

Lagniappe

The dogs brought by de Soto are the ancestors of Louisiana's catahoula leopard dog.

Historic Indian Tribes

As you read, look for:

- the major tribes living in Louisiana when the Europeans arrived, and
- vocabulary terms **immunity**, **tribe**, **treaty**, **totem**, and **clan**.



Above: Hernando de Soto became wealthy after serving in an expedition in Peru. He then began his own expedition, dreaming of riches to be discovered in what is now the southeastern United States.

The *historic* Indian period began when the Europeans came to North America and began to keep written records about Indian life. “The People,” as the American Indians called themselves, had passed down their traditions and history through oral storytelling. This storytelling preserved the important truths for the next generation but did not include much information about their daily life.

The first written history of Louisiana Indians was reported by outsiders. When the Europeans arrived, they wrote letters and journals describing their encounters with the Native Americans. Unfortunately, the Europeans were not always the best observers of cultures that were very different from their own. The language and customs of The People were often misunderstood.

In 1539, Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto set out from Havana, Cuba, to explore the southern part of what is today the United States. He brought with him hundreds of mounted soldiers, his bloodhounds, and a huge herd of pigs. But this Spanish *conquistador* (conqueror) and others like him also brought along European diseases. The lack of **immunity** (natural resistance) to these diseases brought a sentence of death to many who never even saw the intruders.

When the French arrived in Louisiana in the early eighteenth century, they found far fewer people than earlier explorers had reported. The Native American population had been reduced by an estimated 80 percent, as village after village was hit by influenza, measles, smallpox, or cholera. Because of disease, some Indian groups disappeared completely. The French were seeing the effects of the first European contact with Louisiana Indians, although this was only understood centuries later.

The early French explorers and trappers identified a number of tribes, recording names as they heard them. A **tribe** is a group of people who share a common ancestry, language, name, and way of living. The French sometimes

made mistakes in identifying these tribes because they did not understand the tribal groupings.

To communicate with people who did not speak their language, Louisiana Indians used *Mobilian*. This trading language, based mainly on Choctaw, mixed gestures and words. Many of the Mobilian-Choctaw words became place names in Louisiana. For example, *Manchac* (MAN shak) meant “rear entrance” and described the water route that was the back entrance to the Mississippi River.

When the French came to Louisiana, they encountered these tribes on their traditional lands: the Atakapa, Natchez, Caddo, Choctaw, Houma, Chitimacha, and Tunica. Of these, the Atakapa and the Natchez no longer exist as tribes. All of these tribes belong to the Eastern Woodlands culture of North America. Because of their location, the Caddo also shared some cultural traits with the Plains Indians.

Atakapa

The Atakapa and the related Opelousas lived a primitive lifestyle in the Calcasieu Parish area. Early European observers and other tribes described them as cannibals. In fact, the name *Atakapa* means “eaters of flesh” in Choctaw. Their cannibalism was most likely a ritual or ceremony. They may have eaten body parts from dead enemies to gain their power. The Atakapa were displaced when colonists moved into the area where they lived. First the French and then the Spanish maintained frontier forts in their region.

Natchez

The primary village of the Natchez people, called Grand Village, was located near present-day Natchez, Mississippi, on the eastern bluffs of the Mississippi. On the west bank of the river, in northeastern Louisiana, lived the related Taensa and Avoyel tribes. Their flat-topped mounds and fortified villages were noted by the first Europeans. By 1700, their villages were scattered in the forests. However, mounds and temples continued to be part of their culture.

The Natchez had an unusual social structure. Their class system consisted of common people (called *stinkards*), nobles, and chiefs. Everyone in the society, both men and women, wore tattoos showing their status.

Their ruler, known as the “Great Sun,” was like a king and religious figure and held the power of life and death over his subjects. He rode in a litter and



Map 21 De Soto's Expedition

Map Skill: Through which present-day states did de Soto travel?

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In 1962, archaeologists discovered the remains of the Great Sun's house at Grand Village. The ruler lived on top of one of the mounds.



Above: The Grand Village of the Natchez can be seen on the eastern bluffs of the Mississippi River near Natchez, Mississippi.

Opposite page, below: This traditional Caddo village has been recreated at Indian City USA in Oklahoma. The headquarters of the Caddo tribe is in Binger, Oklahoma.

had several wives. When he died, some of his wives and other members of the tribe were killed and buried with him.

The Natchez liked to decorate their clothing with accessories such as belts of red-dyed opossum fur. The women wore the most elaborate clothing of any tribe. They used mulberry bark to make a thread for weaving and then made linen-like cloth.

They strengthened their pottery with Spanish moss. This pottery was used to store and serve food. They ate deer, bison, bear, porcupine, and fowl and a variety of fruits and vegetables. The rich soil produced excellent crops.

This land that fed them well led to the end of their way of life. When the French moved into the area, a French officer took the best farmland of the Natchez tribe. They responded by attacking a French settlement, killing about two hundred people. The French, with the help of the Choctaw, then killed many Natchez and drove the rest from the region. Some joined the Creek, Cherokee, and other Gulf tribes. Any descendants of the Natchez living today are mixed among those groups.

Caddo

Caddo, or Kadohadacho, was the name of a specific tribe, but the French applied it to an entire group of tribes. These included the Natchitoches and the Ouachita. They lived in the land bordering the eastern woodlands and the western plains of North America. Border disputes between France and Spain, and later between Spain and the United States, centered in the land of the Caddo.

The Red River and its tributaries marked the traditional home of the Caddo. They had lived in Arkansas before moving into northwest Louisiana. On today's map, Caddo Lake and Caddo Parish are named for those first occupants of the land.

The Caddo shared this home with herds of bison, hunting them from horseback. The horses came from their neighbors on the western plains, who traded the horses for salt. The Caddo traded their surplus horses to their eastern neighbors, the Tunica.

Like those eastern neighbors, the Caddo also planted crops. Later, they added cattle, hogs, and poultry to their farms. Fish from the many lakes, creeks, and rivers had long provided food.

After the Louisiana Purchase, the Caddo accepted American trade regulations. But the trade goods were inferior, and often the amount was less than promised. In 1835, the Caddo sold their land to the United States. They gave up one million acres of land for \$80,000, part in cash and part in trade goods in a treaty with the United States. (A **treaty** is a formal agreement between two or more nations.) The land reached from DeSoto Parish north to Texarkana. After the treaty, they joined other Caddo in Texas. The Caddo were forced to leave there when the Texans began driving out all Native Americans.

The present home of the Caddo people is a reservation in Oklahoma. An annual turkey dance continues a tradition that began in a time no one can remember. Some participants wear the special capes woven of seeds as they dance and sing the old songs.



Map 22 Historic Louisiana Tribes

Map Skill: According to the map, which tribal group lived in the northwestern part of Louisiana?



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One ancient Caddo site that has been identified was at Mounds Plantation, just north of Shreveport.

Connecting with U.S. History

Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Policy

When Andrew Jackson became president in 1829, about 125,000 Native Americans still lived east of the Mississippi River. Earlier U.S. policy toward the Indians had focused on encouraging them to adopt the lifestyle of white Americans. They had been told they could stay in their homelands if they lived peacefully. In fact, the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Creek became known as the "Civilized Tribes" because they adapted so well to life among the white settlers.

Unfortunately, they lived on rich farmland in the South. Settlers continued to want more of that fertile land, and conflict developed. Earlier agreements with the tribes were ignored when Congress passed the Indian Removal Act in 1830.

President Jackson's message to Congress on December 8, 1830, explains his support of this policy:

The consequences of a speedy removal will be important to the United States, to individual States, and to the Indians themselves. The pecuniary advantages which it Promises to the Government are the least of its recommendations. It puts an end to all possible danger of collision between the authorities of the General and State Governments on account of the Indians. It will place a dense and civilized population in large tracts of country now occupied by a few savage hunters. By opening the whole territory between



Tennessee on the north and Louisiana on the south to the settlement of the whites it will incalculably strengthen the southwestern frontier and render the adjacent States strong enough to repel future invasions without remote aid.

The result of the Indian Removal Act was the forced westward migration of the tribes. The harsh experience of the forced march under the control of the U.S. Army became known as the "Trail of Tears."

The Choctaw removal took place in 1831. Pressure on the Cherokee increased when gold was discovered on their land in Georgia. More than 15,000 Cherokee were forced to follow the Trail of Tears to what is now Oklahoma; at least 4,000 died along the way.

In 1836, President Jackson's last message to Congress included this statement about the Indian Removal Act: "The national policy, founded alike in interest and in humanity, so long and so steadily pursued by this government for the removal of the Indian tribes . . . [ended] by the conclusion of the treaty with the Cherokees."

Jackson continued by asking Congress to direct their attention to the importance of providing a well-digested and comprehensive system for the protection, supervision, and improvement of the various tribes now planted in the Indian country.



Choctaw

When the Europeans came, the Choctaw were the second largest tribe in the southeastern United States, occupying an area that includes present-day Georgia, Alabama, and southern Mississippi and Louisiana. They were farmers living in permanent towns, and they also had extensive trade routes. Some roads in southeast Louisiana are still called old Choctaw roads.

The long-standing conflict between the French and the British spilled over to the New World and involved the Indian nations in the 1700s. The Europeans demanded that each tribe choose sides. The Choctaw chose the French. The Chickasaw, enemies of the Choctaw, supported the British, and conflicts between the two tribes increased. After the French and Indian War, the Choctaw formed two groups, one allied with the French and the other with the British. The conflict in the tribe led to an internal war.

A Choctaw militia fought the British in the American Revolution, and a

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Federal recognition as a tribe is important for funding and the legal right to govern themselves.

Above: This painting by Karl Bodmer depicts a Choctaw camp along the Mississippi River in the 1800s. **Opposite page:** Bodmer painted "Tshanny, a Choctaw Man" near New Orleans during the period of the removal of the Choctaw to the west.

unit of Choctaw warriors fought with Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans. But by the early 1830s, the Choctaw had ceded (given up) most of their land to the United States.

Most Choctaw descendants live on their reservations in Oklahoma and Mississippi. Several small groups of Choctaw continue to live in Louisiana. The Jena Band of Choctaw is recognized as a tribe by the United States. They have a tribal center in Grant Parish. These Choctaw retain their language and many of the skills of the past. They make blowguns, fans of turkey feathers, and baskets of oak and pine straw. Skilled Choctaw crafters prepare deer hides using traditional methods. Another Choctaw group, the Clifton Choctaw, live in Rapides (ra PEEDZ) Parish.

One group living in Louisiana today is the Ebarb-Choctaw-Apache tribe, known as the Louisiana Band of Choctaw. Their tribal office is located in Zwolle in Sabine Parish. Here, near the Sabine River, Lipan Apache joined with a group of Choctaw. The Apache had been brought to the region as Spanish slaves in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Their culture today is a mixture of their native and Spanish heritages. The Zwolle tamale festival features the community's food specialty and showcases their blended culture.

Below: At the Louisiana Folklife Festival, these Houma Indians demonstrate the traditional method of building a shelter using wooden poles and palmetto leaves.

Houma

The Houma (HO muh) Indians greeted the early French explorer Robert Cavalier de La Salle as he traveled down the Mississippi River in the late 1600s. Their primary village, a circle of about 140 cabins, was near the river at Angola in West Feliciana Parish. After losing this location after a battle with the



Tunica, the Houma moved further south. They first lived on Bayou St. John, moved to Ascension Parish in 1718, sold that land to the Acadians, and ended up in Terrebonne Parish.

Driven into the swamp and marsh, they learned to hunt, fish, and trap. The crawfish is the **totem** (tribal symbol) of the Houma and serves as a symbol of kinship and protection.

Another symbol of the Houma was the Istrouma (is TROO ma) or Isti Houma. This tall red pole on the banks of the Mississippi marked the boundary between the hunting grounds of the Houma and the Bayougoula. The French explorer Iberville called the marker *baton rouge*, French for “red stick.” The name of Louisiana’s capital city comes from this story.

The Houma today live mainly in Terrebonne (TER ruh BON) and Lafourche parishes and number themselves at about 15,000. During the years they moved around Louisiana, they intermarried with the Bayougoula, Acolipissa, and Atakapa. This blurring of tribal lines has made it difficult for the Houma to prove their ancestry. Many who consider themselves Houma now speak French. They have lived among the Acadians for many years and shared their culture.

The Houma are recognized by the state of Louisiana as a tribe, but the federal government has never recognized this group as a tribe. The Bureau of Indian Affairs claims they are not descendants of a distinct tribe, have not historically been a distinct community, and have not maintained political influence over their members. These are the requirements for tribal recognition by the United States government. Today, the Houma continue to push for federal recognition.

The Houma maintain a community center at Dulac. Lessons in weaving and woodcarving pass on the old ways. Palmetto baskets show a tradition developed when the Houma used local plants to make the containers needed. The use of herbalism by healers or *traituers* (Acadian French) was valued in both cultures and is still practiced by some members of the community.

Tunica-Biloxi

Both the Tunica and the Biloxi had lived in Mississippi. The Tunica lost their ancestral home when the Chickasaw drove them away. The Biloxi were pushed inland by the French, forced to leave their home near the Gulf Coast. By the late 1780s, both tribes had settled in Avoyelles Parish, in east-central Louisiana. The Spanish gave them a land grant, promising that they could keep their land.



Above: This Houma doll was made out of Spanish moss by Marie Dean of Dulac in the 1960s. Her dolls have button eyes and are usually dressed in palmetto skirts.



The Tunica were great traders. After settling in central Louisiana, they continued this trading activity. They located their settlements near major waterways, taking advantage of an excellent trade route. They became major distributors of salt, a valuable trade good. They also traded arrow points, flint, and horses from New Mexico. As “money,” the traders used shell beads, pearls, or quartz; they kept trading records with bundles of sticks and knots of string.

The Tunica gained power during the European colonial period because of their trading. A French observer described the Great Chief of the Tunica: “He understands his trade very well. He has learned of us to hoard up money and he is reckoned to be very rich.” In addition to trading, the Tunica hunted, farmed, and fished.

The Tunica were governed by both a war chief and a peace chief. The war chief was the military leader, and the peace chief was the tribal leader. Their totem, or tribal symbol, was the rattlesnake and represented the entire tribe.

In the 1980s, after a fifty-year effort, the Tunica-Biloxi tribe was recognized by the United States government.

The Tunica-Biloxi now have a reservation near Marksville in Avoyelles Parish with their own court and police system. When the business of the tribe is conducted, the elders may speak French, for no one today can speak the language of the Tunica. Storytellers still share the myths and tales of their ancestors, although they are told in English or French. Feeling this loss, the Tunica continue to rediscover and reclaim their heritage.

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The Tunica-Biloxi Museum in Marksville (below) houses the “Tunica Treasure,” artifacts that were looted from ancestral graves.



Chitimacha

The name *Chitimacha* means “people altogether red.” By 1650, over 4,000 Chitimacha lived in villages along Bayou Teche, Grand Lake, Butte LaRose, and the mouth of Bayou Plaquemine in South Louisiana. The Chitimacha were ruled by one male chief, who had charge over all the villages. The chief inherited his position. Women could also hold political power and serve as healers, but they could not hold any powerful religious position. In the closed society of the Chitimacha, a child belonged to the clan of the mother, and the birth clan established the child’s social class.

Important rituals were conducted in the dance house. These ceremonies of dancing and fasting sometimes lasted for six days. For a boy’s rite of passage to manhood, he fasted (took no food or water) and sought a vision to help him direct his adult life.

This was the way of life for the Chitimacha when the French arrived. They quickly became victims in the power struggle that followed. After some initial

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The Chitimacha are the only Louisiana Indians known to live presently in their ancestral homeland.

conflicts, the Chitimacha made peace with the French.

When the Acadians arrived, the lives of the Chitimacha changed again. In 1762, some of the Acadians settled near the Chitimacha. Later the two groups intermarried, and French became their common language.

Although they were still living in their homeland at the time of the Loui-

siana Purchase, the Chitimacha were never offered a treaty by the United States. By 1905, they had lost much of their land. After a court struggle and help from Sarah McIlhenny, their neighbor from nearby Avery Island, the Chitimacha regained part of their ancestral homeland. By 1934, they had opened a school for their tribe.

In 1971, the tribe finally received federal recognition. Today, the Chitimacha reservation is almost three hundred acres in St. Mary Parish. Chief Ralph Darden said of his people, "To still walk this same land our ancestors walked. To again be able to care and provide for our people and those around us. To rekindle the pride in being Chitimacha. That is the greatest gift we can give our children."

Opposite page, above: This illustration of a Tunica chief and his wife and child was painted in the 1730s by Alexander de Batz. **Below:** John and Scarlett Darden are shown here making traditional Chitimacha baskets. Some Chitimacha baskets are so tightly woven, they can hold water.





Tribal traditions are passed down from one generation to the next. Here are two generations of Coushatta basket-makers, photographed at Elton. Lorena Langley (right) is shown holding a basket of pine straw animals. Her daughter Rose Medford (above) is making a small basket.

Coushatta

The Coushatta (Koasati) tribe left their home on the Tennessee River after de Soto tried to force them to give him gold they did not have. Moving south, they stayed until they felt the pressure of the British colonies to the east. The Coushatta escaped the Indian slave traders by moving even further west.

Coming from Georgia and Alabama, they settled in south-central Louisiana in the late eighteenth century. After the Americans came to Louisiana, the Coushatta tried to stay neutral in the conflicts between Spain and the United States. They moved frequently along the border between Louisiana and Texas to avoid the clashes between the two countries.

The Coushatta lived in clans made of many families. A **clan** is a group of people who are related by blood. Respect for the mother's clan gave women a special place in tribal life. Each family had its own animal totem.





The crafts of the tribe included weaving beautiful cloth, rope, and saddle blankets. The men made blowguns and bows and arrows for hunting. Like their neighbors, the Coushatta were also farmers.

By the nineteenth century, many Coushatta lived in Louisiana; by 1884, they had purchased their land near Bayou Blue in Allen Parish. The important federal recognition of their tribe came in 1973. Today, they have an active, organized tribal government and a vital and thriving community. Many tribal members are full-blooded and speak the Coushatta language. They follow their rich oral tradition to share the story of their past with the next generation. They still weave their intricate pine straw baskets.

Above: These Coushatta animal dolls are made of pine straw and raffia, the leaf fibers of a type of palm tree.

Check for Understanding ✓

1. What is considered the beginning of the historic period?
2. Some Indians who never even saw de Soto died after his explorations. Why?
3. Where did the Atakapa live?
4. Why did the Caddo leave their traditional home?
5. How did Baton Rouge get its name?
6. Why did the Coushatta move frequently along the border between Louisiana and Texas?