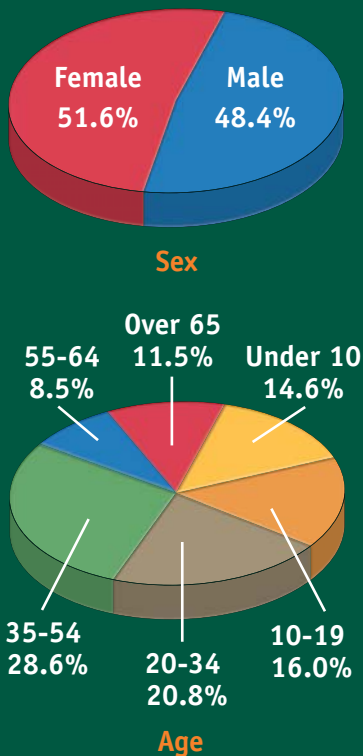


Lagniappe

The word *ethnic* comes from the Greek word *ethnos*, which means “nation” or “people.”

Figure 1
Louisiana’s People, 2000



Right: Louisiana’s people are a blend of many ethnic groups. Norbert LeBlanc is a Cajun alligator hunter and fisherman.

Louisiana’s People

As you read, look for:

- the major ethnic groups in the state,
- the cultural contributions made by those groups, and
- vocabulary terms **ethnic group**, **Acadians**, **free people of color**, **Creoles**, **Anglos**, **lowland South**, and **Isleños**.

Louisiana has a great diversity of people. Their cultural backgrounds have blended into the fascinating mix that is Louisiana today. The cultural differences in the state come from the different ethnic backgrounds of its citizens.

Ethnic Groups

An **ethnic group** is a group of people who share common traditions, beliefs, and patterns of living that include language, religion, customs, and food. The people of Louisiana are much more diverse than some tourists expect to meet.

Acadians

French Canadians migrated to Louisiana in the eighteenth century. When the English gained control of the province of Acadia (now called Nova Scotia), they forced the French to leave. This exile became an important episode in the history of Louisiana. The French-speaking Acadian farmers made their way to the bayous and prairies, developing the region of Acadiana. In fact, the word



Cajun came from the French pronunciation of the word *Acadianne*, meaning “people of Acadia.”

On the map, twenty-two parishes form this triangle of Cajun culture. The many descendants of the first **Acadians** who migrated to Louisiana proudly preserve their language and their customs. Today, people outside Louisiana recognize elements of Cajun culture because of the spread of Cajun food and music.



African Americans

The African American population came to Louisiana in several different ways. The first slaves brought to colonial Louisiana came from West Africa. One of Louisiana’s most famous foods—gumbo—is a gift from these Wolof and Bambara people. The word itself means “okra,” a vegetable used in the soup.

Other slaves were brought from the French colonies of the West Indies. They brought features of their African culture as well as new features that had developed in the West Indies. These slaves spoke French in a dialect known as Creole.

But not all people of African heritage in Louisiana were slaves. Those who were free during the years of slavery were called **free people of color**, or *gens de couleur libre*. Communities of the descendants of this cultural group thrive in several sections of the state today. They consider themselves **Creoles**, referring to their connection to the days when Louisiana was a colony. The term referred to African-French people born in the colony instead of in Europe or Africa.

St. Landry Parish is the home of several large Creole communities. They continue to speak French, as their ancestors did during colonial times. Zydeco music, with its French lyrics, is one of their contributions to world culture.

American Indians

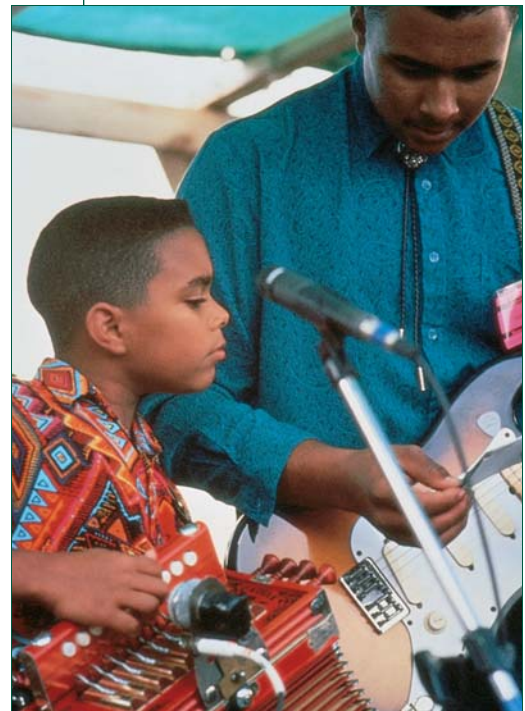
Louisiana continues to be home to some of the descendants of the region’s earliest residents. American Indians have land and tribal headquarters in several parts of the state. The Chitimacha, Choctaw, Coushatta, Tunica-Biloxi, and Houma are the primary tribes remaining in Louisiana.

Anglos

Parts of the state continue the **Anglo** culture developed in the British colonies on the eastern coast of the United States. This English-speaking heritage includes the Scots-Irish, who migrated to Louisiana and established farms in

Map 2 Acadiana

Map Skill: What is the largest parish in Acadiana?



Above: Spencer Frank and a younger member of the Frank Family at the Louisiana Folklife Festival.

the hill country of North Louisiana. The culture here is described as upland South, the accent is southern, and the religion is Protestant.

The low-lying lands along the rivers were perfect for the establishment of plantations. Anglos from other southern states and from New England settled in this area, and the plantation culture that developed is described as **lowland South**. This lowland South culture existed along the Mississippi River, as well as along the Red and the Ouachita Rivers in the northern part of the state. Some differences in customs, speech patterns, and religion are still seen between the upland South and lowland South cultures.



Above: Present-day Isleños display traditional fiesta dress at the annual Isleño fiesta in St. Bernard.

Germans

Germans also immigrated to Louisiana during the early colonial years. However, they did not retain their language and soon blended with the dominant French culture. More Germans arrived in the nineteenth century. A group of these German farm families settled in Acadia Parish and created the community of Robert's Cove. Their grandchildren continue to preserve elements of their German heritage. On December 6, a procession celebrating the religious feast of St. Nicholas goes from house to house.

Hispanics

The oldest and best preserved Hispanic culture in Louisiana is the group of people who still refer to themselves as **Isleños** (is LAY nyos). The word means "islanders." These people are descended from Canary Islanders who were brought to Louisiana when it was a Spanish colony. They live in St. Bernard Parish, where their ancestors settled in the eighteenth century. Some Isleños can still speak the Spanish dialect and sing the songs of those first settlers. Those songs are called *decimas*, ten-stanza narrative songs. Some of the songs tell of the difficulties the first Isleños faced in the Louisiana colony; others tell of Spanish knights who lived centuries ago.

The Hispanic community around Zwolle in Sabine Parish traces its ancestry to the Spanish colony of Texas. In the twentieth century, an influential Cuban community developed in New Orleans after Castro's revolution drove them from Cuba. The most recent Hispanic immigrants have come from Mexico.

Italians

The Italians were another large group of immigrants in the nineteenth century. These new arrivals became farmers, raising vegetables and strawberries. Outside of New Orleans, the largest group of their descendants lives in Independence in Tangipahoa Parish.

The Italians contributed an interesting custom known as St. Joseph's Altar to Louisiana culture. The altar is a thank you for blessings of the past year. The altars are set up sometimes in homes and sometimes in the church. Brought

from Sicily, the tradition includes a feast for friends and strangers. Each visitor is given a dried fava bean for good luck until the next year.

Other Ethnic Groups

The Gulf Coast has offered refuge to many groups of immigrants. Croatians came from the coast of the Adriatic Sea with their sailing skills and developed the oyster industry in the state. Their descendants live in Plaquemines (PLAK mins) Parish. They share this region with Filipino immigrants who were shrimpers. The most recent arrivals to become part of the culture of the wetlands are the Vietnamese. Communities of Vietnamese fishermen now dot Louisiana's coastline.

Chinese immigrants came to Louisiana as laborers during the nineteenth century. Some of them worked on plantations, while others became involved in the shrimp-drying industry along the coast. Chinese communities thrive in Louisiana's cities today. As tolerance for cultural differences has increased, the Chinese now share part of their New Year's tradition with their neighbors. The Lion Dance is a popular sight in Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

A community of Czechs in Rapides Parish continues to preserve their customs. They gather annually to share elements of their culture with each other and with visitors. In Livingston Parish, a Hungarian community still thrives near Albany. Many other cultures have contributed to Louisiana's diversity, including Arabs, Greeks, and natives of India.

Families

Culture is preserved not only by regions and communities but also by families. Often, they come together to share their heritage and pass it along. The tradition of family reunions continues and grows in Louisiana today. In the small North Louisiana town of Dubach in Lincoln Parish, the Colvin family reunion has been held annually since the beginning of the twentieth century. Relatives gather from across the United States to share food and memories. They also visit the family cemetery to honor past generations.

You and your family also contribute to the unique culture of Louisiana. The traditions of the past combine with the customs of today. Your music, food, clothing, language, games, and sports blend into the cultural picture of our state.



Above: Vietnamese immigrants have settled along Louisiana's Gulf Coast. Here, Tran Phu of Delcambre mends a shrimp net.

Check for Understanding ✓

1. How did the word *Cajun* originate?
2. What are five ethnic groups who came to Louisiana?
3. How do families preserve their culture?

Meeting Expectations

Using Photographs as a Source of Information



Photographs provide visual information for research about the past and present. One element of culture that can be studied through photographs is architecture. As an example, look at the photograph above. It shows one of the most famous landmarks in the French Quarter of New Orleans. It was built around 1788 and is still known as Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop. It is described as a cottage with no interior hallways.

See if you can answer the following questions.

1. What materials do you think were used to construct the building?
2. Would the shutters on the building have a practical purpose?
3. What can you tell about the size of the building by comparing with the building next to it?
4. Is there anything in the photograph that proves this was really Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop?
5. What is another source that might tell you more about the building, its style, and its history?

Now, find another photograph that shows a building in Louisiana. What can you learn about the architecture of the building by studying the photograph?