libertine mix of individuals. Taverns and sporting houses soon became a standard feature of the dock area, a district where a good deal of drinking usually took place. By the 1730s, the French Superior Council received regular complaints about abuses in these establishments. The local government took steps in 1746 to regulate taverns and bars. Establishments serving liquor had to be licensed by the Superior Council, and this greatly reduced their number. Efforts at regulation continued through the entire colonial period, although the government experienced constant problems with the local taverns. Many establishments openly ignored the laws, while others found ways to operate beyond them.

The End of French Louisiana

Louisiana faced new problems in the late 1750s when France went to war against Great Britain in a worldwide conflict known as the Seven Years War, or in British North America as the French and Indian War. This international struggle began in 1754 on the western frontier of English America when Virginia sent a detachment of soldiers to scout the Ohio River valley for possible settlement. The British troops came into contact with a French military force from Canada, also sent to the same area for similar purposes. Fighting between the two units ensued, with the British suffering defeat during the initial engagements. This local conflict in the Ohio valley escalated into a global struggle for empire. By 1756, all of the European colonial nations interested in dominating North America had entered the conflict. As allied Bourbon courts, France and Spain joined against their common foe, Great Britain. The war went badly for France. Heavy fighting in Canada resulted in the fall of Quebec to the British on October 18, 1759. Although no fighting took place in Louisiana, the colony on the Mississippi River suffered from isolation and diminished trade as a direct result of the war. By the early 1760s, it had become obvious that France and Spain had lost the war. Louisiana quickly took the consequences for France's defeat in the Seven Years War.

By the end of the French period of Louisiana, it must be noted that New Orleans had grown into a commercially prosperous and self-sustaining city in

the Atlantic world. Its residents traded all across the French commercial system, and it served as the exit point to the rest of the globe for the rich products of the interior of the North American continent. Modern archeological excavations conducted in the Crescent City during the last fifteen years by Shannon Lee Dawdy and her teams of investigators have conclusively proved that New Orleans was a very cosmopolitan place by the time France exited the Mississippi valley. Many of the artifacts recovered by the archeological investigations absolutely substantiate the claim of colonial New Orleans as a lively, vibrant, and teeming port city, one with its own unique characteristics and urban lifeways. Although French policy-makers in Paris attempted to set political and economic norms for the New Orleans, it had become in many ways its own master. Residents of the city enjoyed a large measure of commercial and governmental autonomy that gave them a larger control of their own destinies than previously supposed by historians.

The Peace of Paris in 1763 formally ended the war, as France, Spain, and Great Britain forged a three-part diplomatic accord at the peace table. This agreement had three significant results for the future of Louisiana. First, France ceded all of Canada to Great Britain. Second, Spain gave all of Florida to Great Britain and that former Spanish province became two new British colonies, East and West Florida. East Florida, with its capital at St. Augustine, included most of what is today the state of Florida. The province of West Florida, with its capital at Pensacola, contained all territory west of the Apalachicola River to the Mississippi, including the lands north of Lake Pontchartrain. The Iberville River, or what is today known as Bayou Manchac, separated British West Florida to the north from Spanish Louisiana to the south. Thus, this little waterway south of Baton Rouge served as a major international boundary.

The third and most important consequence of the Peace of Paris in 1763 came when France ceded all of Louisiana to Spain. Great Britain, the master at the peace table, preferred not to take possession of Louisiana, even though France and Spain had both been defeated in the war. Instead, the British wanted the Spanish king to take possession of the Mississippi River colony rather than leave it as French territory. The cost of administering it would be a burden on Spain. Besides, the transfer of Louisiana to Spain would effectively remove France from North America.

Spain, the defeated ally of France, accepted the cession of Louisiana at the Peace of Paris for several reasons. Louisiana would serve as a convenient territorial buffer between the wealthy province of New Spain and the British colonies of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. As well, the Spanish king saw the cession of Louisiana as repayment by France for having brought Spain into the war in

1761. Finally, Spain accepted Louisiana because its control of the Mississippi River would ensure that the western reaches of the Gulf of Mexico could continue to be a “Spanish Sea.”

The Transition to Spanish Rule

The provisions of the Peace of Paris of 1763 shocked and surprised the colonists in Louisiana. Residents of New Orleans reacted to the news with temporary disbelief, apprehension, revulsion, and in some cases open hostility. Few, if any, inhabitants looked forward to becoming Spanish subjects. Several leading citizens of New Orleans, including the wealthy merchant Jean Milhet, made the extraordinary gesture of traveling to France, where they met with the Duke of Choiseul, chief minister of state. Milhet and his group hoped to convince the court to keep Louisiana as a French province. They enlisted the assistance of the aged Sieur de Bienville, then living in retirement near Paris. Bienville and Milhet hoped to secure a personal audience with King Louis XV in order to present their views. The king, already fully committed to the transfer, refused to receive them. Instead, Minister Choiseul firmly maintained that the decision would not change. The inhabitants of Louisiana had to accept their fate and embrace Spanish sovereignty.

While residents of Louisiana chafed at the impending transfer, Spain moved slowly to take possession of the colony, and still had not done so by the end of 1765. During the interim, Louisiana residents continued their lives as though the province still belonged to France, with most public and private functions in the province proceeding as usual. Governor Kerlerec, his term at an end, returned to France. A minor French official, Jean-Jacques Blaise d'Abbadie, replaced him as temporary commandant. D'Abbadie, however, became ill and died on February 4, 1765. Captain Charles Philippe Aubry, the commanding officer of the French garrison, succeeded him. Although well respected in the colony, Aubry lacked the leadership skills needed to preside over a colony in turmoil while it waited for new masters. The citizens of New Orleans held a series of public meetings during 1765 that served to keep the populace inflamed against the coming establishment of Spanish rule. Hence, when the Spanish king sent his own governor the following year, residents of Louisiana had little inclination to support the new regime.

CHAPTER FOUR

Spanish Louisiana

- **March 1766** Ulloa arrives in Louisiana (takes possession January 1767).
- **October 1768** Insurrection of 1768.
- **August 1769–March 1770** O'Reilly establishes Spanish control over Louisiana.
- **1775–83** U.S. war for independence.
- **1777–83** Gálvez governor of Louisiana.
- **1779–81** Gálvez's campaigns against British.
- **1781–91** Miró commandant and governor of Louisiana.
- **1786** Miró's land-grant policy adopted.
- **1783** Treaty of Paris.
- **1789–99** French Revolution.
- **1791–97** Carondelet governor of Louisiana.
- **April 1795** Slave conspiracy in Pointe Coupee.

Antonio de Ulloa

Affairs in Louisiana had degenerated to the point that many residents refused to accept Spanish rule by the time King Charles III of Spain finally appointed a governor for his new possession. In late 1765, news reached New Orleans that the king had selected Antonio de Ulloa for this post. A scientist by training,

Ulloa had a distinguished reputation in the scientific community, having won international acclaim for his observations of flora and fauna.

After a hard voyage plagued by storms, Governor Ulloa arrived in the colony in March 1766 on a single boat accompanied by only seventy-five men, just enough of a contingent to make the people mad but not enough to control them. His arrival in the colony hardly impressed the inhabitants with the power and might of Spain. The new governor landed at the Belize, an outpost near the mouth of the Mississippi River and, instead of making a triumphal entry into New Orleans, he decided to stay there for an extended time. A short tour of the province eventually took him through New Orleans, where he remained for a few days before returning to Belize. Not until January 20, 1767, nearly a year after his arrival, did Ulloa formally take possession of Louisiana for Spain at this southernmost post on the Mississippi. From Belize, Ulloa governed through Aubry who remained at New Orleans. The Superior Council took offense at the new governor's extended residence near the river mouth. They felt that Ulloa should have taken possession of the province with a ceremony at New Orleans, where the appropriate letters of patent could be formally registered with the Superior Council. Thus Ulloa made a bad start even before he eventually established residence at New Orleans.

The long-term difficulties with which Ulloa had to deal seemed even more overwhelming than the short-term problems caused by the circumstances of his arrival. He commanded a small Spanish detachment since he had been told by his superiors to rely on French troops already in the colony. In addition, the Council of State in Spain gave the new governor a budget completely inadequate for the civil administration of the province. These decisions, based on Spain's desire to save money on the costs of government in Louisiana, forced Ulloa to rule through the officers of the old French colonial government.

Ulloa also mishandled some of the economic problems then facing the colony. He issued new trade regulations for Louisiana as one of his first official acts. These commercial decrees sought to bring the trade practices of the province into conformity with the rest of the Spanish colonial empire. Spain operated her colonies according to the economic principles of mercantilism, which called for, among other things, strict governmental regulation over all aspects of the trade and commerce. Ulloa's new rules therefore limited legal trade for Louisianians to a list of designated Spanish and New World ports belonging to Spain. Trade could be conducted only in ships of Spanish registry, with cargoes approved only after a review by government customs officials. Finally, all ship captains had to be bonded with the Spanish colonial government. The residents of New Orleans opposed Ulloa's trade decrees of 1766 and 1767. They believed the rules ruined the established trade patterns of Louisiana. Merchants had

been accustomed to trading with French ports in the Caribbean, in addition to conducting illegal commerce with the nearby British colonies. Ulloa's new trade decrees ended such trade. As a result, the Louisiana commercial community (perhaps the province's most influential group of colonists) lost confidence in the Spanish governor.

In spite of these difficulties, Ulloa did improve some aspects of colonial administration. He conducted an extensive personal tour of the province to check on its military defenses. He constructed a new fort at Belize, and he strengthened the garrisons at other frontier posts. He also sought to better Spanish relations with the Indians. He visited representatives of several tribes, and managed to increase the quantity of gifts that Spain provided within the limits of his meager budget. He also worked closely with his counterpart, the governor of British West Florida, in establishing good relations between their two colonies.

The Insurrection of 1768

Anti-Spanish passions and tempers of the inhabitants, especially at New Orleans, reached crisis proportions after two years of Spanish administration in Louisiana. Many residents disapproved of Ulloa's lackluster leadership style and decried the damage done to trade by his commercial policies. The Superior Council, composed entirely of French residents, opposed the Spanish governor. By the summer of 1768, the council and Ulloa had reached the point at which they could no longer cooperate on matters affecting the routine management of the colony.

On the night of October 27, 1768, a mob of local residents, accompanied by settlers from the German coast, spiked the guns guarding New Orleans and took control of the city. They hastily convened a meeting and drafted a petition asking that Ulloa leave Louisiana immediately. The Superior Council met shortly thereafter and officially declared Ulloa's governorship invalid, basing this assertion on the fact that the Spaniard had never formally presented his credentials to the council. Accordingly, the Superior Council ordered Ulloa to depart Louisiana within three days or suffer the consequences. Ulloa and his family retreated to the safety of a Spanish frigate anchored in the river. As the mob of about 400 persons continued to mill about the city, Ulloa turned to Commandant Aubry for advice. Aubry advised the governor to leave the colony. Although Aubry had vocally protested the mob's action and had disapproved of the Superior Council's resolution, the French officer actually did nothing to stop the uprising. In fact, when Ulloa ordered the mobilization of troops after the mob marched on the city, Aubry countermanded the order



Figure 4.1 North America in 1763.

because he feared bloodshed. The French government later ordered Aubry to furnish full details of the rebellion to the next Spanish governor, including the names of the leaders. This he did, and in so doing earned the eternal hatred of the French inhabitants, who considered him a traitor.

Ulloa and his party sailed down the river to Belize and departed for Cuba, never to return to Louisiana. The leaders of the revolt basked in their success. At New Orleans, the conspirators quickly organized a delegation that sailed for Paris, where it met with officials of the French government. This group brought with them a long memorial that summarized the abuses which the colony had endured at the hands of Ulloa. They asked the French king to reassert control over Louisiana. To strengthen this appeal, various merchants in New Orleans sent personal pleas to their contacts in France asking them to lobby the French court to reclaim Louisiana. French King Louis XV and his ministers, after considering the various arguments, reaffirmed Spain's sovereignty over Louisiana. Back in Spain, Ulloa countered by giving the Spanish government his own long version of the events that had occurred in Louisiana while he served there. He justified all of his actions and recommended legal proceedings against those responsible for inciting the mob. The conspirators, he felt, had engaged in treason.

At this point, it would be useful to note that the Insurrection of 1768 has traditionally attracted a great deal of interest among students of Louisiana history. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many scholars writing about the history of Louisiana described this revolt as a forerunner of the American Revolution. They characterized it as the first attempt in the history of the western hemisphere in which European colonists sought to cast off a monarch and change their form of government by revolution. An unsubstantiated and inaccurate legend persists even to this day that the rebels considered proclaiming New Orleans, and perhaps all of Louisiana, an independent republic. So entrenched had this myth become by the early 1900s that a Louisiana historical organization placed a bronze tablet on the New Orleans Cabildo building declaring it the site of the first independence movement in the western hemisphere. Although that commemorative tablet may still be seen by visitors to the building, modern archival research in the colonial records of Louisiana has definitively disproved its erroneous interpretation. The New Orleans insurgents did not seek independence. They only desired to return Louisiana to the sovereignty and control of the French king.

Alejandro O'Reilly

The Spanish king and his ministers debated an appropriate course of action in the months after the Insurrection of 1768. They decided to dispatch General Alejandro O'Reilly to New Orleans with a large military force to reestablish Spain's control over the colony. O'Reilly seemed well suited for the task. An

Irish Roman Catholic, the general had distinguished himself numerous times in service to Spain. He arrived in Louisiana during August of 1769 with some 2,000 soldiers aboard more than a dozen vessels sailing in flotilla formation. The general landed at the mouth of the Mississippi, where he paused for several weeks in preparation for taking control at New Orleans. While he was anchored downriver, delegations of rebel leaders called upon the general, who greeted them with civility and courtesy. Contrary to the facts, these delegates claimed that the insurrection did not relate in any fashion to questioning the authority of King Charles III or Spain. Instead, they told O'Reilly that the object of their wrath had been Governor Ulloa alone. In particular, the French royal attorney of the colony, Nicolas de Lafrénière, assured the general that the Superior Council supported the rule of law by opposing Ulloa, whom they saw as injurious to the best interests of Spain. O'Reilly listened patiently to these opinions and promised that he would thoroughly investigate the matter once he assumed command at New Orleans.

O'Reilly executed his entrance into the Louisiana capital with a pomp and ceremony designed to impress the colonists. The formalities accomplished, O'Reilly quickly set about investigating the circumstances of the insurrection. Armed with Aubry's report, he took testimony from various citizens, participants and observers alike. With his investigation completed within a few short weeks, the general acted speedily in dispensing his version of justice. He issued a proclamation that gave amnesty to the vast majority of those who had taken part in the uprising. He noted that these individuals had been misled by the small group of malcontents who instigated the revolt. O'Reilly named thirteen residents and officials of the local government as leaders of the insurrection, formally charging each one with treason and ordering them arrested to stand trial for their crimes. The list of these persons included some of the leading citizens of New Orleans. Their group trial lasted less than a month, with O'Reilly serving both as judge and jury, according to the provisions of Spanish law. On October 24, 1769, O'Reilly delivered the verdict of the court, the harshness of which shocked Louisiana. He acquitted one of the defendants, a New Orleans printer who had published the resolution of the Superior Council, because he had not directly participated in the plotting. O'Reilly sentenced six of the prisoners to death, while he gave six others long prison terms. All of the convicted persons had their property and valuables confiscated by the government. A firing squad quickly carried out the death sentences, thereby earning for the general a nickname ("Bloody" O'Reilly) long remembered in Louisiana.

Although Alejandro O'Reilly earned a questionable place in popular Louisiana history for his stern treatment of the rebels of 1768, his enduring

contribution marked the firm establishment of Spanish colonial government. The general began a concerted effort to improve Louisiana's military, judicial, and civil government by instituting a series of reforms that remained in effect for the rest of the colonial era. He dealt with the problem of inflation by decreeing fixed prices for foodstuffs and other commodities sold in the markets of New Orleans. He expelled many of the British traders who had been residing in the city and ordered them to cease smuggling. In an effort to normalize commerce with other Spanish ports, he enlisted the services of the Irish merchant Oliver Pollock, who had followed the general from Havana in order to open trade with Louisiana. O'Reilly encouraged merchants from Cuba to engage in commerce with New Orleans. He reduced customs duties and import taxes for those who agreed to switch their trade to Spanish ports. The general reorganized the Louisiana militia, forming them into twelve companies comprising a total of almost 1,000 men. He repaired fortifications at Pointe Coupee, New Orleans, the Arkansas post, St. Louis, and Natchitoches.

O'Reilly also made efforts to improve relations with the Indian tribes of the province. He met with representatives of the important tribes, bestowing upon them a better quality of gifts than they had received previously. He even arranged a spectacular sham battle for the Indians, which greatly impressed them. A Frenchman who stayed in Louisiana, Athanase de Mézières, immeasurably assisted in these efforts. De Mézières had arrived as a young man at Natchitoches during the summer of 1740 and remained there for most of his life. By the time of the transfer to Spain, he had served in French military for twenty-five years and held the rank of captain in the regiment. He decided to remain at Natchitoches as a private citizen because he had spent a great deal of time cultivating good relations with the neighboring tribes. Recognizing the special nature of de Mézières' experience with the Indians, General O'Reilly appointed him as commandant at Natchitoches in 1769, a position he held for over a decade. De Mézières successfully established formal alliances with the Red River Caddo tribes and made Natchitoches a significant shield for Louisiana against Indian assaults from Texas and the southern Great Plains.

In addition to improving relations with the Indians, General O'Reilly ordered that a census of Louisiana be taken in 1769. The census takers conducted a thorough investigation of the province, rendering a detailed accounting of residents, livestock, and crops while noting the conditions of the villages, settlements, and military posts. This census listed almost 14,000 persons living in Louisiana, with approximately 3,500 of them resident in New Orleans.

General O'Reilly's most sweeping changes came in the area of the civil government. He abolished the old French Superior Council, substituting the

Cabildo in its place. The Cabildo had been the traditional form of Spanish municipal government for many centuries, both on the continent and in the New World. It operated much like a town council, with its delegates (*regidores*) serving as voting members of the body. These *regidores*, or aldermen, set municipal policy, advised the governor on civil matters, and sat as a court of law in the administration of justice in the colony. O'Reilly appointed citizens loyal to Spain to this body and, in so doing, broke the political power of those in the colony who supported the Superior Council. He also abolished all of the French colonial laws, substituting in their place a new code based on the Spanish Laws of the Indies, the legal standard by which Spain governed her empire. These new laws, known locally as the "Code O'Reilly," received widespread publication so that all residents in Louisiana could become familiar with the precepts of the Spanish legal system.

Luis de Unzaga

Technically speaking, Alejandro O'Reilly did not hold the title of governor of Louisiana. That distinction belonged to Luis de Unzaga y Amezaga, who arrived in the colony with him. The general, however, clearly commanded during the time he resided in Louisiana. With the sentences against the rebels carried out and his reforms in place, O'Reilly formally relinquished the government to Unzaga in March of 1770 and returned to Havana. Governor Unzaga thereafter labored to win the respect of the French inhabitants. He appointed large numbers of local residents to minor positions in the government, thereby giving them a part in its decisions. Unzaga also endeared himself to the colonists when he married the daughter of the wealthy and powerful New Orleans merchant Gilbert Antoine St. Maxent.

Unzaga adopted a conciliatory approach to commerce since he had a *laissez faire* view of the illegal trade in contraband goods. In particular, he officially ignored the regular underground commerce with the neighboring British colonies. He realized that the economic prosperity of Louisiana depended upon this trade, even though Spanish law made it illegal. He therefore walked a fine line between a *de facto* sanctioning of contraband trade while officially upholding Spain's commercial laws. For example, in 1772 he publicly made highly visible, yet ineffective, efforts to expel several British traders who had been openly defying the trade laws. The Peace of Paris of 1763 gave British vessels the permission to navigate the river and, in the process, dock near its banks. Taking advantage of this treaty provision, British merchants anchored ships along the river near New Orleans and outfitted them as permanent shops filled with

contraband merchandise. Unzaga tolerated these “floating warehouses” and, because of this, the local economy prospered. British merchants from West Florida dominated trade in the colony by the end of Ulloa’s administration.

Bernardo de Gálvez in Louisiana

Bernardo de Gálvez, a member of a powerful family in Spanish governmental circles, arrived in New Orleans as colonel of the regiment in 1776 during the last full year of Unzaga’s administration. The young officer had already distinguished himself for bravery in military campaigns against hostile Indian tribes on the northern frontiers of Mexico during the 1760s. The young Gálvez became governor in January of 1777, replacing Unzaga, who departed the colony at the end of his term.

Gálvez brought energy and determination to the governor’s office as he embarked upon a wide range of activities. Strengthening the military defense of the colony became an important concern for him. He persuaded the captain general of Cuba (the regional military commander whose jurisdiction included Louisiana) to increase the size of the military garrison. In addition, Gálvez made profitable use of several talented subordinates whose advice consistently proved to be sound. Martin Navarro, as the chief financial officer, and Francisco de Bouligny, as lieutenant governor, worked with the governor in this regard. Bouligny would become one of the longest-serving Spanish officials in the province. He founded the town of New Iberia, commanded the military force that put down a slave revolt, and eventually served as commandant at Natchez. In 1799, at the close of his career, Bouligny served as acting governor of Louisiana.

In addition to commanding talented subordinates such as Francisco Bouligny, Bernardo de Gálvez turned his attention to the problems of contraband commerce in the colony. He closed the “floating” warehouses on the Mississippi in an effort to end this activity. The governor seized these vessels and their cargoes in a series of surprise raids. Thereafter, Gálvez firmly stood his ground when the governor of West Florida, Peter Chester, sent an armed frigate to New Orleans to seek redress for the confiscations. The governor refused to give the British satisfaction and, after a stern diplomatic confrontation that ended in stalemate, the British vessels returned to Pensacola empty-handed.

Governor Gálvez also presided over a period of rising commercial prosperity for Louisiana. He fostered the growth of the tobacco industry by providing subsidies for the crop. He also increased the production of Louisiana lumber by promoting a contract by which local merchants supplied barrel staves for the tobacco and sugar industries of Cuba, as well as those used by the military



Figure 4.2 Bernardo de Gálvez, governor of Louisiana from 1777 to 1783. *Collection of the Louisiana State Museum.*

garrisons of that island. Gálvez also convinced the Spanish government to increase the annual cash subsidy paid to support the costs of civil and military administration. He promulgated the revised Spanish commercial laws of 1778, which came as part of empire-wide revision of Spain's mercantile trade practices. Louisiana merchants could thereafter trade with a much larger group of ports approved by the Spanish government.

Louisiana and the American Revolution

With the outbreak of the American Revolution, Louisiana quickly came to play an important role as a rebel supply depot even though Spain did not enter the conflict until 1779. Spain welcomed the revolt as an event that would weaken her traditional ally, Great Britain. The Spanish government embarked upon a policy of secretly supporting the British colonists, beginning soon after

Lexington and Concord. This assistance would encourage the Americans while avoiding open conflict with the British, something the Spanish wished to do until they had properly prepared their military. For almost four years Spain secretly furnished the American rebels with supplies, munitions, medicines, and other needed goods. New Orleans, due to its key location at the mouth of the Mississippi, became the primary location for this activity.

Secret assistance for the American rebels began during the governorship of Luis de Unzaga when, in 1776, Captain George Gibson of Virginia floated down the Mississippi to New Orleans with a company of men. He requested that the Louisiana governor send supplies upriver to Fort Pitt, from which place the Americans could distribute them to General Washington's army. Gibson found an ally in the New Orleans merchant Oliver Pollock, who persuaded Unzaga to approve this assistance. Gibson's mission to New Orleans began a steady stream of supplies that routinely went to the rebels by way of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers.

This supply route had become institutionalized by the time Bernardo de Gálvez became governor. Oliver Pollock had also become the official commercial agent of the American Continental Congress. From his base at New Orleans, Pollock furnished the Americans with gunpowder, weapons, blankets, uniforms, and medicines. Pollock also served as chief supply agent for rebel military operations in the trans-Appalachian areas of the western frontier. This assistance began during 1777, when Pollock worked closely with the expedition led by Captain James Willing. In January of that year, Willing led a group of rebel militiamen down the Ohio and Mississippi on an attack against British West Florida. Willing and his men raided plantations in the Natchez district, where they captured slaves as spoils of war. They also destroyed a good deal of British property. En route to New Orleans, they laid waste settlements along the way and captured a British vessel in the river. Willing's arrival at New Orleans placed Governor Gálvez in a difficult situation. The governor showed his true feelings of support for the American cause when he gave Willing and his men freedom of the city. Gálvez stood his ground against the West Florida governor's complaints, although his actions greatly weakened relations with the neighboring British colony. Willing and Pollock publicly sold much of the plunder at auction in New Orleans, although Gálvez ruled that some of it had to be returned to several Englishmen whom he deemed innocent victims of the raid. The following year, Pollock also furnished a large quantity of supplies from New Orleans to George Rogers Clark, whose American forces conquered the British settlements in the Illinois country. Pollock, however, lost his personal fortune during the revolution since the Congress never repaid him completely for the assistance which he provided to Willing and Clark.

The Campaigns of Bernardo de Gálvez

Spain finally entered the American Revolution during the summer of 1779 when she declared war against Great Britain. Unlike France (who had joined the war in 1778), Spain did not formally become an ally of the young United States, since the Spanish king worried about the general implications of a colonial revolt and its potential impact on his own possessions. Governor Gálvez reacted to the declaration of war by organizing an expedition to attack British West Florida settlements up the Mississippi River, especially at Baton Rouge. Well defended by almost 500 regular British soldiers, the fort there constituted a large earthwork fortification located very near the present-day campus of Louisiana State University. Gálvez's army, more than twice that size, reached Baton Rouge in mid-September of 1779. The Spanish commander launched an attack, which although a diversion, drew the attention of the defenders. While thus engaged, Gálvez opened a surprise artillery barrage on the fort from gun emplacements previously undetected by the British. The defenders surrendered. The formal capitulation signed between Gálvez and the commander at Baton Rouge on September 21 also included a surrender of the British post at Natchez.

The conquest of the lower Mississippi valley permitted Bernardo de Gálvez to turn his attention to the major British garrisons in West Florida. In March 1780, Gálvez led some 800 men in an attack against Mobile, which quickly fell to his troops. This victory also had the effect of influencing various Indian tribes in the region to switch their loyalty to the Spanish, since by this point the British had lost most of West Florida. Only Pensacola remained in English hands.

Now Gálvez prepared to invade that city. First, he went to Havana, where he gathered army and navy reinforcements furnished by the captain general of Cuba. Some 4,000 men strong, Gálvez's invasion force sailed from Havana, arriving at Santa Rosa Island off Pensacola in October 1780. A hurricane struck the fleet while en route and scattered it across the gulf. This forced Gálvez to return to Cuba, where he regrouped his expedition. It finally arrived, intact, off Pensacola in the late spring of 1781.

After securing Santa Rosa Island as his base camp, the Spanish general ordered vessels carrying his troops to sail across the bar from the open sea into Escambia Bay, from which point they could directly attack the fortress. His naval commander refused to do so, fearing that the ships would run aground crossing the shallow bar. The young general took personal command of the flagship and sailed it into the bay without damage. The other ships followed. This action later earned him special recognition for bravery from King Charles

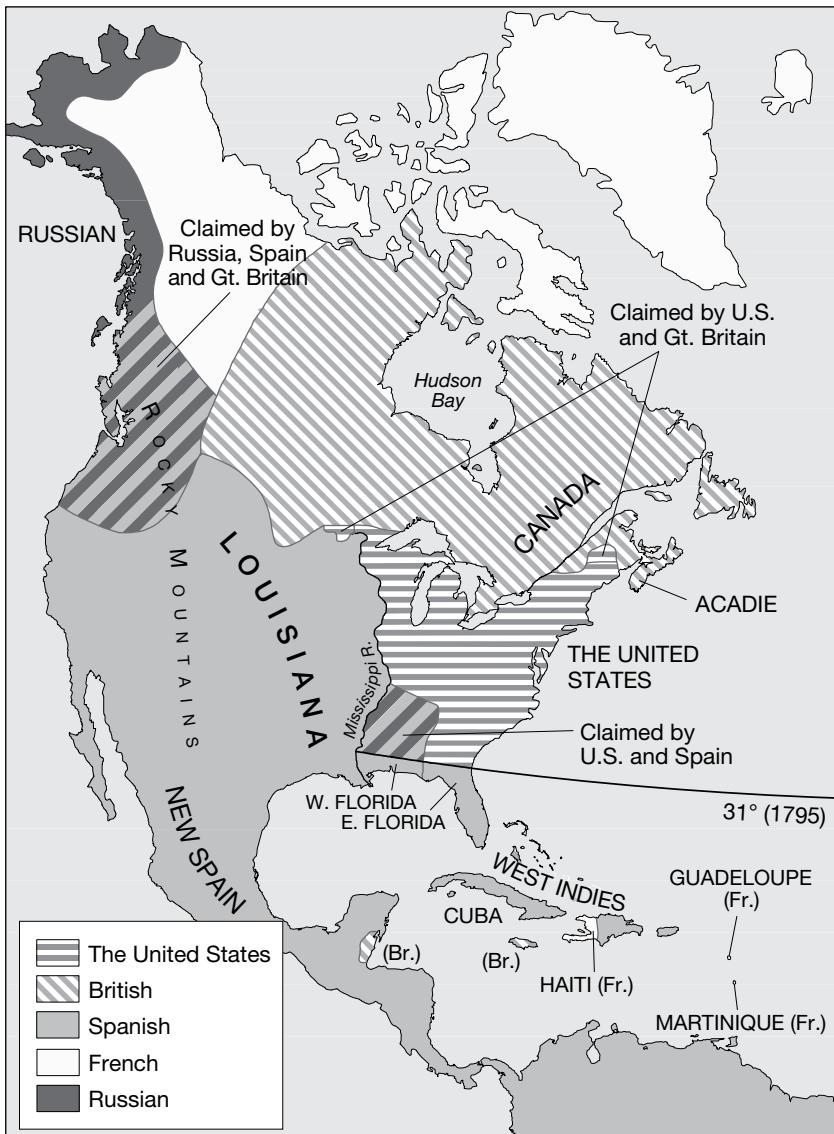


Figure 4.3 North America in 1783.

III, who authorized Gálvez to put the slogan “Yo Solo,” or “I Alone,” as a motto on his coat of arms. Gálvez secured a land position from which he could begin a bombardment of the fort at Pensacola. This siege began in early May, and the arrival of several thousand Spanish reinforcements from Mobile and Louisiana

strengthened the attack. These reinforcements included a detachment of American volunteers led by Oliver Pollock. A lucky shot by one of Gálvez's gunners caused the explosion of the main gunpowder warehouse of the fort, prompting the British commander to surrender. Pensacola became a Spanish possession on May 10, 1781.

Another Peace of Paris, this one of 1783, ended the American Revolution. As part of the settlement, Spain kept all of the territory conquered by Governor Gálvez. The American Revolution therefore resulted in the territorial expansion of Louisiana to include the former province of British West Florida. West Florida became part of Spanish Louisiana as a separate jurisdiction superintended at Mobile and Pensacola by lieutenant governors directed from New Orleans. In the 1780s, the Spanish court created a new administrative jurisdiction, called the Captaincy General of Louisiana and Florida, thus making it an independent governmental region separate from other Spanish provinces in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico.

Spanish West Florida

One of the greatest impacts of the American Revolution on Spanish colonial Louisiana was the transfer of the former British colony of West Florida back to Spain. With the second Peace of Paris in 1783, the areas north of New Orleans all the way to Natchez and east of the Mississippi around the environs of Baton Rouge came under the purview of the Spanish governor at New Orleans. It is for this reason that, ever since the 1783 transfer, this region has popularly been called the "Florida parishes." Many of the English-speaking residents of the former British colony remained. In 1785, Governor Miró announced a Spanish policy that permitted the British residents to become citizens of Louisiana and validated the land grants of those who did so. He decreed in 1787 that new arrivals from the United States could also get land grants and settle in the area if they took a loyalty oath to the king of Spain. The Spanish government approved immigration agents to organize the influx of the new settlers. Some of these ventures involved men whose names would become well known to American history, including Moses Austin and the Baron de Bastrop, who would have a town in Louisiana named for him. In July 1789, none other than Andrew Jackson – destined to be the hero of the Battle of New Orleans in 1815 – swore an oath of allegiance to the Spanish Crown in order to be able to conduct his merchant business in Natchez, where he was then residing. These policies began a decade-long migration to the areas between Baton Rouge and Natchez that brought a considerable number of new residents into colonial Louisiana, almost all of them English-speakers from the United States.

The areas of former British West Florida prospered during the remaining period of Spanish control in Louisiana. Towns in the district, including Baton Rouge, St. Francisville, and Natchez, became thriving places where cotton was traded, while the agricultural areas around them filled with southern-style plantations akin to those farther east, in what was by then the American South. Spanish administrators accommodated the new arrivals, most of whom seemed happy with being subjects of Spain. In 1798, a boundary agreement between Spain and the United States drew the latitudinal line between present-day Mississippi and Louisiana at the thirty-first parallel, thus putting Natchez under American control. For those planters who continued in Spanish West Florida, the profits that came to them through the production of cotton and other staple crops seemed more important than national sovereignty. This region, sometimes also called the Felicianas, remained under Spanish rule when Louisiana became part of the United States with the Purchase of 1803. Increasingly, however, the English-speaking residents of the area looked to the United States as the nation with which they most closely identified. Seven years after the Louisiana Purchase, a group of Anglo-American planters living in the area around Baton Rouge rose up against the Spanish in an insurrection known as the West Florida Revolt of 1810. They ousted the Spanish administrators and declared themselves an independent republic, but in reality these planters never took meaningful steps to found such a government. Instead, they joined the United States soon afterwards and the area became part of the state of Louisiana, a status it has held ever since.

Franco-Spanish Louisiana

Bernardo de Gálvez emerged from the wars of the American Revolution as Spain's greatest hero of the era. He technically remained governor of the colony while largely absent from Louisiana commanding Spanish troops. During his frequent absences, Pedro Piernas and Esteban Miró served respectively as acting governors. Gálvez's exploits and victories won him numerous honors (including a resolution of appreciation from the United States Congress.) These honors ensured that his career would advance rapidly. In 1785, King Charles III appointed Gálvez as the viceroy of New Spain, one of the most important positions in Spanish America. After a short time in that office, however, he died at Mexico City in 1786 of natural causes at the age of 40. In the meantime, Esteban Miró had been officially appointed governor of Louisiana (during 1785).

Miró, a career officer in the military, had unofficially governed Louisiana during the early 1780s while Gálvez was away from the colony commanding

military campaigns. An able and deliberate administrator, Miró lacked the winning personality and high spirits of his predecessor. Although his administration would be marked by peace, expansion, and the absence of crises, the years of his leadership became a time of transition for Louisiana.

Miró attempted to improve the civic image of New Orleans. He outlawed Sunday labor, laid down rules for operating taverns, restricted the sale of alcoholic beverages, and issued regulations regarding the travel and public behavior of slaves. He also turned his attention to improving relations with the Indians by consolidating the alliances Spain had made with them during the revolution. He held formal conferences with the important tribes, gave them presents, and negotiated favorable trade agreements with them. He did, however, have problems with some of them. Indians raided the Natchitoches District during 1787. Miró dealt harshly with the offenders while he gave special medals to the chiefs of the Caddo in order to ensure their continued friendship. The commerce of the colony, increasingly in the hands of Anglo-American traders and members of the French community, prospered during Miró's tenure. He fully implemented the Free Trade Laws promulgated under Governor Gálvez in 1778.

Miró's greatest impact on the subsequent history of Louisiana came in the area of immigration. A 1784 census showed that the colony contained approximately 25,000 persons, with 5,000 of them living in New Orleans. The governor felt that, after almost sixteen years of Spanish rule, the population should have grown more. He therefore embarked upon an aggressive program to encourage immigration. In 1786, Miró promulgated a liberal land-grant policy that he hoped would attract Anglo-American settlers into Spanish Louisiana. In exchange for land, these settlers would have to agree to take loyalty oaths to Spain, formally adopt the Roman Catholic religion, and follow all of the laws of Louisiana. Miró hoped that this policy of "defensive colonization" would create a buffer zone of loyal Spanish subjects against future expansion of the United States. So many American settlers received land grants in the Florida parishes and the Opelousas District that they soon predominated in both areas. Even today, some families in the Florida parishes trace their property holdings to the original Spanish land grants.

Miró eventually became a popular governor among the colonists and they felt sadness when his term came to an end in 1791. They did not, however, remain downcast for long for the new governor, Baron Hector de Carondelet, proved to be equally as popular. The baron continued his predecessor's attempts to maintain good relations with the local inhabitants. Like Miró, Governor Carondelet continued to monitor the expansion of the United States into the Mississippi valley and continued the "defensive" settlement of colonists. The French Revolution threatened the stability of Franco-Spanish society in

Louisiana during Carondelet's tenure. The French king was overthrown and many persons in Louisiana took partisan views of the struggle. As a monarchy, Spain could not countenance the state of affairs going on in revolutionary France. Supporters of the French revolutionaries among the inhabitants of Louisiana therefore posed a problem for Carondelet. The situation reached near-crisis proportions in the mid-1790s when partisans founded revolutionary clubs at Natchitoches and several other locations in the colony. Carondelet decided to take the hard line. He forbade the singing of French revolutionary songs and threatened to discipline those who openly showed sympathy to the French Republic. At the same time, Carondelet also had to deal carefully with the many French monarchists and aristocrats who had sought refuge from revolutionary France in Spanish Louisiana.

Carondelet likewise had to deal with slave troubles at Pointe Coupee, which may have been linked to the Haitian slave revolt or French revolutionary fervor in Louisiana. In April 1795, authorities learned that some slaves actively plotted rebellion. These rebels apparently planned to murder their masters and declare themselves free. The conspiracy evidently centered on the plantation owned by the poet-planter, Julian Poydras. Several white persons apparently supported the recalcitrant slaves.

The governor acted swiftly and decisively in dealing with this matter. Spanish officials arrested more than sixty of the supposed conspirators. A trial, hastily convened in May, convicted fifty-seven slaves and three whites of planning a slave insurrection. Twenty-three of them speedily went to the scaffold, after which their severed heads hung from poles at various points along the banks of the Mississippi. The remainder of the convicted persons received floggings and prison sentences at hard labor. This 1795 Pointe Coupee slave conspiracy has generated debate and discussion among historians, some of whom question whether the "plot" actually represented white paranoia rather than a highly developed slave rebellion. Others believe it to have been a reality that clearly indicated the viability, strength, and unity of Louisiana's African American community. Whatever the case, few scholars would deny that Governor Carondelet acted aggressively and swiftly in dealing with the episode.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Final Years of Colonial Louisiana

- **1764–69** First major Acadian immigration.
- **late 1770s–late 1780s** Immigration of Canary Islanders.
- **1785** Second major Acadian immigration.
- **1788** Much of New Orleans destroyed by fire.
- **1790s–1800s** Immigration of refugees from St. Domingue (Haiti).
- **1793** Roman Catholic Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas established.
- **December 1794** Another major fire in New Orleans.
- **December 23, 1794** St. Louis Cathedral dedicated.
- **October 1795** Pinckney's Treaty (Treaty of San Lorenzo); Étienne de Boré produces marketable sugar crop.
- **late 1790s** Beginning of large-scale cotton production.
- **1799** Napoleon Bonaparte takes power in France.
- **October 1, 1800** Treaty of San Ildefonso.
- **April 30, 1803** Louisiana Purchase Treaty (U.S. Senate ratifies in October).
- **November 30, 1803** France takes formal possession of Louisiana from Spain.
- **December 20, 1803** United States takes formal possession of Louisiana from France.

Population and Immigration

The Spanish had greater success in encouraging immigration to Louisiana than their French predecessors. The population of Louisiana increased more than fivefold during the era of Spanish ownership, but Spaniards constituted only a small minority of these new inhabitants. Instead, Acadians, Canary Islanders, Africans, Anglo-Americans, Englishmen, and Haitians composed most of these immigrant groups, with an increase in the slave population accounting for almost half the total growth. Louisiana had approximately 50,000 inhabitants by the start of the nineteenth century. New Orleans, as the major city, served as home to about 10,000 of them.

Several factors explain the growth in population after 1763. The Spanish government made extensive efforts to encourage settlement of the province. It sponsored immigration programs and promulgated liberal land policies designed to make the colony more attractive. In addition, Spain's conquest of neighboring West Florida during the American Revolution incorporated that province into Louisiana, with its British settlers thereafter included in the population figures. The growth of agriculture also increased the demand for slaves throughout the entire Mississippi valley and New Orleans became the entrepôt for this trade in human cargoes.

The Spanish period witnessed the arrival of one of the colony's most significant immigrant groups: the Acadians. These distinctive people, descended from sturdy French peasant stock, originated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in a colony known as Acadia in the present-day Canadian province of Nova Scotia. By the time Acadia fell to British control in 1713, the Acadians had become a close-knit, clannish, and culturally distinct group of French-speaking folk who had fashioned their own identity. But once the Acadians became British subjects, and for decades thereafter, they experienced continuing problems with their British overlords. In an effort to end these difficulties, Great Britain began a forced exportation program after the Acadians refused to take oaths of allegiance. The authorities relocated thousands of Acadians against their will in various colonies, including those of the Atlantic coast and the Caribbean. This mass movement, known in Acadian history as the *dérangement*, separated entire families. The migrating Acadians did not arrive in Louisiana as their initial destination, but some of them eventually found their way to the lower Mississippi from other New World colonies to which they had been exiled by the British. Thousands of Acadians arrived in Louisiana during the 1770s and 1780s. The Spanish government provided them with material assistance in establishing their farms. Most of the Acadians settled to the west of the Mississippi River in the bayou areas

along the southwestern prairie. There they soon developed a unique rural lifestyle based on hunting and farming. The French inhabitants already in the colony shunned them, most likely because the Acadians appeared to them as unsophisticated and simple folk. These Acadians became the forebears of today's Louisiana Cajuns.

The same immigration policy that resulted in the influx of the Acadians into Louisiana brought an additional group new to Louisiana: the Canary Islanders, or Isleños as they are sometimes known. The Canary Islands, a Spanish possession since the early 1400s, are located off the southwestern coast of Spain. Most inhabitants of the Canary Islands lived as poor tenants trapped in generational cycles of poverty and despair. In 1777, the Spanish government ordered some 700 Canary Islanders to Louisiana in an effort to increase the population of the colony. Many of the men in this group served in the Louisiana military garrison. Thus began an emigration from the Canary Islands that would continue for more than a decade and bring hundreds of Isleño families to the lower Mississippi.

The first Canary Islanders settled north of Lake Pontchartrain on the very borders of British West Florida in what is today West and East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana and Wilkinson County, Mississippi. There they established several small settlements on the Amite and Comite rivers, most important among them the small hamlet of Galveztown, named for the Louisiana governor. Canary Islanders immediately began participating in the American Revolution when Spain entered the war against Great Britain in 1779.

Canary Islanders continued to arrive in Spanish Louisiana in the years after the revolution. In all, several thousand of them came to the Spanish colony. The largest number of them settled south of New Orleans in the St. Bernard district, along the Mississippi between the Crescent City and the point at which the river empties into the Gulf. This was a low-lying, swampy, and not particularly desirable area in terms of sustained agriculture. The Spanish government constructed houses for the Isleños and gave them liberal grants of land as well as subsidies of food and supplies along with some money upon their arrival. The Isleños patriotically organized themselves into a Spanish militia unit and participated in the defense of the colony. Many of these Canary Islanders became trappers, hunters, and fishermen along the lower reaches of the river, also fishing and hunting the bays all along the entire coastal area. They constituted a close-knit community. The Canary Islanders also brought the tradition of cattle raising to south Louisiana from their homeland. Thereafter the area became known as the primary cattle-trading hub in Spanish Louisiana.

In the 1780s and 1790s, the Canary Islanders of South Louisiana adopted growing sugar cane as a major source of income. The areas south of New

Orleans along the river were particularly suited to the cultivation of this cash crop. In time, wealthy planters from New Orleans became interested in the district, something that had a negative effect on the local Canary Islanders. Many of them ended up selling their land to Creole and Anglo investors who helped to establish large, profitable sugar plantations. By the end of the antebellum era, most of the land owned by the original Isleños lay in the hands of large planters who ran grand sugar plantations. At this point many Isleños, dispossessed of their land, became plantation workers, sugar refiners, fishermen, and hunters.

Haitians also immigrated to Louisiana during the Spanish era. The slave revolt in Haiti and independence movement there led by the black general Toussaint L’Ouverture prompted the migration of some 10,000 persons from that island to Louisiana during the 1790s and early 1800s. The 1791 Haitian rebellion, which had led to the establishment of a free black republic on St. Domingue, caused white planters there to seek refuge elsewhere. Black slaves brought by their emigrant masters constituted the bulk of those persons who came to Louisiana as a result of the revolution. All of the newcomers, black and white, carried their Caribbean brand of French culture with them. In fact, many of the strong French cultural influences so visible to Anglo-American residents during the early statehood period existed due to the recent immigrants from St. Domingue, people still in the process of becoming acculturated to Louisiana, especially at New Orleans.

The Louisiana capital also became distinctive in its population by the late eighteenth century due to the relatively large number of free women of color who resided there. A growing free black population had been present in Louisiana since the French period. By the start of the Spanish period, free black women made up about one-half of this group, most of them living at New Orleans. These free women of color actively participated in Louisiana’s economy, in some cases owning slaves and significant real estate in their own name. Historians attribute this free black population to extramarital unions between white men and black women in the colony. From 1769 to 1803, approximately 42 percent of the slave women emancipated in Louisiana had gained their freedom for reasons relating to concubinage.

A more stable system of concubinage eventually arose at New Orleans by the end of the eighteenth century, popularly known as “plaçage.” Under this system, a young free woman of color would be “placed” by her parents under the legal protection of a white male, usually a person of economic and social standing. The man accepting the plaçage would provide a home for the young free woman of color, often establishing an unofficial family with her in addition to

a legal one that might exist elsewhere in the city. Placage created a unique social event in New Orleans, the quadroon ball. This ball became an event at which eligible white males seeking placage met free young women of color.

Colonial Economic Life and Labor

Agriculture constituted the foundation of Spanish Louisiana's economy, with much of it subsistence farming. The immigrant groups, especially the Germans and Acadians, did much to increase agricultural production. By the 1770s, farmers along the German coast and the south central plain grew melons, beans, potatoes, tomatoes, squash, rice, and corn in quantity. Many of the colony's farmers also kept livestock. They supplied the New Orleans and Baton Rouge markets with vegetables as well as dairy products. By the time of the American Revolution, the district around Opelousas had become a center for cattle raising. The livestock industry there became so important that a lively trail-driving operation linked the cattle areas in central Louisiana to the *ranchos* farther west, in Spanish Texas.

An important aspect of colonial Louisiana's economy rested on a complex frontier trade economy that joined diverse groups of peoples throughout the mid-continent region. Since this trade economy involved barter among Indians, slaves, and various European inhabitants, historians have had some difficulty in documenting its widespread impact. Produce and products from farming, hunting, fishing, and livestock raising circulated throughout Louisiana and became the staples of this commerce. "In the course of a year," as historian Daniel H. Usner, Jr., has noted of this frontier exchange economy, "settlers and slaves planted food crops, tobacco, and perhaps some indigo, raised poultry and livestock, and pursued fish, deer, and smaller animals – for their own subsistence and for periodic exchange with each other."

As a partial result of Louisiana's frontier exchange economy, a unique and distinctive cuisine developed during the colonial era. Many food items traditional to the European diet such as wheat and grapes failed to grow in the humid climate. Bread made from wheat (often called "white bread" in the colony) and wines, expensive since they had to be imported, graced only the tables of the upper classes. For most residents, a new cuisine based on crops such as rice, green herbs, and Indian corn (all of which grew in profusion) eventually developed in the colony. Red pepper replaced black pepper at the table, while almost all local dishes used relatively large measures of salt because of the ready availability of that condiment. Fish, shellfish, wild game, chicken, and pork also

played a central role in this “Louisiana or Creole” fare, since these items could be found in abundance and could be easily preserved in brine.

Cash crop agriculture also played an important economic role in the colony. Tobacco had been planted in Louisiana soon after the first French settlements. The largest plantings of the crop occurred along the highland bluffs of the Mississippi or in the black-soiled belts of the province. Louisiana tobacco, however, could never compete in international markets with finer, smoother varieties from the West Indies and Atlantic coast. During the Spanish period, the government attempted to increase tobacco production by subsidizing it and then protecting the market. Thereafter, tobacco turned a profit, largely because of this subsidy.

Sugar and cotton came to Louisiana as cash crops during the colonial period, although neither of them became significant until after Louisiana became part of the United States. Local tradition dates the first sugar plantings to around 1724–26, while Bienville recorded some sugar production in 1733. The Jesuits of the Roman Catholic Church routinely grew sugar cane in their gardens during the 1750s. In 1758, a French planter named Dubreuil began large-scale experiments in sugar planting and milling. He erected the first crude sugar mill in the colony. By the 1760s, several other planters embraced the crop, and in 1765 Louisiana exported some 3,000 pounds of sugar. Production disappeared almost completely during and immediately after the American Revolution because of the difficulty and expense of grinding the cane. Several Louisiana planters renewed their interest in the crop during the 1790s, motivated largely by the destruction of the St. Domingue sugar industry that resulted from that colony’s slave rebellion. In particular, planters began making cane syrup and taffia, a strong liquor sometimes called canebuck. The full development of sugar as a cash crop could not occur because no one knew of a viable process for fully drying and granulating it. Hence, milled sugar remained damp and subject to spoilage. Then, in 1795, a Louisianan named Étienne de Boré perfected a successful dry-curing process during experiments conducted at his plantation located on the present-day site of New Orleans’ Audubon Park. Boré thus earned accolades as the father of the modern sugar industry. After Boré’s successes, the cultivation of sugar cane rapidly expanded and, by 1802, seventy-five plantations along the Mississippi River grew sugar cane.

Cotton also had its beginnings in the colonial era. The Frenchman Bernard La Harpe noted in 1720 that the lands bordering the Red River appeared well suited for cotton cultivation. By the 1730s, many of the colonists grew small amounts of the crop for use in making homespun, but (as elsewhere) the problems of cleaning and removing the seeds from the cotton bolls inhibited full-scale production. As early as 1733, a priest living in Louisiana, Father Beaubois, experimented with a design for a cotton gin; although he did build a crude

apparatus, he could never perfect it. The search for a workable cotton gin continued until Daniel Clark, a Louisiana merchant and planter, read a second-hand newspaper report of Eli Whitney's gin in 1795. Having never seen one personally, Clark engaged a mechanic to build a working model based on the description. It proved to be a great success, one that saw Louisiana enter the cotton era during the closing years of the Spanish period. The final years of colonial Louisiana therefore witnessed the beginnings of an explosion in cotton planting. The crop quickly covered thousands of acres and became popular with many of the Anglo-American immigrants coming to Louisiana. The nearly simultaneous advent of large-scale sugar and cotton production during the 1790s set off the "plantation revolution" that would dominate Louisiana life for the next several decades.

Religion

The Roman Catholic Church existed as the state religion in Spain. For that reason, all colonists belonged to that denomination during the period of Spanish domination, at least in theory. The migration of the Germans and Anglo-Americans into the colony, however, brought many Protestants. The increasing number of Protestants seems to have been tolerated. Although a law prohibited their worship services in the larger towns, they openly practiced their faith in the outlying areas.

General O'Reilly did revamp the structure of the Roman Catholic Church as part of his reform effort. He removed Louisiana from the see of Quebec and placed it under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Santiago de Cuba. He also divided the colony into twenty-three parishes, which he hoped would solve the problems experienced earlier by the Jesuits and the Capuchins. Although Catholic parishes had existed in Louisiana since 1723, O'Reilly's restructuring of them resulted in the creation of geographical areas that eventually became regional units of political government as well. When the United States later instituted the county form of local government in Louisiana, it simply appropriated the already existing parishes because of their efficient organization. Louisiana remained under the Bishop of Santiago de Cuba until 1790, when it came under the purview of the Bishop of Havana. In 1793, Spain created a single diocese for Louisiana and Spanish Florida with its headquarters at New Orleans. The main parish church of the city received its designation as St. Louis Cathedral and, in 1795, Louisiana welcomed its first bishop, Luis Ignacio Peñalver y Cárdenas.

The introduction of Spanish priests into Louisiana after the 1760s created conflict with the French priests who had remained after the transfer. The

Spanish clerics viewed their French counterparts as indolent and irreverent. In particular, Father Cyril of Barcelona denounced Father Dagobert, a venerable French Capuchin, as being particularly incompetent in his priestly duties. Bickering and rivalry between the factions supporting the two priests became so acrimonious that Governor Miró had to intervene in order to force an uneasy truce. Problems continued in the 1780s when Father Antonio de Sedilla attempted to establish the Holy Inquisition in Louisiana. French Catholics, both clerics and laymen, bitterly complained that the Spanish Inquisition would be completely out of place in the colony. They produced such an outcry that Governor Miró stopped Sedilla's efforts, and little came of them.

In spite of its established dominance in Louisiana, the Catholic Church probably never had a strong impact on the everyday life of most colonists. Regular attendance at Mass remained small in relation to the size of the total population. Few priests ventured outside the towns, while many rural parishes existed for long periods of time without a rector. By the late 1790s, New Orleans only had two churches that offered a regular schedule of Masses: St. Louis Cathedral and the Ursuline Chapel. Church officials pleaded regularly with the Spanish government for more funds and priests, but the authorities consistently ignored such requests. Nonetheless, the large majority of Louisiana's residents would have considered themselves, in some basic way, as devout, while the French and Spanish tradition created in southern Louisiana a bastion of Roman Catholicism in what would eventually become the overwhelmingly Protestant American South.

Art and Architecture

Spanish Louisiana functioned as a frontier society even though the casual visitor might have been misled by the urbanity of eighteenth-century New Orleans into thinking the province more cosmopolitan than other colonies in the region. The Spanish government attempted to establish a system of public schools in New Orleans in 1771, but little came of the effort. An ill-fated school operated intermittently under headmaster Don Manuel Andres Armesto, who had difficulty in securing both students and funds. At the very end of the colonial period, Father Ubaldo Delgado assumed direction of the Spanish school and made it work. Most residents with the means to do so, however, continued to prefer to send their children to private, French-speaking academies. In 1788, New Orleans had eight such schools, with some 400 students in total attendance. The 1790s saw the opening of several others to meet needs of the immigrants from St. Domingue.

Literature hardly flourished in French Louisiana, which had no printing press until the arrival of the Spanish. Thereafter, Dionisio Braud established a