

## Chapter 2

### A Multitude of Cultures: The People of Louisiana

#### New Cultures from Old: Cultural Exchange in Colonial and Antebellum Louisiana

The prospect of prosperity brought people to Louisiana, voluntarily or by force. Among the many ethnic groups in colonial and antebellum Louisiana were people of Native American, African, French, Canadian, Spanish, Latin American, Anglo, German, Irish, and Italian descent, who provided the initial ingredients for Louisiana's famous "gumbo" of cultures. During the early years of European settlement contact between Indians, Europeans, and Africans in Louisiana resulted in a three-way exchange. Each racial and ethnic group was too divided politically and socially, or too few in number, to overwhelm the other. In the nineteenth century large numbers of European immigrants, refugees from Saint-Domingue, and white and black migrants from the Atlantic seaboard contributed to this conglomeration. They added diversity to a developing polarization between Latin and Anglo cultures in the state.

Louisiana's medley of cultures was played out in many forms, among them language, religious practice, resistance, recreation, material culture, and diet. For example, the dishes most identified with Louisiana—such as gumbo—represent cross-cultural influences that originated in the era of colonial encounter and exchange. A thick brown sauce, called a roux, is the base from which all forms of gumbo are made. Faced with a shortage of flour, colonists made roux by cooking either sliced okra or powdered sassafras (*filé*) in a slowly heated oil. Then they added seafood, poultry, meat, or any combination of these. It is believed that the name of the finished product comes from the Angolan word for okra, *guingombo*, a vegetable introduced to the region by African slaves, or to the Choctaw word for sassafras powder, *kombo ashish*, which local Indians continued to market into the twentieth century. Gumbo, like many other Louisiana dishes, is often eaten with rice, which Africans brought to the lower Mississippi Valley in the early eighteenth century. In 1718 officials of the Company of the West instructed the captains of two ships bound for Louisiana to buy at least a few Africans "who knew how to cultivate rice," as well as some "hogsheads of rice suitable for planting."

This cultural exchange was especially apparent in the Crescent City, with its resident and transient population composed of many nationalities. Indeed, present-day New Orleans derives its distinctive multicultural, almost foreign character from the meeting of several cultures during its first 150 years. Even though until the late eighteenth century whites were more numerous than blacks in New Orleans, African and Indian slaves from nearby plantations frequently traveled to the city to market goods, drink and gamble at numerous taverns, and sing and dance in the common grounds beyond the town walls. In addition to working and playing in close proximity, blacks, Indians, and whites in New Orleans lived together, residing in adjacent homes or within the same household. This trend continued into the antebellum period. Blacks constituted a majority from 1746 until the 1830s, when the city's population was augmented and further diversified by an influx of German and Irish immigrants.

Often in the process of creating new cultures from elements of each individual one, however, many aspects of the original societies, especially African and Indian, were destroyed. In addition, exchange did not always take place on an even plane, and ruling whites eventually were able to demarcate an oppressed, exploited underclass of poor whites and nonwhites. Although race relations were fluid in the borderlands region of which Louisiana was a part during the colonial era, the frontier's leavening effect only went so far, especially when Spain moved to expand commercial plantation agriculture and the deerskin trade in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Louisiana's integration into the Atlantic mercantile system and its increasing prosperity in the nineteenth century sharpened race and class divisions, much as they had in the West Indian sugar islands decades earlier.

### Population Growth

During their various regimes, France, Spain, and the United States encouraged people to move to Louisiana, primarily to defend the region—which for most of its pre-Civil War history was on the frontier—and through their labor make it profitable. Throughout the colonial era an important policy goal of French and Spanish officials was the peopling of Louisiana, which complemented their other aim of expanding their North American empires. To build and defend a prosperous colony, governors, proprietors, merchants, and others actively promoted the movement of people to Louisiana—by hook or crook. They turned the jails of France inside out, snatched people off the streets of Paris, lured Germans and Spaniards with false promises of instant wealth, and purchased captured Africans by the shipload.

Although eighteenth- and nineteenth-century census figures are notoriously inaccurate and those for Louisiana varied as boundaries shifted, they show a burgeoning population, exclusive of Louisiana Indians, whose numbers steadily declined. A census of 1726 counted 3,784 people: 2,240 whites (including 245 indentured servants and 332

soldiers), 1,385 black slaves, and 159 Indian slaves. By 1746 Louisiana boasted a black majority, with about 4,500 slaves, 3,300 white settlers, and 600 white soldiers. Blacks continued to outnumber whites according to a census of the colony's inhabitants taken in 1766, which showed 5,556 Europeans and 5,940 slaves. Though greatly diminished, the number of Indians surpassed all, with almost 16,000 capable of carrying arms, a figure that did not include women, children, the elderly, and the ailing. By 1788 the number of settlers and slaves had more than doubled to include 19,445 whites, 1,701 free blacks, and 21,465 slaves. Figures for 1788, however, encompassed a much larger geographical area, because by then Spain had acquired West Florida from Britain in the 1783 Treaty of Paris and placed it under the jurisdiction of Louisiana.

The colony's capital city of New Orleans also grew over the span of the eighteenth century, although it did not get anywhere near the size of such Anglo North American cities as Boston or Philadelphia. Between 1721 (year of the city's first census) and 1805 New Orleans's population rose from 472 to 8,222, more than a seventeenfold increase. Most of this surge occurred toward the end of the century and was due more to immigration than to natural increase, a circumstance true of the nineteenth century as well. During the years of Spanish rule (1763 to 1803) the white population almost doubled and the slave population grew 250 percent. The number of free blacks increased sixteenfold, although this group was undercounted throughout the period. In the eighteenth century New Orleans was the largest city in what are today the southeast and southwest regions of the United States.

Under United States rule the city and state's population exploded, jumping from 18,000 to 170,000 and from 80,000 to 700,000 respectively between 1812—the year Louisiana became a state—and 1860. During the antebellum era, that period of the nineteenth century that preceded the Civil War, the Crescent City was the largest city in the South, the fifth largest in the United States, and the nation's only major urban center on the western frontier. In the boom period of the 1830s New Orleans ranked third in size in the nation.

The great variety of peoples and cultures coming to New Orleans contributed to the city's reputation for diversity, earned initially in the colonial period. Within a total population of over 116,000 in 1850, New Orleans had about 20,000 Irish, 13,500 slaves, 11,500 Germans, 11,000 free blacks, 7,500 French, and 2,500 English and Scots. Most of the remaining 50,000 were native-born residents or migrants from other states. No one of these ethnic groups physically dominated any section of the city, despite popular notions of severely divided American and Latin sectors. Antebellum New Orleans was a commercial rather than an industrial city and had few districts where only one ethnic or economic group lived and worked. Although some neighborhoods had distinguishing characteristics, in general, blacks and whites, natives and foreigners mingled in the city's shops, streets, and residential areas.

Much of New Orleans's and Louisiana's population growth was due to the westward movement of free Americans, the forced migration of African Americans, and

the immigration of Europeans. This increase would have been much larger if not for the constant attacks of deadly diseases, particularly prevalent in southern Louisiana. During much of the antebellum period Louisiana had the highest death rate of any state in the United States and New Orleans the highest of any city. Yellow fever, smallpox, and cholera epidemics accounted for many of these deaths. Nevertheless, immigration and migration, along with high fertility rates, offset the state's high mortality rates.

## Ethnic and Racial Groups

Visitors to Louisiana and New Orleans frequently remarked on its assortment of people, languages, religions, economic activities, amusements, and customs:

**There were not only the pure old Indian Americans, and the Spanish, French, English, Celtic, and African, but nearly all possible mixed varieties of these, and no doubt of some other breeds of mankind. . . .**

**. . . I doubt if there is a city in the world, where the resident population has been so divided in its origin, or where there is such a variety in the tastes, habits, manners, and moral codes of the citizens. (Frederick Law Olmsted, 1853)**

### Louisiana Indians

Many native societies lived in Louisiana (which before 1800 encompassed the Mississippi Valley and Gulf Coast region) at the time of French settlement in 1699. They varied in size and complexity, ranging from nomadic hunters and gatherers to sedentary agriculturalists. While the major activity of all precolonial American Indian groups was to obtain enough food to sustain life, several Louisiana societies produced more than they needed and sold or bartered this surplus. They established extensive cultural and economic exchange networks, trading material goods—as well as belief systems, language patterns, technology, and recreational practices—with other native groups in North America and probably even in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean.

Despite continued losses, the state of Louisiana presently has the third largest American Indian population in the eastern United States (18,541 in 1990, 0.4 percent of the state's population). Diseases transmitted by Spanish explorers in the 1500s and Indians coming from settled Spanish areas in the 1500s and 1600s killed many members of the Louisiana Indian nations long before the French came in the late seventeenth century. Thaumur de la Source, a Frenchman who visited Tunica villages in 1699, observed that "sickness was among them when we arrived there. They were dying in great numbers." Though further decimated by disease, liquor, and warfare in the first half of the eighteenth

century, the Native American population of Louisiana got a boost in the 1760s, when Choctaws—long an ally of the French and enemy of the British—migrated westward out of British West Florida and settled along the Mississippi River and the shores of Lake Pontchartrain north of New Orleans.

In the early years of European settlement, and to some extent even through the eighteenth century, Louisiana Indians held the balance of power in their dealings with whites and blacks. Although severely decimated by diseases, Native Americans made up by far the largest segment of Louisiana's population in the 1700s. They were the most effective military force in Louisiana, and French officials courted their favor to protect French settlements and wage war against nearby English and Spanish holdings. Louisiana Indians also taught newly arrived Europeans and Canadians how to live off the land in a semitropical climate and supplied starving settlers with food. They were assisted by slaves imported from Africa, who grew, gathered, and hunted many of the same foods and medicines the Indians did.

Both France and Spain used Indian allies in their constant contest for supremacy in North America. The French and their Spanish successors in Louisiana were successful in forging coalitions with several southeastern Indian nations, the most important being the Choctaw. They used trade goods, arms, and promises of protection to convince the Choctaw and other natives to fight against the British (and later the Americans) and their main Indian allies in the southeast—the Chickasaw and Creek nations. In spite of the unreliable supply and quality of French and Spanish trade goods, Louisiana agents managed to retain the loyalty of their Indian partners.

The French also enslaved some Louisiana Indians, forcing into service prisoners of war, such as captives taken in the Natchez War of 1730. Upon assuming control of Louisiana in 1769, Spanish Governor Alejandro O'Reilly outlawed Indian slavery in accordance with prohibitions on such exploitation throughout the Spanish empire. Few Indian slaves were emancipated, however, because owners merely reclassified them as blacks and thus kept them enslaved. During the administration of Governor Carondelet in the 1790s several slaves sued for their freedom, claiming descent from Indian parents. Some succeeded, although enslavement of Indians, especially in remote rural areas, continued through the colonial period.

Forced off their lands by expanding cotton and sugar plantations in the antebellum era, Louisiana Indians retreated to swamps, marshes, and piney woods. Many lived on the fringes of plantations, raising vegetables and poultry, gathering herbs from the forest, and making baskets and jewelry. They sold and bartered these goods to planters and slaves or carried them by pirogue through bayous and rivers to New Orleans and other towns.

A Louisiana-born poet and historian, Dominique Rouquette, who grew up on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain among the Choctaws, described such activities in the mid-1800s:

**They obstinately refuse to abandon the different parishes of Louisiana, where they are grouped in small family tribes, and live in rough huts in the vicinity of plantations, and hunt for the planters, who trade for the game they kill all they need: powder, lead, corn, woolen covers, etc. Their huts are generally [surrounded] by a fence. In this enclosure their families plant corn, pumpkins and potatoes, and raise chickens. The women use a kind of cane, which they knew how to dye different colors, to make baskets: *lottes* [baskets carried on the back], *vans* [winnowing baskets] and sieves, from which they derived a good profit. They also sold medicinal plants which they gathered from the forests: Virginia snake-root, sage, plantain, tarragon, wild fruit, *pommetes* [medlars] blue bottle, persimmons, and scuppernongs; also roots of *sequiena*, sarsaparilla and sassafras. They also do a little trading in ground turtles, which they find on the prairies. They dispose of these wares at the plantations, in country towns, and at New Orleans. (Kniffen, Gregory, and Stokes, 1987)**

Many other Louisiana Indians relocated to reservations in Oklahoma Territory; they made up part of the 1830s Indian Removal of the Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole tribes from the southern states.

### Africans and African Americans

Africans were also a powerful cultural force in Louisiana, mainly because they were introduced in large numbers during short time periods (the 1720s and 1780s) and came mostly from one region in West Africa (Senegambia), thus relating more easily to one another than did Africans shipped to most other plantation societies of the Americas, who were dispersed because owners feared concentrations of any one language group. With so few whites in the colony, Africans constituted a majority of the population in most settlements during the early years. There were also more blacks than whites in most areas of antebellum Louisiana as well. Slaves were born or brought to the state legally from other areas of the United States and smuggled in from the West Indies and Africa. Free blacks augmented their population by births, manumissions, and immigration or migration. In New Orleans blacks made up a majority of the populace during the first four decades of the nineteenth century; the 1810 census showed two-thirds of all New Orleanians to be black. By 1840, however, the percentage of African Americans in the Crescent City dropped to two-fifths of the population and declined even further over the two decades preceding the Civil War, primarily because more whites moved into the city, increasing numbers of slaves were sent to work the ever-expanding cotton and sugar fields, and free blacks fled abroad to escape rising racial harassment and restrictions.

## Slaves

Wholesale importation of slaves from Africa to Louisiana began in 1719, when ships commissioned by John Law's Company of the Indies deposited five hundred Guinea slaves in the colony. Between 1719 and 1731 5,761 Africans, most of them from the Senegal concession of the company, were brought to Louisiana against their will. Only one other slave-trade ship landed in the colony during the remainder of French rule: in 1743, with 190 Africans. These slaves, along with indentured servants, salt and tobacco smugglers, debtors, soldiers-farmers, and colonists who immigrated of their own volition, labored to construct the new colonial capital and produce crops for subsistence and export.

Although Indian enslavement continued well into the Spanish period, Native Americans never met Louisiana's labor demands; one French governor even proposed to Saint-Domingue officials an exchange of three of his Indians for two of their African slaves. He and other officials and settlers could not persuade slave traders to send the number of bondpersons needed to exploit colonial resources to their full potential, primarily because Louisiana constituted one of the least economically significant of the French and Spanish New World colonies. Because so few Africans came to French Louisiana after 1732, the population relied on reproduction to sustain and increase its numbers. By the 1740s the colony's black population was mainly creole (a term that in the eighteenth century applied to anyone born in the Americas, as opposed to Europe or Africa).

The traffic in slaves to Louisiana did not really take off until the last three decades of the eighteenth century, when the colony was "re-Africanized." During this period, traders brought slaves to Louisiana from Africa, mainly from Senegal and the Bight of Benin. During the 1780s Spain and its Louisiana governors also encouraged merchants to import African and creole slaves from the West Indies. A royal *cédula* (decree) of 1782 admitted slaves from the French West Indies duty free. Two years later another regulation modified that *cédula*, allowing certain slaves to enter duty free but charging a six-percent duty on other bondpersons. A liberal decree of 1789 granted freedom to black slaves who fled alien lands and sought sanctuary in Louisiana.

In light of the 1791 Saint-Domingue revolt and Louisianians' fears that black slaves from the French islands would inspire their own slaves to rebel, Spanish Governor François-Louis Hector, Baron de Carondelet et Noyelles, banned slave imports from the West Indies. Carondelet lifted restrictions in 1793 but reinstated them in June 1795, to last for the duration of the Franco-Spanish war. Even though the war ended one month later, the rebellion in Saint-Domingue continued; Carondelet issued a new proclamation forbidding the entrance of any black slaves, even those coming directly from Africa, into the colony. Although Louisianians continued to smuggle slaves to meet their rising labor needs, local authorities did not again sanction the foreign slave trade until 1800.

In the nineteenth century most of the slaves brought to Louisiana came from other states in the United States, particularly those along the Atlantic seaboard. In 1804 the

federal government outlawed the external slave trade in Louisiana, and the United States Constitution forbade the importation of slaves after January 1808. The Saint-Domingue refugees of 1809 and 1810 obtained special permission from federal authorities to keep their slaves with them when they settled in Louisiana.

Unable to import slaves from outside the United States, merchants actively engaged in the internal, or domestic, slave trade. They transported slaves by water and over land from older areas of the South, like Virginia and Maryland, to the expanding frontier of the Old Southwest. Most of these slaves came to New Orleans, where they were sold at public auction to cotton and sugar planters. In addition to merchants bringing slaves to Louisiana, planters who moved westward with their laborers, livestock, and furnishings also increased the state's slave population.

Traders also smuggled slaves into Louisiana by way of the state's many bayous and swamps. Rising slave prices in the 1850s produced an increase in this illicit traffic and prompted some white southerners, including many from Louisiana, to petition the federal government for repeal of the African slave trade ban. Although Congress rejected this appeal, the Louisiana house of representatives in 1858 authorized importation of "apprentices" from Africa. The measure did not pass the state senate.

By 1850 New Orleans was the South's largest slave-trading center. As early as 1842 slave dealers in the Crescent City numbered 185, and that figure rose to as many as 300 by the end of the decade. The St. Louis and St. Charles hotels, the Masonic Temple, the exchange on Esplanade Avenue, and various other places held regular slave auctions. At least 25 slave depots were located within a half mile of the St. Charles Hotel in 1850. Volume of the trade in slaves escalated from late winter through early spring, the city's peak commercial season. According to French traveler P. Forest in 1831,

**The slaves are seated on benches arranged like an amphitheater. In order to give them a better appearance, the merchants keep them quite clean when they are exhibited to the buyers. The latter come and choose the slaves who will fill their needs. The deal is never concluded until the slave has been completely looked over, from head to foot.**

Most slaves were traded at public auction rather than through private transactions, and the majority were from out of state. Louisianians valued their "seasoned" slaves who were accustomed to the region's harsh climate and often immune to local diseases. They rarely sold their slaves unless forced to do so to settle an estate or pay off debts.

Slave dealers often sold their human merchandise in large groups with little concern for keeping slave families together, even though at various times the Louisiana legislature passed laws forbidding sales that separated families or children under the age of

ten from their mothers. Because state law required that estates be divided equally among all heirs, wives were often separated from husbands and children from parents.

The words and writings of former slaves confirm the sellers' lack of consideration for African-American kinship ties. Solomon Northup, a free black from New York who in 1842 was kidnapped and sold into slavery in Louisiana, described the heart-wrenching separation of a slave woman, Eliza, from her daughter Emily, seven or eight years old, in the slave markets of New Orleans:

**Never have I seen such an exhibition of intense, unmeasured, and unbounded grief as when Eliza was parted from her child. She broke from her place in the line of women, and rushing down where Emily was standing, caught her in her arms. . . . Oh! how piteously then did she beseech and beg and pray that they might not be separated. Why could they not be purchased together?**

Manda Cooper was a slave for at least twenty years of her life. In 1940 the Louisiana Writers' Project interviewed her, and she bitterly pointed out that her mother's master had dispersed her entire family: "I was sold from my ma. All my brothers and sister[s] was sold."

Most slaves resented being sold as property from one person to another with very little control over their wellbeing and that of their children. Like Northup's Eliza, they tried to persuade masters and traders from selling them away from family members and familiar settings. Others injured themselves or pretended to do so to lower their monetary value. Some even took their own lives rather than face a new master and work regimen. On his journey through North America between 1819 and 1821, Adam Hodgson observed that "instances are not rare of slaves destroying themselves, by cutting their throats, or other violent means, to avoid being sent to Georgia or New Orleans." Slaves occasionally engineered mutinies aboard ships while they were transported from the Atlantic coast to Louisiana. Solomon Northup conspired with other slaves to capture the crew and sail for freedom as they traveled from Washington, D.C., to New Orleans.

One of the most famous mutinies took place on board the *Creole* in 1841. In October of that year the *Creole* left its home port of Richmond with a cargo of tobacco and 135 slaves bound for New Orleans. A few weeks into the voyage some of the slaves successfully took control of the ship and headed for Nassau in the Bahamas, a British commonwealth that had abolished slavery in the 1830s. Over the protest of American authorities, the British granted freedom to all slaves aboard the *Creole*, except three who chose to remain with the ship when it sailed to New Orleans.

Although United States officials failed to retrieve these ex-slaves who had won their freedom, in 1853 the Anglo-American Claims Commission awarded the United States \$110,330 to compensate owners for their lost slave property. In the meantime, American courts concluded that slave insurrection, not British actions, was responsible for

the mutiny. Thus, owners could not collect from four of the six insurance companies whose policies did not include losses due to insurrection.

### Slave Life in Antebellum Louisiana

Slaves made up slightly less than half of Louisiana's total population but almost three-fifths of that outside New Orleans in 1850. Nine out of every ten slaves in Louisiana worked on rural farms and plantations. After 1808 few slaves entered Louisiana directly from Africa, and growth resulted from forced migration from other states and natural increase.

African-American slaves performed most of the manual, skilled, and domestic tasks on Louisiana plantations. Both males and females labored in fields and houses, with men specializing in skilled work and women assuming primary care of children. Most slaves worked from sunrise to sunset and beyond. During the grinding season on sugar plantations slaves often worked around the clock. Even when their day's work in the fields ended, enslaved men and women returned to their quarters to prepare their own supper and the next day's breakfast, mend and wash clothes, tend the master's livestock, repair furnishings, care for their children, and carry out numerous other tasks. On large plantations slave drivers managed gangs of field laborers and in turn reported to the plantation's overseer, usually a white man.

Owners valued slaves for their reproductive as well as productive capabilities. Most encouraged family formation among slaves on their own plantations, both to increase their holdings and to discourage adult slaves from running away. Runaways found escape more difficult if they had to take along children and spouses, and few wanted to leave their families behind. Masters reluctantly permitted their slaves to take partners on other plantations. In such instances, they could not monitor the slaves' activities as closely, and weekend visitations took up time and energy.

During his travels through Louisiana in 1831 Frenchman P. Forest recorded his observations of plantation childbearing and childcare practices:

**When a negro woman is pregnant, she is moved to a different dwelling, and as her condition develops . . . she is charged with lighter tasks every day. But these particular attentions of the owner rather result from his ambition—since the life or death of the unborn child means money. . . . Sometimes the child has hardly been brought to the world before he is entrusted to some other woman, while the real mother is inhumanely sold without concern for her tears or her laments.**

Not all masters took such care with their pregnant slaves. Edward de Buiew was born a slave in Lafourche Parish. An interviewer for the Louisiana Writers' Project in 1940 recorded de Buiew's description of how his mother and father were treated:

**Pa always said they made my ma work too hard. I was born in de fields. He said ma was hoein'. She told de old driver she was sick; he told her to just hoe right-on. Soon, I was born, and my ma die[d] a few minutes after dey brung her to the house. Dey even dug holes and put her in dem to whip her before I was born, so my pa said. Pa said he tried to run away. Dey caught him in de woods and almost beat him to death.**

Although slaves recognized their marriages as binding, few masters, even in Catholic South Louisiana, permitted them to solemnize marriages and baptisms in formal church ceremonies. The slave's familial ties were often subjected to the whims and fortunes of his or her master. Slave sales broke up many families—some permanently, others restored after the Civil War. Through perseverance, however, many slaves maintained stable families. Like their ancestors in Africa, most slaves recognized the extended family of grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles. They commonly named their children after kin who had died or been sold away.

As in many areas of Africa, childcare was a communal undertaking, in that all members of the society assumed responsibility for the child's development. The plantation system reinforced this tendency. Usually the older women cared for the plantation's slave children so that both parents could work in the fields.

Slaves, especially those on large plantations, were able to carve out some space of their own where they could act independently and away from the prying eyes of their masters. It was on plantations with twenty or more slaves or on ones that were located close to each other that African Americans could gather in and around their quarters and form some sense of community. This slave community had its own leaders, values, activities, and identity separate from that of white plantation society.

Masters and slaves viewed the order within slave societies from different perspectives. Planters and other white observers accorded house servants the highest status because they usually were emotionally and physically closest to the planter family. Below domestics were the valuable artisans and slave drivers. At the bottom of the slave hierarchy were the field hands.

From the viewpoint of the slaves themselves, however, drivers were most hated, closely followed by house slaves. Slaves living in the quarters often did not trust those who worked in the slaveowner's home and looked upon them as informers or "snitches." The slave community ranked voodoo practitioners and other religious leaders, midwives, and quick-witted tricksters high within their social order. Both masters and slaves held

hunters in high regard. Planters allowed only slaves they trusted to carry arms, and the slave community relied on hunters to supply them with meat.

Slaves reinforced their community ties by gathering together to eat, dance, sing, tell stories, and engage in other social activities. On many Louisiana plantations the noon or evening meal was a communal affair, a time when field slaves took a short break to eat and socialize with each other and their children. Through folklore and song, slaves passed down their collective historical memory from one generation to the next. Few masters allowed slaves to learn to read and write, and legislation passed in Louisiana in 1830 made teaching slaves to do so a crime. Slaves thus conveyed knowledge orally, just as their ancestors did in Africa and colonial Louisiana.

Slaves gained some control over their diet and material circumstances by insisting that planters give them small plots of land called provision grounds. Slave families cultivated these plots during their "free" time in evenings and on Sundays. Harvests from provision grounds supplemented what masters provided and gave slaves foodstuffs they preferred. Slaves also raised poultry, pigs, herbs, and small quantities of tobacco, cotton, or sugar that they sold for money or traded for other desired goods.

African Americans in Louisiana and throughout the antebellum South protested their enslavement and inhumane treatment in many ways. Slaves resisted on a day-to-day basis by slowing the work pace, breaking tools, taking the planter's belongings, faking illness—any action that they perceived cost the master. More violent resistance included poisoning overseers or planter family members, taking one's own life or that of a newborn slave child, and aborting a pregnancy.

When caught doing anything the master, overseer, or driver thought wrong, slaves were usually whipped. Twenty lashes was considered a light whipping. Contemporary observers described what struck them as the strange, but practical, way in which pregnant women were flogged. In the words of former slave Rebecca Fletcher, an interviewee of the Louisiana Writers' Project in 1940:

**They wanted slaves to have babies 'cause they was valuable. So when a slave was about to produce a baby and he wanted her whipped, he had a hole dug in the ground and made her lay acrost it. And her hands and foots were tied, so she had to submit quiet-like to the beatin' with a strap.**

Other punishments included being placed in the stocks or made to wear a collar or chains.

More visible but less frequent forms of slave defiance were running away or revolting. Slaves most commonly ran away for short time periods to avoid or delay punishment. They often reappeared on their own will, although plantation police patrols were kept busy capturing, and sometimes killing, numerous runaways. Patrols placed runaways in local jails or returned them directly to their masters. One former slave,

Rebecca Gordon, told a Louisiana Writers' Project interviewer of her father's running away: "Member one tale he told me about when he run away from his missis. He said she was always mean and was forever having him beat. So he run off one day [and] stayed in de woods for about six weeks before he came out."

Other slaves aimed for permanent liberty. They escaped individually or took the greater risk of bringing along their families. Runaways headed for the swamps and forests, where they established or joined already-existing maroon communities. These runaway or maroon camps raised their own food and raided nearby plantations for additional supplies. Other plantation slaves, especially skilled ones, escaped to cities like New Orleans and passed as free blacks. Very few slaves from Louisiana made it north to the free states and Canada or south to Mexico.

In an interview with a Louisiana Writers' Project worker in 1940, ex-slave Elizabeth Ross Hite recounted the punishment meted out to a runaway slave woman who was captured on Trinity Plantation near Baton Rouge:

**Old lady Oater ran away and built a home in de ground. She had six children. De driver caught her one day and whipped her to death. He beat her until her skin fell off and she died. Den he unloosened her from de tree and buried her in de ground in front of de quarters.**

The largest slave revolt in the history of the United States erupted in Louisiana in 1811. On the evening of 8 January 1811 a group of slaves launched their attack from Colonel Manuel Andry's plantation about forty miles upriver from New Orleans. Led by a Saint-Domingue slave named Charles Deslondes, the insurgents gathered strength from neighboring slaves and maroons as they marched down River Road toward the Crescent City. Revolting slaves killed two whites, burned plantations and crops, and captured weapons and ammunition.

In the meantime, planters organized militiamen and vigilantes, reinforced with United States Army troops from Baton Rouge and New Orleans, to put down the slaves. The free black militia offered its services, and one company was accepted. They and Governor C. C. Claiborne's forces met the advancing slave rebels about eighteen miles outside New Orleans.

What followed was a massacre, an open season on all blacks in the area. Although contemporary accounts estimated the number of revolting slaves at between 150 and 500, they were poorly armed with cane knives, axes, hoes, and a few small arms. Many victims had not participated in the revolt and were innocent bystanders. Official body counts listed 66 slaves killed in battle or executed on the spot, 17 missing, and 16 captured and held for trial. The same report, however, stated that patrols were still uncovering bodies.

The tribunal that met on 13 January on Destrehan Plantation tried a total of 30 slaves and sentenced 21 of them to death. They were shot, and their heads were cut off and placed on poles along the River Road as a warning to slaves who contemplated revolt.

The 1811 revolt occurred less than twenty years after an outbreak of slave conspiracies in the 1790s. In that decade Louisiana slaves, sometimes aided by a few free blacks and whites, fought together for their freedom. They were inspired by rebelling slaves and free blacks in Saint-Domingue and French radical ideals of liberty and equality to overthrow oppressive conditions. The presence of a large, armed white population, divisions among the slaves, and lack of well-defined plans combined to thwart the slaves' aspirations.

Two major slave conspiracies originated in Pointe Coupée upriver from New Orleans in 1791 and 1795. The 1795 conspiracy was by far the largest and most threatening, and "justice" was swift. Colonial officials hanged twenty-three slaves, then cut off their heads and nailed them on posts along the River Road from New Orleans to Pointe Coupée. Another thirty-one slaves were flogged and sentenced to five years of hard labor at Spanish forts in Mexico, Florida, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. Three convicted whites were deported and sentenced to six years of hard labor in Cuba.

Spanish officials also responded to the 1795 conspiracy by enacting new legislation that restricted slave activities and increased the oppressive power of rural police patrols and planters. They gave in to French planters' longstanding demands for greater control over slaves and free blacks. Slaveowners, however, found that they could not entirely stifle the slaves' claims to freedom. Residents and authorities discovered slaves plotting to revolt in Opelousas in 1795 and on the German Coast and at Pointe Coupée in 1796.

Slaves in antebellum Louisiana and the South rarely arose en masse to overthrow the social order or escape to freedom, mainly because they realized the futility of such action. In most regions of the South whites outnumbered blacks, and even where there was a black majority, whites controlled almost all guns and ammunition and regularly patrolled rural areas. Slaveowners aggressively tried to prevent the gathering of slaves from neighboring plantations, made slaves carry passes when off their own plantations, and restricted slaves' access to guns, alcohol, and education.

Slaves in urban areas like New Orleans generally had fewer restrictions placed on them. Skilled slaves in particular could hire out their labor, and as long as they paid their masters a stipulated amount by the day or month, they could use extra earnings to obtain goods and entertainment or to purchase their freedom. Urban slaves also usually enjoyed greater freedom of movement and more opportunities for social interaction with fellow slaves, free blacks, and whites. Some city slaves even lived in houses away from their masters.

Slaves provided much of the skilled and manual labor in Louisiana's antebellum cities. Demand for skilled labor was high, as were wages. Competition between whites and blacks for high-paying skilled employment was also strong, although most labor clashes in the antebellum period were over unskilled jobs. Skilled male slaves worked as

carpenters, masons, bricklayers, painters, plasterers, tanners, coopers, wheelwrights, blacksmiths, cabinetmakers, shoemakers, millers, and bakers. Female slaves were also bakers, as well as seamstresses and cooks. Most market and street vendors were women, African- American and American Indian in particular. In much of Africa women conducted local and regional trade, a practice they continued in the Americas, including Louisiana. Baltimore architect Benjamin H. B. Latrobe, who lived and worked in New Orleans in the early 1800s, noticed:

**In every street during the whole day women, chiefly black women, are met, carrying baskets upon their heads calling at the doors of houses. .**

..

**These female pedlars are slaves belonging either to persons who keep dry good stores, or who are too poor to furnish a store with goods, but who buy as many at auction as will fill a couple of baskets, which baskets are their shop. I understand that the whole of the retail trade in dry goods was carried on in this way before the U. States got possession of the country. It was not then, nor is it now, the fashion for Ladies to go shopping. The Creole families stick still to the pedlars, & tho' many inducements are held out, by the better arrangement & exhibition of the shops, to the Ladies to buy, still—as in everything else—the old habit wears away very slowly.**

Although many city slaves were skilled workers, most were domestic servants. They cared for their masters' homes, families, gardens, and animals, shopped and sewed for the household, and ran numerous errands. The number and appearance of one's servants indicated the urban resident's wealth and social standing, so many prominent whites and free blacks in New Orleans and Baton Rouge outfitted their domestics in great finery when making public appearances. Like craftsmen, domestics were sometimes hired out and earned extra money for themselves as well as their masters. Masters also occasionally gave their favorite servants monetary or material presents. With these earnings domestic slaves purchased their freedom or more commonly bought items not supplied by their masters, such as gold jewelry and other luxury goods.

For much of the antebellum period slaves and free blacks supplied New Orleans's demand for unskilled manual labor. During her visit to the Crescent City in 1827, Englishwoman Frances Trollope commented on "the large portion of blacks seen in the streets, all labour being performed by them. . . . We were much pleased by the chant with which the Negro boatmen regulate and beguile their labour on the river." Black laborers were employed in the city's brickyards, foundries, distilleries, cotton presses, hospitals, schools, convents, and other enterprises. Many men were needed to load and unload river and oceangoing vessels, carry or haul goods between dock and warehouse, lay railroad

track, and dig canals. Slave laborers also worked for the city and state on such public works projects as clearing roads, laying water and gas pipelines, and collecting garbage.

With the surge of white immigrants coming to Louisiana in the late 1840s and 1850s, blacks and whites began to compete more fiercely for unskilled jobs. German and Irish immigrants, in particular, began to take over positions previously dominated by free and slave African Americans. Competition between Irish and black workers made it difficult for labor unions to organize and strike for higher wages. If Irish workers walked off the job, companies hired blacks to replace them, and vice versa. Some New Orleans unions—like those for printers, river pilots, and screwmen—excluded black laborers.

### Free Blacks

The first recorded emancipation of an African slave in Louisiana was that of Louis Congo, who obtained his freedom by accepting a position as colonial executioner in the early 1720s. From the very beginning of its history free people of color resided in New Orleans, but their exact numbers were unknown. French census takers did not indicate whether persons of African descent were slave or free; they consolidated free blacks with whites, indentured servants, or black slaves. Only when Spain effectively took over Louisiana in 1769 did census takers begin to distinguish between free blacks and slaves, *pardos* (light-skinned persons of African descent) and *morenos* (dark-skinned persons of African descent). Their figures, however, were no more accurate than those of the French era and usually undercounted free persons of color.

During Spanish rule the New Orleans free black population grew rapidly as proportions of both the free and nonwhite, as well as the total, populations. In terms of the latter, free blacks rose from 3.1 percent in 1771 to 19 percent in 1805. Over the same period they expanded from 5.1 to 30.6 percent of the free (white and black) population. In contrast to demographic trends found for many Spanish-American regions at the beginning of the nineteenth century, free nonwhites never outnumbered slaves in New Orleans, but they nevertheless composed a substantial proportion of the nonwhite population. Free creoles of color made up only 7.1 percent (97 of 1,324) of the city's African-American population in 1771, but rose to a high of 33.5 percent (1,566 of 4,671) by 1805. The number of free blacks in the entire province of Louisiana also increased during the Spanish period, from 165 to 3,350. Immigration of Saint-Domingue refugees, manumission, and natural increase fueled this growth well into the antebellum era.

In Louisiana, as in many areas of Spanish America, the crown fostered the growth of a free black population to fill middle-sector economic roles in society, defend the colony from external and internal foes, and give African slaves an officially approved safety valve. Colonial policymakers envisioned a society in which Africans would seek their freedom through legal channels, complete with compensation for their masters, rather than by running away or rising in revolt. In turn, slaves would look to the Spanish government to “*rescatarnos de la esclavitud*” (rescue us from slavery) and subsequently protect their rights and privileges as freedpersons.

With this vision in mind Spain, upon acquiring Louisiana from France, made Louisiana's colonial laws conform to those prevailing throughout the empire. For the governing of slaves and free blacks, Spanish Louisiana codes primarily drew upon provisions of *Las siete partidas* ("The Law of Seven Parts," compiled by the court of Alfonso the Wise in the thirteenth century) and the *Recopilación de leyes de los reinos de las Indias* ("Collection of Statutes for the Kingdom of the Indies," which drew together diverse legislation applying to Spain's New World empire in 1681), and also were influenced by the French *code noir* (Black Code), which had been issued for the French West Indies in 1685 and introduced in Louisiana in 1724. Although the code noir imposed harsh penalties upon erring slaves and proved to be one of the more oppressive slave codes in the Americas, it gave free blacks full legal rights to citizenship, ironically after providing unequal punishments and restricting their behavior in preceding articles of the code. Local regulations, however, frequently impinged upon these rights, denying free blacks legal equality with white citizens.

New Orleans slaves followed several avenues to freedom during the era of Spanish rule in Louisiana. The number of slave manumissions recorded in court documents increased with each decade. Although for the period as a whole the majority of slaves continued to receive liberty by way of acts instituted by the master, as they had under French rule, a rising proportion initiated manumission proceedings themselves, expanding from about one-fifth of total manumissions in the 1770s to three-fifths in the early 1800s. The slave or an outside party purchased freedom directly from willing masters and indirectly from more reluctant owners through the governor's tribunal.

In keeping with its aim of encouraging growth of a free black population in Louisiana, the Spanish crown implemented a practice common in its American colonies known as *coartación*: the right of slaves to buy their freedom for an amount either negotiated with the owner or determined by the courts. Louisiana's code noir had permitted masters over the age of twenty-five to manumit their slaves, with prior consent from the superior council (the French colonial governing body). Spanish regulations, however, did not require official permission for a master to free his or her slave and even allowed slaves to initiate manumission proceedings on their own behalf. The slave, a friend, or a relative could request a *carta de libertad* (certificate of manumission) in front of the governor's tribunal. Two and sometimes three assessors declared the slave's monetary value, and upon receipt of that sum, the tribunal issued the slave his or her carta. Under Spanish law a slave did not have to depend upon the generosity of the master or mistress to attain freedom; rather, the slave relied on his or her own efforts and the aid of a favorable legal system. Louisiana slaves and parties arguing on their behalf recognized support from Spanish officials for "a cause so recommended by the law as that of liberty."

*Coartación* offered advantages to slaveholders, slaves, and the Spanish government, and all three groups acted according to their interests. The crown benefited from a growing free population of color that tended to accept its middle status in a three-caste society, aspired to attain the privileges of white colonials, and supplied the

colony with skilled laborers and militia forces. *Coartación* provided slaveowners with incentives that encouraged slaves to work more productively, reduced their provisioning costs, and compensated them at the slaves' estimated fair value. Legal manumission also acted as an effective form of social control by offering liberty to obedient bondpersons and denying it to rebellious ones. In turn, the system facilitated slave efforts to acquire the necessary cash or goods with which to purchase their freedom independent of the master's will.

Although freed and free persons of color consistently experienced exploitation and prejudice in a hierarchical society such as prevailed in New Orleans, the continuous and expensive struggles undertaken by many slaves to attain freedom attested to their appreciation of liberty as something desirable. Several court cases indicate that not all slaves aspired to free status or viewed such status as advantageous. In such an urban setting as New Orleans slave artisans and traders, in particular, moved about, transacted business, and socialized much the same as free persons of color. Their ability to do so, however, could be taken away from them at any time at the whim of their owners; persons legally manumitted at least exercised a greater measure of control over their lives. As in Cuba and Brazil, free blacks in New Orleans grew in numbers and status during Spanish rule both in response to laws and cultural attitudes and to such material factors as demographics and economic activities. Antebellum Louisiana's large free population of color, unique in the United States South in terms of wealth and influence, traced its roots to the Spanish regime, when slaves could attain freedom with greater ease than at any other time.

Free women and men of color in Spanish New Orleans actively participated in the economic and social life of the society. Though usually not as prosperous or prominent as leading white persons, some free blacks successfully battled downward mobility and secured a stable niche in the middle stratum. Free persons of color borrowed money from and loaned it to whites, other free blacks, and slaves. Free blacks generally garnered wages equivalent to work performed by their white and hired-slave counterparts, earnings that placed them in the lower and middle economic sectors. In Louisiana and other colonies crown and local discrimination against nonwhites both in the courtroom and on the street restricted access to resources needed to enter the upper echelons of the social hierarchy. Records for the Spanish period of New Orleans's history attest to the daily battle free blacks waged to fight off poverty, free their families, and acquire property and patronage. Those who flourished often functioned as leaders among their peers, most prominently as commanders in the free *pardo* and *moreno* militia units.

Like free blacks in other American urban areas, those in New Orleans labored at middle- and lower-sector tasks in which they sometimes competed with lower-class whites and slaves but offered little threat to prominent whites. Policy and practice excluded them from the professions, clergy, and government positions, and relegated most of them to manual or skilled labor. Throughout the colonies competition and hostility flared between unpropertied whites and free creoles of color, most frequently manifested in attempts to

limit free black participation in certain trades. Although craft guilds developed in some parts of the Americas, a general lack of trade restrictions characterized colonial New Orleans. In the city demand for labor consistently surpassed supply, a situation that reduced competition and augmented opportunities for nonwhites to acquire skills.

The work free blacks did reinforced their ambivalent position in the community. Persistent dependency and even downward mobility plagued newly freed blacks, who often expended all their resources to gain liberty and then had to toil at the same tasks they had undertaken as slaves. On the other hand, blacks manumitted long ago or born free frequently attained economic independence as farmers, slaveowners, traders, and businesspersons. Economically successful free creoles of color usually endeavored to distance themselves from their slave past and identify with values espoused by whites. In a frontier, peripheral society such as New Orleans, however, racial and economic groups relied on each other for peace and prosperity.

Despite some problems, New Orleans censuses in 1791 and 1795 furnish partial glimpses of the tasks at which free people of color toiled. Especially numerous in 1795 were free carpenters, shoemakers, seamstresses, laundresses, and retailers. Scanty data from the 1791 census of New Orleans further indicate the frequency of certain occupations among free black male household heads: seven carpenters, five shoemakers, three tailors, one blacksmith, one hunter, one cooper, one wigmaker, and one gunsmith. A 1798 census of household heads in the suburb of St. Mary recorded three male wood dealers, two male carpenters, one male carter, one male gardener, two female settlers, one female tavernkeeper, and one female washer, out of a total free black population of ninety-six. Most likely, free blacks pursued those trades in which they had been trained as slaves, there was less competition from white workers, or demand exceeded supply. Although few written regulations restricted access to jobs by race, custom and practice all too frequently relegated free persons of color to positions with low prestige, responsibility, and pay.

As in most colonial societies, sex, as well as race, in large part defined occupation. With few exceptions, free black females in New Orleans performed tasks different from those of males, a practice reinforced by both African and European traditions. Men functioned as artisans and laborers, whereas women commanded retail activity, running small commercial establishments such as shops and stalls and peddling their wares on the streets. Women also solely assumed the sex-specific tasks of seamstress and laundress; male tailors supplied and repaired men's clothing. Tavernkeepers among the free black population were most commonly females, whereas among whites they were males. Among tavernkeepers licensed by the city in 1787 there were sixty-three white males, two white females, two free black males, and six free black females. These figures probably concealed male-female partnerships in which the man obtained the license but operated the business jointly with his female consort. For example, upon being imprisoned for debt, the free *moreno* Francisco Barba begged the court for leniency; he and his wife ran a tavern

and boarded soldiers of the Mexican regiment stationed in Louisiana, and his wife faced difficulties managing the service by herself.

In general, the wages free people of color earned varied by skill, competence, labor demand, and individual whim. Women's tasks usually commanded lower wages, although those involved in trade probably could earn as much or more than their male counterparts. Wage data for the period are scarce and do not have much meaning until the cost of necessary staples, supplies, and rents can be computed. Travelers to New Orleans, however, generally noted high wages that were frequently offset by exorbitant prices for land, slaves, drygoods, and foodstuffs. According to the physician Paul Alliot, at the opening of the nineteenth century "the ordinary day wage for men or women workers is four escalins [French coin equivalent to a Spanish real]. Relatively to the price of house rent and of all products in general, there are very few who live in comfort."

Like most white persons and slaves, free people of color acquired their skills by observation and apprenticeship. With the exception of the Ursuline school for girls, the royal Spanish school, and some private classes given by "qualified" individuals, few institutions in New Orleans offered a formal education. Wealthy colonists sent their children to schools in Europe, but the majority relied on private libraries and the expertise of master tradespersons. Free blacks in particular learned trades, because there was a demand for their skills and they were excluded from most professions that required formal learning. Again, in the words of Alliot: "There are many workmen of all kinds at New Orleans. All the men of color or free negroes make their sons learn a trade, and give a special education to their daughters whom they rarely marry off." In addition, many freed persons acquired skills during their enslavement, and they often used these talents to earn the money that purchased their freedom.

Women and men in the service sector most likely obtained their talents less formally than artisans or managers. They watched other slaves and free persons sewing, hunting, washing, cleaning, and vending and learned from them. On 21 May 1803 don Antonio Jung manumitted his slave María Clara, the seven-year-old daughter of his former slave Francisca. That same day doña Margarita Landreau, widow of don Julian Vienne, registered a note of obligation assuming responsibility for the education of María Clara. In exchange for the girl's labor over a twelve-year period, Landreau agreed to teach her the arts of cooking, washing, and everything else necessary to manage a house.

Local militia units commanded by black officers furnished critical support for free blacks and provided them with their most significant political institution. Colonial administrators depended on free blacks to defend their provinces because in Louisiana and other frontier regions able-bodied white men were too few, a situation free men of color used to their advantage. The New Orleans free *pardo* and *moreno* militias constituted a vital part of Spain's circum-Caribbean defense system, a role the free black community and colonial administrators recognized and rewarded. Military association offered free blacks in New Orleans and throughout the Spanish empire one more instrument through which to advance socially and to voice their claims as valuable, trustworthy subjects.

This legacy originated in the French regime, when colonial leaders first formed and employed free black troops in the 1735 campaign against the Chickasaw Indians. After organizing a company of forty-five free blacks and slaves with free black officers, Governor Bienville led them into battle. French authorities created a permanent company of fifty free black militiamen in 1739. This company battled Native Americans at Fort Assumption into the next year but then dissipated. From 1740 until 1779 neither the French nor Spanish employed free black troops in active combat.

Spain reactivated New Orleans's free black militia in 1779 to fight the British during the American Revolution. Militia members fought valiantly and contributed to Spanish victories at Baton Rouge (1779), Mobile (1780), and Pensacola (1781). While in the service of Spain, free black soldiers and officers defended New Orleans and surrounding areas from threatened French incursions during the revolutionary years of the 1790s. Between 1779 and 1801 the New Orleans free black militia grew from two companies of 89 men to two battalions of 496 men. The 1801 militia roster recorded one company of grenadiers and three of infantry in the free *pardo* battalion and one company each of grenadiers and infantry in the free *moreno* battalion. In addition to engaging in direct combat, members of the free black militia captured runaway slaves, fought fires, repaired breaks in the levee, policed the city, and marched in religious and secular parades.

The free black militia in New Orleans functioned as a corporate group in society, and as such, it wielded its organized strength on behalf of all free persons of color. Spanish corporatism, in which individuals were organized into bodies such as nobility, clergy, military, and artisans, conferred special privileges on group members. Militiamen, especially officers, utilized their titles, reputations as loyal, honorable *vecinos* (citizens), and patronage from leading whites, many of them military men themselves, to increase their material and social influence. The title that accompanied promotion in rank conferred upon the holder recognition from the white community, which honored and valued military service. Officers of the free black militia also often functioned as leaders among free persons of color, and they prominently placed their titles on public documents. For example, in the 1795 census of New Orleans Francisco Dorville identified his occupation as "*capitaine des mulâtres libres*," even though he more fully devoted his time to running a tavern and selling goods in New Orleans and Natchitoches.

Militia membership promoted group cohesiveness and identity among free persons of color. Free black militiamen, most notably officers, married each other's daughters and sisters and loaned money and provided other types of assistance to one another. Officers commonly practiced lucrative trades and thus more likely possessed the means to aid fellow militia members than did the rank and file. Members of the free black militia also served as godparents for each other's children and stood for each other at weddings. Free blacks, especially officers, passed the tradition of militia service on to their sons and grandsons.

Although free blacks acted upon every opportunity, several factors, some of them beyond their control, influenced their capacity to provide economic security for themselves

and their families. First, free blacks who acquired marketable skills either before or after attaining freedom tended to prosper. Throughout the Americas skilled blacks found it easier to purchase freedom and continue to earn as a free person. Many slaveholders allowed their slaves to rent themselves out, taking a portion of the pay and permitting the slaves to keep the remainder. One freed woman, Helena, poignantly revealed the impact that possessing a skill high in demand could have on attaining and retaining freedom. Helena tried to convince the court that appraisals of her slave son were excessive because he knew no trade and his master had readily admitted that the slave was a thief and drunkard. In her plea she provided several examples of skilled slaves who had purchased their freedom for the same amount as her son's appraisal and pointed out that an unskilled slave could never earn such an exorbitant sum.

The free person of color's ties to and reputation in the white community constituted a second factor in the succeed-fail equation. A society stratified by race and class such as prevailed in Spanish New Orleans primarily operated according to *parentela* (extended family) and *clientela* (patron/client) relationships. Advantages accrued to those free blacks who were linked by kin and patronage to leading white families. When a prominent white man, don Luis de Lalande Dapremont, brought charges of criminal activity against the free black Pedro Bailly, he threatened the livelihood of Bailly and his family. Bailly claimed that the charges were false and entered out of spite; Dapremont had just recently lost a suit that Bailly had brought against him for collection of a debt. Bailly also stated that the mistrust engendered by these charges had seriously affected his retail business because white patrons from whom Bailly had borrowed funds and goods were harassing him for payment and refusing to extend additional credit. A militia officer and loyal servant of the king, Bailly had earned the distinction of a *buen vasallo* (good subject) meriting the favor of local leaders. The court eventually dropped Dapremont's charges against Bailly, thereby restoring his favorable reputation.

Free persons of color occasionally formed business partnerships with white individuals. Pedro Viejo, a white man, jointly owned a small dry goods store with Juana, a free black. A native of Guinea, Juana was a former slave of Luis Poirson and the legitimate daughter of two slaves. Half of the enterprise belonged to her, and she designated Viejo as her only heir. Free woman of color María Juana Ester and Antonio Sánchez, a white man, were partners in another retail business. Born in New Orleans to Victoria Rouden, a free black, and an unknown father, María Juana had one natural daughter named Francisca. In her will María entrusted Sánchez with selling her share of the partnership's goods and placing its proceeds in her daughter's possession. Included in the estate inventory were farm and carpentry implements, wagons, ox teams, cows, horses, lumber, a canoe, slaves, and two farms.

Kinship ties to white persons, as well as patronage, gave some free people of color added economic leverage. Some white fathers publicly acknowledged their free black consorts and offspring and donated personal and real property to them. In his 1794 will don Pedro Aubry declared that he was single but that he had two natural children—Pedro

Estevan and María Genoveva—by María Emilia Aubry, all his former slaves. As his only heirs, the children received a farm seven leagues from New Orleans, two slaves, livestock, furniture, and household goods.

In some cases, however, patronage placed free blacks in positions of dependency much like slavery. Throughout the New World manumission provisos or self-purchase debts often enveloped newly freed persons in conditions of lingering servitude. Such a continuing dependent relationship transpired in New Orleans between don Antonio Pascual and Angélica. Pedro Visoso manumitted his slave Angélica, about thirty years old, for 400 pesos paid by don Antonio. Angélica in turn contracted with don Antonio to serve him the rest of his life, but she retained all the rights of a free person. These arrangements, while exploitative, also offered a newly manumitted person who had few skills or assets a secure means of support.

Indeed, a third factor that could help a free person of color succeed materially was that of being born free or having free kin. Second- or third-generation free blacks usually inherited the accumulated property, no matter how meager, of past generations, and slaves who had well-established free black friends or relatives stood a better chance of being "rescued" from slavery than those with no ties to the free black population. For example, Juan Bautista Hugón, born free and a captain of the free *pardo* militia when he died in 1792, purchased the freedom of four of his five children and at least one of their mothers during his lifetime. At the time of his death Hugón's goods consisted of a house and land on Calle Santa Ana in New Orleans, one slave, furniture, and clothes. He donated to don Juan Bautista Macarty's slave Magdalena a bed, a stoneware fireplace adornment, one pig, and some chickens. Hugón also requested that his executor, the *moreno* captain Manuel Noël Carrière, purchase his fifth child's *carta de libertad*. Hugón's goods sold at public auction for 1,095 pesos. After paying for the *carta*, outstanding debts, and burial and court costs, Carrière turned over 227 pesos, 5 reales to Hugón's children.

One final testament illuminates the extent of property a free person of color could accumulate during a lifetime and bestow upon relatives and friends when she or he died. It also reveals the intricate kinship and patronage ties among free blacks and whites. Perrina Daupenne, a free person of color, drew up her will in August 1790. Single and childless, she was the natural daughter of a white man she confessed not to know and the free black María Daupenne. Daupenne owned a house in New Orleans and ten slaves, five of whom she freed. She also instructed her executor to purchase the freedom of a slave belonging to a white man. In addition to giving the charity hospital ten pesos and a priest thirty pesos to say thirty masses for her soul, Daupenne donated slaves, livestock, clothes, furniture, linen, household goods, and a cypress grove to her friends, aunts, and cousins, all of them women. To her brother she gave her share of their dead brother's estate. Daupenne's white godmother, doña Sinfora Prado y Navarete, received all her gold jewelry and a mahogany wardrobe. Daupenne appointed another white person and government official, don Andrés Manuel Lopés de Armesto, to be her executor. Finally, Daupenne named as her heir Candio Tomás, a free black and legitimate son of her cousin

María Juana Pierre Tomás and of Pedro Tomás, both free. Few free people of color went to their graves this wealthy, but those who did usually enriched at least some free blacks and slaves who remained behind.

Like white New Orleanians, Daupenne and other free persons of color invested much of their wealth in slaves. The pattern of free black ownership of slaves in Spanish Louisiana closely resembled that of other Spanish-American colonial regions and Brazil, where free black populations were large and restrictions on manumission never emerged. In these areas, as well as in Spanish Louisiana, free blacks primarily owned slaves to help them in their trades or agricultural pursuits. As long as slave prices remained low, free people of color who could afford bondpersons used them. In addition, free blacks could afford to purchase their slave relatives and free them with few constraints.

Under the French and Spanish regimes free people of color ideally had legal rights and privileges equal to those of white citizens. Local regulations occasionally curtailed their efficacy, but in general free blacks possessed property and contractual rights equal to those of whites. Unlike the French code noir, Spanish law also permitted Louisiana's free persons of color and slaves to accept donations of property, including slaves, from whites and other free blacks. Armed with these powers, free blacks purchased and sold slaves as they would any other type of property. Like their white neighbors, free blacks invested in African slaves for use and speculation more frequently than for benevolent purposes.

Free people of color in New Orleans also manumitted substantial numbers of slaves, both kin and non-kin. Free blacks saved or borrowed money to grant freedom to their loved ones. Free blacks wishing to free their slave kin could pay the manumission price directly to the master or indirectly through government tribunals, thus avoiding the arduous process of first purchasing and then later freeing slave relatives.

As they struggled daily to achieve or maintain respectable living standards, free people of color made time to enjoy the company of whites, slaves, and other free blacks in various ways. New Orleanians participated in the festivities surrounding the carnival season and other religious holidays, and they observed baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals. Free blacks also joined slaves and whites at taverns and gambling tables, playing such illegal card games as "twenty-one" and canasta. Consequently, many spent time in jail with each other, too. With few exceptions, persons of all colors and classes worked and played together, by choice and necessity.

In the primarily frontier environment of colonial New Orleans free blacks, whites, and slaves mingled in the streets, markets, taverns, dancehalls, churches, and private homes of the city. Despite the efforts of some religious and secular authorities and other individuals, New Orleans society refused to follow any strict social stratification based on race, class, or legal status. Occasional raids on billiard halls alleged to house illegal card games uncovered "distinguished" and lower-status whites, free people of color, and slaves drinking with and betting against one another. Free blacks and whites formed common-law unions, usually without the church's blessings but at least with its toleration. Free blacks also married or had relationships with slaves, but they often had to live apart. Even

when a white person or slave did not live in the same household with a free black, he or she very often resided next door to one.

Even as free and slave, black and white socialized together, officials made sure that each person was aware of his or her place in society. In fact, many leisure events, especially those related to carnival, reinforced the social order while simultaneously allowing members to criticize it. Persons of African descent recognized the restrictions placed on them and only temporarily escaped them.

As free persons of color mingled with whites on the streets and promenades, in houses, markets, and shops, and around card tables, bars, and dance floors, they often adopted white cultural values and eroded the solidarity of free persons of color as a group with distinct interests. On the other hand, kinship ties, militia service, and white discrimination drew free persons of color together. The forces of decentralization, however, overpowered those of centralization; free blacks in Spanish New Orleans maintained their anomalous position in the city's society, linked to both slave and white populations in different ways until overt discrimination in the antebellum period shaped the threatened free black population into a more cohesive entity.

With the Americanization of Louisiana and commercialization of sugar and cotton production, free blacks encountered increasing discrimination and legal restrictions. During the first decades of United States rule cotton and sugar production and trade exploded, profit-oriented planters and merchants introduced thousands of African-American slaves, and Caribbean refugees, European reactionaries, and American laborers poured into lower Louisiana. A rising tide of racism accompanied the closing and more precise defining of white society, an influx of white women, and more intense competition between free black and white labor in the antebellum period. Unaccustomed to large, influential groups of free blacks, Anglos and even Latins in New Orleans regarded their numbers, skills, and military power, all primarily gained during the era of Spanish rule, with trepidation.

Even as they faced increasingly adverse circumstances in the first half of the nineteenth century, free African Americans were some of Louisiana's most prosperous planters and farmers, owning more property than free blacks in any other southern state. In 1850 there were 504 free black Louisianians who owned real estate worth at least \$2,000. Their average holding was almost \$8,000, which included urban and rural properties. Although that number declined in 1860 to 472, the average worth rose to over \$10,000. Far behind Louisiana in second place was South Carolina, whose 162 free blacks in the same category had an average real estate holding of \$4,723 in 1860. Three out of every ten free black estate owners were women.

The Metoyers and other free black families living in the Isle Brevelle colony on Cane River near Natchitoches acquired vast holdings of land and slaves during the antebellum period. In 1830, at the height of their affluence, the Metoyers owned more slaves than any other free black family in the United States. Residents of the Isle Brevelle colony grew cotton and corn on their plantations and traded with white and black

merchants in New Orleans. Free people of color from New Orleans and Saint-Domingue married members of the colony and contributed to its prosperity.

The settlement traced its beginnings to Marie Thérèse, also known by her African name of Coincoin, a slave woman who was freed by her white common-law husband, Pierre Metoyer, in 1778. Before taking a white wife ten years later, Metoyer gave Marie Thérèse a small plot of land, which she and her fourteen children converted into an empire. In 1974 the federal government declared the early Metoyer holdings, known collectively as Melrose Plantation, a national historic landmark in recognition of its singular origins and the unique architecture displayed in several of its eight remaining buildings.

Another prominent free black planter was Andrew Durnford, son of British merchant Thomas Durnford and Rosaline Mercier, a free woman of color. At the age of twenty-eight Andrew Durnford entered the planter class in 1828 by purchasing at a cost of \$32,000 fourteen slaves and a tract of land ten by forty arpents on the Mississippi River some thirty miles below New Orleans. He began cultivating sugarcane on what became St. Rosalie Plantation. Durnford also inherited money and land in New Orleans and McDonoghville from his parents. He and his wife, Marie Charlotte Remy, had three children. One of Durnford's closest associates was his New Orleans factor, John McDonogh, a white merchant and philanthropist. When Durnford died in 1859, the land value of St. Rosalie Plantation was \$51,500 (down from a high of \$82,800 in 1850) and the value of its slaves \$71,550 (high of \$84,750 in 1855). At one time Durnford owned over seventy-five slaves.

Most of Louisiana's free blacks lived in New Orleans, where their opportunities to gain freedom, find skilled, manual, and domestic jobs, and interact socially were greatest. Free blacks composed about forty percent of the African-American population in New Orleans, ranging between a high of almost forty-six percent in 1820 to a low of thirty-six percent in 1840. Their number in 1840, however, was greater than in any other decade: almost 20,000 out of a total New Orleans population of slightly over 100,000. A growing slave and especially white immigrant population in the 1830s reduced the proportion of free blacks in the total populace. In addition, in response to increasing discrimination and oppression in Louisiana and throughout the South, many free black New Orleanians moved to Haiti, Mexico, France, and other foreign destinations. Some returned to Louisiana after the Civil War.

Free blacks played an important role in the New Orleans economy, where labor, especially skilled labor, was often in short supply. Many owned successful businesses or engaged in the professions and amassed substantial estates that included real, personal, and slave property. Many New Orleans shoemakers, cigarmakers, ironworkers, furniture makers, and lithographers were free African Americans. Free black men like Lucien Mansion and Georges Alcès operated sizable cigar factories, with Alcès employing as many as 200 hands. Among the most prominent daguerreotypists and lithographers was Jules Lyon, a free man of color who was born in France and spent most of his adult life in

New Orleans. When Lyon returned from a trip to France in 1839, he introduced the daguerreotype process, an early form of photography invented by Parisian Louis Jacques Daguerre.

Among free blacks women outnumbered men two to one and often established long-term relations with white men. United States laws, unlike Spain's, prohibited interracial marriages. In response, whites and free blacks or slaves formed common-law unions or went to France, Mexico, and the Caribbean to wed legally. Travelers frequently commented on New Orleans's free black and slave society. Most observed this society only for a short time and as outsiders, thus creating and perpetuating many myths and stereotypes, especially about free black women:

**A distinction subsists between ladies of colour of a very singular sort; those who are but one remove from the African cast, are subordinate to those who are from two to three, or more, and are interdicted, by custom, from intermarrying with the whites; but they are allowed, by the same authority, to become mistresses of the whites, without being dishonoured in the eyes of society, that is, they are esteemed honorable and virtuous while faithful to one man; but if, in their amours, they at any time become indiscriminate, they lose the advantage of ranking among the virtuous, and are classed in the city books among prostitutes and slaves. This, or a native disposition to continence, has such a domination over them, that the instances of their infidelity are very rare, though they are extremely numerous, and are mistresses to the married and unmarried, and nearly to all the strangers who resort to the town. . . .**

**Negresses and female Mestises next follow: the first are principally employed as servants, of which every family has a considerable number; the second perform all kind of laborious work, such as washing, and retailing fruit through the city in the hottest weather; and being considered as a cast too degraded to enter into the marriage state, they follow a legal kind of prostitution, without deeming it any disparagement to their virtue or their honor. (Thomas Ashe, 1806)**

### Early White Settlers

For much of the colonial period Louisiana was sparsely populated by whites, many of them banished from Europe for their antisocial behavior or enticed to Louisiana by misleading propaganda and promises of free land. Although Spain had some luck in attracting white settlers (primarily Acadians and Canary Islanders) as part of its policy to expand commercial plantation agriculture, France was much less successful. The number of whites coming to French Louisiana was greatest during the 1720s, when the proprietary

Company of the Indies, rather than the crown, governed the colony. Among the 7,020 colonists who disembarked in Louisiana from the 43 ships sent by the company between October 1717 and May 1721, there were a few from Ireland and Switzerland. The wide variety of tradespeople immigrating between 1718 and 1719 included 15 weavers; 14 tailors; 9 joiners; 9 surgeons; 8 each shoemakers, masons, and bakers; 7 wigmakers; 4 each carpenters, ropemakers, coopers, and gardeners; 3 brewers; 2 each upholsterers, goldsmiths, cooks, butchers, governesses, valets and chambermaids; 1 hatter; and 1 maker of gold and silver cloth. Early French colonials obviously found little demand for these trades in the Louisiana wilderness and were ill-equipped to run farms for their own sustenance, let alone market a surplus.

The first settlers of Louisiana brought with them varied backgrounds. Both French and Spanish royal authorities hoped to create in their New World colonies similar, but improved, versions of the mother country. And in an unfamiliar, threatening setting Louisiana colonists transplanted and clung to their social values, even exaggerating them. Settlers were especially sensitive to the social hierarchy of ancien régime France in which birth weighed heavier than wealth, though the two often went hand-in-hand. For example, when a Capuchin curate in New Orleans, strapped for funds, auctioned off the most desirable front pews to the highest bidder, he aroused the ire of the officers' wives, who were displaced by wealthier but baser-born women. They even made their husbands present their complaints to the colonial governing body, the superior council, and eventually the curate had to restore some of the pews to these high-browed ladies.

On the Louisiana frontier, however, adjustments to proper French custom had to be made. For one thing, the upper sectors of French society did not immigrate to the colony. The vast majority of Louisiana's early colonists came from the lower social orders in France, and they aspired to quick wealth and upward mobility. In addition, Canadian immigrants made up the backbone of early colonial society, and they had already modified French traditions and moral values to meet local conditions. Canadian men found concubinage with Native American women acceptable and rarely attended church. As soldiers, trappers, and hunters they had developed a penchant for independent thought and action; in their new Louisiana home they frequently mutinied or deserted when pay levels, provisions, or labor assignments fell short of their expectations.

Many of Louisiana's first colonists did not go there voluntarily, and they escaped from a regimen of hard labor, low pay, and inadequate provisions at the first opportunity. In the 1720s French Capuchin Father Pierre F. X. de Charlevoix admonished that desertions

**should have been anticipated; that colony having been settled almost entirely by people sent over by force, or Concessionaries who did not find there what they had been led to expect; for soon the only thought of either was to get out of it. . . .**

**The most malcontent were the soldiers, who received absolutely nothing but bread, while meat was distributed to the Company's workmen, and even to the criminals, who were quite frequently employed by the settlers.**

Another French priest, Father du Poisson, noted in 1727 that "besides these grantees and planters, there are also in this country, people who have no other business than that of vagabonding." Rumors of men and women being dragged off the street and out of the prisons to be shipped to Louisiana spread throughout France and Canada. One must remember, though, that a large number of the prisoners were merely debtors; up to the nineteenth century persons who could not pay their bills were imprisoned.

Women played active roles in Louisiana's exploration and settlement from almost the very beginning. Accompanying La Salle in 1684, a few women sailed with other colonists on four ships from La Rochelle, France. By early 1687 only twenty colonists survived, among them seven women. Harsh conditions continued to kill off even these few hardy souls. Men, women, and children alike hunted what game they could with diminishing supplies of ammunition. All but a handful who joined Indian villages eventually perished.

Women next entered the colony in 1704. As in most frontier environments, women were in short supply. Royal and proprietary authorities encouraged and even forced women to immigrate to Louisiana. Women, they thought, could populate the colony, as well as stabilize those troublesome, unruly males and convert them into God-fearing, hard-working, peaceful farmers. Louisiana's first women included officials' wives, marriageable women, indentured servants, and prostitutes and other criminals. Father du Poisson noted sarcastically that the women and girls coming to Louisiana were "taken from the hospitals of Paris, from Salpetriere, or from other places of equally good reputation, who find the laws of marriage too strict, and the care of a single household too troublesome. Voyages of 400 leagues present nothing to terrify these heroines." Many of Louisiana's early bachelors preferred indigenous women to these cast-offs from French society.

European and Canadian women nonetheless contributed significantly to the settlement of Louisiana and played multiple roles in the colony's development. In addition to populating and stabilizing the frontier, women labored as servants, midwives, tailors, dressmakers, laundresses, bakers, cooks, and menders. On a higher level, one of the three major shareholders in John Law's Company of the West was Catherine Barré, madame de Chaumont, wife of the honorary secretary of the king. She invested 850,000 *livres* in the company and obtained a concession near Pascagoula. Like most concessionaires, she did not reside in Louisiana and exhibited little interest in its affairs.

## Ge rm ans

Intent upon making Louisiana profitable and unsatisfied with its French settlers, the Company of the Indies tried to lure agriculturalists, especially hard-working Germans, to the colony. The chief propagandist who extolled the virtues of Louisiana was John Law, a Dutch financier who headed the company. Between 1720 and 1722 Law sent an estimated 1,600 German, Alsatian, and Swiss settlers, soldiers, and indentured servants to his Louisiana concessions located in Arkansas, on the Gulf Coast, and just below New Orleans. Over half of them died en route to Louisiana, and disease, famine, and natural disasters forced most of the German immigrants to resettle in a more fertile, safe spot just above New Orleans, known today as the "German Coast." These farmers marketed their fruits, vegetables, poultry, and livestock in New Orleans and frequented its taverns, dancehalls, and church.

Scholars who have studied these German immigrants generally agree that their descendants quickly assimilated into French-Louisiana culture. This was particularly true for those who resided outside of the concentrated population on the German Coast (eighty inhabitants in 1751) or who married non-Germans. Linguistically mixed families in which the mother spoke German retained German dialects longer, but even in the colonial era many Germans spoke French or Louisiana creole and did not develop a Franco-Germanic patois comparable to the German, English, and Dutch patois of the Pennsylvania Dutch. French census takers, priests, and notaries transliterated or simply translated German family names into French. For example, Scheckschneider became Ceixnaitre, Schön became Chesne or Chaigne, and Zweig ("branch" in German) became Labranche. As late as 1831, however, one French traveler to Louisiana—P. Forest—commented that descendants of the original German colonials continued to speak their native language.

Forest visited Louisiana prior to the mass immigration of Germans in the 1840s and 1850s. During the antebellum period Germans immigrated to Louisiana in two waves: just after the Napoleonic wars of the early 1800s and from the 1840s to 1860. Destruction following several French invasions forced the first group to flee, and failed revolutions and crops drove the second group out of Germany. Between 1820 and 1850 almost 54,000 Germans entered the port of New Orleans, with over 126,000 adding to that number in the first five years of the 1850s. Although most continued on to the Midwest and California or fell victim to disease in Louisiana, enough remained to make up about one-tenth the population of the Crescent City in 1860.

Many of these mid-nineteenth-century German immigrants were farmers, butchers, skilled workers, and professionals. As in other states, Germans gradually monopolized the brewing trade in Louisiana. Most New Orleans metal workers, especially silversmiths, were German. German immigrants also dominated the art of lithography, which had been invented in Munich, Germany. One of New Orleans's leading lithography firms in the 1850s and 1860s was the partnership of Benedict Simon, a German, and Louis Lucien Pessou, a free man of color.

Just as in the colonial period, other Germans, especially those of the first wave, came as "redemptioners," or indentured servants. To pay for passage, redemptioners contracted their labor for a period of three to eight years following their arrival in America. Once "redeemed" they were free to seek a living in Louisiana or go elsewhere.

Germans also contributed to the unique culture of Louisiana, adding German breweries, restaurants, dancehalls, theaters, and music festivals. German architects influenced Louisiana landscapes, among them Charles Frederick Zimpel, who designed the Orleans Cotton Press. German artisans also crafted many of the buildings in Lafayette City, an upriver suburb that was incorporated into New Orleans in 1853. German musicians and merchants introduced and popularized the accordion. Cajun bands later adopted the diatonic accordion and incorporated it into their eclectic musical tradition.

Joseph Eder, a German cabinetmaker and carpenter, wrote back to his friends in Germany about New Orleans and the opportunities he found there around 1853:

**Now, dear reader, I cannot tell you so much about this city, for in all of Germany there is no city like it. It is five hours' walk long and three hours' wide. And in this seaport you again see no end of sailboats and steamboats which come and go every day. You cannot even imagine it. My dear friends, you are entirely in error if you believe America is a wild land, for there is no more beautiful country.**

...

**A person need do no more than hang up his sign. If he has a business which does not please him, he need only change his sign and start something else. A fortune is not necessary for this. An artisan who has no more than his tools can work independently.**

From the other side of the dock, so to speak, a New Orleans resident gave his impressions of the Germans arriving by the boatful in 1853:

**A large immigrant ship just arrived with a load of steerage passengers. Their style of beauty proclaimed them German, and if that was not sufficient to ensure conviction the grunting gutturals of their language, their meershaums and picturebook clothing would have been conclusive. Little fraus and frauleins built on the six by five principle, waddled around the deck or climbed on the bulwarks and surveyed with prodigious leaden eyes the land of promise. On the levee a large number of older emigrants from the fatherland assembled, who with stentorian lungs and beaming countenance called to the new comers.**

### Immigrants under Spanish Rule: Isleños, Acadians, and Anglos

Spain actively promoted population growth in Louisiana and encouraged immigration from many nations by promising settlers land, supplies, and money. The crown especially endeavored to attract Isleños (natives of the Canary Islands) and Acadians, who offered little political or cultural threat to the French and Spanish already resident in Louisiana. A few Acadians had emigrated or been expelled from their homeland in Canada during the 1750s and early 1760s, but mass migration of Acadians into Louisiana began after 1765 and totaled four to six thousand men, women, and children. They mainly settled along the Mississippi River above the German Coast—an area subsequently named the Acadian Coast—and in the western districts of Opelousas, Attakapas, and Lafourche. They, along with over ten thousand refugees who fled war-torn Saint-Domingue for Louisiana in the 1790s and early 1800s, reinforced French culture in Louisiana.

Besides administrators, merchants, and military personnel, the largest contingent of Spanish-speaking immigrants to settle in Louisiana were Canary Islanders. Approximately 2,000 *Isleños* arrived in Louisiana in the late 1770s. Forced to colonize hostile regions, many of them died, and those who survived lived mainly in isolation, making occasional trips to New Orleans to sell their farm products. They retained their language and customs but exerted little cultural influence on other Louisianians. About 100 settlers arrived from Málaga, Spain, at about the same time as the Canary Islanders. Under the leadership of Colonel Francisco Bouligny they founded New Iberia, Louisiana, in 1779. Unfortunately for Spain, these Malagueños showed little penchant for tilling the soil and relied on slaves provided by the crown to do the work for them.

Spain initially discouraged English and American immigrants, although the crown changed its outlook and policy in the 1780s. Throughout the 1770s Maryland and Carolina farmers arrived from the British colonies, and after 1763 several British subjects settled in West Florida, an area that was returned to Spain in 1783. Once the United States secured its freedom, farmers and land speculators from the Atlantic seaboard poured across the Appalachians into adjacent United States territory and the northern reaches of Spanish Louisiana. Recognizing that it could not halt United States penetration of the Mississippi Valley, Spain adopted a new strategy to incorporate its enemies rather than futilely struggle against them. In exchange for swearing a loyalty oath, Spanish officials offered the former British subjects religious toleration, generous land grants, and rights to navigate the Mississippi. British and American mercantile firms established agents in New Orleans, and demand combined with high wages drew northeastern tradesmen to the city. By the end of the century Anglo-American merchants and ship captains controlled much of the river trade and commerce at New Orleans. Spain was successful in increasing Louisiana's population but ultimately lost the colony to the settlers, merchants, and land speculators that its policies attracted.

## Jews

Louisiana's Jewish community flourished in the nineteenth century, spurred primarily by immigration from Germany. By 1860 Louisiana was home to the largest Jewish population in the South, numbering about 8,000 residents. Many of the German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Polish people who came to Louisiana were of the Jewish faith. Jews were officially denied residence in the colony of Louisiana under both French and Spanish rule. Nevertheless, several Jews had lived and traded along the Gulf Coast since the early 1700s. These first Jews in Louisiana—most prominent among them the Monsanto family—were descendants of the Sephardic Jews who migrated to the Americas after Spain expelled them in 1492. They established themselves in Brazil and the Caribbean in the 1600s and afterward migrated throughout the Americas, including Louisiana.

Judaism was not firmly established in Louisiana until the formation of a Portuguese congregation, the Gates of Mercy, in 1828. By the end of the antebellum period, New Orleans Jews had founded four synagogues: Gates of Mercy, Dispersed of Judah, Gates of Prayer, and Temime Derech. Congregation Temime Derech (The Right Way) was the youngest, established in 1857 by the Crescent City's growing Polish population. Other synagogues dotted the Louisiana landscape, including Bikur Cholim (Visiting the Sick) in Donaldsonville in 1856; Shaare Chesed (later B'nai Israel) in Baton Rouge in 1859; Har El (Mount of God, later B'nai Zion) in Shreveport and Gemiluth Chassodim (Unselfish Benevolence) in Alexandria in 1861; B'nai Israel (Children of Israel) in Monroe in 1868 and in Natchitoches in 1871; Shaarey Zedek (Gates of Righteousness) in Morgan City in 1871; B'nai Sholom (Children of Peace) in Bastrop in 1877; and Gemiluth Chassodim (later Temple Emanu'El) in Opelousas in 1877. In some places, cemeteries and benevolent societies preceded the congregation. Women played a crucial role in building these communities. They often spearheaded fundraising efforts, particularly in the construction of synagogues and temples. In Baton Rouge the Ladies Hebrew Association, for example, organized in 1871 to raise money to build a synagogue for Congregation Shaare Chesed. B'nai B'rith, a national Jewish fraternal organization, helped create a network among Jews in Louisiana, as it did in isolated areas across the country, including the rural South.

Temple Sinai, the first Reform congregation in New Orleans, was founded in 1870. Reform Judaism, which originated in Germany, took root in the United States in the 1820s, but did not flourish until the last third of the nineteenth century. It sought to modernize ritual, relax dietary laws, and allow women a greater role in religious practices. Some Reform innovations in synagogue worship included mixed-sex seating, the removal of head coverings, and the introduction of organs and choirs.

Many small storekeepers and traders in rural antebellum Louisiana were Jews. They prospered by maintaining kinship and business ties with Jewish merchants in New Orleans and New York. The real boon for country storekeepers came after the Civil War, however, when plantations were divided into tenant or sharecropper farms and former

slaves entered the market. In Louisiana's urban areas many retailers, especially dry-goods merchants, were Jews.

Prominent members of Louisiana's antebellum Jewish community included Judah Touro and Gershom Kursheedt, both Sephardic Jews, and Daniel Warburg, a German Jew. The son of Dutch immigrants, Judah Touro was born in Rhode Island in 1775 and moved to New Orleans in 1801, when Louisiana was still under Spanish rule. Touro quickly established himself as a commission merchant, real estate developer, and community leader. A generous philanthropist, he used his wealth to build a synagogue, an infirmary, an almshouse, and a public library in New Orleans. When he died in 1854, Touro also left money to libraries, hospitals, and parks in cities throughout the United States.

Touro Infirmary opened in New Orleans in 1852, when Judah Touro established a hospital with Dr. Joseph Bensadon as its head. Touro's will stipulated that the "Hebrew Hospital" operate as a "charitable Institution for the relief of the Indigent Sick." The board of directors leased the hospital to Bensadon with the understanding that the hospital would admit needy Jewish patients, follow Jewish dietary regulations, and observe Jewish holidays. In 1874 the infirmary merged with the Hebrew Benevolent Association and became the principal Jewish charitable institution in the city. From the beginning, Touro also served non-Jews and in 1883 began admitting them to its charity wards.

Gershom Kursheedt was the first president of Dispersed of Judah (which later became Touro Synagogue) as well as the Hebrew Benevolent Association. He also steered Judah Touro's philanthropic impulses toward Jewish institutions and helped establish the Jewish Widows' and Orphans' Home. Apart from his involvement with Jewish organizations, he was a founder of the Howard Association, a voluntary public health organization.

Born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1789, Daniel Warburg came to New Orleans by 1821. Like Touro, Warburg was a commission merchant. He established a business with another German, Henry G. Schmidt, and also speculated in real estate. Warburg lost most of his holdings in the aftermath of the nationwide economic panic of 1837. He died in 1860.

Warburg's common-law wife was Marie Rose Blondeau, an Afro-Cuban woman who died in 1837. Blondeau began her relationship with Warburg as a slave, and in 1830 Warburg freed their first child, Eugène, at age four. As required by law, Warburg had to obtain special permission to free a slave under the age of thirty. Warburg also freed Blondeau at about the same time, because their next four children were born free. Warburg's sons Eugène and Daniel became prominent marble cutters and sculptors.

## Irish

Like Germans, persons born in Ireland had settled in Louisiana from its earliest days. During the colonial period Spain sent Irish priests to Louisiana to minister to the region's growing English-speaking Catholic population. The Crescent City held its first St.

Patrick's Day celebration in 1809, and Irish community leaders founded St. Patrick's Church, the city's second Catholic parish, on Camp Street in 1834. Irish architect James Gallier Sr. worked on St. Patrick's.

The major influx of Irish, however, came after 1830, especially following the potato blight of the 1840s. By 1860 the Irish in New Orleans numbered over 24,000, about one-fourteenth of the total population. Unlike German immigrants, most Irish who came through the port of New Orleans stayed there, primarily because they could not afford passage farther inland. They crowded into the Crescent City's riverfront neighborhoods and strained its limited housing, employment, education, and other municipal resources. Many destitute Irish fell victim to disease, crime, and unemployment.

Native residents and writers grossly exaggerated the Irishman's reputation as a violent drunkard and gambler. At the same time they exploited his vote and labor, forcing him to compete with free blacks and slaves for the city's most dangerous and low-paying manual jobs. Most of the Irish coming to Louisiana who were peasants and victims of the potato famine in Ireland had to take unskilled, low-wage jobs. They mainly dug canals and ditches and built roads, levees, and railroads. They also labored on the docks and in the warehouses of Louisiana's commercial centers and in 1860 made up almost half the deck crews of western steamboats.

In so doing, they often competed with African-American workers, both free and slave. Builders of the New Basin Canal, which connected the downtown American sector of New Orleans with Lake Pontchartrain, preferred to hire Irishmen because the work was dangerous, and they did not want their valuable slaves injured or killed. Often laboring in water up to their hips, Irish canal diggers were most susceptible to yellow fever, malaria, and cholera. Estimates of the number of Irishmen buried along the New Basin Canal ranged from 3,000 to 30,000, and a popular song mourned their passing:

**Ten thousand Micks, they swung their picks,  
To dig the New Canal  
But the cholera was stronger 'n they.  
An' twice it killed them awl.**

After completing the New Basin Canal in 1836, many of the Irish laborers still alive became draymen, carting goods between wharves and warehouses. Irishmen forced free blacks and slaves out of the drayage business, as well as the related hack business. In the 1840s Henry Didimus described the streets of New Orleans crowded with over two thousand Irish draymen, "cursing and railing, lashing their poor beasts, and not unfrequently, and with more propriety, lashing each other." Among women, Irish domestics sometimes replaced black servants, particularly in the Anglo-dominated uptown Garden District.

Several Irish, especially those arriving before 1830, were professionals. Irish teachers, lawyers, doctors, architects, and printers practiced in Louisiana. Others managed boardinghouses, hotels, and other small businesses.

### Antebellum Foreign-Born French

French nationals came to Louisiana directly from France and as refugees from the West Indies. During the nineteenth century New Orleans continually drew greater numbers of French-speaking immigrants than any other urban area in the United States. By 1860 New Orleans was home to more than 10,500 French-born residents. Ties between Louisiana and France remained strong in the antebellum period. A number of Louisianians, both black and white, made frequent trips to France, maintained contacts with friends and relatives there, and received schooling or training in France.

German traveler Karl Pörtl did not hold French immigrants in high regard when he observed them in 1826. Although these numerous Frenchmen included lawyers, merchants, and physicians,

**the greater part . . . consists of adventurers, hair-dressers, dancing-masters, performers, musicians, and the like. The French are of all men the least valuable acquisition for a new state. Of a lavish and wanton temper, they spend their time in trifles, which are of no importance to any but themselves. Dancing, fighting, riding, and love-making, are the daily occupation of these people. . . . Without either religion, morality, or even education, they pretend to be the leaders of the *bon ton*, because they come from Paris, and they in general succeed.**

Keep in mind, though, that traditional animosity between Germany and France most likely influenced Pörtl's opinion.

One of the lawyers whom Pörtl did not include in his description of the "greater part" of French immigrants was Pierre Soulé. Performing in New Orleans in 1846, the French musician Henri Herz had this to say of Mr. Soulé:

**In New Orleans I had the rare privilege of knowing Mr. and Mrs. Soulé, whose home was the meeting place of all the distinguished people in the region. Mr. Soulé, born in France of French parents, rose rapidly to the top rank in the legal profession, and he had the unique experience, for a foreigner, of representing the United States as ambassador to Madrid. His learning was as profound as his manner was friendly.**

## Saint-Domingue Refugees

Between 1809 and 1810 over 10,000 French Saint-Domingue refugees came to New Orleans, doubling the population of the Crescent City. These immigrants originally fled war-torn Saint-Domingue in 1803, as black slaves emerged victorious in the Haitian Revolution, the only successful long-term slave revolt in the Americas. The refugees first resettled in nearby Cuba but left six years later when Spanish authorities expelled them in retaliation for Napoleon's invasion of Spain.

This large influx of French-speaking immigrants, made up of about even numbers of whites, free blacks, and slaves, reinforced the dominance of Latin culture in south Louisiana, at least for a few decades. Although the refugees added to New Orleans's cosmopolitan character, they also increased tensions festering between Latin and Anglo residents since the Louisiana Purchase.

Black refugees to Louisiana also introduced or enhanced already-present aspects of African and Haitian culture. These included voodoo/hoodoo practices, shotgun house architecture, and some of the symbolism and words associated with Mardi Gras Indian rites. New Orleans was the birthplace of voodoo in North America. Many African Americans in Louisiana believed—and continue to believe—in the power of the spirit world and ancestor worship. As an African religious system, voodoo helps keep living persons in harmony with their spirit ancestors and nature. Dahomean people retained their religion of *vodu* with them when taken from West Africa to Saint-Domingue (Haiti) and then to New Orleans in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Both black and white New Orleanians employed the services of the famed Marie Laveau and other voodoo priests and priestesses in the nineteenth century. According to one former New Orleans slave, N. H. Hopley, Marie sold many charms to ward off evil spirits: "Some of the big [white] ladies—and men too—came to her for advice; others consulted her by mail." Protective charms frequently used by blacks included blue glass beads, pierced coins, and crystal pendants.

Even though he did not practice voodooism himself, Hopley seemed to admire Marie Laveau and "always attended the Congo Square functions." Although he was "too young to take any active part," he "learned everything." Laveau, he said,

**did not sit on a throne nor wear royal robes. . . . Generally [she wore] a dress of jenny-blue calico—skirt made very full—a kerchief 'round her neck and a tignon or headdress, large hoop earrings of gold, some beads, and a brooch. She went on the streets as unconcerned as any washerwoman, smiling and often speaking to those she met.**

**Whenever she was seen, people would stand aside and whisper, "Here comes Marie Laveau," and wait until she passed. But her power—it seemed supernatural! She worked with charms and herbs and incense and snakes and skeletons, and invoked spirits.**

Others did not speak of Laveau so favorably. Among them was Marie Brown, who in a 1940 interview for the Louisiana Writers' Project, said of the "Voodoo Queen":

**That she-devil, that hell-cat Ma-rie Laveau! . . . She walked like she owned the city and everything. She looked like a devil. . . . What she look like? I can see her now. She was banana-color and wore always a madras handkerchief tied around her head. There were two curls, one on each side of her face.**

**That hell-cat! She must be a-burning for her sins. She said she could call spirits outer your house. She would make pictures come off [the] wall. She could do anything she wanted.**

### Other Groups

During the antebellum period Louisiana began to attract an increasing number of Italian immigrants, although large groups did not arrive until the 1880s and 1890s. Most of the early Italians came from Sicily and carved a niche in Louisiana as importers and sellers of citrus fruit from the Mediterranean and bananas from Central America. By 1850 New Orleans had the largest Italian settlement in the United States, but quickly fell behind northern industrial centers in the post-Civil War era.

New Orleans was one of the few United States cities in the nineteenth century to draw immigrants from Spain and Latin America. The city was popular among Hispanics because of its Latin familiarity and geographic closeness. The port also maintained regular shipping lanes to Cuba and Central America.

\* \* \*

### Conclusion

The many people of Louisiana contributed to its medley of cultures. They reinforced the "foreign" or cosmopolitan character of Louisiana, and New Orleans in particular, and helped shape the region's unique customs. William Darby, an early nineteenth-century traveler, was one among many visitors to note the Crescent City's diversity: "No city perhaps on the globe, in an equal number of human beings, presents a greater contrast of national manners, language, and complexion, than does New Orleans." And Vermonter Joseph Holt Ingraham takes us back to a Sunday morning in New Orleans in the 1830s:

**The whole city had come forth into the streets to enjoy it [spring sunshine]. . . . The long narrow streets were thronged with moving multitudes. . . .**

**. . . As we issued from Chartres-street—where all "nations and kingdoms and tongues" seemed to have united to form its pageant of life—upon the esplanade in front of the cathedral, we were surprised by the sound of martial music pealing clearly above the confusion of tongues, the tramp of feet, and the rattling of carriages.**

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