

What is Culture?

As you read, look for:

- the elements of culture, and
- vocabulary terms **cultural diffusion, culture, jazz, blues, fais-do-do, zydeco, gospel music, and spirituals.**

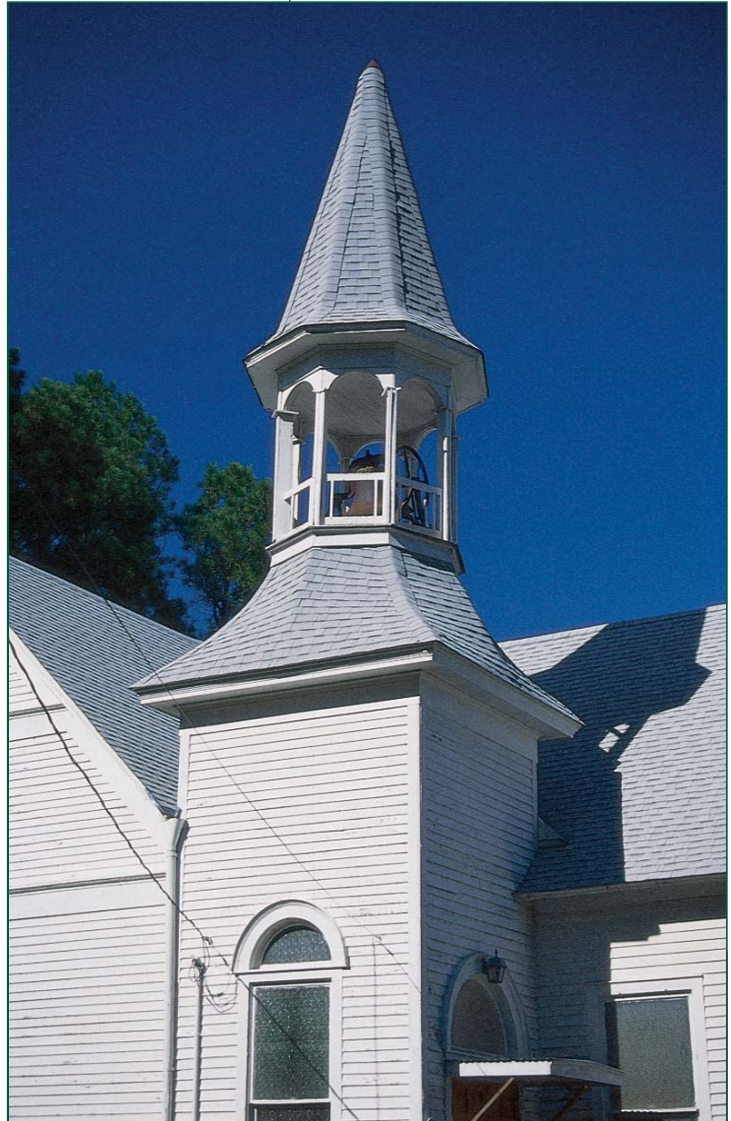
Culture is the way of life of a group of people. The elements of a culture include religion, music, food, clothing, language, architecture, art, literature, games, and sports. All of these elements combine to create the interesting culture of Louisiana. They enhance the quality of life for the state's citizens. Often, these elements are the basis for one of the many festivals in the state.

Religion

The first European religion in Louisiana was Roman Catholic because the French and then the Spanish controlled the colony. At the time, both were Catholic countries. After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, members of various Protestant religions moved into the territory. Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians were later joined by other Protestant groups such as the Lutherans, who were often German immigrants. Members of the Jewish faith have come to Louisiana at various times. More recent immigrants have brought Buddhism and Islam into Louisiana.

Music

New Orleans is the birthplace of jazz. **Jazz** is a kind of improvised music with strong rhythms and syncopation (accents in unexpected places). Brass bands and piano players helped create this new sound. Jazz has spread across the planet, an ambassador for Louisiana culture. In New Orleans, jazz funerals for musicians feature marching groups called "second lines." The music of contemporary jazz greats like the Marsalis family owes much to the music of earlier artists.



Above: Religion is an important element in Louisiana culture. This church is in Cheneyville in Rapides Parish.

Lagniappe

Jelly Roll Morton, a musician from New Orleans, claimed that he invented jazz back in 1897 by combining ragtime, French quadrilles, and blues.

Below: Storytellers and local musicians, such as accordionist Ophe J. Romero of the Romero Brothers, entertain visitors every day under the Evangeline Oak in St. Martinville.



The **blues** is also a link to the past. This music style is based on black folk music, especially on the chants of the plantation workers. Those rhythms were memories of their African culture and made the slaves' lives and their work more bearable. The instruments most associated with blues music are the guitar and the harmonica. Later, when horns were added and the tempo changed, the new style was known as *rhythm and blues*.

In the 1930s, a cultural anthropologist (a scientist who studies human cultures) toured the United States collecting folk music. The blues music Alan Lomax recorded in Louisiana is now part of the Smithsonian's Folkways Collection. One of those he recorded was a Shreveport musician named Huddie Ledbetter, better known as Leadbelly. A statue of this artist now stands in downtown Shreveport.

Another famous form of Louisiana music comes from Cajun bands. These musicians sing in French as they play the fiddle, the triangle, and the accordion. The Cajuns, who are descended from the Acadians, learned to play the accordion from the Germans who moved into southwest Louisiana in the 1880s.

The early Cajuns often held dance parties at their rural homes. Entire families came, and the young children were put on blankets on the bedroom floor. They were told to go to sleep, which in French is *fais-do-do* (fay doh doh). This became the name of these dance parties, and today the term **fais-do-do** refers to a Cajun dance.

Zydeco (ZI de koh) is the special music of French-speaking African Americans of South Louisiana. It is much like Cajun music; the song is sung in French and played on an accordion. An added instrument, the rub board, is used for rhythm.

Country music is part of the heritage of North Louisiana. In the days before television, when people gathered for entertainment, musicians brought their instruments. Their string bands usually included a guitar, a fiddle, and a mandolin.



Above: New Orleans jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis and his group performed at an October 2005 event in San Jose, California, for Apple Computer.

This traditional southern country music developed into *bluegrass* music and then into modern country music.

Country music and blues were adapted to become *rock and roll*. Rock and roll started in New Orleans as early as the 1940s. Antoine “Fats” Domino and Little Richard recorded 1950s rock-and-roll hits. A young musician named Elvis Presley performed his new music in the Municipal Auditorium in Shreveport

before he gained national fame. Jerry Lee Lewis left Ferriday in Concordia Parish to become a piano-pounding rock-and-roll star. The Beatles and the Rolling Stones listened to Louisiana musicians as they developed their own style. The Neville Brothers and many other musicians continue Louisiana’s contribution to rock and roll.

Many early rock-and-roll musicians started out singing **gospel music**. Gospel is church music that blends elements of folk music, **spirituals** (the sacred folk songs of African Americans), hymns, and popular music. You

Lagniappe

Louisiana musicians still achieve fame in the world of country music. Kix Brooks of the country duo Brooks and Dunn is from Shreveport. Tim McGraw, from the small town of Start, won the CMA Entertainer of the Year award in 2001.

can hear gospel music in churches throughout Louisiana every Sunday morning. Songs sung in African American churches preserve the old spirituals and add contemporary music. Rural churches in North Louisiana feature gospel quartets.

More formal classical music also contributes to the musical sound of Louisiana. Orchestras have created musical culture since colonial days. Young musicians today continue this tradition as they audition for the Louisiana Youth Orchestra.

Community brass bands were popular at the turn of the twentieth century. Today, high school bands perform concerts and provide the marching bands for local parades. Music continues to add a tempo to life everywhere in Louisiana.

Food

Newcomers and visitors to Louisiana usually comment on the music and the food. Louisiana food is considered one of the best elements of our culture, although some find the spices a little too hot! The food of Louisiana has spread across the world in recent years, with Cajun restaurants in places like Salt Lake City, Utah.

The food most identified with the state is actually the Cajun and Creole food of South Louisiana. Until recently, residents of North Louisiana ate more like their

neighbors in East Texas and Mississippi. People north of Alexandria were more likely to eat fried chicken or barbecue. For many years, crawfish were not considered food anywhere outside of Cajun country. Fish fries featuring catfish took the place of crawfish boils. Today, boiled crawfish is served throughout the state.



Above: Louisiana has a world-class seafood industry. This plate features three products that would satisfy any seafood lover—crawfish, crab, and shrimp.

Check for Understanding ✓

1. What is cultural diffusion?
2. What are two elements of culture?
3. What kind of music originated in Louisiana?