CHAPTER ONE

Native Peoples and European Contact

- **8,000–10,000 years ago** Paleo-Amerindians first inhabit the future "Louisiana."
- **8,500–4,000 years ago** Period of Meso-Amerindian culture.
- **1492** Christopher Columbus discovers New World.
- **1519** Pineda expedition maps entire Gulf of Mexico, including Louisiana coast.
- **1539–43** De Soto expedition explores future southeastern United States, including Mississippi River and Louisiana (De Soto dies May 1542).
- **1534** Jacques Cartier explores and claims St. Lawrence River (Canada) for France.
- **1608** Québec City founded.
- **1672–73** Marquette and Joliet explore Mississippi River and confirm it flows to Gulf of Mexico.
- **April 9, 1682** La Salle reaches mouth of Mississippi River and claims "Louisiana" for France.
- **1684–87** La Salle's failed attempt to establish settlement near mouth of Mississippi River.

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Perspectives on Colonial Louisiana History

Much of present-day Louisiana existed as a colony of France, and then Spain, before becoming part of the United States. In addition, other areas of the state were a colony of Great Britain. First settled by the French in the late 1690s, Louisiana became a Spanish possession in 1763, at the conclusion of the Seven Years War. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 joined New Orleans and the lands west of the Mississippi River to the young United States. The United States assumed jurisdiction of the areas east of the river, now known as the "Florida parishes," during the War of 1812. The Pelican State, therefore, enjoys a colonial heritage that is French, Spanish, and English. For that reason, colonial Louisiana attracted a wide variety of French-, English-, and Spanish-speaking peoples along with the Native Americans who had long dwelled on its land. As an agricultural colonial province based on the production of cash crops such as sugar and cotton, the colony also attracted large numbers of unwilling immigrants from Africa. The African American influence also contributed in essential ways to its cultural development. Colonial Louisiana thus became a true "melting pot" of peoples, languages, customs, and cultures, which made it from the start a diverse place, a quality the state of Louisiana still retains. The existence of a major port at New Orleans also made colonial Louisiana a vital trade center, one in touch with world rhythms and markets from the time of the city's founding in 1718. The part it played in trade and commerce gave the Crescent City and its environs a cosmopolitan air. At the same time, the agricultural areas of the colony's interior and its remote rural hinterlands held pockets of insular, isolated communities. This dichotomy between urban and rural culture remains characteristic of the modern state.

As well, colonial Louisiana encompassed a far greater geographical area than does the state today. Louisiana during the colonial era comprised almost half the interior of the present United States, from the Gulf of Mexico to French Canada. Most of this vast territory, however, was never settled by Europeans and remained the domain of Native peoples. The rich diversity of colonial Louisiana and its geographical extent have long attracted the interest of historians, not only because the history of the colony involves those of other present-day states – Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, and parts of several others – but also because the history of colonial Louisiana touches on many central themes in the history of the nation, including the American Revolution, and the westward expansion of the United States. The historical studies written by historians of colonial Louisiana over the years, which tell the story of the province from diverse perspectives, bear this out. Some historians have written about the history of early Louisiana from the perspective of French

colonial history, while others have considered it in the context of the Spanish New World empire. Both the French colonialists and Spanish Borderlanders, as the latter group is popularly known, see the colonial era of Louisiana from viewpoints outside of U.S. history. In addition, historians concerned with Native Americans and their history, along with those interested in African Americans and their contributions to our past, have also found colonial Louisiana a rich and significant place to study. Even historians of the environment flock to the study of early Louisiana, intrigued by its wetlands, numerous river and bayou systems, and varied uplands topography, factors that made – and still make – the state environmentally unique.

All of this gives the historical literature of colonial Louisiana a multicultural diversity and variety perhaps unequaled in telling the story of any other state in the nation. Many of the events that contribute to the history of colonial Louisiana did not, however, take place inside the geographical confines of the modern state, but in locations that exist today as parts of other states in the Mississippi River valley. The following chapters therefore attempt to balance the colony's great geographical and historical diversity with a primary focus on important historical events that took place inside the boundaries of the present-day state. At the same time, an attempt is made to place this history within the context of the larger geographic region covered by the greater colony during its existence as part of the French and Spanish empires.

The Geography of Modern Louisiana

The natural environment has always been crucial to understanding the Louisiana historical experience. The great river that bisects the state forms the central corridor of a complex series of smaller streams, bayous, and other sorts of watercourses that have provided the stage upon which the history of the state has been played. The peoples of Louisiana, who parade through the past as players on this stage, have always done so with one of the many waterways as their backdrop. Native American hunters, intrepid French explorers and trappers, swashbuckling Spaniards, Acadian fishermen and herdsmen, and Anglo-American planters, along with modern-day stevedores, refinery workers, and urban office clerks, have all had the rhythms of their historical existence in Louisiana influenced by the mighty rivers and widespread bayous. Beyond the waterways, the existence of vast wetlands in the southern regions of Louisiana, the fertile prairies in the southwestern part of the state, combined with the forested uplands to the north and the deep delta flatlands along the Mississippi, have helped to create a distinctive history, from colonial times to the present. The extremes

of weather, coupled with the state having a coastal location along the northern shore of the Gulf of Mexico, also have given a distinct cast to that history. Unusually hot and wet in the spring and summer, Louisiana can be frigid in the winter, while the long fair-weather seasons make for a fertile agriculture. Louisiana's weather can also be violent. Destructive tornados, driving rainstorms, and devastating hurricanes constitute a regular feature of its history.

Today, Louisiana ranks thirty-first in size among the nation's fifty states. From its eastern to its western boundaries, it measures about 290 miles; from north to south, the distance is a bit less, nearly 280 miles. New Orleans, the most populous city, lies at about the same latitude as Cairo, Egypt, located along the 30th parallel. (Parallels of latitude are the imaginary circles of the earth that parallel the equator.) The state's location along the Gulf of Mexico makes for relatively low elevations throughout all of Louisiana, with the highest point being the 535-foot-high Mount Driskill in Bienville Parish. Numerous points lie right at sea level and notable others, such as suburban districts of New Orleans, lie below the level of contiguous bodies of water.

The fertility of Louisiana's soil is supported by a climate well suited to agriculture. Most of the state is semitropical, with rainfall averaging 57 inches per year. Although annual rainfall levels tend to be higher in the southern parts of the state, in most years they are well distributed throughout the state. The average annual temperature ranges from 60 to 72 degrees Fahrenheit, although during the winter and summer months daily extremes vary from freezing conditions to well over 100 degrees. The lowest officially recorded temperature dipped down to 16 degrees, in Webster Parish, while the highest climbed up to 114 degrees, in Bossier Parish. All of this makes for one of the longest growing seasons in the nation, officially lasting from 220 days per year in north Louisiana to 350 days in the south.

In addition to fertile land, Louisiana has a great many rivers, streams, bays, and bayous, some of them navigable for boats of all sizes. Preeminent among them is the Mississippi River. Rising in the interior of North America several thousand miles north of the Gulf of Mexico, the Mississippi is the fourth-longest river in the world. Along with the immense amount of water carried by the river come mud and sediment, the deposits of which over the centuries have made the soil of Louisiana among the most fertile in the nation. Also important is the Red River, rising on the high plains of New Mexico and Texas. It cuts through northwestern Louisiana and provides some 370 miles of navigable water. The Red River has also served as a major water route in the development of the state.

The drainage of Louisiana's numerous rivers, streams, and bayous into the Gulf of Mexico has created along the Louisiana coastline some of the largest wetlands

in the world. This zone of coastal marshes accounts for about 40 percent of the total saltwater wetlands of the entire United States. The preponderance of water in Louisiana makes for interesting statistical comparisons: the total area of the state is approximately 48,500 square miles, with some 4,000 of these consisting of marshland, 2,800 of lakes and ponds, and 3,400 of bays and tidal flow areas. Hence, almost one-quarter of Louisiana's surface is covered by water. From the time of its first human inhabitants to the present, residents of Louisiana have never been far from the water's edge.

The Earliest Inhabitants

The first people to inhabit the land now known as Louisiana lived as nomadic hunters who appeared in the area some 8,000 to 10,000 years ago, during the last Ice Age. Little is known about these prehistoric inhabitants beyond what the science of archeology can provide. They lived in small family units and survived as hunter-gatherers. The land they knew had little in common with the present-day state, which took on its modern topography at the end of the Ice Age. These groups survived by hunting giant mammoths, ground sloths, and other species of large mammals then native to the region. To bring down their prey, they made numerous projectile points to tip their spears, the remains of many of which are today widely scattered across Louisiana.

As time went on, and the great flows of ice retreated increasingly northward, these early hunters adapted their folkways to the changing flora and fauna of the land, which became heavily forested. The peoples grew to be less nomadic and their numbers increased. The nature of their projectile points also became more sophisticated and elaborate. In addition to spear tips, they began to make axe heads, mortars, and knife blades. As the larger Pleistocene-era mammals became extinct, the peoples adapted their hunting practices to pursue smaller woodland varieties of animals, including deer, bears, panthers, and various types of birds. They also turned to Louisiana's waterways and swamps to feast on fish and shellfish. Indeed, they disposed of the shells of the oysters, mussels, and clams they consumed by making great mounds of them, known as middens. Many of these middens can still be found along the coastal areas and river banks of Louisiana and are thought to mark sites where these early folk and their descendants gathered to garner shellfish, a main staple of their diet.

Eventually these people learned to construct crude canoes made from dugout logs. They also had established a rudimentary trade network with other groups as far away as present-day Tennessee and Georgia. These changes seem to have been so pronounced that some anthropologists use these developments

Figure 1.1 Poverty Point, in northwest Louisiana, is a popular site for archeologists as well as tourists. *Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism.*

to mark the appearance of a new culture, the Meso-Amerindian, which dominated the region from approximately 6500 B.C. to 2000 B.C. These peoples lived at permanent sites of regular habitation, although these locations could by no means be called towns. Places such as Catahoula Lake in central Louisiana, Saline Bayou near Natchitoches, the Marksville mounds, and the Jonesville Temple mounds in Catahoula Parish nonetheless provide ample archeological evidence of this developing Native American culture. The Poverty Point National Monument, located in West Carroll Parish, is the best-known such site in Louisiana. The area features earthen mounds that date back to twelve centuries before the birth of Christ.

It is clear to those who study these important cultural developments that contact with the larger, relatively more sophisticated, and culturally complex native civilizations to the south in modern Mexico influenced the early Native peoples of the lower Mississippi. So too did regular communication with those groups living to the southeast in the Caribbean, and also to the east in the heavily forested areas of the upland and coastal south of the present-day United States. Added to these influences came contact with Native groups to the north, up the great river system into the interior of the middle continent. For that

reason, Louisiana during its pre-European period existed as what anthropologists term a "cultural sink," an area that served as a crossroads attracting into it diverse groups from outside its boundaries.

Although the Meso-Amerindians had such a simple culture and lived so long ago that few tangible clues about their culture and lifestyle exist, modern archeologists have studied what artifacts they have to offer some conclusions about the nature of their existence. Evidence indicates that these early inhabitants lived in every part of present-day Louisiana. Their forms of social organization became increasingly more complex as time went on. They enjoyed food rich in both its nourishment and variety: waterfowl, fish, alligators, turtles, venison, fruits, and nuts constituted regular parts of their diet. Given this abundance, they had little cause to engage in extensive agriculture, although they appear to have cultivated some items, including an early strain of corn along with beans and squash.

Their habitation sites reveal that they fired pottery, making cooking utensils and storage containers. During later stages of development, Louisiana's Meso-Amerindians also worked copper into bracelets and other types of personal jewelry. The religious beliefs of these early folk had a relatively high level of sophistication since their burial sites indicate complex rituals. Native craftsmen made special pottery burial vessels while, at least in some areas of the region, burials took place in specialized cemetery plots. In some of these, graves indicate the joint burial of families, occasionally in raised burial mounds whose interiors contained wood-reinforced tombs. The ornamentation on the objects found in these burials includes artistic representations of flying serpents, rattlesnakes, eagles, hawks, human hands and eyes, and clouds. Embossed copper plates that appear to have the likenesses of "gods" carved in them have been found at some sites. Many of these symbols shared common characteristics with those of other Native American groups living as far to the east as the Atlantic coast and as a far south as Mexico.

By the time of the European Middle Ages, Louisiana's Native peoples had made great progress in becoming the highly organized tribes that greeted the first explorers who came to the region from Spain and France. It is clear to anthropologists that the development of Native cultures in the lower Mississippi exhibited heavy influence from groups living elsewhere to the east, west, and southwest. Indeed, even at this early juncture of human habitation, the extensive river systems that passed into the Mississippi delta made the region a crossroads of culture. From the east, the dominant linguistic strains of southern Native Americans made their influence felt as they brought vestiges of their woodland society to the area. Archeological evidence also indicates trade contact with the relatively more highly developed cultures of Mexico and the

Southwest. Additional cultural influences from parts of the Great Plains came by way of the Red River. Taken together, all of these contacts brought to the area of present-day Louisiana a dynamic Native American presence that continued to develop after the time of European contact.

In considering the Native groups of Louisiana, it must be understood that their tribal structures did not continue unchanged from the time of first European contact until the present. Many and disparate factors in history worked to change, alter, destroy, and rebuild the tribal organizations of Louisiana's Native peoples across the last several centuries. New diseases brought to the Americas by European arrivals during the early colonial period ravaged indigenous populations everywhere on the continent, including the lands that would become Louisiana. Military actions against Native peoples as Europeans expanded into new settlement areas also realigned the tribes, as did the disappearance of traditional hunting and gathering grounds when agriculture moved in to take their place. The tribes of Louisiana also found themselves caught up in European colonial rivalries, often playing one European group off another, as the lower Mississippi valley became the site of a contest between empires in the eighteenth century. Some tribes allied with the French, others with the Spanish or the British. Over time, this too tended to destabilize tribal organizations. The arrival of other native peoples from the east, groups pushed westward into the area by the spread into the interior of European settlement based along the Atlantic coast, also changed tribal structures. Most scholars today prefer to classify Native Americans by means of their linguistic groupings, for languages remain much more constant over long periods of time than do political constructs. What follows, then, will survey the major linguistic or cultural groups of Native peoples as they existed in eighteenth-century Louisiana, the major century of its colonial existence.

The Native American peoples living in Louisiana in the eighteenth century can be grouped into six important linguistic or cultural groupings: the Attakapa, the Caddo, the Tunica, the Natchez, the Muskhogean, and the Chitimacha. Each of these groups included particular tribes that had their own names and self-identities. Many of them had their own distinct language dialects, traditions, cultural patterns, and geographic areas of habitation. Some of them did not long survive the European encounter with their particular folkways and traditions intact, especially the Natchez, whom the French eventually conquered. Others, such as the Caddo, continued for centuries with their culture unbroken. Nonetheless, all of them had an important impact on the colonization and settlement of colonial Louisiana.

The Attakapan groups, living in the far southwest of the present-day state, included four major tribes along with the distantly related Opelousas. The name "attakapa" comes from Choctaw origins and means "human flesh eater."

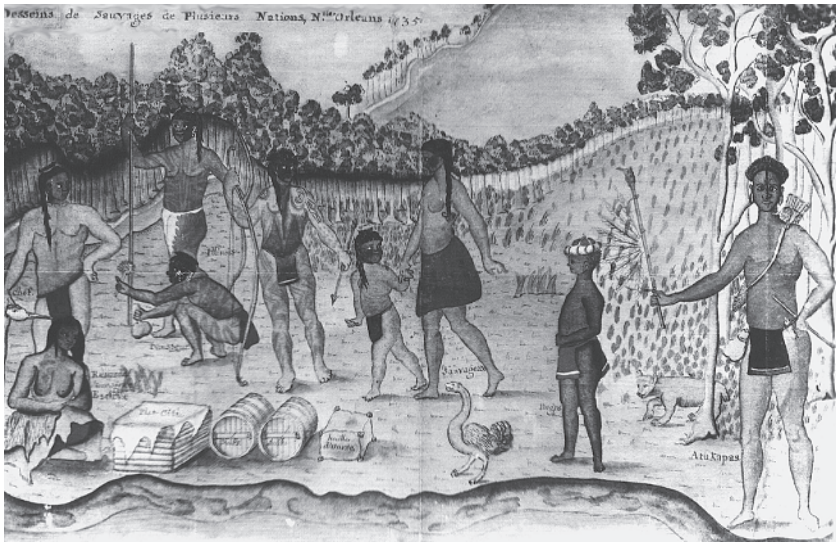

Figure 1.2 Indians of several nations, New Orleans, 1735, as pictured by Alexandre de Batz. *The Louisiana Collection, State Library of Louisiana, Baton Rouge, Louisiana (hp001174).*

Indeed, some instances of ritual cannibalism existed among these tribes, but they generally confined such activities to eating enemies slain in battle as part of ceremony. One of the Attakapan tribes, the Sunset People, lived along the Sabine River and around the area of Lake Charles. An eastern group of Attakapans inhabited the major portion of the southwestern prairie along the Mermentau and Vermillion rivers, while the Opelousas lived immediately to their north. The first Europeans to encounter the Attakapa commented on their lack of cultural development. Their timidity in the face of European contact ensured that they did not last long into the colonial era, except for a few isolated villages which endured into the nineteenth century. In particular, historians believe that European diseases struck them very hard and constituted a major factor in their demise.

To their north, along the modern Texas–Louisiana border into Arkansas, lived the Caddoan groups. They constituted the westernmost extension of the Muskhogean peoples that included groups such as the Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw centered farther east in the American South. The Caddoans lived in permanent habitation sites. The fertile floodplains of the Red River and its tributaries provided lands for agriculture. They also hunted a wide variety of game as a steady part of their diet. Most of the Caddoan tribes lived in small villages comprising large houses made of timber with thatched roofs. The houses

contained furnishings that reflected a high order of craftsmanship: colored rugs, baskets, jewelry, and decorated pottery.

All of the Caddoan tribes existed as part of three informal political confederacies: the Hasinai centered to the west in present-day Texas; the Kadohadacho in northwestern Louisiana and southern Arkansas; and the Natchitoches, who lived in the Red River valley near the present-day town of the same name. Each confederacy had a simple form of bureaucratic organization with minor officials, sub-leaders, tribal chiefs, and an overlord of all the tribes known as the Grand Caddi. They had a structured religion with a priesthood class. The confederacies in fact had a high priest, called the Xinesi, who kept an eternal flame from which all lesser temple fires of the various Caddoan tribes had to be lit. Although they fought their enemies, they attempted to coexist peacefully with their neighbors, including the Europeans.

The Tunica groups lived to the east of the Caddoans, with their territory running in a northward direction into the modern states of Arkansas and Mississippi. Originally centered in present-day Vicksburg, they seldom entered Louisiana except on hunting expeditions that took them into the southern regions of their tribal lands. Like the Caddoans, the Tunican peoples had a highly developed economy. They hunted, fished, and engaged in subsistence agriculture. In addition, they maintained active commercial networks in the region, specializing in trading salt with their neighbors. They, too, had villages, although they tended to be more nomadic than the neighboring Caddoans.

European contact greatly altered the Tunicans as they changed the location of their settlements and amalgamated with neighboring linguistic groups. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Tunica and Ofo tribes had moved southward to inhabit the banks of the Mississippi River north of Baton Rouge. In so doing, they blended with the Natchez-speaking Avoyles, who had been living in the Pointe Coupee region. The Tunica Hills of West Feliciana Parish became a major center for them and, in recent decades, important archeological discoveries there have provided great insight into their historical existence. These discoveries, widely reported in Louisiana's press during the 1980s, have been popularly called the "Tunica Treasure," although most of the artifacts are workaday items of cultural importance rather than gold, silver, or jewels.

At the time of European contact, present-day northeast Louisiana and southern Mississippi south of the Tunica region served as home to three Natchez groups: the Taensa, Avoyle, and the Natchez tribe proper. The Taensa, living west of the Mississippi, existed as traditional enemies of their cultural and linguistic cousins, the Natchez, who lived along the east bank. The Avoyle, as the weakest of the tribes, eventually disappeared into the Tunicas after the latter tribe moved south.

The Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto, who passed through the region in the 1540s, first came into contact with these Natchez linguistic groups and recorded that they lived as a noble people, large in population. By the time the French arrived at the end of the 1600s, however, their numbers had declined, perhaps because of fighting or disease. The Natchez seemed especially warlike and had highly developed rituals by which they fought. These ceremonies included an event at which the participants feasted, made pompous war speeches, drank bitter potions, and engaged in frenetic dancing. Organized Natchez attacks usually took place three days later. The war parties seemed well organized, traveling quietly in single file, avoiding fires at nights, and hoping to surprise their unsuspecting enemies.

The Natchez fought fiercely with bows and arrows, clubs, and copper knives. During their raids they sought to intimidate their opponents by doing as much physical damage as possible. They also reveled in the taking of scalps. Once home from a victory, the Natchez engaged in more celebration. They made captives sing and dance, while they smoked the peace calumet once more. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Natchez constituted a major problem for the French during the early colonial era. In the 1720s and 1730s, French military troops fought several wars with this tribe before they finally subdued the Indians.

To the south of the Natchez region, from the Florida parishes to the river delta below New Orleans, there lived at the time of European contact some seven different tribes of the Muskhogean linguistic family. These tribes had a cultural relationship to the Choctaw, whose homelands could be found farther east in Mississippi and Alabama. Among them, the Houma constituted the most significant of the Louisiana Muskhogean tribes. They lived on the east bank of the Mississippi downriver from the Natchez tribal areas.

The Houma had a large village, which the Sieur d'Iberville observed early in the eighteenth century. The Frenchman noted some 140 cabins arranged in a circle, the town home to some 350 warriors and their families. These natives worked the gravel deposits in the modern-day Florida parishes in order to fashion weapons and high-quality stone implements. The Bayougoula, another related tribe living to the southwest of the Houmas, shared many of their characteristics and traits. They lived along the north shores of Lake Pontchartrain near the present-day Louisiana town that bears their name. More so than the Houma, the Bayougoula lived on the bounteous marine life in their district. They adopted the alligator as their totem symbol.

Little is known of the other Muskhogean tribes since they did not long survive into the European era. Evidence indicates that they sometimes engaged in war with one another. Their warlike tendencies showed at one of the earliest moments of European exploration, when the Quniapisa attacked the Sieur de la Salle's expedition in the 1680s. The Acloapissa appeared to have lived along the

Pearl River and, because of that location, became one of the first tribes to come into regular contact with the French. They moved farther west to avoid the French and eventually amalgamated into the other tribes of the delta country.

Another of the six major groups, the tribes of the Chitimacha, lived in southern part of the state in the deep delta country and swamp areas west of the Mississippi River, their major settlements situated along Bayou Plaquemine, Grand River, and Bayou Teche. This group contained three tribes: the Washa, the Chawasha, and the Chitimacha proper. Early French settlers in the area estimated that the three tribes comprised some 4,000 persons, making them a very large population group for the era. These three tribes, however, could not coexist peacefully with each other. The Chawasha, for example, allied with the French in 1707 in attacking the Chitimacha. The Washa, although the smallest of the three in numbers, eventually disappeared as a tribe because of their inability to coexist with their neighbors.

Figure 1.3 Chitimacha basketmaker, Christine Paul. The complex weaving techniques of the Chitimacha have changed little from traditional methods for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. At the present time, few descendants of this group still practice the art. *McIlhenny Company Archives, Avery Island, Louisiana*.

The Chitimacha nevertheless exhibited some of the highest cultural attainments of any group in the lower Mississippi valley. They had elaborate crafts, a highly developed form of social organization with an elite class, and a relatively advanced religion. Their villages had substantial houses built of wood with thatched roofs. Many villages also had sweat houses, similar to modern-day sauna baths, in which water heated on fires produced steam for healing purposes. These tribes carved wooden objects, made toys for their children, and worked metal such as copper into tools.

Late-Arriving Native Americans

The arrival of Europeans as permanent settlers during the 1700s had two important effects on the Native American groups of the lower Mississippi valley. First, the European arrivals upset the previously well-established relationships between the tribes of the present-day state of Louisiana. Second, and most important, other tribes from elsewhere (especially from the interior of the modern states of Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee) moved into Louisiana in response to the arrival of the British and French in North America. The colonial period of Louisiana history therefore witnessed new Native American tribes that arrived to make their homes in the delta country of the Mississippi River and, although not historically related to the area, they became Louisiana tribes. The Biloxi, the Koasati, the Lipan, and the Choctaw constituted the most important of these.

The Biloxi initially lived along the Gulf Coast in the area between present-day New Orleans and Mobile, Alabama. Along with other Mobile Bay groups, the Biloxi became the first to meet the French when Iberville founded settlements along the coastline of the modern state of Mississippi. The Biloxi later moved to the Mississippi River above Baton Rouge, where they blended with the Tunica, although neither tribe lost its separate historical identification. The Koasati also moved eastward into the region, initially settling along the bluff lands of the Florida parishes near Baton Rouge and in the Red River region of Rapides Parish. The Spanish colonial government welcomed the Koasati during the late eighteenth century as a buffer between Louisiana and the British in West Florida. The Lipans (sometimes called Connechi) also migrated into Louisiana during the period of Spanish domination, although they moved into the area from Texas. These tribes constituted a subgroup of the Apache linguistic family traditionally found on the high plains of the American Southwest. The Lipans settled in present-day De Soto, Sabine, and Red River parishes.

The Choctaw, however, constitute the most significant Native American group to move into Louisiana during the European period. Starting in the 1760s, and lasting for the rest of the eighteenth century, the Choctaws made a

major migration from the east. British colonization along the Atlantic coast pushed this tribe westward into Louisiana. The Choctaw settled all along the west bank of the Mississippi River north of Pointe Coupee, completely dominating the lower reaches of the Ouachita, Boeuf, and Tensas rivers as well. Smaller Choctaw groups established themselves in the Pearl River region and in Evangeline Parish. By the end of the 1700s, they had scattered all the way to the Sabine River. This tribe grew and prospered to become one of the largest in Louisiana. By the nineteenth century they had become the state's most widespread Native American group.

The Choctaw lived in small family groups clustered in villages of rude huts, sometimes in the vicinity of European settlements. The Choctaw peacefully supported themselves as hunters, often supplying wild game to the Europeans for a fee. They regularly planted pumpkins, corn, and potatoes, and kept chickens. They also gathered medicinal plants from Louisiana's forests, selling home remedies made from snake-root, sage, plantain, tarragon, and wild fruits. The women made baskets out of cane. The fine craftsmanship of these woven items made them prize possessions among Louisiana consumers.

In recent decades, historians have spent much time and effort examining Native American society and culture in colonial Louisiana. These efforts have brought them to the conclusion that women played a much larger and more important role in their indigenous society, especially in the public sphere, than European women did in theirs. This was partially motivated by the fact that Muskhogean groups to the east were matrilineal, meaning their familial descent was traced through the mother instead of the father as was the case for Europeans. Women of course maintained much of the culture, foodways, and social organization of the groups. They also played an important role in intertribal relations. Marriages between neighboring groups often solidified bonds of peace, while women played a role in intertribal diplomacy. They also played a role in maintaining relations with French and Spanish authorities in both Louisiana and Texas, the neighboring European colony to the west. In this regard, the writings of historian Juliana Barr have been particularly significant in highlighting the role women played in the groups of the lower Mississippi River and Gulf Coast.

Additional recent research by Sophie White has shown very clearly a subtle and complicated interplay between Europeans and Native Americans during the colonial period of Louisiana history. Up until recent decades, most histories written of the colony concentrated on the ways in which the French, Spanish, and English arrivals in the province attempted to dominate the Indians over time, hoping to make them more like Europeans. New research proves that the relationship between Europeans, especially the French, and

the indigenous populations of Louisiana was more complicated. To a considerable extent, Native Americans influenced all of the groups who arrived in the area. Early in the colonial era, the French, for example, adopted many Native American ways. This involved much more than Europeans adopting Indian foods, styles of dress, and ways of dealing with the frontier. It also included intermarriage between groups that created new identities and ways of looking at race in the colony. In short, the dividing line between European and Native American in early Louisiana history was not as distinct as formerly assumed.

Native Americans Today in Louisiana

By the late 1800s, the Choctaws, along with Louisiana's other Native American tribes, had become an "invisible people." Many assimilated into other ethnic populations. The European populations of the state ignored them and even where these tribes maintained their culture, they did so largely in privacy. Not until the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s did these groups convince other Louisianians to look with pride upon the Native American heritage of the state. The United States Census of 1990 indicated that Louisiana had the third-largest Native American population in the eastern United States. That census sets the official Native American population of the state at over 16,000 persons.

The tribes today fall into three classifications: those who are formally members of federally recognized tribes; persons who officially belong to one of the state of Louisiana-recognized tribes; and individuals of Native American blood who live scattered about Louisiana and personally maintain their cultural identification as such. There are, of course, numerous other Louisianians of diluted Native American bloodline who have lost such identifications and, for this reason, are not counted as official members of Native groups.

Since the 1920s, the United States government has formally recognized those Native American tribes that can demonstrate they have been organized, political units over long periods of time. The Chitimacha in St. Mary's Parish became the first such Louisiana tribe to receive this recognition, in 1925. Since then two other tribes within the state have received federal recognition: the Koasati and the Tunica-Biloxi. Following the provisions of a 1934 federal law, these three tribes are accorded a measure of self-government. Each elects a tribal chairperson and a council that works with the federal government in administrating tribal lands, communal property, federal programs, and cemeteries. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the state of Louisiana also developed programs for tribes that maintain their cultural identities.

In recent years, the Louisiana Choctaw, the Tunica-Biloxi, the Koasati, the Chitimacha, and the Houma have been especially active in advocating Native American rights and the improvement of social, economic, and political conditions for Native Americans in the state. The Jena band of the Choctaw has a tribal center supported by the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department, along with a recreation facility. The Ebarb Choctaw community operates a special state-supported school for its tribe and actively celebrates its heritage with an annual festival held at the small community of Zwolle. The Chitimacha maintain a school, council house, community grocery, and a meat-processing cooperative on their reservation at Charenton. The Koasati have a modern center in Allen Parish, while the Houma (currently the state's largest) have organized into the United Houma Tribe. The Tunica-Biloxi, now located predominantly in Avoyelles Parish, have built a tribal housing development, established a job program for members, and undertaken a crafts program. They also maintain a tribal museum at Marksville, which displays part of the "Tunica Treasure" unearthed north of St. Francisville in the 1980s.

In spite of these recent developments, the impact of Native Americans on Louisiana has largely been historical. They existed as the first inhabitants of the land and, as such, had much to teach the Europeans colonists who arrived in the area that eventually became Louisiana. Their vast knowledge of topography, flora and fauna, and frontier lifestyles is today reflected in the many Native American place names and words that have become part of the everyday language of Louisianians. In addition, Europeans adopted many of the agricultural and hunting techniques mastered by Native Americans and these have forever influenced Louisiana culture. Not all of these exchanges, however, constituted peaceful encounters, and this fact constitutes one of the major impacts of Native Americans on the subsequent history of Louisiana. Native American–European conflict permeated the entire colonial period, lasting into the nineteenth century, giving a special character of frontier violence to these eras of history. Few could deny that without the Native American heritage of Louisiana, the state would today be a very different place.

Early Spanish Explorations

Christopher Columbus opened a new era in the history of the European world when he made his great discovery of 1492. Two decades of Spanish expansion followed, as Spain dominated most of the western hemisphere. In 1519, the governor of Spanish Jamaica commissioned Alonso Álvarez de Pineda to lead an expedition to map the entire coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Pineda's expedition

sailed the shoreline, making a fairly accurate map. En route, the Spaniards camped at the mouth of a great river that emptied a massive volume of water into the Gulf. Pineda called this the "Rio de las Palmas" (or River of Palms). Some historians today debate whether he actually saw the Mississippi, instead believing the river he noted might have been the Mobile, Rio Grande, or Soto de Marina rivers. Still, none can dispute Pineda's claim to be the first European to gaze upon the coast of Louisiana.

The Spanish Crown failed to pursue Pineda's recommendations for settlement and, for the rest of the 1500s, relatively few Spaniards came to the region compared to the numbers that went to other parts of the Americas. Those Spaniards who did visit usually did so on their way someplace else. Álvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca and Hernando de Soto, the first two Spaniards in the area, had passed through it on their way elsewhere. Each of them arrived in separate expeditions. Cabeza de Vaca and several of his men lost their boats on the Gulf Coast in 1528 while attempting to reach Spanish settlements in Mexico. Captured by hostile natives, Cabeza de Vaca and three other surviving members of his failed expedition escaped and fled inland, where he took up residence with a more hospitable tribe. He wandered through the region for almost six years, learning Native American languages and plotting a return to Mexico. He finally reached the northern outposts of Mexico in 1536. Once in Mexico City, Cabeza de Vaca prepared a long report on all he had seen and done. Although historians question if he actually traversed land within the modern boundaries of Louisiana, the narrative history of his adventures sparked a temporary Spanish interest in the lands bordering on the northern Gulf of Mexico.

Hernando de Soto arrived shortly thereafter and explored the present-day American South. He and his 600 men left Cuba in May of 1539, landed on the east coast of Florida, and marched across modern Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana on a journey that took over three years. In the process, De Soto came upon the Mississippi River near Natchez. There the stream became his grave when he died of a fever on its banks in May 1542. His men, before turning homeward, placed the explorer's body in the waters of the river in hopes of saving it from defilement by hostile natives, perhaps the Natchez. The survivors of the De Soto expedition, led by Luis de Moscoso, constructed seven small boats on the banks of the Mississippi. They began their journey downstream on July 3, 1543, exiting the mouth of the river several weeks later. They eventually reached Mexico after becoming the first Europeans to traverse a major section of the river through Louisiana.

De Soto's followers recorded in detail much of what they saw, including observations of the flora and fauna along with their impressions of Native

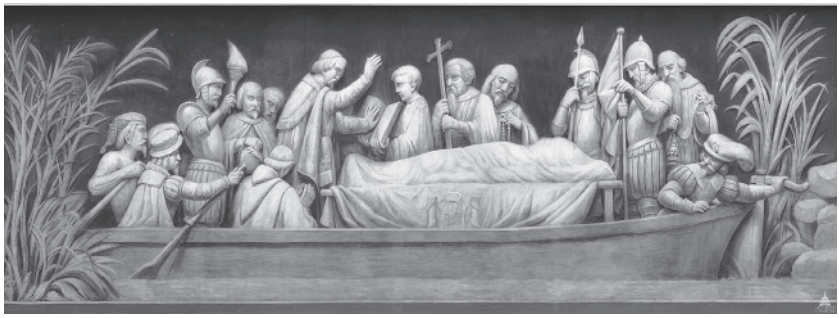

Figure 1.4 To protect his body from enemies, Hernando de Soto's men placed their dead leader's body during the night in the Mississippi River, which he may have been the first European to discover. *Architect of the Capitol*, *www.aoc.gov*.

Americans. Reports they made, valuable for the historian, had the effect of delaying for decades Spanish settlement of the region since the area held little of interest. Hence, Spain's political rival, France, would be the first European nation to plant a lasting settlement in Louisiana.

The Expansion of French Canada

The European colonization of Louisiana grew from the expansion of French Canada. Jacques Cartier first explored the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1534, claiming Canada's shores and the lands drained by the river for the French king. Although he founded settlements, his failure to find gold and silver temporarily dampened France's excitement about establishing a colony there. But the gradual realization that profits could be made from the fur business rekindled France's desire for a colony in Canada. By the 1630s, New France (the colony's official name) had become an important center for the fur trade, as well as a source of marine products and naval stores such as tar, pitch, and turpentine.

The Canadian fur industry proved to be very profitable. Starting in 1647, the French business monopoly that controlled the commerce began leasing its rights to private individuals and smaller business concerns. Only licensed traders could trap legally. Large profits came to these fur contractors, especially when beaver-pelt hats became fashionable wear in Europe. French merchants and trappers penetrated the wilderness and made agreements with native tribes to supply furs. Because of growing demand for skins, trapping gradually reduced the population of beavers as well as many other fur-bearing animals

of North America. The more successful the trade, the greater the need for previously untrapped lands. The geographical territory of New France thus grew at a furious rate, although the population always remained small.

Marquette and Joliet

In French Canada, word circulated by the 1670s of a large river lying to the west. A wealthy merchant hired the explorer Louis Joliet to find it. Joliet turned to a member of the Jesuit order for assistance on this journey. Father (or "Père" in French) Jacques Marquette had great experience in the wilderness. In May 1672 the party of seven Frenchmen led by Marquette and Joliet left Canada, passing along the shore of Lake Michigan, through Green Bay, and by portage into the Wisconsin River.

They floated down that stream for more than a week, finally emerging onto the great river that the native tribes called *Mississippi*. Joliet and Marquette therefore became the first Europeans to use that name. As they continued downriver, Joliet's compass revealed that the waterway went south toward the Gulf of

Figure 1.5 Marquette and Joliet and their men descending the Mississippi. *Library of Congress, Lot 4409 (R) (G), LC-USZ62-1164988*.

Mexico rather than west to the Great South Sea, as Europeans then called the Pacific. They eventually reached the point where the Arkansas River joined the Mississippi. There, the explorers met the Arkansas Indians, who warned them that a tribe further downstream had firearms. The Frenchmen assumed these weapons had been supplied by the Spanish, whose colonies lay to the southwest. Upset by this news, the explorers decided to return home, retracing their route. Joliet and Marquette chose not to make another voyage down the Mississippi, but their report attracted the attention of others interested in furs.

La Salle Claims Louisiana

René-Robert Cavelier, better known by his noble title Sieur de La Salle, indicated a great interest in the travels of Joliet and Marquette. (The term *Sieur* denoted the French equivalent to the British rank of knighthood designated by the title of *Sir*.) La Salle was born in the small town of Rouen, France, on November 21, 1643. He came from a locally prominent family that was very religious. His older brother Jean became a priest in the Sulpician order. Not much is known about La Salle's youth except that he had a studious vein. His first vocation was that of the Catholic Church. He studied with the Jesuits at their school in Rouen, becoming a postulant on his way to full-scale membership in the order.

As a young man in his twenties, however, La Salle decided to leave the Jesuits in pursuit of another career. Because he had never taken his final vows as a Jesuit, the officials of the order released him from membership for his inability to conform to monastic life. La Salle's elder brother, the priest now known as Abbé Cavelier, had migrated to Canada the year before the young man had left the Jesuits. The La Salle family had long been involved in the development of New France, as the colony was officially known. La Salle's uncle had been a member of the company of One Hundred Associates that had invested heavily all along the St. Lawrence in an effort to make New France profitable. It therefore seemed logical that La Salle would go to Canada in an effort to find his fortune.

In 1667 an eager La Salle migrated in to Canada, where he had good connections: as mentioned, a brother already lived in New France and his uncle was a wealthy investor in the fur trade. La Salle ascertained that trading in furs with western Native American tribes offered the fastest way to secure wealth. He, too, had heard stories of the Mississippi River, and he eventually managed to talk to none other than Louis Joliet about it. Now La Salle decided to seek permission to explore the great river from the French king, Louis XIV.

La Salle's activities constituted a significant turning point that moved the European frame of reference from the Atlantic coast to the interior of the continent

and the Gulf of Mexico. His activities opened the vast interior of North America to European expansion, even as they ushered in the dawn of a long period of intense inter-colonial rivalry between France and Spain, eventually spilling over to England. La Salle's considerable efforts unfolded in three waves: first, his attempt to dominate the fur trade on the western Great Lakes during the mid- to late 1670s; second, his trip down the Mississippi River all the way to its mouth in the early 1680s; and third, his unsuccessful attempt to establish a French post on the western Gulf of Mexico in Spanish territory (within the modern boundaries of the state of Texas). An almost single-mindedness of purpose underlay all of these activities: to locate a water route to the Indies while simultaneously weakening King Louis XIV's great international rival in the Americas. In the process, La Salle naturally hoped to garner a great personal fortune.

In 1677, La Salle sailed to France with his faithful lieutenant, Henri de Tonti, to ask royal approval for this venture. Tonti, a colorful frontier character, went by the nickname "Iron Hand." As a young soldier, he had lost his right hand in a grenade explosion, after which he hired a blacksmith to fashion an iron hook as a replacement. Wearing it ever thereafter, the imposing sight of Tonti wielding his artificial hand as a weapon gave him great stature with the tribes of the Mississippi valley. After receiving royal permission for their proposed explorations, La Salle and Tonti returned to Canada in 1678 to organize the expedition. Various financial reverses delayed these efforts; not until 1682 did La Salle begin his trip.

Early in February of 1682 La Salle and his men, roughly following the route traced by Joliet and Marquette, reached the Mississippi. Here they rested a bit "and at daylight, embarking anew on the dark and mighty stream, drifted swiftly down toward unknown destinies." They coursed downstream for over two months, carefully noting the tribes in the region and observing the landscape. "The great river Mississippi is very beautiful in all places," one of La Salle's men noted, "without any fall or rapid from the Arkansas to the sea." La Salle passed the site of present-day New Orleans sometime in early April. The expedition continued south, and excitement grew among the men when the flattening of the land and the swampy banks indicated to them that they must be nearing the river's mouth. La Salle held formal ceremonies on April 9 (somewhere in modern Plaquemines Parish) for the purpose of taking possession for France of all lands drained by the river. During a solemn Mass of celebration, La Salle named the territory Louisiana in honor of Louis XIV. The expedition laboriously retraced its route back to Canada after reaching the Gulf of Mexico.

This success convinced La Salle that France needed a settlement on the lower reaches of the Mississippi. Such an establishment would provide a base for fur traders, become a commercial center, and protect the lower Mississippi River valley from Spanish encroachments. La Salle again went to the French court

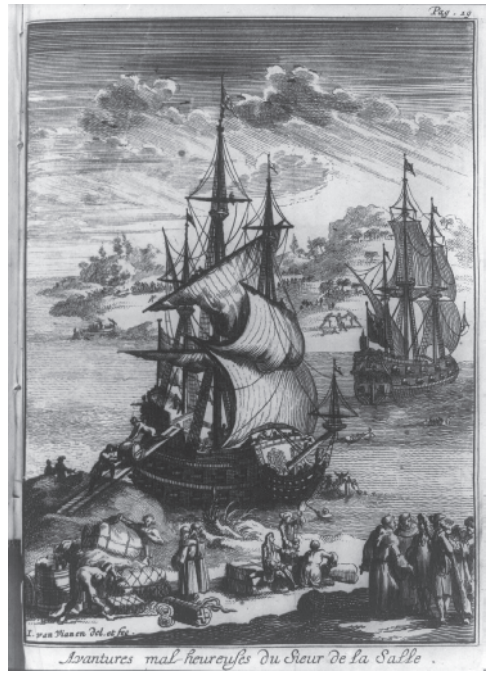

Figure 1.6 René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, depicted on the shore with crew members and priests, upon landing on the Gulf Coast. *From "A New Discovery of a Vast Country in America," by Father Louis Hennepin, 1698. Library of Congress, #LC-USZ62-3283.*

and secured permission from the king to plant such a colony. La Salle and his colonizing expedition, including soldiers and families of settlers, left France in 1684 bound for the Mississippi. The progress of this group, however, did not go smoothly. La Salle developed a fever on the voyage across the Atlantic, while the hardships of the journey lowered morale. By the time the group stopped at French Hispaniola for new supplies, La Salle and the naval commander engaged in constant quarrelling and refused to cooperate with one another.

The expedition finally left the French Caribbean bound for Louisiana, but after reaching the Gulf Coast, La Salle and company failed to locate the mouth of the Mississippi. Modern historians blame this failure on inaccurate navigational equipment. Instead the expedition continued to sail westward, past the coasts of modern Louisiana, until they landed on the shores of present-day Texas. There the colonists built a crude fortification and residences which became a base for exploring the surrounding region. A series of calamities and

disasters beset this colony, including the sinking of La Salle's last remaining ship *La Belle* in Matagorda Bay. Without a ship, La Salle decided to lead a scouting party to the northeast in an effort to locate the Mississippi River. He undertook this effort in January of 1687, departing on foot from Fort St. Louis with only a small number of his men, leaving most of his party at the settlement. En route, some members of the traveling party became frustrated with La Salle and plotted to murder him. The mutiny occurred on March 19, 1687, when several of his men ambushed and killed the French explorer at a location somewhere in present-day East Texas.

The ill-fated French colony at Fort St. Louis did not long survive the death of its leader. Most of the inhabitants died either of natural causes or at the hands of hostile Native Americans. Those who did not perish had to deal with Spaniards who shortly appeared in the region. Since Spain claimed the western Gulf Coast, Spanish officials became understandably upset when word of the French settlement reached Mexico. There, the viceroy ordered an army detachment northward to locate and destroy the French settlement. After several efforts to find it, Captain Alonso de León and his troops arrived at Fort St. Louis during 1689, having traveled from their post at San Juan Bautista on the Rio Grande. De León found the settlement in ruins, the fort in shambles, and the homes empty. He did, however, locate several survivors (mostly children) who had taken refuge with friendly Indians in the interior. The Spanish took them back to Mexico as prisoners.

In modern times, historians and archeologists have spent much time searching for the site of this settlement and the location of La Salle's lost ship. Historian Herbert Eugene Bolton, who was active in the early decades of the twentieth century, postulated as early as 1914 that the post must have been on Garcitas Creek on the north side of Matagorda Bay. In 1950, archeologists from the University of Texas excavated the site, but they were unable to ascribe the site definitively to La Salle based on the artifacts uncovered. Twenty years later, historical archeologist Kathleen Gilmore subjected these artifacts to detailed analysis, in the process proving conclusively that this was indeed the site of the post. Starting in the 1990s, this site became the location of intensive archeological investigation. Nautical archeologists thereafter discovered the underwater resting place of La Salle's ship. The site of the fort and the shipwreck became the focus of intense archeological activity that has produced thousands of artifacts, including a cache of canons that constitute a remarkable discovery. Since *La Belle* went down with most of La Salle's supplies in it, the materials raised by the archeologists comprised, as one of them said, a full kit of items needed by a seventeenth-century explorer to found a settlement. These excavations yielded weapons, foodstuffs, clothing, and various sundries useful in daily life.