

Spanish Control

As you read, look for: the Spanish plan for the Louisiana colony, the arrival of the Isleños, and vocabulary terms **Cabildo** and **surveyor**.

O'Reilly was also charged with removing French power and French law from this now-Spanish colony. He organized the government and the military according to the Spanish colonial policies.

Order and Organization

O'Reilly used the Spanish colonial law (the law of the Indies) as the model for Louisiana. He replaced the French Superior Council with the Spanish **Cabildo**. This group functioned as a town council and as a court of law.

O'Reilly selected the members of the first Cabildo. Later, in the accepted Spanish custom, the positions were bought. As time went on, this governing body was given more responsibilities. The New Orleans building constructed for its meetings was also called the Cabildo.

O'Reilly intended to stop the British smugglers because this was against Spanish colonial law. British traders in the Manchac settlement had customers across the bayou in Louisiana. After France stopped sending goods, these smugglers had been the colonists' only source of needed supplies. O'Reilly set up trade with merchants from the Spanish colony of Cuba. Continuing his work, O'Reilly visited the interior districts of Louisiana to examine the forts. Then he turned to other problems. Because prices for food were too high, he set the prices that merchants could charge. He also made changes in the French slave laws, abolishing Indian slavery. He improved Indian relations by continuing to give them gifts.

O'Reilly then ordered a census to provide the detailed information required by Spain. An official **surveyor** was appointed to measure and mark off boundary lines to establish land ownership. No complete surveys had been done by the French.

Now Louisiana was a true Spanish colony. O'Reilly had been sent by the king as a military commander to get the colony under control. He had indeed ended the rebellion and brought order to the colony. In October 1770, Alejandro O'Reilly set sail for Spain. Before he left, he turned the colony over to its new governor.

Figure 19

Spanish Colonial Government



Lagniappe

The census commissioned by O'Reilly listed 14,000 persons living in Louisiana. About 3,500 lived in New Orleans. Native Americans were not counted, and the majority of the 14,000 were slaves.

Louisiana Under Unzaga

Luis de Unzaga y Amezaga had been sent with O'Reilly to become the governor once the colony was under control. To maintain order, Unzaga needed to have good relations with the colonists. One of his earliest decisions helped win them over because it improved their economy and their lifestyles.

The illegal trade with the British colony of West Florida continued. The actions of Ulloa and O'Reilly had only increased the smuggling. But Unzaga overlooked the Spanish trade laws and allowed British merchants to set up shop in New Orleans. This trade and the sound Spanish coin money improved the colonial economy.

Unzaga handled other problems with a mild manner and efficient style. He appointed many French to government positions, making the colonists more willing to be ruled by Spain. He became even more accepted when he married a wealthy French merchant's daughter. His was among the first of many marriages between Spanish officers and the daughters of the French colonists.

The Spanish wanted the colonists to be satisfied with their situation. Otherwise, they might be influenced by the growing tensions in the British colonies. That unrest might explode at any time and spill over into Louisiana.

Unzaga strengthened the Louisiana forts by repairing them and bringing in more soldiers. He also sought the loyalty of Indian tribes by continuing to sell them firearms. These warriors would be needed as allies if war broke out with Great Britain.

Below: Hovey Cowles (left, as a leather-armoured Spanish soldier) and Gus Martinez (right, as an ensign) are "interpreters" at Los Adaes SCA. Los Adaes was a Spanish fort built in 1721 to protect Texas from the French.





The Isleños

The possibility of war made loyal colonists in Louisiana essential. King Carlos III, however, still doubted the loyalty of his new French colonists. The Spanish government looked for a group of loyal Spanish subjects. The new colonists came from the Spanish Canary Islands, which lay off the northwest coast of Africa. They called themselves *Isleños*, the Spanish word for “islanders.”

The Isleños came to Louisiana beginning in 1777. They faced disease, hurricanes, lost ships, and delays in the crossing. Many who left the Canaries never reached New Orleans, but those who did settled throughout the colony.

The Isleños had also been brought to Louisiana to join the military. But a soldier’s low pay was not enough to support a family, and the Isleños families were directed to become farmers instead. The Spanish government gave them land, houses, cattle, poultry, farm implements, and food to tide them over.

Above: Tommy Benge and Blaine Benge, dressed in the typical fiesta dress of Gran Canaria, receive flowers from Dorothy Benge during the 1998 Isleño Festival. The Benges are descendants of the Molero family, who came to Louisiana from the island of Tenerife, in the Canary Islands.

Check for Understanding ✓

1. Name three plans O’Reilly had for the colony.
2. How did Unzaga handle trade?
3. Why did Spain send the Isleños to Louisiana?

Spotlight

New Iberia

New Iberia or *Neuva Iberia* means “new Spain.” In 1779, a Spanish official named Colonel Francisco Bouligny founded this town on Bayou Teche. Today, he is honored with a bronze statue in Bouligny Plaza in the city.

Colonists from Malaga, Spain, were brought to the new settlement to grow flax. But when they discovered flax would not grow in Louisiana, they raised



Above: The Conrad Rice Mill in New Iberia is the oldest operating rice mill in America. It was founded in 1912 and placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1981.



cattle and grew corn. Soon these early Spanish settlers merged with the French culture. Spanish names in Iberia Parish today include Segura, Sanchaz, and Miguez. But these descendants of the Malagans are more likely to speak Cajun French than Spanish.

New Iberia's most famous house stands on a Spanish land grant on Bayou Teche. This house, known as Shadows-on-the-Teche, is a wonderful example of the Louisiana of yesterday. William Weeks gained title to the land in 1792; his son built the imposing man-

sion in 1831. William Weeks Hall (great-grandson of the original owner) restored the white-pillared plantation house to its former grandeur. Today, the National Trust for Historic Preservation guards this American architectural treasure. The Old Spanish Trail (today's Highway 90) passes in front of the house.

Below: Sunlight filtering through the trees inspired the name for the Shadows-on-the-Teche plantation house, built in 1831.

