

## Louisiana's Cultural Regions

As you read, look for:

- the similarities and differences among Louisiana's cultural regions, and
- vocabulary terms **region**, **upland South**, **urban**, and **rural**.

Visiting the state's many festivals is one way to study the elements of Louisiana's culture. A map shows these elements in a different way. The Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism divides the state into five regions. A **region** is an area defined by similar features. Physical regions include common climate and landforms. Cultural regions include similar elements of culture such as ethnic heritage, language, religion, food, music, or recreation. Each of Louisiana's five cultural regions, shown in Map 1, has cultural ties that makes it different in some ways from the rest of the state.



**Map 1**  
Louisiana's Cultural Regions

**Map Skill:** In which cultural region do you live?

**Top:** An Acadian homestead is one of the attractions at Longfellow-Evangeline State Commemorative Area in St. Martinville.



## Sportsman's Paradise Region

This region's label was chosen because of the many lakes, rolling hills, and forests in northern Louisiana that offer abundant outdoor recreation for residents and visitors. Fishing and hunting have been a part of life here for generations. Bass fishing tournaments are big business on the lakes of the region. Newer sports like water-skiing and power-boat racing add a different kind of excitement.

North Louisiana has more in common with the neighboring states of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia than with South Louisiana. A cultural anthropologist uses the term **upland South** to describe this region. Early settlers came from other southern states. The heritage of the people of this region is Anglo-Saxon or Celtic, meaning their ancestors were English, Scottish, or Irish.

The northwest section of the region has Shreveport-Bossier City as its **urban** (city) area. These two cities are in different parishes and are separated by the Red River, but they blend together into one urban culture. Museums and theaters expand the region's culture beyond the Sportsman's Paradise image.

In northeast Louisiana, the urban center is Monroe-West Monroe. These cities are joined by a bridge across the Ouachita (WASH i tau) River, and both are in Ouachita Parish. The University of Louisiana at Monroe provides a cultural focus for the community.





## Crossroads Region

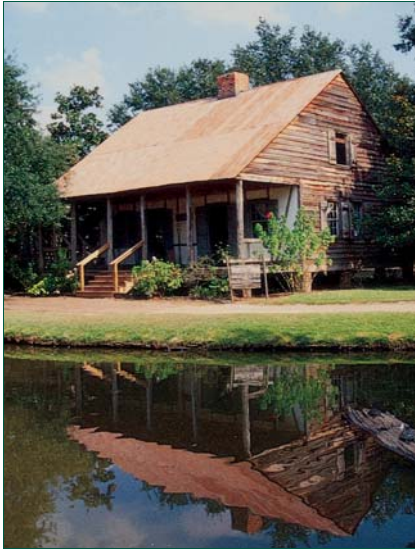
The region called the Crossroads covers the center of the state and merges the cultures of North and South Louisiana. The urban center is Alexandria-Pineville. Like Shreveport and Bossier City, these cities are on the banks of the Red River. Both are in Rapides Parish.

In this region, small towns like Cheneyville and Winnfield feature Main Street stores and churches. In the **rural** (country) areas, some people still live on farms and continue their traditions. Weathered old barns symbolize these rural roots.

**Above:** Cheneyville, in Rapides Parish, is typical of the small towns in the Crossroads region. **Left:** Weathered old barns, like this one in Natchitoches Parish, symbolize the rural roots of the Crossroads region. **Opposite page, above:** Shreveport is the state's third-largest city. **Opposite page, below:** The lakes in the Sportsman's Paradise region are a popular destination for anglers and other outdoors enthusiasts.

# Lagniappe

The Cajun French word for frog is *ouaouaron*.



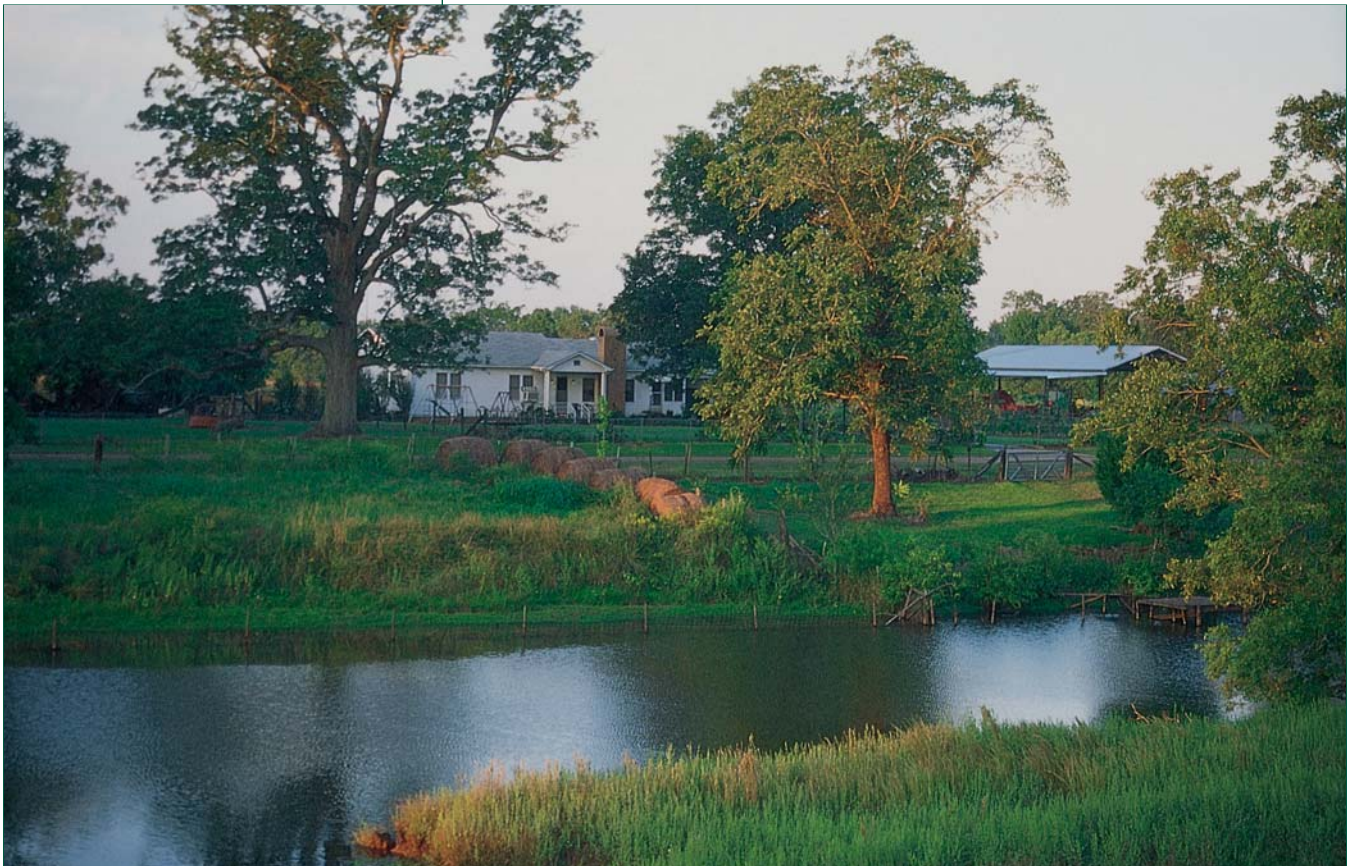
## Cajun Country Region

Small towns fewer than ten miles apart show the change from the crossroads of North Louisiana culture to the Cajun heritage. The two towns of Bordelonville and Acme in Avoyelles Parish reveal these differences. Bordelonville is filled with Cajun French Catholics; just across the Red River, Acme was settled by Anglo-Protestants.

Cajun Country itself spreads over a triangle in southwest Louisiana. Within this region, the culture can be further divided into prairie Cajun and wetlands Cajun. The National Park Service Center features the prairie culture in Eunice (Acadia Parish) and the wetlands culture in Thibodaux (Lafourche Parish). On the prairie, the Cajun culture centered on agriculture and livestock, while the wetlands Cajuns were fishers and trappers. This life continues today, but new economic developments such as the oil industry have brought cultural changes.

Urban centers in Cajun Country include Houma (HO mah), Lafayette, Morgan City, and Thibodaux. Lake Charles is also included in the Cajun Country region but shares some cultural characteristics with neighboring Texas.

Although American fast-food restaurants are now common in these cities, some of the customers still speak Cajun French. Many of those customers work in the oil industry instead of in the traditional occupations of their fathers.





## Plantation Country Region

Old plantation homes, live oak trees, and Spanish moss are the common symbols of this region. As its name suggests, this region has more plantation homes than any other place in the South. And, like cultural regions everywhere, there is much more to life here than the expectations suggest.

Life reaches from the past toward the future in this area along the Mississippi River. The cultural mix includes the conflicts of that past and the struggle for a better tomorrow. Today, people have begun to look for the cultural heritage of all who live in the region, not just the heritage of those who lived in the big house on the plantation.

Baton Rouge is the urban center of this region. The state's capital city has a mix of people and lifestyles that mirrors the state. Every ethnic group living in Louisiana today is represented in Baton Rouge.



**Below:** Bocage Plantation house in Darrow was built in 1801. **Left:** Parlange Plantation in New Roads is a National Historic Landmark. **Opposite page, above:** The lifestyle of the Acadians in southern Louisiana in the early 1800s is preserved at Acadian Village in Lafayette. **Opposite page, below:** A scenic bayou winds through the Cajun town of Bordelonville.



# Spotlight

## Local Interest Museums

Local museums around the state display elements of Louisiana's culture, past and present.

In New Roads in Pointe Coupee Parish, a historic house dating from the French colonial days of Louisiana is the museum and tourist center. The building was built around 1750 and was once part of Parlange Plantation.

The building was constructed in the style called "Louisiana Creole." That is, it was built of cypress timbers sawed by hand into 3½- by 10-inch timbers, which were held in place with large wooden pegs. This construction style was also used by the French in Canada. The space between the timbers was filled with *bousillage*, a combination of mud and moss.

Today, the house displays many cultural elements of French Louisiana. A loom is still used to weave cotton just as it did more than 150 years ago. Baskets woven by early settlers and their Indian neighbors decorate the rooms.

**Right and below:** The Pointe Coupee Museum is housed in a unique Creole cottage on the False River.



Louisiana has many other museums, both large and small. The state museums include the Cabildo in New Orleans and the Louisiana State Exhibit Building in Shreveport. Local museums include the Ford Museum in Homer, Claiborne Parish; the W. H. Tupper Museum in Jennings, Jefferson Davis Parish; and the West Baton Rouge Parish Museum in Port Allen.

**Right:** The Ford Museum in Homer is located in the old Claiborne Hotel on the town square.



**Below:** The French Quarter, famed for its “lacy” balconies, is New Orleans’s greatest attraction.



## Greater New Orleans Region

The city of New Orleans often seems like another world to visitors, even those from other parts of Louisiana. It is often described as “cosmopolitan,” an American city that is more like a European one. A busy port on the Mississippi River exists alongside an exotic historic district. A walk through the French Quarter reminds the tourist of Louisiana’s past.

The largest city in the state is sometimes described as having more in common with the Caribbean and South America than with the rest of the United States. The relaxed atmosphere of the tropics replaces the bustle of Boston.







**Left:** The ornamental fences are a feature of the Garden District of New Orleans, originally a strictly “American” section. **Below:** The culture of the Acadiana region is captured by New Hope Chapel at Acadian Village in Lafayette.

## Other Regional Labels

Cultural regions are not mandatory boundaries on a map. Unlike the parish lines that are set by law, regions can change and can have different labels. People of many backgrounds live in each area of the state, and variations can be found in every community.

Some people divide the state into three regions—North Louisiana, South Louisiana, and New Orleans. Others say that South Louisiana should be divided into New Orleans, Acadiana, and the Florida Parishes. The part of the state in “the toe of the boot” is called the Florida Parishes because it was once part of the colony of West Florida. This region was settled by people more like their neighbors in North Louisiana than those in New Orleans and Acadiana.

Whatever regional divisions are used, it is important to know that the cultural histories of North Louisiana and South Louisiana have been very different. These differences are no longer as great as they once were, but they still affect social, political, and economic interactions.



## Check for Understanding ✓

1. What are two characteristics used to identify a cultural region?
2. How is the culture of North Louisiana different from Acadiana?
3. What makes the Florida Parishes different from the rest of South Louisiana?