

Bennett H. Wall and John C. Rodrigue, Editors
By Light Townsend Cummins • Judith Kelleher Schafer
Edward F. Haas • Michael L. Kurtz



LOUISIANA A HISTORY

SIXTH EDITION



WILEY Blackwell

Louisiana

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A History

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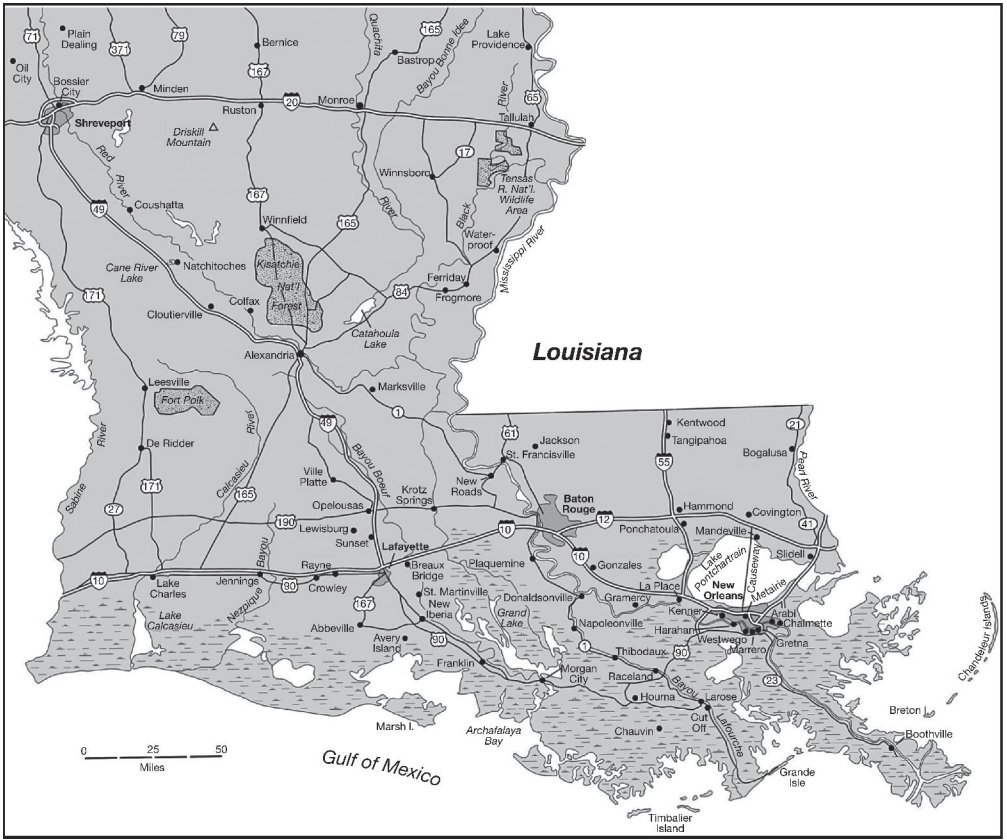
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Map 1 Louisiana.



Map 2 The United States, with Louisiana highlighted.

Introduction

Although the history of each state is unique, Louisiana boasts one of the most fascinating of them all. From the thousands of years preceding European contact to the tragic events of Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill, Louisiana has a history that, whatever else one might say about it, has never been boring. The histories of few other states command attention as does Louisiana's; and among the states that make up the American South, perhaps only Virginia, South Carolina, and Texas have histories that rival Louisiana's in significance to U.S. history.

The history of Louisiana, colorful as it is, risks being reduced to cliché or caricature. Given the food, music, and other elements of its rich cultural heritage; the American Indians, Cajuns, Creoles, various African peoples, and other contributors to its complex racial and ethnic composition; politicians such as Huey and Earl Long and Edwin Edwards at the helm of a political system unparalleled for shenanigans and hijinks; and the *laissez les bons temps rouler* (let the good times roll) attitude of many of its residents, Louisiana elicits a grin as much as serious contemplation. The fact that Louisiana consistently ranks at or near the bottom of nearly every statistical measure of "quality of life" only adds to a tendency not to take the state seriously. Where else could motorists display bumper stickers urging voters – as was done during the 1991 gubernatorial campaign, and only half in jest – to "Vote for the Crook"?

And yet, as raucous as the state's history may seem, readers of this book will discover that Louisiana also attracts serious scholarly attention. It would not be an exaggeration to say that some of the most cutting-edge research produced in

all of American history involves Louisiana. Ground-breaking works on Indian–white relations during the colonial era; the origins, development, and expansion of racial slavery in the South; antebellum southern politics; the Civil War and the abolition of slavery; the accomplishments and failures of Reconstruction; the rise of the “Jim Crow” South and the origins of racial segregation and disfranchisement; the gains and shortcomings of the modern civil rights movement; and even the World War II era and the legacy of the Holocaust have employed Louisiana as their setting. The history of Louisiana can be studied in its own right, in order to help explain how the modern state came into being, but it can also be studied as a window onto the larger problems of U.S. and even world history.

Indeed, understanding Louisiana history requires a global perspective. College-level instructors who teach the survey course on the first half of U.S. history often grapple with the concept of a single nation emerging from several distinct parts but whose rise was not foreordained. The traditional story of the founding of the United States focuses on English immigrants landing on the Atlantic seaboard in the seventeenth century and spreading their culture westward, destroying native peoples in their wake. But the study of Louisiana better illustrates the complexities and contingencies of nation-building and makes clear that the United States was not born solely on the East Coast. In this respect, Louisiana and the lower Mississippi valley constituted just one of several points of European settlement that not only helped to form the United States but were also part of the larger European conquest of the western hemisphere. This expansion into the New World, moreover, was but part of an even larger process of European expansion into the rest of the inhabited world between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries. Louisiana was therefore founded within the initial phase of what we today call “globalization” – shedding new light on a familiar story.

That said, local or state history customarily places the entity under study at the center of the universe. Louisianians are often criticized for their parochialism, but in truth theirs is no worse than that of anyone else. If anything, the advantages of examining Louisiana’s history outweigh the drawbacks. Louisianians are known to take great pride in their state, and this pride often translates into an interest in the state’s past, even among those who otherwise care little for history. Many students at colleges and universities in Louisiana take a Louisiana history class because of a genuine desire to know more about their home state, but they then find that the study of Louisiana history also shows how history works and how societies develop over time. Similarly, studying Louisiana history gives students a sense of history as an organic, dynamic discipline. Many people mistakenly believe the study of history involves nothing more than memorizing an endless parade of names, dates, places, and treaties. Not surprisingly, they think history is boring. The essence of history, however, is

not merely knowing *when* certain events occurred but understanding *how* and *why* they occurred, while also placing them within an interpretive framework. In short, by studying Louisiana history we come to understand the larger historical process.

The study of Louisiana history can also demonstrate to students that past events did not just happen in the abstract. To the contrary, it can help them gain an appreciation for how events both within and outside Louisiana unfolded and for how the consequences of those events affect their own lives. Having taught Louisiana history for a number of years, I can attest to the many times students remarked to me that they hailed from a town or community I had mentioned, or that some family forebear had participated in the events we discussed. Among my favorites were the young woman whose grandfather had agreed to allow the Louisiana civil rights attorney, A. P. Tureaud, to use his name as lead plaintiff in a school desegregation case and the young man whose great-grandfather was one of the “Round Robins” who helped Huey Long escape conviction during his 1929 impeachment trial. His family still possesses the gold pocket-watch Long gave to his great-grandfather in return. Yet even students who did not have such a direct connection often simply noted that Louisiana history had given them a better understanding of why things are the way they are in the state. Whereas courses on world history, western civilization, and even U.S. history can seem hopelessly remote, studying Louisiana history can help students appreciate history’s immediacy.

As readers will also discover, the history of Louisiana is replete with violence, oppression, exploitation, and many other depressing topics. In this regard, Louisiana’s record is no better or worse than that of any other people or place. More important, the goal of studying Louisiana history is not to make students feel either good or bad about Louisiana; it is not meant for students to celebrate their heritage or to make them ashamed of it. Instead, the goal is to achieve a rational, dispassionate understanding of the past and of how that past continues to shape the present. There will be no attempt in the pages that follow to whitewash Louisiana’s historical record; neither will there be moral condemnation of people who lived in other times based on today’s standards. Those who study history have an obligation to themselves and to their subjects to try to understand the past on its own terms. It is impossible to examine such topics as slavery, the African slave trade, racial oppression, or the slow, systematic destruction of Louisiana’s American Indian populations without feeling a sense of moral outrage. But such outrage, though unavoidable, is not the goal of history – understanding is. If we can gain some insight, however limited, into the world-views of both oppressors and oppressed, then we have learned something about the human condition.

Louisiana history therefore has much to offer. Fortunately, readers of the new, sixth, edition of this book can avail themselves of a single volume that encompasses the scope and complexity of Louisiana's endlessly fascinating history. The exemplary team of scholars who collaborated on previous editions of *Louisiana: A History* has been brought together again. Each author is renowned in Louisiana history and in the American historical profession in general, and together they make a formidable group. Light Townsend Cummins, author of Part I, is a widely published scholar who applies his keen insight and incisive wit to Louisiana's colonial period, from the state's prehistory through the Louisiana Purchase. Judith Kelleher Schafer, author of Part II and a prize-winning scholar of slavery in Louisiana and of Louisiana's legal history, brings her considerable erudition to the greater part of the nineteenth century, providing illuminating discussions on such ever-contentious topics as slavery, the Civil War, and the era of Reconstruction. Edward F. Haas, author of Part III and an accomplished historian of Louisiana and New Orleans politics, begins with what is sometimes referred to as Louisiana's "dark ages" (the years after Reconstruction), moves forward into the twentieth century, and concludes with a consideration of Huey Long and with what Haas appropriately calls "the struggle to catch up." Finally, Michael L. Kurtz, author of Part IV and also a highly respected and widely published scholar of recent U.S. history, examines Louisiana history since Huey Long, bringing the story right up to the present. A number of other general histories of Louisiana are available, but none of them can boast of a group of authors so distinguished or so uniquely qualified to bring Louisiana's past to life.

There is also much that is new about the sixth edition of *Louisiana: A History*. Every chapter has been revised and updated, some fairly extensively, in order to incorporate the fresh and exciting research on Louisiana history that continues to appear. In his Part IV, Michael Kurtz has added an entirely new chapter – Chapter 19: "Louisiana in the New Millennium" – that covers the period since 2000. This chapter places more recent events in historical perspective and provides masterful accounts of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the BP oil spill, and other developments that are still very much in the news. The suggested readings at the end of each of the book's four parts have also been significantly updated. One entirely new feature in this edition is the inclusion of timelines at the beginning of each chapter, noting the major events, episodes, and developments that occurred during the period in question. Instructors and students alike will no doubt find this a helpful and welcome addition.

One other important change should be noted. Since publication of the previous edition of this book, its former publisher, Harlan Davidson, Inc., was acquired by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., a prestigious and highly respected house

with offices in the United States, the United Kingdom, and throughout the world. Harlan Davidson had been founded nearly forty years ago by the late Harlan Davidson, Sr., and it enjoyed a solid reputation as a publisher of high-quality history titles for the college-level market. Although the company always had been a family-run business, the acquisition by Wiley has provided an opportunity for the Harlan Davidson titles to reach a wider audience. Fortunately, the former publisher at Harlan Davidson, Andrew J. Davidson, is now a senior editor at Wiley, and so it is a pleasure to be able to maintain a professional association and friendship with Andrew. The general editor and the authors of *Louisiana: A History* are pleased to be part of the Wiley family, and we see the publication of this new, sixth, edition of this book as the start of a long and fruitful relationship.

While there is much that is new about this book, it nonetheless rests on a solid foundation. Quite simply: it is the best one-volume history of Louisiana available. But perhaps the strongest endorsement comes from readers themselves. Many times students have mentioned to me how much they enjoyed reading *Louisiana: A History*. How often can *that* be said about a college-level textbook? As noted, Louisiana history is a serious undertaking. It is not all color and pizzazz. And yet, color and pizzazz are vital components of the Louisiana story. More than any other state history, the history of Louisiana requires not just a scholarly approach but an intuitive “feel.” Thanks to Professors Cummins, Schafer, Haas, and Kurtz, this book achieves that goal.

The combination of intuition and scholarly rigor that this book provides is essential to understanding Louisiana’s fundamental problem. How can a state boasting such immense potential suffer from such persistent and seemingly intractable problems? Why does Louisiana never seem to be able to “get its act together”? Why are the schools, roads, and other essential elements of public life substandard? Why is the political system so corrupt? Why is such a large proportion of the population unhealthy, impoverished, and poorly educated? Why do Louisianians put up with it? The overwhelming majority of the state’s people, of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, are honest, hard-working, and conscientious citizens who want a better life for themselves and their children. Louisiana may not realistically be able to aspire to the top of national quality-of-life indicators, but there is no reason it should always rank at or near the bottom.

No doubt, the legacy of slavery, racial oppression, and the plantation economy that dominated Louisiana for so much of its early history created difficult obstacles. But other southern states have also faced such obstacles and have made great progress in surmounting them. Louisiana boasts many assets, including great scenic beauty and bounteous natural resources, and it is a wonderful place to live. Some observers have argued that the very things that make

life in Louisiana so attractive – the food, music, fauna and flora, Mardi Gras, warmth of its people, successful collegiate sports teams, mild winters, and other diversions – are exactly what make its residents willing to tolerate the downside of Louisiana life. Whatever one feels about these issues – and reasonable people can always disagree – the first step toward addressing the challenges Louisiana faces is to understand the state's history. Every historical time period is unique, and yet many of the issues Louisianians face today have confronted previous generations.

Notwithstanding everything that is new in this edition, *Louisiana: A History* very much bears the mark of the man whose name still appears as general editor, Bennett H. Wall. Ben's passing ten years ago was a tremendous loss to the fields of Louisiana history and southern history and to the American historical profession as a whole. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Louisiana history and southern history – and their respective professional organizations, the Louisiana Historical Association and the Southern Historical Association – would not be what they are today without Ben's many years of dedication and commitment. It is only fitting that his name continues to appear as this book's general editor, since he was instrumental in bringing it to fruition in the first place and to keeping it alive and updated. I was honored when Andrew Davidson invited me for the fifth edition to begin assuming the duties of general editor. I have taken a more active role in shaping this new, sixth, edition, and I thank Light, Judy, Ed, and Michael for graciously tolerating my meddling. But nobody can replace Ben Wall.

John C. Rodrigue

Part One

Light Townsend Cummins



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 herdsman, 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 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.