

# Early Historic Culture

As you read, look for:

- elements of Native American culture, and
- vocabulary terms **pirogue** and **calumet**.

**Below:** This painting by Francois Barnard, "Choctaw Village near the Chefuncte," provides an opportunity for us to see history through the eyes of a person who actually lived it.

When the first Europeans came to Louisiana, the American Indians who were living here had a rich culture.

## The Village

Community life was organized around a tribe or a clan, which was headed by a chief or chiefs. Kinship was very important and, along with social class, directed much of a person's life.





**Above:** The Choctaw played ball games as a form of recreation as well as to help them improve their skills for hunting and war. George Catlin caught the spirit of these games in his painting "Choctaw Ball Game."

Membership in clans was passed through the mother's side of the family. The Caddo and the Tunica ranked the clans, with some more powerful than others, and chiefs chosen only from specific clans. The Natchez had a caste (class) system with several levels. Moving into a higher group was possible through marriage, but a person could also lose rank by marriage. The Chitimacha followed a true caste system, in which people married only within their own class.

Children were raised in these groups, often under the care of all the adults. In some tribes, the mother's brother handled discipline, and the father's role was more like a big brother. Discipline was mild, and the disapproval of the adults was usually enough to change unacceptable behavior.

Children's play often imitated adult work. In this way, they learned gender roles and the skills they would need as adults. But much of their childhood involved physical exercise, especially swimming and running, and they were not expected to do much work before age ten.

Games were an important part of village life. Much excitement centered on games like chunky and several kinds of ball games. Chunky was a one-on-one match in which a stone called the chunky was rolled between goals. One player rolled the chunky, while the other hurled a pole to hit it. Betting on the outcome was a key part of the activity. Other competitive matches included wrestling, racing, and archery.



**Above:** The matchcoat in this 1730s painting by Alexander de Batz was made of bison skin and was a protection against the winter weather.

## Lagniappe

The Plains Indian sign language name for the Caddo was “pierced nose.”

## Clothing

The Indians who lived in Louisiana wore simple clothing made from available materials. The clothes were suited to the climate and the season. Men wore breechcloths made from buckskin and held at the waist with a belt. The belts were made of fur, fiber, or buckskin and were often decorated. Buckskin leggings provided more covering, and men wore them when traveling or in severe weather.

The women wore simple skirts. Natchez women were covered from the neck down with a garment of cloth made from mulberry bark. Choctaw women wove long skirts of buffalo wool or mulberry bark fiber. Women in other tribes wore skirts made of woven palmetto leaves, Spanish moss, other plant fibers, or buckskin. For warmth, Caddo women added buckskin or fur ponchos. Children were dressed very simply and sometimes did not wear any clothes during the summer. When they needed footwear, the Indians made moccasins from the skins of deer, bear, or bison.

Europeans admired the Indians’ feather cape, which was a woven net covered with turkey, duck, or swan feathers. Both men and women wore these beautiful garments for special occasions.

Body ornaments and tattooing were common to all groups. Sometimes the tattoos indicated important deeds or clan membership. Body painting had different purposes, and certain colors and designs had different meanings. Pierced ears were popular, and the Caddo pierced their noses to wear small silver ornaments. Their necklaces, bracelets, and rings were made of copper, silver, or gold.

## Work

The natural environment of Louisiana provided the Indians with the plants and animals to meet their needs. Those who lived near the coast often had no need for farming and survived on the huge supply of clams. Others planted crops in the rich soil. The Native Americans also hunted, fished, and collected wild plants.

The men worked together to clear land, construct houses, and build boats. They partially burned a cypress log and scraped out the burned area with shells to make a dugout. These boats were good for bayou travel, and the French later named them **pirogues** (pe ROGS).

Women gathered together to weave baskets, make pottery, or craft other utensils. The double-walled baskets woven by Chitimacha women from river

cane were so well designed that they could float.

Members of the tribe also spent their time preparing food and making essential clothing and tools. Any items they did not need were traded for additional supplies.

## Shelter

The Indians built their houses from available materials and adapted them to the climate. The Caddo built rectangular log houses, filling the cracks with clay mixed with deer hide to keep in the warmth. They also built a round summer house of woven grass. The Choctaw built a simple wood frame, plastered it with a clay-and-moss mixture, and then thatched it with palmetto leaves. Most of the tribes used some variation of these three types.

The houses often had no window openings, and the small door faced the east for good luck. The houses varied in size; in some tribes, they were quite large and accommodated several families.

## Food

In the wild, the Indians found acorns, hickory nuts, mayhaw, blackberries, and many other plants, including 250 kinds of roots. One of these was a wild sweet potato, the forerunner of the yam grown in Louisiana today.

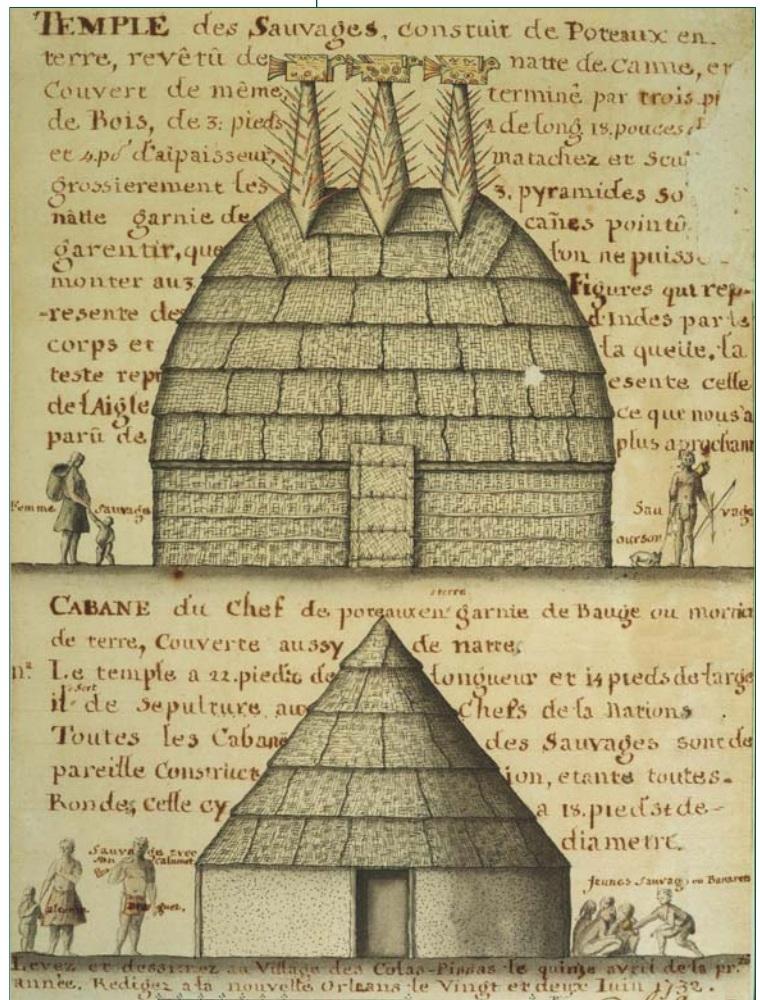
This amazing list of foods was increased by farming. Long before the Europeans arrived, The People were successful farmers. At first, the Indians cultivated local plants such as the sunflower, amaranth, and tobacco. Trade with tribes in Mexico brought seeds for corn, beans, and squash, which soon replaced the earlier crops.

Corn became the mainstay of their meals. They ate boiled corn and a dish of corn mixed with beans and other vegetables or fruits. The dish with ground corn was called sagamite (sa GA me ta). Corn was dried, making it a portable

food supply. Called “pinole” by the Spanish and “cold meal” by the British, this dried corn later developed into the well-known southern dish of grits. The dried corn was ground into meal and baked into bread. Another dried corn dish made by the Choctaw and Caddo included a meat filling, making a tamale-like dish.

## Lagniappe

Sagamite was described often in French accounts of welcoming feasts.



**Above:** The cabin of a chief (bottom) and a temple (top) depicted in this 1730s Alexander de Batz illustration are typical of the shelters built by the Native Americans in Louisiana.



**Top:** At the Grand Village of the Natchez, a Natchez house, granary, and drying platform have been reconstructed. **Above:** Deer were important animals to the Native Americans, providing both food and clothing.

To protect the supply of corn from hungry animals, the Indians built granaries high off the ground. This stored food helped the Indians survive in years when crops were poor.

The Indians supplemented the vegetables and fruit with the meat of deer and bison. Bear provided not only meat but also oil. Bear oil was the best fat available and became a substitute for money in an exchange economy.

## Religion

The religion of the Indians was based on their concept of the world. Everything in the world had a place as part of a sacred whole. Preserving balance and harmony was the purpose of religious activities, which were supervised by priests, chiefs, and holy men.

The light of the sun represented a sacred power to several tribes. The Natchez believed that their main leader, the Great Sun, possessed special gifts from the sun. Fire was one symbol of the sun's power. Sacred fires and religious icons were often kept in special temples.

For most tribes, the annual celebrations included a new corn festival and a harvest festival. Some ceremonies continued for several days, with the participants getting little sleep or food. Dance and music were important in these religious festivities. Dances had specific meanings, and dancers often imitated animals to tell a story or teach a lesson. The musical instruments accompanying these songs and dances included drums and cane flutes.

Some Indian practices were not understood at all by the Europeans. The ritual of sacrifice seemed cruel and evil, especially to those who saw the women offer their babies to the death fire of a great chief. To some Indians of the early eighteenth century, however, that act brought honor to the family and sent spirits to join the chief in the next world.

## Government

A war chief and a peace chief usually led the tribe. The war chief was the military leader, the one who decided when to go into battle. The peace chief handled the tribal matters. Some tribes also had sub-chiefs. Some chiefs inherited their positions; in other tribes, they were selected, usually from among tribal elders. The Tunica-Biloxi and the Coushatta still have a council of tribal elders to advise the chief.

Smoking the **calumet**, or peace pipe, with another tribe was a formal ceremony. This was an agreement to avoid war. To show its importance, each calumet was very carefully made. The pipe was usually made of clay or hollow cane and decorated with feathers and other significant items.

The reasons for going to war varied. The chiefs might feel menaced by a neighboring tribe. Sometimes the chiefs wanted to acquire captives, or the young men might want to improve their status by earning glory in battle. The Indians did not go to war without the required ritual and ceremony.

The tactics of the Indians were completely different from the Europeans' experience. The Indians acted in secret, hoping to surprise their enemy. They depended on knives and war clubs in hand-to-hand combat. Captured women could marry into the tribe, and children were usually raised as members of the tribe.

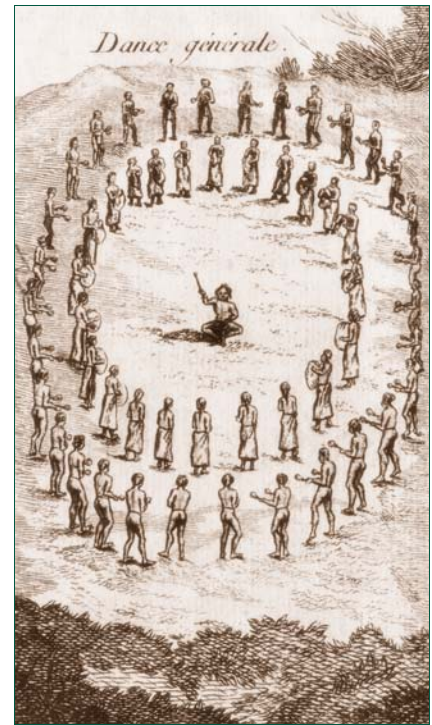
The peace chief was responsible for the normal, day-to-day activities within the tribe. He acted as judge when wrongdoings occurred. Criminal acts were not tolerated because they destroyed harmony. Punishment was severe and included beating, banishment, and even death.

## Contact with Europeans

Interaction with the British, French, and Spanish changed the Indians' way of life forever. The Europeans interfered with the internal affairs of the tribes and relocated many of them. They involved the Indians in their conflicts, enslaved them, and encouraged them to capture others as slaves. The early people of Louisiana changed from a hunting and agricultural society to one that depended on trade. But in that colonial trade economy, they were expected to serve as hired soldiers to fight the battles of the Europeans.

### Check for Understanding ✓

1. How was membership in clans passed on?
2. How did the climate affect the type of clothing worn?
3. What kind of work did men do together?
4. What were three ways food was acquired?
5. What were two reasons for going to war?



**Above:** The ceremonies of Louisiana Indians celebrated important events. Most ceremonies included dance.

## Lagniappe

The Indians usually timed their wars for late spring or early fall when travel was easier and villages were safer without men.

# Meeting Expectations

## The Caddo Treaty of July 1, 1835

**The Indian Removal Act resulted in the removal of the Caddo Indians from Louisiana.**

**ARTICLE I.** *The chiefs, head men, and warriors of the said nation agree to cede and relinquish to the United States all their land contained in the following boundaries [The treaty includes a detailed description of Caddo tribal lands in Arkansas and Louisiana equaling somewhere between 600,000 and 1,000,000 acres].*

**ARTICLE II.** *The said chiefs head men and warriors of the said nation do voluntarily relinquish their possession to the territory of land aforesaid and promise to remove at their own expense out of the boundaries of the United States and the territories belonging and appertaining thereto within the period of one year from and after the signing of this treaty and never more return to live settle or establish themselves as a nation tribe or community of people within the same.*

**ARTICLE III.** *In consideration of the aforesaid cession relinquishment and removal it is agreed that the said United States shall pay to the said nation of Caddo Indians the sums in goods, horses, and money hereinafter mentioned, to wit—Thirty thousand dollars to be paid in goods, and horses, as agreed upon to be delivered on the signing of this treaty. Ten thousand dollars in money to be paid within one year from the first day of September next. Ten thousand dollars, per annum in money for the four years next following so as to make the whole sum paid and payable eighty thousand dollars.*

This supplement was added to the treaty at the agency house in the Caddo Nation and State of Louisiana on July 1, 1835.

*And WHEREAS Larkin Edwards has resided for many years to the present time in the Caddo Nation—was a long time their true and faithful interpreter, and though poor he has never sent the Red man away from his door hungry. He is now old and unable to support himself by manual labor, and since his employment as their interpreter has ceased possesses no adequate means by which to live: Now therefore—*

*And it is further agreed that there shall be reserved to Larkin Edwards his heirs and assigns for ever one section of land to be selected out of the lands ceded to the United States by the said nation of Indians as expressed in the treaty to which this article is supplementary in any part thereof not otherwise appropriated by the provisions contained in these supplementary articles.*

**A section of land is 640 acres. Larkin Edwards sold this land to one of the partners in the new Shreve Town Company. Edwards received \$7,000 for the land soon after the Caddo treaty was signed. This section of land became the city of Shreveport.**

- 1. Where were the Caddo tribal lands located?**
- 2. How much land was sold to the United States?**
- 3. Why was Larkin Edwards given a section of land by the Caddo tribe?**
- 4. How much per acre was Edwards paid for the land? Based on a total of 600,000 acres, how much per acre were the Caddo paid by the government?**
- 5. Who benefitted from this treaty? Explain your answer.**