

A photograph of a man in a red hat and dark clothing playing a saxophone on a street at night. He is leaning against a black lamppost. The background features a light-colored wall and a red door. The scene is illuminated by the warm glow of the street lamp.

# The Connoisseur's NEW ORLEANS

*by Robert A. Stebbins*

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**by**

**Robert A. Stebbins**

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*To Art and Donna Weffen*

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## Preface and Acknowledgments

*The Connoisseur's New Orleans* represents a blend of five of my professional specialities. One is my involvement as resource person for an ongoing, non-credit course on New Orleans. I started teaching the course in 1979 as part of the University of Calgary's Travel-Study Program. The participants receive ten hours of instruction on the food, music, history, architecture, and lifestyle of New Orleans prior to spending nine days there experiencing and expanding further their newly acquired knowledge.

I also work in the sociology of the arts, with an emphasis on music. My research on jazz musicians laid the foundation for the initial version of the educational travel course. In addition, my research on popular culture, in particular entertainment magicians and stand-up comics, has given me much insight into the social worlds of the ubiquitous street and nightclub entertainers of New Orleans. Further, I have conducted a number of studies on serious leisure, including the serious tourist, or *connoisseur*, as he or she is referred to here. Connoisseurs want to cut through the rampant commercialism now defiling many popular cultural attractions around the world, to return home with a deep and lasting understanding of those attractions. Finally, my unquenchable interest in the past and present existence of North America's French-speaking peoples is evident throughout this book.

Since the sojourn for most visitors to New Orleans lasts between three and seven days, they must weigh its many attractions. *The Connoisseur's New Orleans* helps them decide what to do; its object is to identify, describe, and explain the unique and substantial cultural features of this city. Unlike the standard tourist guide, it offers visitors, especially those who have come for the first time and cannot stay long, a profound look at the history, food, music, architecture, and lifestyle of New Orleans.

In other words, my aim has been to write an educational yet readable book for the serious tourist who wants to experience the city's culture in depth rather than be titillated by its commercial husk. This book is, accordingly, neither a tourist guide, such as published by Frommer or Fodor, nor a scholarly analysis, such as *Carni-*

*val American Style: Mardi Gras at New Orleans and Mobile*, by Samuel Kinser, or *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, edited by Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon. To be precise, it was not my intention to provide an exhaustive treatment of the cultural areas just mentioned. Rather, I wanted to foster a moderately profound understanding of them and thereby whet the reader's appetite for deeper study and experience in these areas. That having been said, a standard tourist guide will likely be of use as a source of practical information about tours, shops, hotels, attractions, and the like. Chapter 7 contains such information about the history, jazz, cuisine, architecture, and lifestyle of New Orleans, while chapter 6 includes an annotated list of festivals.

The factual and observational content of this book comes, in the main, from two broad sources. The first is a set of published works written by experts in the cultural areas considered here. These references are listed in the section entitled "Sources," found on pages 143-145. The second source is a set of my personal observations of the cultural life of New Orleans and the reactions of the participants in the non-credit course.

Apart from a discussion of Cajun food, *The Connoisseur's New Orleans* says relatively little about the Cajuns themselves and about their region, which lies west and southwest of New Orleans. Their history, culture, and lifestyle are different from those of the people of New Orleans; therefore they can only be properly treated in a book devoted largely, if not exclusively, to them. The view of Cajun life as an extension of life in New Orleans is an unfortunate misconception. Nonetheless, visitors to New Orleans who have time to spend in Cajun country are bound to find the experience highly rewarding.

Several people read the manuscript in one version or another, and made many valuable comments and suggestions. For their help, I wish to thank Mary and Darol Wigham, David and Barbara Todd, and the two anonymous reviewers selected by the publisher. I am also deeply grateful to editor Judy Millar and cartographer Marilyn Croot for their assistance. The black-and-white photos were taken by me. The cover photograph is the work of Ron Calamia. His permission to use it for this purpose is gratefully acknowledged.

# 1

## **Tourist New Orleans**

People still come to New Orleans . . . looking for music and sin, for places where they can act decadent for a cover price, where they can watch the wild bamboula in relative safety. Sometimes they are satisfied with sipping too many fake absinthe cocktails on Bourbon Street, sweating out a set of Dixieland at Preservation, or buying a T-shirt with an image of copulating alligators and an obscene slogan on the back. (Carol Flake, *New Orleans: Behind the Masks of America's Most Exotic City*)

For nearly everyone who has heard about New Orleans, the very name of the city conjures up irresistible images of debauchery where they can eat, drink, and be merry. They think of jazz, distinct cuisine, an impressive array of festivals (especially Mardi Gras), and – it could almost go without saying – the French Quarter. Everyone likes a party it seems, and New Orleans is commonly seen as one seamless celebration radiating outward from its pulsating core, Bourbon Street.

Even the more seriously minded find a certain measure of enjoyment in the party atmosphere of New Orleans. But they also benefit from facets of the city holding more specialized appeal, many of which are found in the French Quarter. For instance, the cosmopolitan nature of the Quarter has attracted and inspired a long list of famous painters and writers, including Edgar Degas, George Catlin, Mark Twain, William Faulkner, and Tennessee Williams. More recently, because it is exceptionally tolerant, New Orleans has become the home of one of North America's largest and most vibrant gay communities. And, for architecture buffs, the city offers a unique array of urban housing, some of it over two and a half centuries old.

These distinctive traits, which we shall see are but a small sample, help explain two other unique aspects of New Orleans: the plethora of nicknames and the pronunciation

of its official name. I know of no major city in North America with seven nicknames, each describing an important quality of that city. Some urban nicknames in North America are simply abbreviations, for example L.A., Frisco, Chi (Chicago), and T.O. (Toronto). And nearly every city has at least one descriptive nickname, as in Bean Town (Boston), Windy City (Chicago), Queen City (Toronto), and Mile High City (Denver). In this vein, New Orleans is known as The Crescent City, in recognition of the sinuous course taken by the Mississippi River as it flows through town, and as the Isle of Orleans, inasmuch as it is surrounded by water. It is also referred to on occasion as The International City, because of its exceptional mix of racial and ethnic groups and because of its economic status as a seaport. As for the remaining nicknames – The Big Easy, The City that Care Forgot and, more rarely, The *Ville Sans Souci*, or, more vaguely, The Queen of the Mississippi – they announce to all the world the city's special predilection for the good life.

Nor do I know of any North American city whose name is subject to such wide variation in pronunciation. Perhaps because its name is not Anglo-Saxon but French, New Orleans, when referred to by English-speaking people, is subject to no less than five pronunciations. Most North Americans say Noo OR-lins or Noo OR-luns. Southerners seem more inclined to pronounce it Noo Or-leens. Upper- and upper-middle-class Orleanians who were born and raised in this city come closest to the true French pronunciation when they say Noo Or-lee-ins. Most picturesque of all, however, is the Brooklyn-style pronunciation given the city's name by its working-class – N'awhlins. The Brooklyn accent in New Orleans, of which this pronunciation is possibly the most commonly-heard example, has still not been adequately explained.

The reason for my first visit to the Crescent City in 1972 was the same as many others': I came to attend a convention (the American Sociological Association's annual meeting). My introduction to the place was out of the ordinary, however, for my colleague Jack Buerkle, who collaborated with banjoist Danny Barker to produce the sociological study of jazz musicians entitled *Bourbon Street Black*, was on hand to give me a personal tour of the old city, the

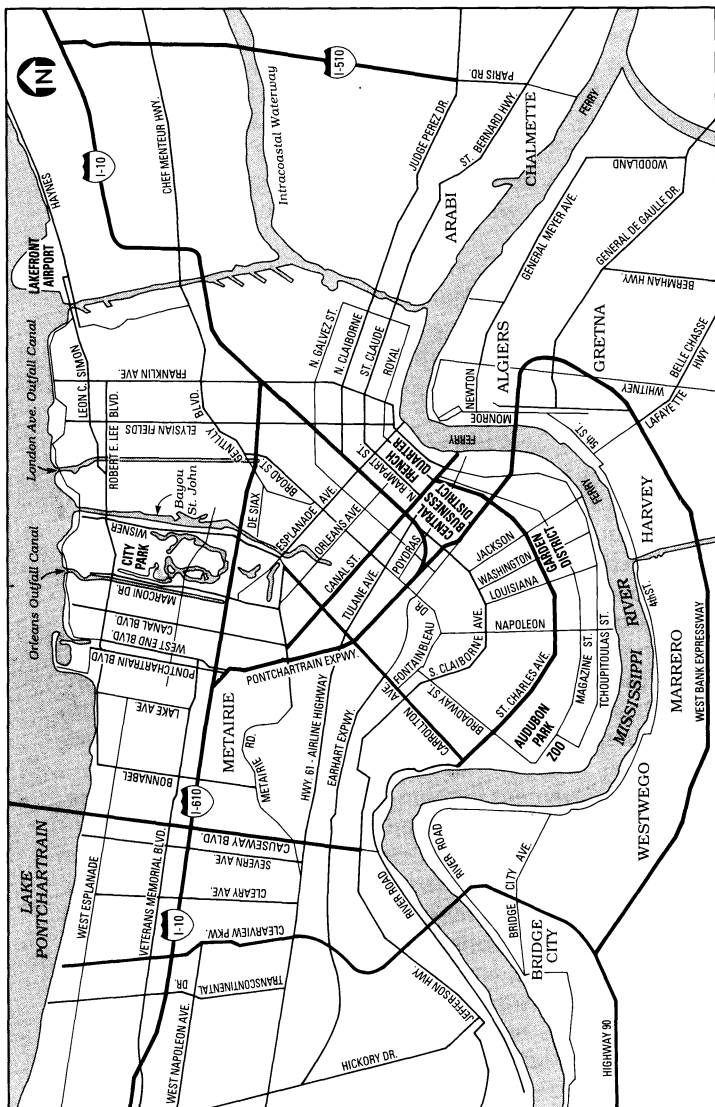


celebrated Vieux Carré, or French Quarter. Suddenly my younger days, during which I worked as a jazz musician, and my subsequent professional days, during which I pursued a speciality known as the sociology of jazz, were being given new meaning as I walked the streets where the early music was first played. Although I was certainly impressed with the jazz, the food, the architecture, and the general social atmosphere of the Quarter, I would subsequently read extensively about these and other aspects of the city to expand my understanding of their significance in New Orleans life.

While I was reading, the Faculty of Continuing Education at the University of Calgary invited me to serve as the resource person for a course on New Orleans jazz, to be presented as part of its educational travel program. I designed a course consisting of ten hours of instruction followed by a corresponding "laboratory" experience, wherein I, the resource person, and the course participants would go to New Orleans for nine days to hear jazz in its native habitat. That was 1979. The jazz we heard was provided as part of the annual Jazz and Heritage Festival. As for the course, it was a success. Indeed, in April of 1994 I returned as its resource person for the seventh time, bringing to eleven the number of visits I have made to the city either in this capacity or in that of tourist or conventioner.

It became clear early in this string of visits that, although New Orleans offers the tourist an immense variety of attractions, only a handful of them are truly distinctive and substantial. I will refer to them as *cultural areas* and the tourist's involvement in them as *cultural experiences*. These areas are history, jazz, Creole-Cajun cuisine, New Orleans architecture, and the New Orleans lifestyle. Their distinction and substance are examined in chapters 2 through 6. New Orleans is also known for other cultural achievements, most notably its contributions to the fine arts, particularly music, painting, sculpture, and literature. These are not, however, general tourist attractions.

My aim in the remaining sections of this chapter is to paint a backdrop for the examination of the different cultural experiences. First, the "commercial" side of tourist New Orleans.



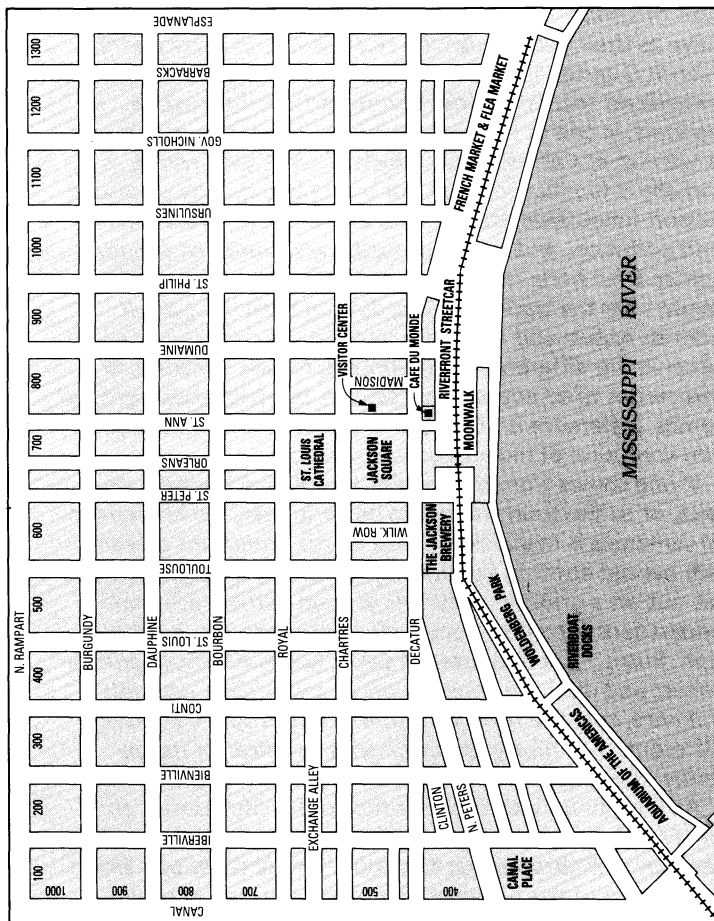
Map 1. Greater New Orleans, the French Quarter, and the Central Business District

## Tourist First Impressions

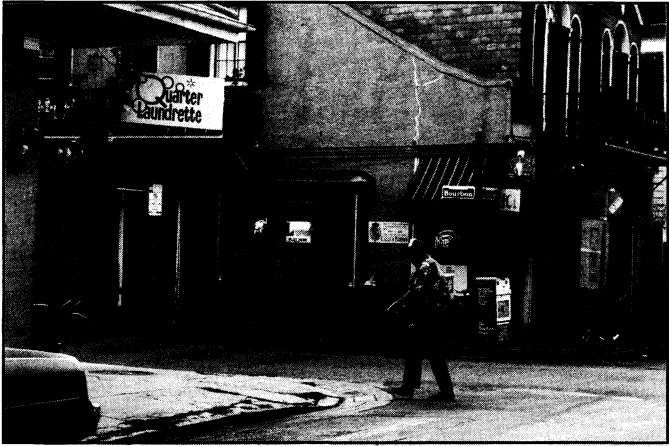
Most tourists reach New Orleans by car, train, or airplane, although ocean-going cruise ships have recently started to dock at the Riverwalk and thus to provide a small proportion of visitors to the city with water access. Most tourists have as their destination the city's center, in particular the French Quarter, the heart of tourist New Orleans. The North American tourist's most common first impression, it appears, is one of having arrived in a large, run-of-the-mill American or Canadian city. Much of what they notice initially is familiar to them, for example baggage carousels, airport limousines, traffic-filled expressways, urban noise and pollution, and the usual hustle and bustle of a major center. Even here, however, the alert tourist at the airport might hear the traditional jazz coming from the public-address system and along the route to the city's center might observe the different-looking houses, mosaic of canals, or cemeteries filled not with headstones but with above-ground tombs. Difference is there, but is often missed in the speed and confusion of modern urban transport.

If one comes from the west to the central business district, or to the train station on its perimeter, the impression of sameness is magnified. There North Americans at least will behold another familiar sight: a clump of skyscrapers set out on a gridiron of streets choked with vehicles and pedestrians forced to obey traffic lights at every intersection. Buses – just like those in other North American cities – collect and discharge passengers at predictable intervals. Yet here, too, the observant tourist might spot something different, most likely the St. Charles streetcar or its facsimile, the Vieux Carré Minibus.

At this point I interrupt our trip to the city's center and the French Quarter with a brief geography lesson; it will serve us well throughout this book. It only takes one look at the map of the Crescent City to see the futility of discussing directions with reference to the points of the compass. Orleanians solved this problem years ago by inventing the following set of directional terms. Taking Canal Street as the dividing line, Orleanians speak geographically of points lying *upriver* or *above* this line and those lying *downriver* or *below* it. Likewise, *riverside* refers to areas



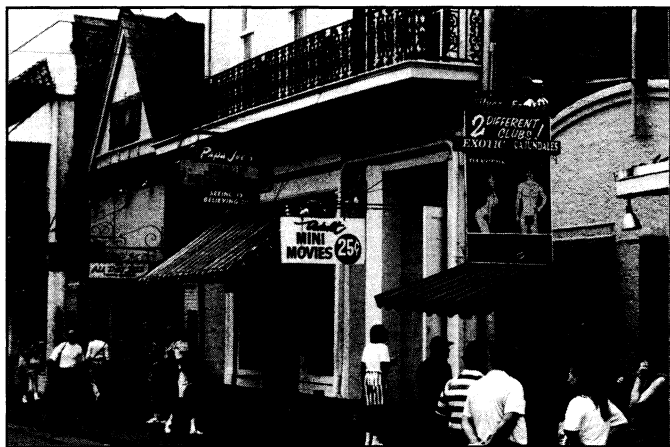
Map 2. French Quarter Today



*Residential corner in French Quarter*

close to the Mississippi, whereas *lakeside* to areas close to Lake Pontchartrain. *Uptown* denotes that part of the city extending upriver from the French Quarter and *downtown* that part extending downriver from the Quarter. The central business district is uptown. The *back-of-town* is the area located between the river and the lake, part of which is also known as *midcity*.

The French Quarter is located just downriver from the central business district. It is a six-block by eleven-block grid of narrow streets, few of which are wider than three cars placed side by side. Its buildings are rarely more than four or five stories high, and most are built right to the sidewalk. In many places there is a continuous wall of town-houses (stores at street level, apartments above), which bear numerous Spanish architectural features from the occupation of the late eighteenth century. Other dwellings are separate, designed in the unmistakable idiom of New Orleans urban architecture. Even today, and despite its many commercial elements, the French Quarter continues to resemble a typical neighborhood in a southern European city. It is the responsibility of the Vieux Carré Commission, which has been in operation since 1921, to regulate and preserve the "quaint and distinctive character" of the French Quarter.

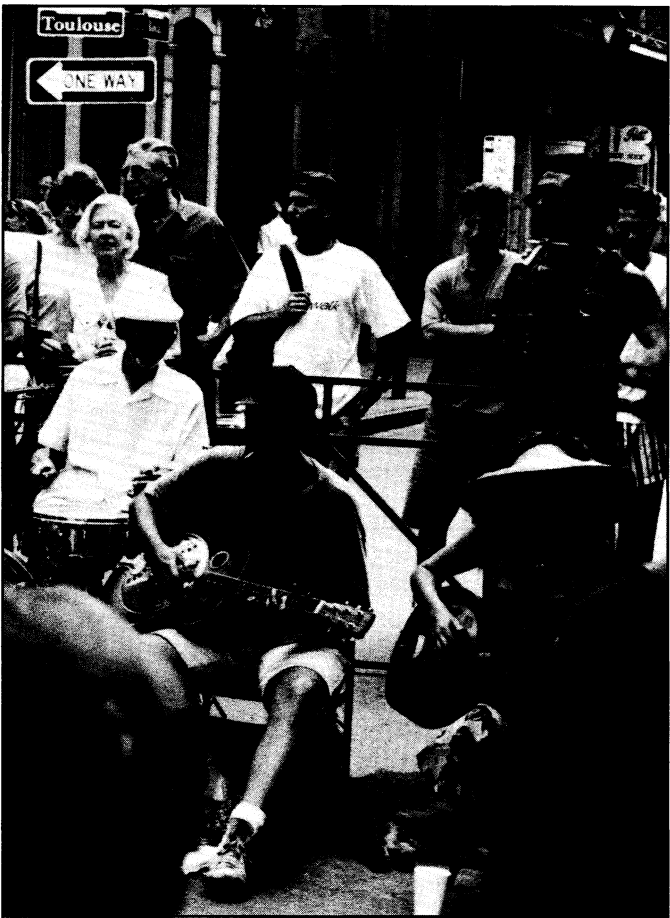


*Commercial entertainment on Bourbon Street*

The first-time tourists to New Orleans with whom I have spoken have invariably described their maiden entry into the French Quarter as one of shock, albeit a generally pleasant shock. Since most had never visited Europe, they had no direct experience with an urban setting so quaint and charming, no realistic idea of what to expect.<sup>1</sup> Their comments indicated that they were surprised by both the architecture and the commercialism of the place. Since we have just considered the first, and will say a great deal more about it in subsequent chapters (especially in chapter 5), I shall devote the remainder of this chapter to discussing the second.

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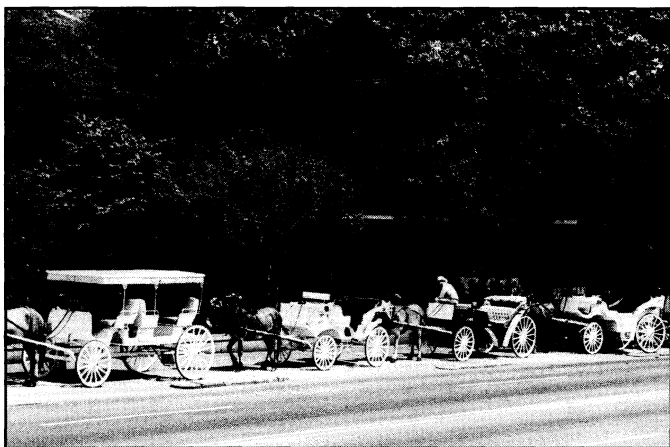
1 Montreal and Quebec City have also retained in their historic sections a number of the early architectural features they inherited from France. Today, the New Orleans French Quarter is distinguished from the old sections of these two cities by its activities, notably, traditional jazz, Creole/Cajun cuisine, and the Bourbon Street promenade. Moreover, some New Orleans architecture is unique, even when compared with that of Montreal and Quebec City.



*Buskers on Chartres Street*

### **Commercial New Orleans: Inside the French Quarter**

In speaking of commercial New Orleans, I am really speaking of the commercialism of the French Quarter and its adjacent upriver and downriver tourist zones. The rest of the city is probably no more or less commercial than any other large city in North America, or at least any other large tourist city there. Finally, commercialism in the French



*Carriages on Decatur Street at Jackson Square*



*Flea market, downriver end of the French Market*

Quarter is by no means evenly distributed throughout. Approximately half the area is composed either of residences or a mixture of residences, schools, day care centers, and religious establishments. Commercialism exists here, too, but mostly of the neighborhood store variety, interspersed with the occasional bed-and-breakfast operation.





*Commercial art in Jackson Square*

Even though the commercial areas of the French Quarter also contain many private residences, most tourists seem wholly unaware of this function. Rather they are commonly both captivated by and thus blinkered by the myriad commercial activities available at street level. Here, on many streets, they can go from door to door, block after block, confronting every few steps of the way still another invitation to spend their money. The real cost of a trip to New Orleans is typically far higher than food, lodging, and transportation.

The range of opportunities to spend money is impressive, even for the most inveterate patron of Canadian and American commercial tourist zones. Gift and souvenir shops abound. Nor is there a shortage of eating and drinking establishments, which together come close to covering the gamut of human wants in this sphere. Stores selling paintings, posters, and photographs are common in New Orleans, as are those vending different kinds of crafts. Book and record outlets, both new and used, dot this area of the city. The tourist can also go to a number of museums and historic buildings as well as, since 1991, the splendid new Aquarium of the Americas. And one section of the Quarter even contains a concentration of stores specializing in

antiques. Mixed with all this are a number of small- and medium-sized hotels and motels.

Nevertheless, some commercial and service establishments are conspicuous by their absence. The small grocery stores scattered throughout much of it nonetheless become extremely rare in its commercial section. Fortunately, the small A & P supermarket at the corner of St. Peter and Royal helps offset this deficiency. There is only one drug store, which is Walgreen's at Iberville and Chartres. The sole liquor store, Vieux Carré Wine and Spirits at 422 Chartres, is sometimes needed when the meager stock at the small groceries or the drug store will simply not do. If you want to avoid the ubiquitous, annoying stamp machines that require exact change and give you a handful of stamps you will never use, go to the post office at 1022 Iberville where you can buy stamps in bulk. And, despite all the business transacted in the Quarter, there is only one bank in the area. Appropriately named the First National Bank of Commerce, it is located at Royal and Bienville and offers automatic teller service.

The first ten blocks or so of Bourbon Street make up a commercial zone of their own. Here lies New Orleans's entertainment "strip." Walter Cowan and his colleagues wrote that, "in contrast to the old-world charm which pervades most of the Vieux Carré, there is Bourbon Street with its tinsel tawdriness. It is the 'strippers strip,' rowdy and raucous, and filled with people from before dusk to long after midnight every day." It is closed to vehicular traffic at night, an arrangement that permits thousands of people to wander up and down the street, enjoying easy access to its many nightclubs, restaurants, jazz haunts, snack counters, strip joints, souvenir shops, pornography stalls, and curbside take-out bars. Many stroll with a drink in one hand, lawful behavior in New Orleans so long as the libation is contained in a paper or plastic cup. In this city liquor is sold legally seven days a week twenty-four hours a day. On a typical night Bourbon Street is packed with men and women of all ages, attired in everything from jeans and shorts to business suits, fine dresses and, occasionally, even formal wear. They stroll, they stop and talk, they look into the open doors of the nightclubs and striptease parlors. A throbbing *mélange* of jazz, rock, Cajun, country, and zydeco provides a blaring musical background for all this.

The impact of Bourbon Street on the initiate to the French Quarter is invariably powerful. Even the most jaded cannot help being impressed by the gaiety. There is no entertainment strip like it in all of North America and, if my sampling is accurate, most first-time American and Canadian visitors to New Orleans have only a vague idea that such a place exists on this continent. The music, the narrow street, the open doors, the warm weather, the liberal liquor laws, the restriction of motorized vehicles, and more combine to create a unique party atmosphere. They also combine to create the archetypal expression of commercial New Orleans.

Speaking of streets, let us note that most of them in the commercial parts of the French Quarter are filled with people. Bourbon Street is only the most extreme example in this regard. And where there are people in New Orleans street entertainment is sure to be as well. Mimes, jugglers, acrobats, magicians, dancers, and small bands are among the many kinds of buskers working for tips on the "banquettes" (New Orleans for sidewalk), in the barricaded streets, or in such places as Jackson Square, the French Market, and the Moon Walk along the river.<sup>2</sup> Bourbon Street is, as one would expect, a prime location for street entertainment, but these other venues are popular too. The buskers are joined, principally around Jackson Square, by a gang of commercial painters and craft vendors. Many of the first are portraitists.

Immediately downriver from Jackson Square lies the French Market, another tourist attraction and bastion of commercial appeal. It has been a market for over 250 years. Here, at one time, the French exchanged goods with the Indians, and more recently the German farmers in the area sold their produce to the city's residents. Today, tourists can enjoy a stroll through the bustling fruit and vegetable market and adjacent weekend flea market. Just upriver they can hear more street jazz, explore still more shops offering

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2 The term "banquette" has survived from the early days of the city when this French word for bench was applied to the raised, plank-covered walkways that, when erected along the sides of the dirt streets, took on the appearance of benches.

a variety of merchandise, and sip café au lait and eat beignets (deep-fried French doughnuts) at the celebrated Café du Monde. The streetcar showing the destination of Desire Street, in commemoration of Tennessee Williams's play, "A Streetcar Named Desire," is no longer at the downriver end of the French Market, just beyond the flea market. After repairs, it will be placed in a more central location within the French Quarter.

Notwithstanding the several barricaded streets, tourist life in the French Quarter is further enriched or complicated, depending on your point of view, by vehicular traffic. Delivery trucks routinely penetrate the area to supply the hundreds of stores and restaurants. Horse-drawn buggies make their way up and down the narrow streets to the accompaniment of the patter of the drivers and the staccato of the horses' hooves. As difficult as driving is in the commercial sector of the Quarter, many people still try to maneuver their cars through the congestion.

### **Commercial New Orleans: Outside the French Quarter**

Although the French Quarter is the magnet that draws millions of national and international visitors each year, many interesting tourist sites exist elsewhere, both inside and outside the city. For those who are staying in the Quarter and who have the time and the money, their location can become the base from which to explore these external attractions. The commercial side of the tourist's life in New Orleans is by no means limited to the Vieux Carré, only centered there.

From the French Quarter or the downtown hotels, it is possible to ride the streetcar (Garvey and Widmer, in *Beautiful Crescent*, say Orleanians eschew the word "trolley") upriver to the Garden District.<sup>3</sup> Now a registered National Historic Place, this is the oldest street railway in the world. Here you can walk for hours along streets lined with the stately nineteenth-century homes of the Americans, built after the French refused to sell land to them in the Vieux Carré. Tours of the city (which include a cemetery or two)

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3 Publication details of works cited in this book are listed in Sources, pp. 143-145.

and the river (which include selected battlegrounds) radiate from the French Quarter. And from there the more energetic can go still farther afield to spend as much as an entire day touring plantations or cruising swamps and bayous.

The list of attractions and activities available both inside and outside the French Quarter is even longer than this. But, since most of them can be experienced in some form in many other cities (e.g., the Zoo, Superdome, river tours), I will refrain from discussing them here. The rest, as already indicated, are special to New Orleans. They will be covered at appropriate points in one of the later chapters.

## **Commercialism and the Connoisseur**

My observations suggest that, after a few days, heavy doses of commercialism tend to deaden our sensitivity. Connoisseurs, in particular, soon learn that the commercial forms of jazz sound the same, the gift and souvenir shops sell identical goods, and the paintings in Jackson Square are really of the same genre. Soon their minds balk at the seemingly endless trivia intoned by the tour guides, such as the amount of tonnage freighted on the Mississippi in an average year or the date on which the owner of the San Francisco plantation got married. Cute stories about personages – Jean Lafitte, the pirate, and Marie Laveau, the voodoo queen, are tour guide favorites – are entertaining, but, like all entertainment, short-lived.

Connoisseurs like a certain amount of commercialism and entertainment, too. But they soon get their fill, at which point, in New Orleans at least, they begin searching for something more substantial. After all, they reason, why pay thousands of dollars to travel to this city for mere diversion, something they can as easily find at home. Why pay a small fortune for experiences that, because they are chiefly entertaining, are also fleeting? Under the conditions of pure commercial tourism, the tourist returns home with little or no money and no enduring pay-off from the money spent while away.

Yiannakis and Gibson found that serious tourists do exist, albeit they constitute but a small minority of the millions of people who tour these days. Of the fourteen tourist roles they identified, two – the “anthropologist” and the

"archaeologist" – can be said to be seeking cultural experiences similar to those sought by the New Orleans connoisseur. The anthropologist tours because he or she enjoys meeting the locals, trying their food, and speaking their language. The archaeologist goes on tours to view archaeological sites and ruins as part of his or her historical study of an ancient civilization.

Every New Orleans connoisseur is constituted of a bit of the anthropologist and even the archaeologist. But the first operates in a peculiar environment, where he or she must somehow keep pervasive commercialism at bay and, while doing this, set aside the time and maintain the inclination to carefully explore and experience the cultural areas of music, food, architecture, and the lifestyle of the city. An important prerequisite for this exploration is a working knowledge of the history of New Orleans, a cultural area separate from the preceding four.

# 2

## **The City and its Past**

The resulting way of life differed dramatically from the culture that was spawned in the English colonies of North America. New Orleans' Creole inhabitants ensured not only that English was not the prevailing language but also that Protestantism was scorned, public education unheralded, and democratic government untried. (Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*)

How did the cultural areas mentioned earlier become established and grow so in importance? Part of the answer to this question is that New Orleans was, and still is in certain ways, essentially French. Although New Orleans was founded for other reasons, it became the only city in France's colonial empire where settlers tried to imitate, if not emulate, the aristocratic lifestyle of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Paris. Still, it was a city that also had to adapt to its proximity to and political ties with the United States in general and the American South in particular.

Nevertheless, the French colonial period left many permanent features of local social and cultural life, a number of which are profound and, for this reason, hold great appeal for the connoisseur of New Orleans. Paris has always been known for its food, music, architecture, and relaxed lifestyle. New Orleans, it seemed, was destined to gain a similar reputation. Although these cultural areas have undergone considerable change over the years, they remain intact, distinct in character, and French in spirit. They can be effectively explored and experienced during a short visit, providing the visitor can cut through the commercialism (one of the recent changes) to reach their deeper levels of significance.

A fifth area – the general history of New Orleans – is clearly indispensable for understanding the other four and



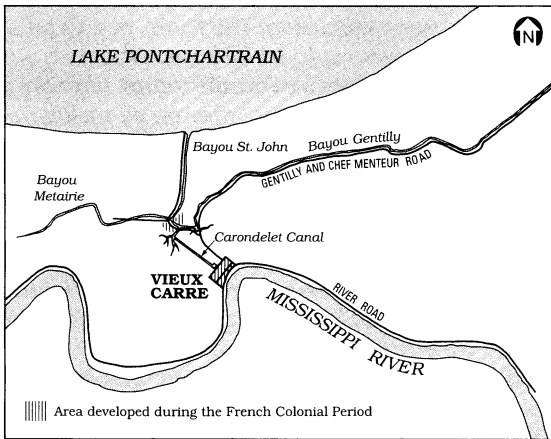
their special histories. Nevertheless, the four can be directly experienced, whereas the experience of history is necessarily indirect. Unless, of course, we are speaking of history in the making, or history unfolding in the present where we can witness events. But the closest we can come to directly knowing past history is to visit the sites where it took place and try to imagine what happened at the time. In New Orleans there is no shortage of opportunities for this kind of cultural experience (see chapter 7 for a list).

## **The City's Beginning**

The reasons for founding New Orleans have very little to do with the cultural areas examined in this book. One principal reason was militaristic: from the late seventeenth century Louis XIV of France recognized the importance of gaining control of the mouth of the Mississippi River (known to him as fleuve Saint-Louis) as a way to check growing British dominance in this part of North America. In 1784 he dispatched René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, with instructions to accomplish this feat, but shipwreck, disease, and conflict with the Indians ended in mutiny, assassination of La Salle, and failure of the mission.

In his second attempt Louis XIV engaged two brothers from Ville Marie (today's Montreal), who had a record of successful colonization in New France. They were Pierre and Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville and Sieur de Bienville, respectively. Between 1698 and 1702 the two explored the Gulf coast of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, establishing colonies at Biloxi, Natchez (then Fort Rosalie), and Mobile (then Fort Louis). Iberville died in 1706. His brother, 19 years his junior, continued exploring the mouth of the Mississippi where, in 1718, he established a fourth colony – La Nouvelle Orléans – named in honor of the duc d'Orléans in France.

The site held considerable military and commercial potential for the colony. It was located 110 miles inland from the mouth of the Mississippi on a great bend in the river, where the observer has a commanding view both upstream and downstream. The land there is formed from the alluvial soil of the Mississippi delta, soil somewhat higher than the level of the sea but barely higher than that of the river. About a



**Map 3. Vieux Carré in the French Colonial Period**

mile toward the lake the terrain begins to drop imperceptibly to a level below the sea and into what was at the time an immense swamp.

Fortunately for the interests of France, the high ground along the river is connected by another, much narrower strip of high ground to a distant bayou – a sluggish, marshy stream – which empties into a brackish tidal lagoon to which Bienville gave the name Lake Pontchartrain (see Map 3). A perfect escape route, he reasoned, for should defense of the river against the British go badly, he could then retreat to the lake by way of the bayou, which he had called Bayou St. John after his patron saint, and sail from there to Lake Borgne in the Gulf of Mexico. Today, the narrow strip of land, known as Esplanade Ridge, is traced by Bayou Road. At the time, it was an Indian portage. Bienville also recognized that the short distance to Lake Pontchartrain and the Gulf would be advantageous for trade, inasmuch as it would obviate the need to sail 110 miles to and from the mouth of the river.

It never was necessary to use the portage for military purposes. But, since the threat of British attack was omnipresent, Bienville was asked to stay as governor of the new colony and establish it as a permanent and livable place.

The challenges were herculean. The forest had to be cleared so that a town could be laid out. What was worse, the community was located in hostile Indian territory and erected on the edge of a swamp infested by snakes, mosquitoes, and alligators, having a nearly unparalleled capacity for generating communicable diseases.<sup>1</sup> Hurricanes were another problem (one hit in 1719, another in 1722), and the river frequently overflowed its banks.

Accordingly, the recruitment of colonists had to be more persuasively undertaken here than in many other parts of the French empire. This is how a small gang of slaves, prostitutes, and convicted salt thieves came to be among the early settlers of a community that would later pride itself on its elite image. Some of the 300 inhabitants living in the other three coastal colonies were also encouraged to move to the new settlement.

New Orleans was laid out in 1720 by military engineer Pierre Lablond de la Tour according to the typical plan of a late medieval French town. Such towns were built around a *place d'armes*, or military parade square, fronting a river or the sea and flanked by a jail, church, priest's home, government office building, and set of official residences. De la Tour's assistant, Adrien de Pauger, began to implement the plan the next year. It consisted of nine squares running along the river and six squares running toward the lake. A grid of streets led away from the parade square to the boundaries of the community. The latter were to be marked by forts and earthen ramparts but, when it became clear that there was no need for them, they were not built.

Today, New Orleans's Place d'Armes is known as Jackson Square. Then, as now, it was situated at the front and center of the French Quarter, which over the coming years expanded across the external common, eventually reaching a total of thirteen squares bounded upriver and downriver by Canal and Esplanade Streets, respectively. And then, as now, Rampart Street formed the lakeside boundary. Plantations, which supplied some of the daily food, were established

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1 Bienville, who was known for his capacity to get along with the Indians, is credited with keeping open warfare with them to a minimum.

immediately beyond the adjacent common.<sup>2</sup> Their number grew along with the town's population.

## Early Life

Early life was difficult, to say the least. The first houses were crude and small; many were simple wooden huts modeled after those of the nearby Choctaw Indians. Furthermore, due to the widely fluctuating levels of the Mississippi, the unpaved streets were frequently turned into muddy streams. The critical need to contain the river was confronted in 1723 with the first attempt of many to construct a levee. To make matters worse, most of the important economic and political decisions concerning the colony were either directly or indirectly made in France, chiefly for the benefit of homeland interests. In one way or another these decisions were related to the preposterous belief, promulgated by John Law, that the area was teeming with gold and silver and that lucrative pearl fisheries lay just offshore.

John Law was a highly unscrupulous but nonetheless talented gambler and businessman from Scotland, who succeeded in establishing in France in 1717 a holding company called *Compagnie d'Occident*, or Company of the West. Frenchmen were encouraged to buy shares in the company, the money from which would be used to exploit the valuable gems and minerals said by Law to abound in the Mississippi valley. Not surprisingly, the company's shareholders were far more interested in mining these resources than in seeing to the day-to-day survival of the colonists. Yet, there were no gold and silver, no profitable pearl fisheries, no real company assets at all in the colonies.

But, as Herbert Ashbury noted, this lack in no way prevented Law from sending six thousand white settlers and three thousand black slaves to help search for the fictitious natural wealth. Still, many of these people must have either returned to France or moved to other communities in North America, for Walter Cowan and his colleagues report that the population of New Orleans in 1721 was only 470, with

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2 The common was a communal area of land found just outside the walls of many medieval communities. Its chief use was agricultural.

another 1,269 people living in the suburbs. Even though the value of the Company of the West dropped sharply in 1720, it continued to dominate the New Orleans economy for another two decades. In the meantime, Bienville with his meager resources had to try to feed, house, and buoy up thousands of disenchanted compatriots.

Fortunately, Bienville's plea made in 1719 for more solid citizens than criminals and prostitutes began to be heard. The Government of France suddenly quit sending such people, and concentrated instead on recruiting German peasants. About two-thousand of them reached Louisiana in the early 1720s, where, with their agricultural expertise, they complemented the colonists' penchant for trading for food instead of growing it. Thus, the Germans contributed enormously to the survival of the colony. They settled in the "German Coast," an area approximately twenty-five miles upstream from the Vieux Carré bounded by Lake Pontchartrain, Lac des Allemands, and Bayou des Allemands.

Despite its many difficulties, New Orleans soon generated enough economic activity to be classified a seaport. Later, in 1723, it was declared the capital of the French colony of Louisiana, a designation held earlier by Mobile. La Salle had established the boundaries of Louisiana in the name of France. They encompassed all the land drained by the Mississippi, a vast territory that included the Ohio River system and extended north and west into present-day Minnesota and Montana. Yet, notwithstanding its seaport status and the occasional profits derived from its indigo plantations and fur trading operations, the colony continued to languish in poverty throughout the first half of the eighteenth century.

Bienville was Governor of Louisiana until 1725, the year he was relieved of his appointment following an unsuccessful campaign against the Indians two years earlier. But the subsequent decline of the colony led to his reinstatement in 1733, which lasted until his voluntary retirement in 1743. His successor, Marquis Pierre de Rigaud de Vaudreuil de Cavagnial, served until 1753. De Vaudreuil, who developed an unenviable reputation for political corruption, is also credited with inaugurating the lavish social life for which New Orleans eventually came to be known. Walter Cowan and his colleagues write that "in 1753 the marquis welcomed his successor, Louis Billouart, Chevalier de Kerléréc,

with a feast to which four hundred of the elite were invited. For the soldiers and all the rest of New Orleans, two fountains of wine flowed in the Place d'Armes."

Economic conditions were still precarious when the French-speaking Acadians began arriving in 1757. They were living in Nova Scotia when the British cruelly expelled them in two waves in 1755 and 1758. The weak economy and limited habitable space in New Orleans made it impossible to absorb such a large number of newcomers. Still, Orleanians, who were deeply sympathetic with their plight, did what they could to help. According to Brasseur and Forêt, the Acadians had no choice but to settle outside the city in the swamps and bayous of Southwest Louisiana. The Cajuns of today are the descendants of the exiles from New France and the Acadians who arrived later directly from France. The word "Cajun" is a colloquial alteration of the word "Acadian."

## **Life under the Spanish**

The history of New Orleans took a dramatic turn in 1763 when, as part of the Treaty of Paris, France ceded to Spain New Orleans and its immediate area, which was all that remained of Louisiana after the Treaty. France was near bankruptcy. French authorities reasoned that it would be better for them if Spain rather than Britain controlled Louisiana. The deal was secretly consummated the year before in the Treaty of Fontainebleau, a Bourbon family pact in which Louis XIV obliged his Spanish Cousin, Charles III.

The colonists, who still identified strongly with France, were highly embittered by the arrangement. Carolyn Kolb reports that anti-Spanish plots were so prevalent that the first Spanish governor quit, unable to tolerate the hostile political climate. It took an armada of 24 ships and 2,600 soldiers under the generalship of Don Alexander O'Reilly to bring the New Orleans French to heel. The Don was an Irish count who had distinguished himself in the military service of Spain. Curt Bruce reports that O'Reilly counted 3,190 persons, 1,225 of them slaves, in the census of the community he took in 1769, the year of his arrival.

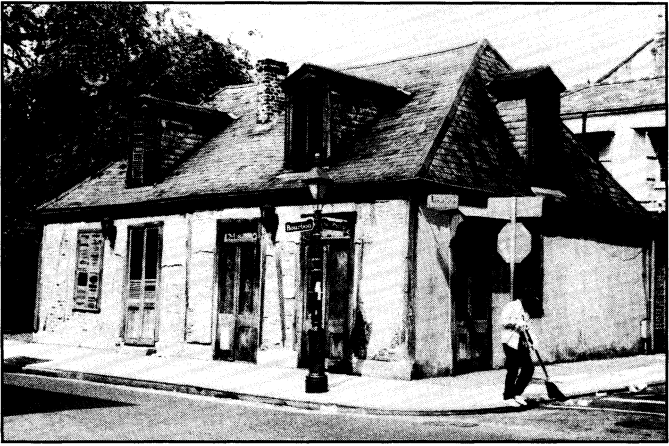
Notwithstanding the enmity, the colony profited economically under the Spanish. Agriculture flourished and, as

a result, it became more self-sustaining in foodstuffs. It even developed a lively export trade of rice, cotton, and sugar cane. Commercial experimentation with these export crops had been conducted in the area in the 1740s and 1750s. During the Spanish period, New Orleans progressed still further as a seaport and as a trading center with the West Indies and the European mother countries. During the American Revolution, the Spanish used New Orleans to aid the colonists in their struggle against Britain.

All this time, New Orleans remained unofficially French. In the social sphere, the Spanish were strongly inclined to imitate the glamorous lifestyle that had begun to develop there. And, since francophones greatly outnumbered hispanophones, French remained the dominant language in everyday affairs, even though Spanish was the official tongue and the streets throughout the Vieux Carré and the suburbs were hispanicized.

Jerah Johnson writes that the influence of the Spanish on the buildings of New Orleans, once thought to be profound, is now questionable. Whereas we will look at this issue more closely in chapter 5, let it suffice for the moment to note that careful research has failed to turn up evidence of even one Spanish architect working in New Orleans during the Spanish period. Nevertheless, the Spanish had the opportunity to influence local architecture on two occasions.

Initially, the town's buildings were made almost entirely of wood and for that reason were almost completely destroyed by the first of two great fires. The one in 1788 consumed over 800 buildings, or four-fifths of the total; the one in 1794 destroyed a fifth of the city. The community was rebuilt on both occasions in an architectural style common at the time in Spain and Southern France. Only a handful of buildings survived both conflagrations, one of which was the second Ursuline Convent on Chartres Street. A house on Dumaine Street known as Madame John's Legacy was also spared. These two are the sole remaining examples in New Orleans of mid-18th century French colonial architecture. The first was built in 1745. The second was built in 1727 and, since it was only partly burned in the 1788 fire, was rebuilt in the following months in the original architectural idiom. After the fire of 1794 the governor declared that all buildings must have tile rather than wooden roofs.



*Jean Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop and Bar is an old Creole cottage of the Spanish era.*

The Creole culture for which New Orleans is so famous got into full swing during the Spanish period. The French term *créole* is derived from the Portuguese *crioulo*. Cowan and his colleagues point out that the word has many definitions and has been used with considerable imprecision over the years. The definition that ultimately gained ascendancy in New Orleans refers to men and women of either French or Spanish descent who were born in the New World. Creole became the label for those local residents who knew their community first-hand and could be counted on to support it. The Creoles saw themselves as different from those who represented particular (often exploitative) interests from the old country and who, it was certain, would favor those interests.

Still, despite the opposition to Spanish rule put up by the French, the two nationalities did intermarry frequently. These mixed marriages became the cauldron in which the two national cultures were blended in the new social and geographic milieu of South Louisiana. The distinctive lifestyle of New Orleans began to take shape at this time.

Spanish rule ended 1 October 1800 when New Orleans was returned to France. Napoleon Bonaparte, then First Consul of France, pressured the Spanish into making the concession as a condition in the secret Treaty of Ildefonso.



But New Orleans failed to remain French for long. In 1803 it passed into American hands as part of the Louisiana Purchase. Since the Revolution of 1776, the Americans had wanted an outlet to the Gulf of Mexico via the Mississippi for goods produced west of the Allegheny Mountains. From New Orleans these goods could be cheaply shipped by water to East Coast ports. For his part, Napoleon was leery of holding valuable territory at such a great distance when war was imminent with Britain, an acknowledged power on the high seas.

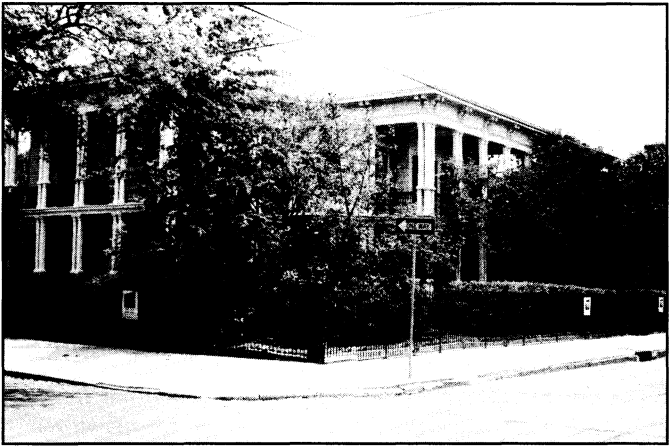
### The American Invasion

Today's Orleanians are Americans, and an expression such as the "American Invasion" must surely ring strangely in their ears. Yet that is precisely how the Orleanians of the early nineteenth century felt about Americans; they were seen as intruders – albeit unarmed ones – who were encroaching on Creole culture and community organization. Now an even more severe clash of cultures was in store than when the Spanish moved in.

In particular, the Latin Catholic ways of the French and Spanish as expressed by the Creoles of New Orleans contrasted sharply with the Anglo-Saxon Protestant ways of the Americans as developed in the Northeastern United States. The first emphasized art, leisure, family tradition, hereditary wealth, and social position. The second stressed work, freedom, initiative, equality, and the self-made man. Moreover, the new official language – English – was even more foreign than Spanish, since it is of West Germanic rather than Romance stock.

Joan Garvey and Mary Lou Widmer describe the cultural situation in the city at the time:

**Culture shock** was another experience felt by both natives and new American immigrants. Most Americans had had few business dealings with free people of color [discussed shortly], for one thing. Americans were also not prepared for the French Creoles, who were poorly educated and provincial, but haughty and proud of their heritage. The Creoles considered themselves a breed apart, and far more cultured, with their theater and their opera, than the Americans with whom they were now doing business. They were different, and *cultured*, in those areas considered by them to be important. By American standards, they



*Garden District mansion*

were culturally backwards, but the Creoles were not interested in using American standards, or being measured by them.

The Creoles, like the colony itself, were not money-makers to any great extent.

It was true that most Orleanians had only limited experience with Americans. For many of the first, all of the second were like the uncouth, buckskinned "Kaintocks." These free-living, free-swearing frontiersmen from Kentucky and Tennessee piloted down the Mississippi wooden flatboats and keelboats filled with such goods as cornmeal, whiskey, and pickled pork destined for maritime shipment to the Eastern markets. Once their boats were unloaded and the longer planks sold as lumber for constructing houses or paving the streets and banquettes, they would take their leisure in New Orleans in ways encouraged by the liberal social atmosphere: drinking, gambling, fighting, and fornicating. Gambling, both on land and on the riverboats, became legal in New Orleans in 1823 with the proviso that a proportion of the proceeds be used for charity.

Nevertheless, now that New Orleans was part of their country, Americans were drawn like a magnet to its sophisticated lifestyle and commercial potential. In 1810 the United States Census recorded a population of 17,224, making the city the fifth largest in the United States. It reached

33,000 people by 1815 and 41,000 by 1820. Although most newcomers during this period were Americans, they were joined by a stream of French immigrants in flight from revolutions in France and the West Indies. The Irish started immigrating to New Orleans in significant numbers in the 1820s, settling, with the Americans, in their own neighborhoods, mostly along Tchoupitoulas Street in what had become Faubourg St. Mary and in the community of Lafayette in which the Garden District eventually took shape.

The French word *faubourg* refers to a community that develops outside the city walls, a sort of suburb. The term is still used in New Orleans, as in Faubourg Marigny, but is given the anglicized pronunciation of FAW-berg.

The Creoles wanted nothing to do with the Americans. And, whereas there were exceptions, many refused to sell property to them either in the French Quarter or in their faubourgs. As a consequence, the Americans were forced to form communities of their own, which they did upriver from the Vieux Carré on land that was also above sea level. The first of these, known initially as Faubourg Sainte-Marie and then later as Faubourg St. Mary, eventually became the present-day central business district. Although French Jesuits farmed there until the Spanish arrived, the latter claimed it as their own and developed it to some extent as a separate residential community. The latter also gave its streets Spanish names such as St. Charles, the King of Spain at the time, Carondelet for the Baron de Carondelet, and Baronne for the Baron's wife.

This is the point at which to note that topography is responsible for some unusual patterns of urban growth in New Orleans when compared with other North American cities.

Generally speaking, the area was a vast swamp, some of it lying as much as two feet below sea level. The high ground sometimes reached fifteen feet above sea level and was invariably found along the river's edge and along ridges such as the Esplanade. Hence, until an effective pumping system was installed early in the twentieth century, which could prevent flooding in the low-lying areas, the city's growth tended to take the form of an inverted "T," with the French Quarter located where the crossbar joins the stem of the letter. That is, settlement was concentrated along both sides of the river and, from the Antebel-

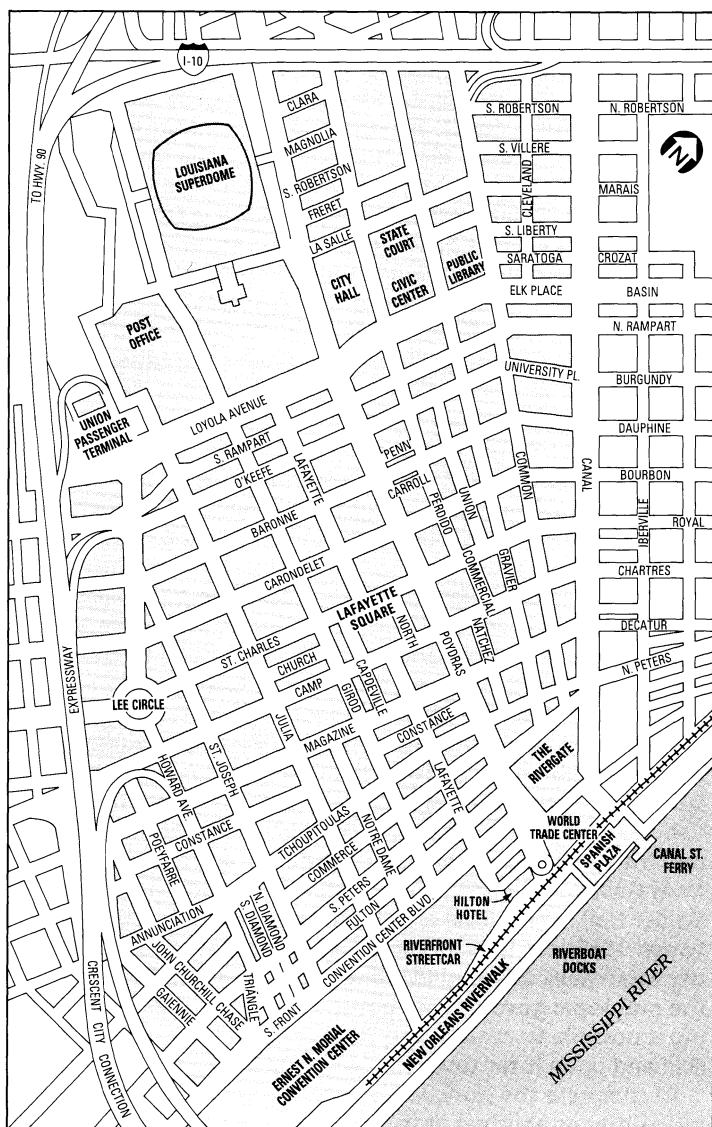
lum Period, along the Esplanade Ridge. A certain number of people did live in the swampy areas, but they were poor, mostly black slaves and servants.

At almost the same time the Vieux Carré was founded, a much smaller community by the name of Algiers started up across the river. Bienville himself held a small tract of land there. It was not until 1840, however, when the Duverjé Plantation (Bienville's old holding) was subdivided, that Algiers began to grow significantly. As for the Esplanade Ridge, mostly Creoles built there, which they were forced to do when they ran out of land in the Vieux Carré. Taking up residence in the American sector was psychologically out of the question.

Hemmed in thus by the local topography, the city grew outward in a series of faubourgs, extending from the Vieux Carré both up and down the river on both sides and along the Esplanade Ridge. As just noted, Faubourg Sainte-Marie was the first of these; it was located immediately upriver. In the 1840s the Americans, who were still having trouble buying land in the French Quarter, began to develop their own outlying communities even farther upriver, one of which was the opulent Garden District. It is a contemporary architectural tourist attraction. Today, the Creole faubourgs are part of the city of New Orleans, itself surrounded by suburbs, among them Metairie, Kenner, and Chalmette.

Indeed, in 1836, the standoffishness of the Creoles eventuated in the establishment of two legally and administratively separate municipalities: the Creole sector, or Second District (including the Vieux Carré) – administered from the Cabildo next to the St. Louis Cathedral in Jackson Square – and the American sector, or First District – administered from Gallier Hall on St. Charles Street in Faubourg St. Mary. Gallier Hall, which local architect James Gallier, Sr. built between 1845 and 1850, became City Hall in 1853 when the city was finally united under one administration. In 1953 the municipal government moved to the Civic Center, making it possible to rename the St. Charles building as Gallier Hall and open it for tours.

To complete the story, let us note two other separate municipalities established at this time. The Third District, Faubourg Marigny, was located just downriver from the Vieux Carré. Bernard de Marigny, a Creole planter, sub-



Map 4. Central Business District

divided his plantation in 1805 expressly to develop a faubourg. For the most part, it became the home of native-born workers and artisans, many of whom were Free Men of Color. The newly annexed City of Lafayette (now the Garden District) became the Fourth District.

In the coming years, Faubourg St. Mary evolved into New Orleans's central business district (see Map 4), where we find the usual North American features of this urban zone: a concentration of buildings housing business- and government-related functions. As in other North American cities, few people reside here. In the second half of the twentieth century, once the engineers learned how to construct skyscrapers on New Orleans's boggy land, the business area took on an even more typical appearance. In the meantime, the Creoles were running their own commercial and governmental activities in the French Quarter which, in European fashion, were simultaneously interlarded throughout the community with residential and recreational functions.

In short, the Americans made one of their most lasting contributions to New Orleans life with their commercial acumen and the prosperity that flowed from its application. For this reason, they soon challenged the Creoles for leadership of the city. The Creoles, when compared with the Americans, were less adept at commerce.

Canal Street, a boulevard constructed with an unusually wide median strip, served as the common border for the two main administrative districts, the Creole sector and the American sector. It owes its name to a Spanish plan to build between the two roadways a canal linking Bayou St. John with the river. During the 1790s, when the Baron de Carondelet was Governor, he implemented an idea that Lloyd Vogt says was initially conceived during the French colonial period to dig the canal as far as the French Quarter. Present-day Basin Street marks the end of the canal, where once there was a large basin for turning boats around. American plans drawn up in 1807 called for completion of the canal, most of whose route was to run along the median strip of Canal Street. But, after thirty-six years of procrastination, the project was forever abandoned.

From the 1836 division into separate municipalities, the median strip also acted as a social buffer between the Creoles and the Americans. There was no canal, nor was the land legally the property of either group. The term "neutral

ground" soon emerged as the name for this territory, a term now applied to median strips throughout New Orleans. Nonetheless, as Joseph Tregle notes, Canal Street was at most a political division. The burgeoning American business functions had earlier expanded into the French Quarter, in some instances as far as St. Louis Street, without, however, changing the architectural character of the old town. In other words, the real social division between the two sectors was much vaguer.

Notwithstanding these differences, the Creoles were more than willing to join with the Americans, the seedy Kaintocks included, to fight the Battle of New Orleans against their arch enemies, the British. On 8 January 1815 a motley troop of 4,000 men consisting of Creoles, Kaintocks, sailors, pirates (among them Jean Lafitte), Indians, and Free Men of Color defeated the British at Chalmette downriver from the Vieux Carré. It was a stunning display of military strategy based on intimate knowledge of the local terrain. American General Andrew Jackson, leader of the force, became an instant hero in New Orleans. So grateful were the Creoles that they renamed Place d'Armes Jackson Square. Strange as it may seem, the battle, the last of the War of 1812, was unnecessary. A peace treaty had already been worked out and was awaiting ratification. But, alas, none of the protagonists at Chalmette had heard about that.

Many years later St. Leger Joynes and Jack DuArte wrote: "Consider the irony, New Orleans began as a French colony out of the scheme of a Scotsman; it became Spanish at the hands of an Irishman; and the English almost won it in the end except for the generalship of an American." No wonder they call it The International City.

## **The Golden Age**

The years between approximately 1825 and 1862, when the American Civil War began, were New Orleans's most glamorous and prosperous. This was the Golden Age. Vogt describes the upper-middle class lifestyle of the era:

New Orleans hosted wealthy cotton and sugarcane planters, fancy riverboats, and sailing ships from all over the world. Immigrants were arriving every day, and new buildings were being constructed throughout the city, which now boasted fine restau-



*Statue of Andrew Jackson in the square named in his honor*

rants, grand hotels, a flourishing opera, and festivities including lavish balls, banquets, and parades. New Orleans was the wealthiest city in the United States. Gambling and dueling were common, as was the practice of voodoo.

But there were also many problems. Flooding was still common. The city was only beginning to pave its streets. During the early decades of the nineteenth century, this was accomplished with a variety of materials: cobblestones, ballast blocks from merchant ships, and planks from the boats of the Kaintocks. Sewers were open drains into which refuse of every description was thrown. As a consequence, residents suffered from frequent epidemics of typhoid, cholera, malaria, and yellow fever. Vice of every kind was as rampant.

The Quadroon balls exemplify the opulent lifestyle of antebellum New Orleans available to those who could afford it. The quadroons were women of one-quarter black blood born of a union between a white and a mulatto. The balls served to pair well-to-do white men with these, frequently beautiful, light-brown skinned "women of color." This occurred when the man chose one of them from among his dancing partners to become his mistress, a custom known as *plaçage*. These unmarried women, who remained faithful to their sponsors, were for this reason not regarded as prostitutes.



The offspring from these liaisons were known as *gens de couleur libres*, or Free Men of Color, later to be renamed Creoles of Color. Although most became laborers, artisans, and small shopkeepers, some inherited slaves and plantations, accumulating enough wealth in the process to educate their children in France. In addition to these free people of color, several boat loads came to New Orleans in the early nineteenth century as refugees from the slave uprisings in the Caribbean. They, too, were artisans and craftsmen.

Much of this was possible because of the Code Noir (black code) proclaimed by Louis XIV in 1724. Exceptionally humane for its day, the Code enjoined owners from treating their slaves cruelly. It also decreed that freed slaves must have the same rights and privileges as if they were born free. The Code further established Roman Catholicism as the official religion of the colony, while requiring that Jews be expelled from it. Still, so far as anyone knows, no Jews lived in the colony at this time. In any case, Cowan and his colleagues note that this part of the Code was ignored when Jews did begin arriving in significant numbers in the nineteenth century as part of the stream of German migrants. The Napoleonic Code of 1804, which became the basis for the Louisiana Civil Code of 1808, extended many of these principles.

The Golden Age was a period of major urban growth and expansion. During this period the Americans recruited large numbers of German and Irish immigrants to construct a major series of canals and railroads. The same immigrants also worked at improving the streets. Their rewards were meager and the costs of the heavy manual labor great, inasmuch as they became highly susceptible to the aforementioned diseases. Since the Creoles denied them access to the Carondelet, or Old Basin, Canal, the Americans built one of their own in the 1830s. Known as the New Basin Canal, it linked the lake with the western edge of Faubourg St. Mary. In 1950 the New Basin Canal was filled with dirt. Today it serves as the right-of-way for an interstate highway. By 1840 New Orleans was home for 102,193 people, making it the third largest city in the United States at the time.

This was also the era of important transportation changes. The first steamboat, which was constructed in 1811, arrived in New Orleans in January, 1812. When the Erie Canal opened in 1825, it began receiving an increasingly large share of the East Coast shipping business that

formerly belonged exclusively to the Crescent City. Shortly thereafter, the railroads began operation, generating still more competition in the transportation sector. Yet, the city continued to prosper during the Golden Age. By 1860, for example, it boasted the world's largest cotton market and one of the world's largest slave markets.

Vogt reports that, in the same year, forty percent of the population was foreign born, having come to New Orleans from no less than thirty-one different nations. At one point more Irish lived in New Orleans than in Boston. But, between 1840 and the end of the century, the Germans held the title of largest immigrant group. Tregle reports that foreigners were so numerous by mid-century that the designations of "American section" and "Creole section" had become meaningless, demographically speaking. Moreover, the influx of immigrants and the growing ascendancy of the Americans were beginning to take their toll on spoken French, the public use of which began to decline noticeably starting in the 1840s.

## **The Civil War and Reconstruction**

New Orleans had a population of 155,000 when it entered the Civil War, following the decision made by the State of Louisiana to secede from the Union. That occurred in January 1861. On 25 March Louisiana joined the Confederate States of America in which New Orleans was the largest and wealthiest city. War began in April. Still, New Orleanians staunchly opposed secession because of its potentially deleterious effects on river trade, even if they strongly supported slavery. And, whereas they thought they were well-protected by two forts at the mouth of the Mississippi, first one and then the other was overwhelmed in March of 1862 and the city taken without a shot the next month.

The customary air of romanticism persisted even into the period of hostilities, enhanced as it was by the traditional duels, the soldiers' parades, and the heroic actions at Fort Sumpter of hometown general Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard. Beauregard returned to New Orleans after the war, becoming a simple lodger in the slave quarters behind a mansion on Chartres Street. Novelist Francis Parkinson Keyes purchased the mansion in 1944 and had it and the outbuildings restored. It is now open for public tours.

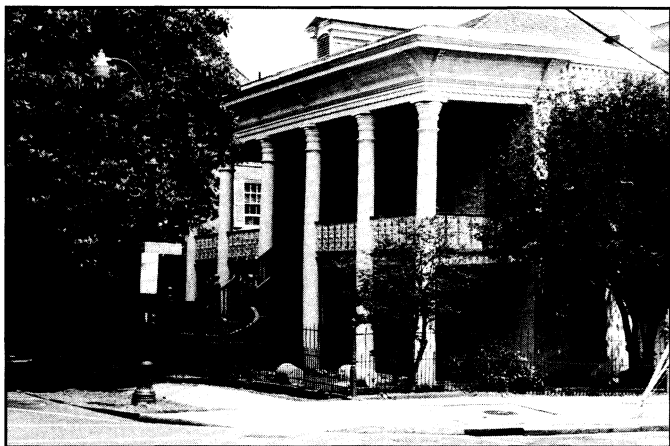


*Père Antoine's garden at the rear of the cathedral  
was the scene of many a duel.*

But overall, the war brought an end to the flamboyant lifestyle of the city. It was occupied by federal troops for fifteen years, the first eight months of which were spent under the leadership of the hated General Benjamin F. Butler. Backed by an army of 18,000 men, he ruled in a ruthless, highhanded manner, earning for himself the sobriquet in New Orleans and throughout the South of "Beast." Responding to national and international condemnation of his behavior, the federal government relieved him of his New Orleans post in December, 1862. The war also led to the collapse of the slave economy and, as was feared, seriously hampered river trade for several years. It was clear that the economic foundation of the city was declining significantly.

Reconstruction was chaotic everywhere in the South, and New Orleans was certainly no exception. At the federal level, power struggles erupted frequently between the Republicans, the governing party that led the antislavery campaign, and the Democrats, now the voice of the postwar South. Political violence and corruption ensued as both parties tried to capture the new black vote. During the fifteen years of military occupation, New Orleans was rocked by numerous riots and armed insurrections.

On the economic front northern carpetbaggers roamed through the region, bent on making money from the new



*Old Creole home on Esplanade Avenue*

commercial opportunities opened up by the social upheaval. Some of them tried to advance their personal business interests by entering state or local politics and some of these people resorted to shady practices. Soon "carpet-bagger" came to refer pejoratively to any outsider who entered or tried to enter the local or state political arenas.

All in all, the New Orleans economy was not as badly crippled as the other urban economies in the South. The port, closed during the war, began to revive in 1865 following the cessation of hostilities. The city also continued to grow, although at a less dramatic rate than earlier. By 1878, it had a population of 210,000 and, correspondingly, an active housing industry. In the 1870s, New Orleans emerged as the country's main transshipment center with the Gulf of Mexico for goods shipped by rail and water. The river was still a primary transportation route for merchandise not requiring rapid delivery. Nevertheless, New Orleans did not regain its status as second largest port in the United States until 1945.

During this period still another wave of Irish and German immigrants landed in New Orleans and, toward the end of Reconstruction (generally held to be 1877), an influx of Sicilians began. The latter settled in the French Quarter, moving into the former homes of the Creoles, many of whom

had relocated to the lakeside and downriver faubourgs. Vogt notes that this was a most fortunate transition for the Quarter, for a considerable number of the dwellings there had seriously deteriorated and would likely have been demolished had someone not been living in them.

Most of the Sicilians, however, were unskilled and uneducated. As a result, they soon became a burden for the local economy, already struggling to absorb a surfeit of black day-laborers. Cowan and his colleagues report that vendetta killings were also believed to be common.

## **The Twentieth Century**

By the turn of the century, 287,104 people lived in New Orleans. Installation of a sophisticated pumping system in the heretofore swampy back-of-town was opening up habitable land for large-scale settlement. Mechanical pumps had been available since 1859, but it was the high volume screw pump invented by A. Baldwin Wood, a New Orleans engineer, that gave the city the technological means needed to implement its contemporary comprehensive drainage system. Work began on the project in 1899; approximately ten years later most of the midcity area had been drained.

In this system water flows by gravity through a series of outfall canals to either Lake Pontchartrain or Lake Borgne where it is then pumped from the delta basin into one lake or the other. To stay dry, New Orleans must be pumped constantly. Staying dry also depends on the efficient functioning of two major concrete spillways, the Bonnet Carré and the Morganza. Located up the river from the city, they work to divert Mississippi floodwaters to Lake Pontchartrain.

The Huey P. Long Bridge was completed in 1933, giving rail and highway access to Algiers and the rest of the West Bank. Heretofore, this area could only be reached by ferry. The Greater New Orleans Bridge, completed in 1955, augmented still further this suburban expansion, which by now had become a major population movement. The 1950s ushered in a lengthy period of extensive suburban growth in the United States, a trend that was evident in New Orleans as well. In fact the demand for access to the outlying parishes (the Louisiana equivalent of a county) was robust enough to justify construction of the twenty-four mile

Pontchartrain Causeway, the longest multi-span bridge in the world. It opened in 1969.

After losing population to the suburbs in the decades following World War II, New Orleans experienced a temporary return migration. In part this was due to the dearth of low-cost suburban and exurban land suitable for housing. The swampiness of the Mississippi delta still haunts the city, forcing builders to drive piles deeply to ensure stable foundations. Even then, as James Janssen has observed, some homes eventually sink because reclaiming a swamp always leads to significant "soil shrinkage." Moreover, some areas are still subject to occasional flooding. Gentrification was also a force in the return migration. Orleanians had rediscovered the charm of the old sections of their city and set about renovating the old houses so they could live there. But, more recently, the crime and violence issuing chiefly from the black population are fueling a new inner-city exodus, a problem New Orleans shares with literally every other large American urban center.

According to the 1990 census, the city of New Orleans has a population of 496,938, living in the heart of a metropolitan area of nearly 1.3 million people. The census also demonstrated that the area is slowly losing inhabitants: During the 1980s the population of the city declined by nearly 11 percent, while that of the metropolitan area dropped by 1.5 percent.

Nevertheless, it seems that the desire to leave twentieth century New Orleans has never been as strong as it presently is in nearly every other major city in the United States. Priit Vesilind writes that most of the old-line families who have lived for years in the Garden District are staying on there. Instead of collecting in racially homogeneous districts, blacks and whites have tended, since implementation of the Code Noir in 1724, to live in the same neighborhoods, where the neighborhoods are differentiated from one another chiefly by the socioeconomic status of their residents. Logsdon and Bell describe how, in the ante-bellum period, the continuous flow of immigrants who were unfamiliar with American racist tendencies "helped maintain relationships between black and white New Orleanians that were more elaborate than those in any other city in the United States." Garvey and Widmer observe that

in Early New Orleans, in spite of social segregation, there was no geographical segregation of blacks and whites. Slaves lived within walking distance of their employers, usually in small houses in back of the big houses owned by the whites. When the boulevards were divided into blocks, neighborhoods developed with an affluent white perimeter, enclosing a small nuclear cluster of blacks, which has survived until today.

Additionally, ethnic diversity, always a prominent feature of New Orleans's social landscape, may be contributing a certain internal stability. In the latter half of the present century, the already complicated New Orleans ethnic mosaic was further enriched by a new community of Yugoslavs and more recently one of Latin Americans. Newly arrived immigrants prefer to settle near their expatriates, leading thus to the development of relatively homogeneous neighborhoods. Like many North American cities, New Orleans was, and still is to a significant degree, a patchwork of such neighborhoods, most containing some middle-class homes and family-run corner groceries.

Besides these population changes, twentieth-century New Orleans has seen several other important developments. One of them was North America's only experiment with legalized prostitution, the notorious Storyville district of New Orleans. As is common in port cities everywhere, prostitution in this city has known a long and colorful history. To prevent its expansion into the respectable areas of town, alderman Sidney Story proposed in 1897 that a twenty-block area, bordered on the riverside by lower Basin Street, be legalized for both gambling and prostitution. The experiment lasted until 1917, when the Secretary of the Navy demanded that the district be shut down to protect the morals of young sailors training in the city. The mayor reluctantly complied, predicting that prostitution would continue on a clandestine basis in other parts of town. And it did. Today nothing remains of Storyville; all its buildings have long since been demolished.

The port has always been the main source of trade and business activity, even if it has not always been second to New York in dollar volume. New Orleans's chief imports are coffee, sugar, and bananas. Her chief exports are rice, cotton, sulfur, and lumber. These have recently been augmented by oil and petrochemical products, which together constitute a vibrant new sector of the New Orleans export

economy. Today shipbuilding and ship repair constitute an important industry. And, although New Orleans is not considered a manufacturing city, a variety of manufacturing plants do operate here.

If all goes according to plan, the waterfront will be stripped of its twenty-nine wharves by the year 2000, and, in effect, reestablished as part of a vast new port presently under construction just east of the city. The change will undoubtedly enhance tourism which, since World War II, has become still another major force in the economic life of New Orleans. It is now the city's second largest industry. And, as Tony Jackson observes, "New Orleans has one final geographical card to play: its position on the north-south axis in the brave new world of North American free trade."

In 1905 the city finally came to grips with the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, the source of five major yellow fever epidemics since 1793. During that period the disease claimed 100,000 lives. Walter Reed proved conclusively in 1901 that this insect carried the disease. But it was another four years before Orleanians realized that it was breeding under their noses, in the cisterns many of them kept at the backs of their homes and used for collecting and storing drinking water. Once the true cause was known, the cisterns were screened over and hundreds of miles of open gutters oiled and salted.

Over the years yellow fever has served as a rallying point for Orleanians regardless of class, race, or religion. On this matter there was always common ground, for yellow fever was indiscriminatory. It took victims, at times liberally, from every demographic category.

## **The Connoisseur's City**

By contemporary standards, New Orleans is not a rich city. It lacks significant heavy industry and, accordingly, languishes under a weak tax base. Furthermore, it must contend with a variety of social problems, which prey unceasingly on its modest treasury. Its unique geographical conditions drive up building costs.

Yet, with tourism advancing as a global economic force, New Orleans will surely benefit. It is already a world convention center, a development that has enhanced enormously its hotel and restaurant industry. Furthermore, we



have seen that many people now come to the city for no other reason than to enjoy it. We have seen, too, that most visitors seldom push beyond the commercial veneer to explore and experience its unique cultural areas of history, music, food, architecture, and lifestyle. Still, as the following account of New Orleans music demonstrates, this is hardly an impossible undertaking.

# 3

## **Jazz: A Cosmopolitan Music**

The blending of West African and European music had a pronounced head start because of the wide range of assimilation by people of color amidst unusual business prosperity. For during its early years New Orleans was a melting pot *par excellence*.

(Marshall Stearns, *The Story of Jazz*)

Although there are many definitions of jazz and none is without controversy, the one in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* is more descriptive than most and as such is well-suited for our purposes:

**jazz:** American music developed from religious and secular songs (as spirituals, shout songs), blues, ragtime, and other popular music (as brass-band marches) and characterized by improvisation, syncopated rhythms, contrapuntal ensemble playing, special melodic features (as flatted notes, blue notes) peculiar to the individual interpretation of the player, and the introduction of vocal techniques (as portamento) into instrumental performance.

These different musical forms and practices came together in the latter half of the nineteenth century in New Orleans, where jazz is widely regarded as having been born. They came together in a city where music had become the basis for the pursuit of a sophisticated leisure lifestyle. They came together in a city where people from many different races, religions, cultures, and nations lived in a social milieu that accepted, and sometimes even encouraged, interpersonal relations across ethnic lines. This was the melting pot in which jazz was blended.

## The Ingredients of Jazz

One important ingredient in the melting pot of jazz was the set of European harmonies and melodies brought to New Orleans first by the French and Spanish, and later by the Irish, Germans, and Americans. In the main, these were the harmonies of art, or classical, music, but among them were also many of the current melodies of European and American folk music. Strains of both were evident in the music provided for Creole dancing, notably the quadrille, a kind of square dance. The harmonies also gained more widespread expression in the band music of the day, especially its marches, which enjoyed tremendous popularity in late nineteenth-century France and the United States.

Black Orleanians added another important ingredient: their own musical traditions transported from Africa and the Caribbean. These included their folk melodies, as well as a variety of distinctive rhythms. The latter were played either as solos or as accompaniment to the melodies. Since nearly all blacks were slaves, at least initially, these traditions became the basis for shouts, or field hollers, and plantation work songs. The blacks also had their own dances. For years, the evenings of Congo dancing in Beauregard Square (now Louis Armstrong Park) served as popular entertainment for many an Orleanian, regardless of his or her race or ethnicity.

By contrast, other ingredients were, from the beginning, hybrids of European, Caribbean, and African rhythms and harmonies. The religious music of the period can be characterized thus, although black Orleanians were surely more inclined than their white counterparts to add African rhythms. The same was true for the black spiritual. Irving Sabloski observed, "Clearly both West African music and Anglo-Saxon hymnody contributed to it [the black spiritual]. The essence of the Negro spiritual, however derived from neither, but rather from this people living in this place at this time. . . . The process of their combining created something wholly new."

The popular music of the second half of the nineteenth century, as heard in minstrel shows, barbershop song, and family singing, contributed yet another hybrid ingredient to the jazz melting pot. Many of the freed slaves in the community became familiar with the popular and even

some of the classical music of the whites without, however, abandoning their own black musical heritage. Lynn Abbott examined the extensive contribution made by American blacks to the rise of barbershop song in the latter part of the nineteenth century. He found that New Orleans blacks figured prominently in this process.

The New Orleans cultural mix contributed to the jazz melting pot in its own special ways. One was the musical background of the Creoles of Color, a background they acquired through their European family ties. Some of them received training in classical music from local French, German, or Italian professors. With respect to playing jazz, lessons on the piano, violin, and clarinet were especially helpful. Buerkle and Barker report that some also attended the opera, where they had elite seating reserved exclusively for them. The Creoles of Color were also familiar with European and American folk and popular musics, as well as with their expression in the marches and quadrilles. At the same time, many of these musicians retained aspects of their own black heritage. Thus they served as an important artistic bridge between the black and white musical cultures of New Orleans.

In addition, the increasingly discriminatory racial climate of post-Civil War New Orleans evolved into a social ingredient all of its own. At first, the racial tolerance of nineteenth-century New Orleans mixed poorly with the pro-slavery attitudes of the American South, including those of many Louisianans who rejected the urban culture of this city. But after the Civil War, racist sentiment began to build everywhere in the state against the liberal provisions of the Code Noir and its successor, the 1808 Louisiana Civil Code. Logsdon and Bell note that: "at this point [after the Civil War], the state legislature began an assault on their [blacks'] rights of manumission and began transferring enforcement of existing restrictions from local to state authorities." During approximately the next thirty years the Creoles of Color gradually slid from their earlier position of wealth and influence. In 1894 the state legislature voted to rescind the various liberal codes. At this time all people with any black genetic heritage whatsoever, the Creoles of Color among them, officially lost the civil rights heretofore legally theirs.

Still, by this point, Sablosky argues, Creole artisans had been suffering economic decline for a decade. Their white

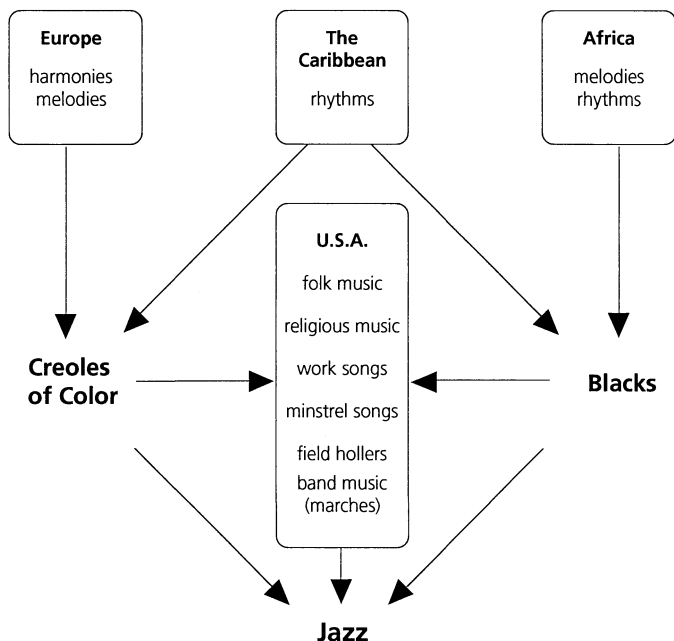
clientele increasingly preferred to patronize white craftsmen. As a result, those Creoles of Color with sufficient musical training began to supplement their dwindling income by playing in the brass bands. From there economic necessity combined with racial discrimination to force them to seek work in the black jazz bands.

One important change to result from this discriminatory atmosphere was that the light-skinned Creoles of Color, with their European musical training, were now in the same socioeconomic boat with the black-skinned New Orleanians, with their Afro-Caribbean musical heritage. White Orleanians of the day increasingly defined both categories as black, even while I refer in this book only to the second as black.<sup>1</sup> Some of the first had played music for the elite of the city, but now they were forced to work in the service and entertainment spheres of their art. In the meantime, some of the blacks were trying to learn European music by teaching themselves to play such instruments as the trumpet, trombone, and double bass (known in jazz circles as the string bass). Unfortunately, they had neither the money nor the contacts to arrange for proper music lessons. Moreover, their instruments were second-hand and sometimes of poor quality. Many of them had become widely and cheaply available when the Civil War military bands were demobilized.

The *déclassé* Creoles of Color were now effectively confined by law to menial work, formerly the province of pure-blood blacks and possibly other ethnic groups of low esteem. The pure-blood blacks and Creoles of Color who had the instruments and the ability to play them much preferred to seek a livelihood in music rather than toil on the docks, in the warehouses, or in the cotton mills of the city. In short, because of the economic and political situation in which they found themselves, musicians from these two

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1 Differentiating blacks and Creoles of Color, among others, by the shade of their skin was, and to some extent still is, a custom especially characteristic of New Orleans. Lumping all people with any genetic black heritage in the category of black with no consideration for the degree of blackness is a politico-legal classification that did not gain ascendancy in New Orleans until late in the nineteenth century.



**Figure 1. The Development of Jazz in New Orleans**

distinct musical traditions were now destined to meet on the job. Here they would share ideas and organize as best they could the production of music as directed by the needs of their employers and audiences and their own strengths and weaknesses as artists. At first, as Garvey and Widmer point out, the Creoles defined the early jazz as inferior European music, filled with mistakes and played by (black) musicians who were unable to read.

Figure 1 summarizes the development of jazz in New Orleans according to the complex blend of the many different ingredients.

## **Making Music Together**

All the necessary ingredients were in the melting pot by the late 1880s to early 1890s when New Orleans blacks and Creoles of Color began playing music together. Charles Nanry underscores the importance of the marching band in New

Orleans at this point in the rise of jazz. Military bands had been prominent there since the days of Napoleon. The funeral band tradition of Spain and Southern France had also found its way to the city. To this was added the American marching band craze of the 1890s. In New Orleans, as in other American cities, such bands were sponsored by different lodges, fraternities, and secret societies, many of which were black. Organizations of this sort were common in Africa.

The marching bands were ubiquitous. As they paraded up and down the streets of the city, sometimes on foot, sometimes on a wagon, they attracted a great deal of attention. For this reason they were often hired to drum up attendance for a wide variety of local events, including picnics, dances, prize fights, and river excursions.

Although marching offered a livelihood for some black and Creole musicians in the late nineteenth century, it was by no means their only form of musical work. The bands were also in demand for parties, picnics, parades, funerals, weddings, political campaigns, and more. In addition to all this they provided background music in some of the bars. The elements of fun and entertainment in the New Orleans lifestyle have always been accompanied by plenty of music. In this respect nothing had changed.

When the two musical traditions – Creole and black – met on the bandstand, adjustments had to be made. The music was collective, and the musicians were being paid to play it. They had to find a way to satisfy their employers and their listeners and, for that matter, themselves. The Creoles of Color could both read music and play their instruments properly. They instructed the blacks in these areas. For their part, the blacks, who could improvise, play by ear, and make “hot” and “blue” music, passed on these talents to the Creoles. As they were learning and accommodating each other’s musical language and tradition, they were unwittingly developing a new music that would eventually be called jazz.

Although it has been subject over the years to nearly unlimited speculation, the etymology of the word jazz is still in doubt. At first the word was spelled “jass.” Hugues Panassié and Madeleine Gautier report that “in the opinion of elderly Negroes whose memory goes back many years, the word ‘jazz’ is simply an onomatopoeic encouragement





*Preservation Hall was a warehouse  
before it became a center for traditional jazz.*

or exhortation to the musicians. 'Jazz it' they cry, much in the sense of 'get going.'" Others such as Walter Cowan and his colleagues believe that the word originated in the bordellos of Storyville, where it was used as an obscene term.

The advertising function of the marching (and riding) band favored the trumpet which, in the hands of the right man, could be heard at a greater distance than any other instrument in the ensemble. When played with inspiration and a big sound, it was guaranteed to attract the attention of everyone in the vicinity, a quality of musicianship for which Charles "Buddy" Bolden, an early New Orleans jazz trumpeter, was well known. With such talent Bolden was in constant demand.

The special role of the trumpet in the marching bands brings us to a unique characteristic of that kind of music at that time in New Orleans. The talented members of the band were displayed rather than subordinated to its overall sound. For, even if they could not outblow the trumpeter, they still strove to be distinct, have a novel sound, and be heard above the rest. This encouraged the use of squeals, honks, slides, glissandos, and similar devices, which a trained listener might define as inferior musicianship. The evidence is, however, that these men knew their instru-

ments reasonably well, but chose to play this way for effect.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the musicians also wanted to impress the audience with their virtuosity. As with the trumpet players, musicians playing other instruments were in demand to the extent they could produce a musically pleasing combination of novel and audible sounds. All this squares with our opening definition of jazz as a music based on individual interpretation and improvisation.

At first, given their background in marching bands, the musicians preferred quadruple rhythm, the relatively slow 4/4 tempo of march time. The trumpets carried the melody. The tubas and trombones doubled it in the bass register, while the clarinets embellished it with an obligato in the upper register. As is typical of marching bands everywhere, the drums were used strictly for time-keeping.

But the large marching and funeral bands were rather poor outlets for expressing individuality. If every member tried at once to audibly express his artistic uniqueness, the result was sure to be cacophonous. Luckily, the new music was gaining popularity, and the public was asking for concerts in addition to the marching and riding performances. The concerts were usually held indoors. And, since the advertising function was inappropriate here, the musicians began to limit the size of the band to one of each kind of instrument except, perhaps, for two trumpets. This left an ensemble of five to seven players, who would sit and play.

In this setting, because it could provide a chordal bass structure, the banjo often replaced the tuba (if it had not already been replaced by the double bass). Moreover, in the coming years, the piano would enter the band, along with one or two saxophones. Nonetheless, the size of the typical combo, then as now, remained at between five and seven pieces, which has meant that the kinds of instruments composing it have sometimes varied considerably. Even later, jazz orchestras would develop. They would have multiple instruments of the same kind and feature their best soloists.

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2 A discussion of early jazz couched in masculine terms accurately reflects the sex ratio of the day. According to Buerkle and Barker, women entered jazz later and then chiefly as singers and pianists.

It was at this time that the traditional jazz band as we know it today really began to take shape. In the small groups each musician had a chance to express his virtuosity and individuality. Reputations began to develop. Still, not everyone could solo at once, in the usual sense of the word solo. To meet the desire to do so, the musicians invented the practice of collective improvisation. Collective improvisation is, at bottom, a form of polyphony. It is the production of several harmonically interrelated but otherwise independent lines of music. In collective improvisation no player stands out or, from another perspective, each stands out equally. With it was born what we now refer to as "traditional jazz," or "New Orleans jazz." These are the preferred terms, by the way. "Dixieland," says Tom Dent, is regarded by New Orleans musicians as a white elitist term.

### **Early Jazz in New Orleans**

At first, the blacks and the Creoles of Color were, for the most part, working in different areas of the city, producing music in their neighborhoods for various local functions. The latter were working downtown in the French Quarter and the Creole faubourgs, while the former were working uptown in a largely black area adjacent to the central business district. Two different styles of the new music had developed which, however, began to merge once the Creoles of Color began going uptown to play with their black colleagues.

Both styles were popular throughout New Orleans, but the uptown "canebrake" style was, among other things, more rhythmic.<sup>3</sup> This style was expressed in the music of trumpeters Buddy Bolden and Joe "King" Oliver. The Creole style played downtown was exemplified by Armand J. Piron (clarinet), John Robichaux (violin), and Alphonse Picou (percussion).

The jazz of the blacks was widely held to be both musically and socially livelier than that of the Creoles of Color.

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3 A canebrake is a dense growth of giant sugar cane. I have never seen an explanation of why one style of early jazz came to be described by this term.

As mentioned black jazz was hot, blue, and more rhythmic. Furthermore, it was the blacks who invented the practice known as the "cutting," or "carving," contest, in which bands would compete to see which could draw the biggest crowd to the event being promoted. Here, the role of a strong trumpeter is obvious. Moreover, it is possible that the black community was more receptive to the jazz played by blacks than the Creole community was to that played by Creoles of Color. In any case, the black musicians were heroes in their neighborhoods. There, youngsters would form a "second line," a ragged contingent that followed the marching band by strutting to the music and imitating the musicians on homemade instruments. Second lining is still popular in New Orleans, except that today people of all ages and races participate.

The jazz funeral was another black innovation. During the processional the deceased is accompanied to the grave by a marching band playing appropriately melancholy music. But on the return trip the music is joyful – an appropriate sendoff for an old friend or relative – and, psychologically, a good way to assuage grief. Garvey and Widmer write that jazz funerals still take place in New Orleans, although they are now conducted almost exclusively for musicians who have passed away.

While the blacks and Creoles of Color were integrating their musical styles, a stylistic integration of another kind was also occurring. In the bars around the city the pianistic tradition of ragtime was beginning to merge with the band tradition of jazz. Although a notated music, ragtime is a closely-related precursor of jazz. Indeed, early jazz bands often played rags which, in most instances, are fast, energetic, sixteen-bar piano tunes and on which, according to Eli Newberger, the typical jazz artist, although not the typical ragtime artist, would improvise variations. For this reason early jazz was sometimes referred to as ragtime, even though musicologists regard the two as distinct forms of music.

Jazz spread quickly to other parts of the city where, to the extent that members of the two ethnic groups played together, the amalgamation of the Creole and black styles continued unabated. The music was popular in the resort areas along the shores of Lake Pontchartrain. Some of the main hotels in the central business district regularly booked

dance bands, while scores of bars, cafés, and restaurants across the city hired combos for dancing or listening. The riverboats featured jazz, as did places in some of the suburban and exurban communities, notably Gretna, Westwego, Covington, and Mandeville.

And what of famed Storyville? Did it not also provide work for jazz musicians? Al Rose and Edmond Souchon write that "the District," as it was referred to locally, never was the great source of musical employment claimed by so many writers:

This [claim] is not only untrue, but offensive and insulting to the vast majority of New Orleans jazzmen, including some of its brightest stars, who not only never played in Storyville, but, indeed, never even saw it. The district never employed more than two score musicians on any given night. That includes Mardi Gras! By the time Storyville came into existence there were hundreds of musicians who had already been playing jazz music for more than a decade.

Perhaps this erroneous claim gained currency because a good number of jazz musicians did work routinely in the "Tango Belt," a zone of bars, cabarets, and dance halls that encircled Storyville. Bourbon Street was in the Tango Belt. Whatever the explanation, blues and ragtime piano rather than small band jazz were the preferred kinds of music in Storyville's "sporting houses" (brothels). What was required here was relatively soft background, or "parlor," music appropriate to the business goals of the place, not hard-driving, foot-stomping jazz tunes. Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton made his living for a while playing ragtime in these places, most notably Tom Anderson's Annex.

## **New Orleans Jazz Today**

By the end of World War I, a fair number of Orleanians had taken up jazz as an occupation, a line of work that was, however, almost entirely unknown anywhere else in the world. But such ignorance would be short-lived, for several of the leading exponents of the music had already begun to perform on the steamboats that plied the Mississippi. It would not be long before river cities as far north as St. Paul and Minneapolis would hear jazz, and local musicians there would begin to play it. Furthermore, it was but a short

overland trip from the Mississippi to Chicago, where between 1913 and 1918 a number of bands staffed by New Orleans musicians found employment. New York would be next.

So it was that jazz spread from New Orleans, first across North America and then across Europe. In the coming decades it would not only diffuse but also diversify. James Collier and Bradford Robinson have identified seven distinct styles, the first of which is the New Orleans or traditional style. The other six and their approximate dates of origin are swing (1925-1930), bop (1939-1940), progressive-cool (mid-1940s), mainstream-modern (late-1940s), free or avant-garde jazz (late-1950s), and jazz-rock (late-1960s). Today's list of famous jazzmen and jazzwomen includes representatives from all seven styles who, as a group, got their start in scores of cities in North America and, to a lesser extent, Europe. Chronologically, the first names to appear on the list are those of the great New Orleans performers of traditional jazz. They include trumpeters King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, and Freddie Keppard; clarinetists Sidney Bechet and Jimmie Noone; trombonists Kid Ory and Honoré Dutrey; drummer Warren "Baby" Dodds; pianist Jelly Roll Morton; bassist Ed Garland, and many others.

Although jazz continued to thrive in New Orleans after the music diffused to other parts of the world, the city did lose its title as world jazz center. New York – the cradle of the other six styles and home of the recording industry – quickly acquired this honor, which it holds to this day. Nevertheless, New Orleans can boast of a vigorous local jazz community. It is also the world center of traditional jazz. Notwithstanding its stereotyped association with drugs, alcohol, and Storyville, jazz, since its emergence as a distinct art form, has always been special to Orleanians. In this city, as Buerkle and Barker's research demonstrated, jazz musicians are well respected and their music highly esteemed. Additionally, playing jazz is often a family trade, one associated with such famous names as Barbarin, Allen, Dodds, Dutrey, and Marsalis.

Furthermore, not all the stars of New Orleans jazz left town and, among those who did leave, a number of them returned. For example, singer and trumpeter Joseph "Sharkey" Bonano, who recorded frequently on the major record labels, spent most of his career playing in small



*Maison Bourbon jazz club*

groups employed in New Orleans. He died in 1972. Another trumpeter, Al Hirt travels a great deal, yet has somehow managed to appear regularly over the years at one nightclub or another on Bourbon Street. Clarinetist George Lewis led his own band in New Orleans, a band that he also took to New York on occasion. Oscar "Papa" Celestin recorded on international labels, but remained a New Orleans trumpeter and band leader until his death in 1954.

Today, when in New Orleans, devotees of modern as well as traditional jazz can hear both styles performed by world renowned musicians, unless, of course, the latter are on the road. It is precisely for this reason that tourists may be unable to savor a live performance by trumpeter Wynton Marsalis or his brother Branford, now an established saxophonist. But pianist Ellis Marsalis, the father of Wynton and Branford, plays regularly at Snug Harbor, a jazz club located a few blocks from the French Quarter in Faubourg Marigny. Clarinetist Pete Fountain is generally in town at his own club in the New Orleans Hilton near the Riverwalk. Al Hirt and the Dukes of Dixieland, when in town, can presently be heard at Patout's Restaurant on Bourbon Street and Maxwell's Toulouse Cabaret on Toulouse Street, respectively. Until his death in March, 1994, banjoist Danny Barker performed from time to time at various locations in

the French Quarter and at the Fairground during the annual Jazz and Heritage Festival.

Jazz in contemporary New Orleans, as in many other large North American cities, is found throughout the metropolitan area, uptown, downtown, back-of-town, and in the suburbs. I counted twenty-eight restaurants and nightclubs in the May, 1994, issue of *Offbeat*, a New Orleans music monthly. They all offer jazz regularly, sometimes several sessions a week, sometimes two or three sessions a month. Five other establishments regularly feature brass bands whose music, Danny Barker says, is even more exciting than that of the jazz bands. At least five brass bands are available today to play for funerals or parades.

There is, however, a concentration of traditional jazz venues in the French Quarter, most of which are on or near Bourbon Street, now the sole vestige of the old Tango Belt. Some of this jazz has succumbed to the dominant commercialism of the area. Still, I know of several that can be counted on to offer authentic and exciting jazz performances. They are listed in chapter 7.

Preservation Hall, a most special place for jazz enthusiasts in search of the traditional music, is also listed there. It is located on St. Peter Street just riverside of Bourbon, where it has been since 1943. Preservation Hall was established for the purpose of preserving traditional jazz through live performances since, at that time, the music seemed on the verge of disappearing. Many a great jazz musician has played here over the years, including George Lewis, Danny Barker, Percy Humphrey, and Kid Thomas.

Danny Barker himself once remarked in a public meeting when asked about the authenticity of the music played at Preservation Hall, that what you hear is "authentic old." He meant that the jazz heard there is not commercial – it is genuine traditional jazz – but that old musicians do not necessarily play it well.<sup>4</sup> Playing music is a physical activity, the capacity for which can wane with age. Nonetheless, the hundreds of people who line up each evening to hear a performance at Preservation Hall attest the appeal of the

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4 Statement made during a panel on the sociology of jazz, held at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, New Orleans, August, 1972.





*Banjoist Danny Barker and friends at the Palm Court Cafe*

music. The exceptionally low admission price of three dollars no doubt contributes to its popularity.

Among the opportunities to hear jazz outside the French Quarter are those offered by the hotels in the central business district. I have already noted the most celebrated of these, namely Pete Fountain's club in the New Orleans Hilton (founded in 1978). Good jazz, some of it traditional, some of it modern, can be found from time to time in several other hotels. Lovers of modern jazz should also be sure to check the week's list of performers at Snug Harbor (see chapter 7).

Finally, if in town around the end of April or the beginning of May, try to attend some of the annual New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. It offers traditional and modern jazz as well as a marching band or two, usually the Olympia, Tuxedo, or Dirty Dozen. Except for the bands, the music is performed either in large tents or on outdoor soundstages. Prominent local and international performers are featured. In addition, the latter usually give, some time during the festival, a more formal concert in a theater or auditorium in the central business district. As for the marching bands, Tom Dent says they still play jazz, although their approach has evolved over the years to the point where it often diverges from true march music.

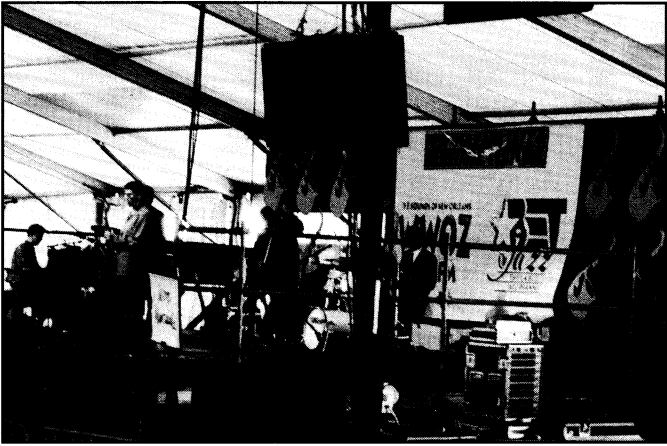
An interest in live music should not lead one to overlook the New Orleans Jazz Club Collections (formerly the New Orleans Jazz Museum). It is housed in the Old U.S. Mint Building at Esplanade and Decatur. Besides its fascinating displays of memorabilia and photographs, visitors are treated to a range of well-researched vignettes about the history of jazz in the city. All this is presented in an ambience of recorded New Orleans music.

## **The Connoisseur's Jazz**

Learning to separate good jazz from mediocre or bad jazz takes practice; it requires us to listen to the music and develop an ear for quality. Unfortunately, this book can offer little advice here, beyond encouraging the reader to start listening. Nor can it or should it tell its readers what tastes they should have in jazz. Because I concentrated in this chapter on the rise of jazz and hence on its earliest style, one might get the impression that this style is best. All seven styles have their followers and there is no objective way of saying which is better. Yet, many jazz fans prefer certain styles; for them, individually, better and worse styles do exist. In any case, in New Orleans, swing and traditional jazz are more prevalent than post-1940s styles. Today, it is rare to hear any of the latter in the French Quarter.

As a person develops an ear for good jazz and a taste for one or more of its styles, he or she also learns to distinguish art jazz from commercial jazz. For instance, both can be well played; the musicianship can be equally good. In general, however, commercially oriented musicians improvise minimally so as to keep the melody ever-apparent. Commercialism is further evident in the use of superfluous gimmickry ("crowd pleasers") capable of exciting the general audience. Clowning around on-stage while playing and assuming positions or wearing something inimical to good playing are two common examples. Playing at exceptionally fast tempos or playing beyond the normal range of the instrument, can sometimes be interpreted as commercially motivated approaches to the music. Finally, these days, commercial jazz is likely to be ear-splittingly loud.

By contrast, art jazz is presented in a businesslike way, more or less as the musicians would present it at a concert. This is true even in a jazz-oriented nightclubs, notwith-



*WWOZ jazz tent at the Jazz and Heritage Festival*

standing the interest of its owner in running a successful business. Between selections, the leader of the band may still talk to and joke with the audience but, when the music-making is underway, the musicians do all they can to ensure that their art remains the principal focus for everyone in attendance. The best bands also attend carefully to whether the sounds of their instruments balance properly, while bearing in mind that excessively loud music can distort the balance as well as the individual sounds themselves.

Compare the art jazz presented in, to use extreme examples, Snug Harbor or Preservation Hall, on the one hand, with the commercial jazz presented in many of the Bourbon Street clubs (excluding Maison Bourbon), on the other hand. The differences will soon be apparent.

# 4

## Creole-Cajun Cuisine

New Orleans food is special. It is the last intact and authentic regional cuisine in the country and, in its way, a regional cuisine of Europe as well. (Richard Collin and Rima Collin, *The New Orleans Restaurant Guide*)

Until the recent Creole-Cajun food craze, this cuisine could only be found in South Louisiana, giving visitors to the city of New Orleans still another reason for lingering there as long as possible. From my, admittedly, rather limited experience with restaurants elsewhere in North America where the proprietors claim to serve New Orleans food, I have the feeling that, in reality, nothing has changed: one must still go to South Louisiana to savor the best specimens of the cuisine. For example, in a restaurant in Calgary locally reputed for its New Orleans menu, I was presented with a bouillabaisse heavily seasoned with curry. Curry is not an ingredient in New Orleans cooking. In all honesty the bouillabaisse was tasty, but it was, for all that, neither a Cajun nor a Creole dish. In Philadelphia, I once struggled to consume a seriously over-peppered blackened redfish, the original recipe for which is a Cajun invention. More generally, my experience suggests that outside South Louisiana "Creole" and "Cajun" mean tongue-blistering doses of cayenne in every dish whereas, in my twenty-two-year association with New Orleans, I cannot recall eating anything that was too hot.

Three conditions help explain the poor representation of South Louisiana cuisine outside the region. First, certain indispensable ingredients are unavailable in many other parts of the world, even though the authors of most Creole-Cajun cookbooks now identify acceptable substitutes where they can. For example, how easy is it to find in, say, New York or Toronto the flavoring and thickening agent

used in many gumbos, *filé* (pronounced fee-lay), a powder made from dried wild sassafras leaves? As well, the competent preparation of any complex cuisine takes practice; sophisticated cooking is both a craft and an art. Haute cuisine Creole-Cajun style is no easier to execute than haute cuisine French or Italian style. True, many restaurants in New Orleans and elsewhere make no pretensions about providing haute cuisine. They offer instead *cuisine bourgeoise*, or ordinary, everyday meals, which are more or less on the order of what one would find in the typical middle-class home in the local area served by the restaurant. Finally, many restaurateurs seem ignorant of the fundamentals of Creole-Cajun cooking and its social and cultural background. It is to this last subject that we now turn in our examination of New Orleans food.

### **What is Creole-Cajun Cuisine?**

In recent years in the New Orleans area restaurants, the distinction between Creole and Cajun cooking has become increasingly blurred. The rural to urban migration of the Cajuns, diffusion of their recipes by means of published cookbooks, and increased tourist interest have all played a role in advancing this ongoing culinary amalgamation. More and more, in the restaurants of New Orleans, the two are treated as a hybrid, known variously as Creole-Cajun, New Orleans, or South Louisiana cuisine. Only in the private homes in the area, according to chef Paul Prudhomme, does the distinction between Creole and Cajun retain any real significance.<sup>1</sup>

Still, in 1984, the year Prudhomme published his first and perhaps most famous cookbook, he considered the distinction both valid and useful, if for no other reason than as historical background to understanding the contemporary culinary scene in New Orleans:

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1 It should also be noted that Creoles – the descendants of people of French or Spanish extraction – are found along the Mississippi coast, throughout South Louisiana, and in Eastern Texas. It is, however, the cooking of the Creoles in and around New Orleans to which this chapter refers.

People often ask me what's the difference between Cajun and Creole cooking. Cajun and Creole cuisines share many similarities. Both are Louisiana born, with French roots. But Cajun is very old, French country cooking – a simple, hearty fare. Cajun food began in Southern France, moved on to Nova Scotia, and then came to Louisiana. The Acadians adapted their dishes to use ingredients that grew wild in the area – bay leaves from the laurel tree, filé powder from the sassafras tree, and an abundance of different peppers that grow wild in South Louisiana – learning their use from the native Indians.

The evolution of Creole cooking, just like the Cajun, has depended heavily on whatever foods have been available. But Creole food, unlike Cajun, began in New Orleans and is a mixture of the traditions of French, Spanish, Italian, American Indian, African, and other ethnic groups. . . . The position of cook was highly esteemed and the best paid position in the household. Those cooks, most of whom were black, would be hired by other families, often of a different nationality. . . . Over a period of time, they learned how to cook for a variety of nationalities, and they incorporated their own spicy, home-style way of cooking into the different cuisines of their employers. This is the way Creole food was created. Creole cooking is more sophisticated and complex than Cajun cooking – it's city cooking.

Yet the integration of blacks into New Orleans society stretched well beyond the realm of cooking, leading to an intricate interlace of their lives with the lives of their white neighbors. Garvey and Widmer note that

the slaves of New Orleans and their white masters exchanged cultural modes of expression. . . . The paternalistic French and Spanish rulers encouraged the African culture among their slaves, allowing West African dancing, music, cooking, and architecture to survive without interference. Also, New Orleans Negroes, living as they did in such close proximity to their white masters, in a city of limited size surrounded by water, experienced a greater knowledge of the whites than the plantation Negro, and in the city, the two cultures overlapped.

In New Orleans, slavery was viewed with a unique attitude. A slave was bought for his brawn, which enabled him to work, but he was also enjoyed for his cuisine, his humor, and his many cultural aptitudes.

The role of the black cook in the development and diffusion of Creole cuisine held special interest for Rima and Richard Collin. The authors observed that black cooks, in the course of their careers, worked not only for different upper-class families, but also for various cafés and restaurants.

Wherever they were employed, they blended their own Afro-Caribbean heritage of spicy food with the traditional recipes of the family for whom they cooked, a family that would have had roots in Germany, France, Italy, or Spain. Thus, as they went from job to job, they added new ethnic recipes to their repertoire, always enhanced with a dash of their own tastes. Historically, then, the cuisines of the Creoles and the Cajuns were by no means the same.

But today – and this is our definition of Creole-Cajun cuisine – the Creole and Cajun cuisines are merging in a strong, spicy, but not overhot blend of sauces and stocks. Apart from these qualities, it is a blend that defies description. Creole-Cajun cuisine is one of four great haute cuisines in this world, where it stands proudly along side those of France, Italy, and Lebanon.

## **The Elements of a Renowned Cuisine**

Two prerequisites for good Creole-Cajun cooking are a solid knowledge of the techniques of preparing the cuisine and a acquired talent for improvising on the written recipe. Furthermore, the cook must be willing, in many instances, to devote several hours to making these meals. Traditional New Orleans cooking goes poorly with the modern penchant for throwing supper on the table fifteen minutes after arriving in the kitchen following a day's work. Note also that some of the techniques of New Orleans cooking are also used in other cuisines and so may be familiar. New Orleans cooking is unique, but it nevertheless shares certain elements with other styles of cooking, especially the French style.

It is not my intention in this section to describe the techniques in the detail needed to apply them on the spot. Many cookbooks and cooking courses exist to fill this need. Rather, my aim is more general: to familiarize the connoisseur with the basic techniques and ingredients of New Orleans cooking, such that he or she will know in broad terms what the chef will do (or should do) to prepare the meals listed on the restaurant's menu. No one can function as a true gourmet – a connoisseur of a particular cuisine – without this kind of knowledge.

The initial step in preparing many Creole-Cajun dishes is described in the apothegm: "First you make a roux." The



stews, bisques, gumbos, étouffées, and court bouillons all require this basic sauce, which came to Cajun-Creole cooking from France. A roux is also the basis for some of the other New Orleans sauces such as the brown meunière sauce. Whatever the dish, the appropriate roux contributes a distinct flavor.

The ingredients of a roux are simple and, in a way, so is its preparation: butter or oil and flour cooked and stirred in a skillet over high heat for approximately a half hour. The longer the roux cooks the darker it becomes. The knack for preparing roux rests on knowing when to stop cooking a medium brown, dark brown, or black mixture before it is burned and must be thrown out. An important facet of creativity in New Orleans cooking is knowing which shade of roux goes best with the meat, fish, or poultry dish being prepared. In many modern households a supply of roux, perhaps in several shades, is stored in the freezer, thereby avoiding the lengthy process of preparation every time the cook wants to make a meal that requires this fundamental sauce.

The various stocks constitute another central element in New Orleans cooking. Their ingredients testify to the propensity, born of earlier hard times, for local families to waste nothing. Leftover meat, poultry, drippings, carcasses, seafood shells, and even vegetable trimmings can be put into a pot with water and placed on the burner to simmer. The result is a savory base for a soup, gravy, or sauce. Some New Orleans stocks are almost black in color; they add a strong aroma to the preparation in question. As with the different roux, the use of a particular stock depends on the creative sense of the cook.

New Orleans cooks use a range of cooking techniques, many of which are standard. These include boiling, broiling, poaching, deep-frying, and sautéing. Beware of the adjectives "sautéed" and "panéed." Some Louisianians describe sautéed foods as "panéed," a Cajun term for pan-fried foods. Usage is inconsistent, however, for other Louisianians refer to breaded morsels as panéed, which is the meaning of the French adjective *panée*. Smothering, or étouffée, is an infrequently used technique outside South Louisiana, but an extremely common one within the region. It came to New Orleans from Cajun country. Meat and fish étouffée are prepared by smothering them in chopped vegetables and cooking the preparation over low heat in a tightly closed

pot. The meat or fish is simultaneously steamed and flavored with the vapors emitted by the cooking vegetables.

Although the ingredients in New Orleans cooking are many and varied, some fruit, meat, fish, poultry, seasoning, and vegetables are used much more often than others. The five most common vegetables are onions, celery, bell peppers, parsley (preferably the flat-leaf variety), and green onions (locally known as "shallots," but different from French shallots). Rice, because of its local availability, has also come to be widely used. Okra serves as the basis for the ever-popular gumbos, although it is also eaten in its own right as a vegetable. Other special vegetables include Creole tomatoes (exceptionally large and juicy and locally grown) and the mirliton, or "vegetable pear." The latter resembles a small, hard-shelled, green squash.

Beef is used in Creole-Cajun cuisine but, since prime beef is not raised locally, it must be prepared in special ways. Thus, Orleanians are fond of eating it as a steak garnished with imaginatively prepared sauces, as grillades (squares of browned beef sirloin prepared in a spicy roux), as daub (thinly sliced beef served with spaghetti sauce), or as daub glacé (daub cooked with spices and served cold). Pork and veal are also popular.

New Orleans is also renowned for its sausages – chaurice, boudin, andouille, and the Creole hot and smoked sausages being the most commonly used. They are served as main dishes or added as seasoning to gumbo, jambalaya, and bean preparations. Chaurice (pronounced show-rees) is a spicy pork sausage. Boudin (approximate pronunciation: boo-den) is a Cajun white sausage made of rice, chicken, vegetables, and ground pork. Andouille (pronounced awn-doo-ee) is a thick, black pork sausage, a native of Cajun country. Creole smoked sausage consists of pork or a combination of pork and beef. Adding copious amounts of pepper transforms it into Creole hot sausage.

Dishes featuring local fish and crustaceans occupy a prominent place in the menus of the vast majority of New Orleans restaurants. The locally available blue crabs are served in several ways, something also true for the crawfish (never pronounced "crayfish" in New Orleans), except that the latter are only available from November through May or early June. Crawfish, however, are much cheaper than crabs and, for that reason, an everyday favorite at all levels

of society. Oysters, too, know a great range of preparations, including eating them raw garnished with personally prepared sauces. Unfortunately, recent threats of hepatitis have persuaded many lovers of the raw oyster to switch to its cooked versions. Shrimp are also abundant in the area. The locally available fish include drum, flounder, pompano, speckled trout, red snapper, and redfish (member of the bass family). Catfish, a Cajun favorite, is the main fresh-water fish in the New Orleans diet. The local fish and crustaceans are invariably the freshest; they are also the ones for which the Creole-Cajun seafood recipes were developed.

The five most common spices in New Orleans cooking were listed in the earlier paragraph dealing with vegetables: they are parsley, onions, celery, green pepper, and green onions. The typical Creole spice rack includes these ingredients as well as filé, cloves, allspice, and black and white pepper. Additionally, since Orleanians have no taste for bland food, they also maintain a supply of powdered cayenne pepper and one or more of several brands of hot pepper sauce. Tabasco and Louisiana Red Hot are perhaps the two most common hot sauces found on the tables of New Orleans restaurants.

As for poultry, one is most likely to find chicken and domestically raised duck and quail on New Orleans dinner tables. Unless it happens that the householder takes advantage of the rich availability of wild game in South Louisiana. Then it is possible to dine as well on rabbit, turtle, partridge, armadillo, and the wild forms of duck and quail.

It is not, however, the chicken (and other poultry), but the egg for which New Orleans is so famous. In the late nineteenth century and quite in contrast with the traditional French *petit déjeuner*, the city earned a reputation for its hearty breakfasts. Rima and Richard Collin report that these were initially prepared in such French Market restaurants as Tujague's (when Madame Bégué was owner) as a midmorning meal for merchants and tradesmen who arose early in the day. Eggs eventually became the centerpiece of these repasts, which subsequently gained popularity in restaurants outside the French Market area, notably Antoine's and, later, Brennan's. Most of the celebrated egg dishes are spiced and sauced elaborations of omelets and poached eggs.

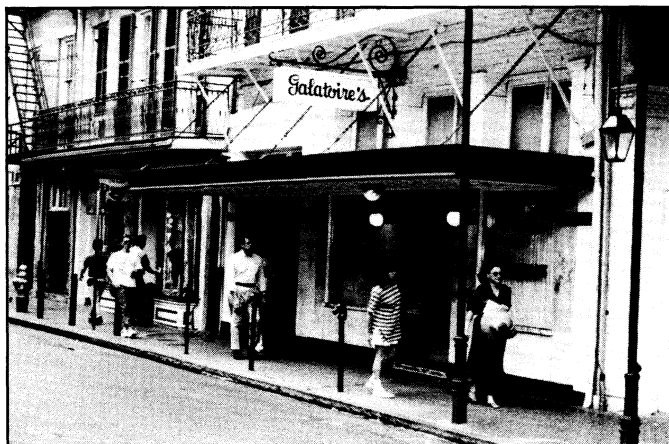
## Dining Out in New Orleans

According to Walter Cowan and his colleagues, the recorded history of dining out in New Orleans dates to 1791, when the Café des Émigrés opened its doors as a meeting place for refugees from the West Indian uprisings. General dining out, however, or dining out as a form of leisure for those social classes who could afford the practice, really began later during the Golden Age. Most of the fine restaurants of the day were found in hotels, where they catered to both local and visiting patrons. In 1837, the St. Louis Hotel became the first to offer the free lunch, a substantial meal with dessert to people who dropped in for a noontime drink. This service, Cowan and his colleagues note, was soon copied by the other hotels as well as some of the taverns, and remained in effect into the present century. According to the Collins, those who could not afford to eat in the hotel restaurants patronized the innumerable small cafés and coffeehouses which, in the French tradition, had sprung up throughout the city. Except in the hotels where they shared the culinary limelight with an assortment of continental dishes, Creole dishes tended to dominate the menus.

The tradition of owner-operated, family-owned restaurants, which has made New Orleans one of the world's great restaurant cities, began in 1840 when Antoine Alciatore arrived in the city from Marseilles to open a *pension*, or boardinghouse. For the convenience of his clients, Alciatore added a restaurant to his lodging operation. Restaurant Antoine, as it was first known, was eventually given the anglicized name of Antoine's and moved in 1874 to its present site on St. Louis Street. Here, the fifth generation of Alciatores still passes on recipes and restaurant management acumen to the next family member designated as owner. At first, diners at Antoine's had to order without a menu – the waiter told them what was available that day. When the restaurant began to provide menus they were written in French only. Today, however, the bill of fare is written in French and English. Antoine's, say the Collins, is the oldest established restaurant in the United States. Food critic Tom Fitzmorris notes that, in the later part of the 1800s, the restaurant defined Creole restaurant cuisine by pioneering many of today's standard recipes.



*Antoine's Restaurant*



*At Galatoire's, smartly attired patrons line up on the banquette amidst the hubbub of Bourbon Street.*

Antoine's knew no significant competition in the realm of haute Creole cuisine until Victor and Galatoire's opened in 1902 at the present location on Bourbon Street. (It became Galatoire's in 1905.) In one sense this restaurant also dates to 1840, for Victor Bero ran a restaurant from that year until 1902, the year he joined Justin Galatoire. Service is



*Commander's Palace*

simple, unhurried, and unpretentious at Galatoire's and no one, not even the President of the United States, can reserve a table. Instead, he or she, along with everyone else, lines up outside amidst the hubbub of Bourbon street.

In 1880 Émile Commander opened Commander's Palace, the only internationally acclaimed New Orleans Creole res-

restaurant operating outside the French Quarter. Located on Washington Street in the Garden District, it is now owned by the Brennan family. That family entered the restaurant business in 1945 when Owen Brennan opened Brennan's on Royal Street. Although Brennan's is known around the world for its breakfasts, never miss an opportunity to sample its dinner menu; it has one of the best in town. Last but not least is Broussard's, which began operations on Conti Street in 1920 and was extensively renovated at the same location in 1976. Some say it has the most beautiful dining room of any of the great New Orleans restaurants.

Together these five restaurants have carried on the tradition of haute Creole cuisine in New Orleans, even if, today, it contains many Cajun elements as well. They all operate on the principle expressed by Cowan and his colleagues that "dining out in New Orleans can be compared to an evening at the theater, but the scenery is secondary, the spotlight is on the cast and the chef's production." Although the decor is often rather ordinary, the service is always efficient, even indifferent, and without flourish. In these restaurants, the Collins point out, the *pièce de résistance* really is the meal:

What is most unique in New Orleans food is its classlessness. . . . There is almost none of the elaborate service and surroundings that take the place of food in much of the country. Atmosphere in the best New Orleans places comes from authentic age or from the presence of distinguished food on the plate. Food is first in New Orleans, and if you expect the usual airs, elaborate themes, and service distractions found in most other cities, then the grandness of our food will disappoint you.

Thus you can expect the best, says the "Souvenir du Restaurant Antoine," which nevertheless does take time to prepare:

That if you are in a hurry, it is useless to waste your time in a first class restaurant. Time is a necessary element in the proper preparation of food, and if you cannot spare the time, you are better off at the corner drug store, where they will dish you out an already prepared sandwich in short order, and it will probably taste better than a complicated culinary concoction thrown together in less than the required time. Hurry enters not into the mind of the gastronome.

It is no wonder that, as Pritt Vesilind puts it, "successful chefs [in New Orleans] . . . are household names, admired like symphony conductors."

Other excellent Creole restaurants exist as well, but either they are newer or they present an inconsistent history. Arnaud's, a great Creole restaurant in the 1930s and 1940s, subsequently decayed, but is now, according to restaurant critic Tom Fitzmorris, making a most substantial comeback under a new owner. Tujague's on Decatur has had a similar career. K-Paul's Louisiana Kitchen, which is owned and operated by chef Paul Prudhomme and his wife Kay Hinrichs, is a highly successful newcomer. It opened in 1979. These restaurants and a few others help buoy the Creole tradition in the present (with its recently acquired Cajun elements), even if they were not around to help carry it over from the distant past.

The restaurants considered so far are commonly classified as Creole-French in contradistinction to the Creole-Italian restaurants in New Orleans. The city's Italians, most of whom trace their ancestry to Sicily, bring to Creole cooking their love for olive oil, certain fresh herbs, and a special rich, brown roux-based tomato sauce known as red gravy, or tomato gravy. According to the critics, Sal and Judy's and Pascale's Manale number among the best in this category. And recently, while eating in a New Orleans restaurant in this category, I was reminded of an ageless verity: whether in New Orleans or elsewhere, even excellent, long-established restaurants can decline. Maintaining high quality in the restaurant industry requires constant vigilance.

## Famous Dishes

New Orleans is renowned not only for its cuisine, but also for the many famous dishes comprising this cuisine. These dishes can be divided into the *cuisine bourgeoise*, or the ordinary fare consumed more or less routinely, and the *haute cuisine*, or the extraordinary fare consumed on special occasions in private homes and the finer Creole-Cajun restaurants. It is the restaurants, however, that have been instrumental in establishing the international reputation of the following dishes, for it is here, in both the fine and the ordinary restaurants, that tourists eat their meals then



return home with glowing reports about their culinary experiences. A list of my favorite restaurants, classified by type of food and service, is presented in chapter 7. For specialized advice on a particular restaurant and some of the dishes served there, I recommend the latest edition of Tom Fitzmorris's *The New Orleans Eat Book*, a paperback widely available in the New Orleans bookstores.

### Cuisine Bourgeoise

Jambalaya is possibly the best known New Orleans dish of this category, although it was originally developed in Cajun country where it was modeled after the Spanish *paella*. It consists of rice mixed with ham, beef, pork, fowl, seafood, or smoked sausage, all of which is seasoned with cayenne and chili powder. It is a party and picnic dish and, in Gonzales, Louisiana, a Spanish-Cajun town upriver from New Orleans, the foundation of its annual Jambalaya Festival. Preparing a feed of jambalaya is a tasty way to dispose of leftovers, which is apparently why some authors translate it from the Cajun as "clean up the kitchen." Etymologically, however, Rita and Gabrielle Claudet say it is a hybrid word whose parts are strung together from the French *jambon* meaning ham, the Acadian *à la* meaning "in the," and the African *ya* meaning rice.

Gumbo got its name from the African *gombo*, or okra. Either okra or filé are used as thickeners in this thick, chunky soup, a mainstay in many a New Orleans home. Recipes for gumbo abound but, according to Fitzmorris, all have a roux base and fall into one of two classes: seafood and okra or chicken and filé. The seafood gumbo is the more common of the two. The mixture includes vegetables and is served over steamed white rice. Both gumbo and jambalaya give plenty of latitude for culinary creativity which, in private homes, is often expressed with whatever edibles are around at the time.

Red beans and rice, although eaten on other days, is a popular New Orleans Monday lunch. In the past, mothers heated water that day for washing clothes. It was also an opportune time to set a pot of red (or white) beans on the stove to simmer in a liquor flavored with such items as onions, bay leaf, and ham or sausage. Once cooked, the mixture was served over steamed white rice. As with the

first two dishes, this one can also be prepared for mass consumption. Monday is still the day the connoisseur is most likely to find red beans and rice on the menu in New Orleans restaurants.

Creole turtle soup, although less common as a household dish than the aforementioned dishes, is nevertheless very much a part of the New Orleans culinary tradition. Turtles abound in the Gulf of Mexico and in the many swamps surrounding the city. Turtle meat is mixed with, among other ingredients, sherry, lemons, onions, and hard-boiled eggs to make up a soup or a thick stew, depending on preference.

Crawfish can be prepared in nearly innumerable ways but, in their *cuisine bourgeoise* form, they are boiled in a spicy court bouillon and, most commonly, served chilled. This is the preference in New Orleans. In Cajun country, by contrast, they are served piping hot, straight from the pot. Tom Fitzmorris describes how to eat these crustaceans, which measure about four to five inches long, including claws and tail, and which, when boiled, constitute one of the most popular meals in South Louisiana:

This is shirt-sleeves eating, involving a technique known as "squeezing the tip" (of the tail, which pushes the meat out once you've broken the crawfish in two) and "sucking the head" (which is just what it sounds like, for the purpose of extracting the delicious fat lodged in the animal's thorax).

Orleanians purchase crawfish by the bags full, live, fresh, or frozen. They do likewise with shrimp, which they prepare and eat in much the same way. Alternatively, they will chill a batch of cooked shrimp, then dip them in a piquant remoulade sauce. Crabs, too, can be boiled in a court bouillon although, in the simplest recipe, the whole crab is served deep-fried.

The practice of shirt-sleeves eating includes consuming raw oysters on the half-shell. Oyster bars seem to be available everywhere in New Orleans. Customers place orders with the shuckers at the bar for a dozen or half-dozen of these bivalves, then sit down to eat them with soda crackers and garnishes of their own creation. The latter may consist of one or a combination of ketchup, horseradish, and lemon juice, perhaps enlivened by a dash of hot sauce. The garnished oysters are commonly washed down with beer.



*Shirtsleeves eating – a crawfish feed  
at the Jazz and Heritage Festival*

The closest a person can come to a meal of fish and chips in New Orleans is a repast of catfish. This fish has a distinctive sweetish taste. Most of the time it is served fried in a batter, preferably one made of cornmeal. The batter is most commonly prepared using Cajun recipes.

Finally, no discussion of New Orleans *cuisine bourgeoise* would be complete without mentioning two famous sandwiches. The poor boy (or "po'boy") is the city's version of the submarine, except that the former is much older and generally far better tasting than the latter. The first poor boys were concocted in the 1920s as a five-cent lunch for poor boys. These sandwiches come in twelve-inch "pistolettes" (see below) of New Orleans French bread sliced down the middle from end to end and filled, in the typical case, with beef, shrimp, soft shell crab, or fried oysters. The customer can order his or her poor boy "dressed" with cheese, pickles, lettuce, tomatoes, and mayonnaise. Some Orleanians eat the sandwich this way; others prefer it smothered in gravy.

By the way, even the New Orleans French bread is special. It is a light, crusty, white bread baked in a variety of forms (e.g., the oval or round "cap" loaf; the long, cylindrical

"pistolette") and served hot or cold with each meal of the day in most homes and all restaurants. Everywhere it is consumed in great quantities. Two bakeries meet the city's commercial and domestic needs on a daily basis with bread so delicious that few restaurants or homemakers feel a need to make their own.

The other famous New Orleans sandwich is the muffuletta, an early twentieth-century Italian creation. It consists of an eight-to-ten-inch round, two-to-three-inch thick loaf of bread, filled with cheese, olive salad, minced garlic, and Italian ham and salami. Central Grocery on Decatur Street made the first muffulettas. And, although they still make them, they now compete with a large number of sandwich specialists, both inside and outside the French Quarter.

As the Collins have observed, New Orleans eating has a certain classlessness about it, a condition that is most evident at the level of *cuisine bourgeoise*. Nearly everyone can afford to eat these dishes in their homes and in the restaurants, with the result that the well-to-do and the less-well-to-do patronize the same, quite ordinary restaurants for poor boys, bowls of gumbo, and plates full of crawfish. Such has been the city's lifestyle for at least one hundred years. Obviously, to the extent a restaurant specializes in haute cuisine and its meals are priced accordingly, the populist character of dining out diminishes.

The Collins also observed that Orleanians eat "exuberantly." That is – and this appears to be especially true for *cuisine bourgeoise* – eating can be a messy affair. The muffuletta leaks on your hands, the crawfish juice squirts on your shirt, or the jambalaya splatters on the tablecloth. New Orleans French bread breaks up like egg shells. One plosive utterance sends the powdered sugar on the beignet flying in every direction. It cannot be helped. Moreover, it is difficult to remain dignified in these circumstances, which is of little concern to Orleanians in any case. They eat, have a good time, and talk loudly and enthusiastically about the experience. It follows that New Orleans restaurants are noisy, including even those serving haute cuisine.

## Haute Cuisine<sup>2</sup>

New Orleans is renowned the world over for certain of its egg dishes. The one pioneered by Brennan's, the anchor of their "Breakfast at Brennan's" menu, is eggs Hussarde. It consists of two poached eggs mounted on a Holland rusk along with a slice of grilled ham or Canadian bacon and slices of grilled tomato. The construction is flooded with marchand de vin and hollandaise sauces.

As famous is eggs Sardou, originally prepared at Antoine's in honor of French playwright Victorien Sardou who once visited the restaurant. Here, too, the chef starts with two poached eggs but, instead, he sets them on top of creamed spinach, which, in turn, is spread over a bed of artichoke bottoms. The entire affair is bathed in hollandaise sauce.

Oysters Rockefeller is a turn-of-the century creation of Antoine's, so named because it is extremely rich. Fresh oysters on the half-shell are covered with an aniseed-flavored spinach sauce. The sauce atop the oyster is then baked. Whereas the sauce is complicated, the procedure is simple. Oysters brochette, always a popular dish, is relatively easy to prepare: oysters and pieces of bacon are alternated on a skewer, floured, then deep-fried in butter. Oysters Bienville is made in several different ways, one of which is to smother the oysters in an egg and shrimp sauce before baking them in their shells.

The tourist can choose from a wide variety of haute cuisine crab dishes, with the most famous being possibly the fried soft shell crab. These crabs are plucked from the water immediately after having molted, but before their new shells can harden. They are first rolled in a piquant batter made of flour and then deep-fried in oil. Shrimp are often prepared the same way. New Orleans also has a justifiably high reputation for its shrimp remoulade, a highly seasoned chilled appetizer. It is a kind of shrimp cocktail, which owes

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2 When it comes to haute cuisine, most people think immediately of French cooking. Some excellent French restaurants operate in New Orleans, notably Crozier's and La Provence, which are, however, beyond the scope of this book, inasmuch as they are in but not of this city.

its personality to the Creole mustard-based remoulade sauce covering each shrimp.

The two best-known haute cuisine crawfish meals are crawfish étouffée and crawfish bisque. The first is a stew, a meal in itself smothered and cooked in onions, green pepper, and chopped celery and seasoned with garlic, black pepper, and minced parsley. The bisque is a thick soup made of chopped vegetables, crawfish heads and tails, and significant amounts of cayenne pepper. It is one of the most complicated to prepare of all the New Orleans dishes.

Of the many different kinds of fish consumed in The Crescent City, speckled trout (the sea variety) and redfish are the most popular with Orleanians and, it appears, with tourists. The red snapper is also prized but, because it dwells deep in the ocean, it cannot be netted. For this reason it is expensive to catch. Trout in New Orleans is often served deep-fried, covered with a flour-based meunière sauce. Adding almonds to this sauce transforms the dish into trout amandine. Redfish and red snapper can be prepared the same way. Blackened fish, a dish inherited from the Cajuns, is also a major attraction in New Orleans fish restaurants. The fish is coated with a black-pepper paste and cooked at a high temperature in a black iron skillet. Finally, trout Marguery, the recipe for which was developed at Galatoire's, is a treat for the connoisseur of poached fish. It is served with a roux-based sauce filled with highly seasoned boiled shrimp.

### **Famous Extras**

A number of well-known New Orleans foods are consumed either as snacks or as supplements to the main course of a meal. The beignet (pronounced ben-nyay), a square, deep-fried doughnut amply garnished with powdered sugar, is one major example. Tourists and Orleanians alike consume servings of three or four, washing them down with chicory coffee or café au lait (half milk, half chicory coffee) at the Café du Monde in the French Market or Morning Call on Severn Avenue in the suburb of Metairie. Orleanians made a virtue of necessity when they developed a taste for the chicory extender after being forced during the Civil War to augment their meager coffee supply with it. Like most Europeans they like their coffee strong and hot.

Bread pudding is possibly the most common New Orleans



*Courtyard dining in New Orleans*

dessert both in homes and in restaurants. It is a ready, tasty, economic use of New Orleans bread, which quickly grows stale. The old bread is crushed, soaked in milk, and then mixed with sugar, vanilla, and raisins. A whiskey or brandy sauce is served as a topping.

Bananas Foster is another celebrated dessert. This dramatic confection of Brennan's is more common in restaurants than in homes, since it consists of basting with flaming rum and banana liqueur a ripe banana laid in a sauce of cinnamon and brown sugar. The banana is then laid on a plate, ice cream placed on top, and the two covered further with the sauce.

Second only to bread pudding in domestic and commercial appeal is caramel custard, also known as flan, crème caramel, crème renversée, or egg custard. This egg-based dessert is baked in a custard cup, allowed to cool, then removed and placed on a plate where it is doused with caramel sauce. Crème brûlée makes a delicious variation on this same theme.

Other favorites include pecan pie, calas (New Orleans rice cakes), and frozen Creole cream cheese. The latter two are rarely available in restaurants, although they are immensely popular in New Orleans homes. The cream cheese, which resembles cottage cheese packed solidly in heavy cream, is

sold in the local supermarkets. It can be frozen for consumption as a dessert. The calas are fluffy, sweetened, raised cakes made of rice and yeast, deep-fried, and served hot. Both the calas and the Creole cream cheese are sometimes eaten as a breakfast. Such is the case at the Old Coffee Pot (on St. Peter Street), the only French Quarter restaurant I know of that serves them.

Last but not least are the pralines (pronounced PRAH-leenz) of New Orleans. This confection is made with milk, butter, nuts (often pecans), and brown and white sugar. The mixture is allowed to solidify into thin round patties, which are sold at nearly countless stores throughout the city. Terry Thompson says it is the butter and milk that makes New Orleans praline so distinctive.

Our list of extras would be seriously incomplete were we to ignore the three special alcoholic drinks of New Orleans. Indeed, it is claimed that the term "cocktail" originated in the city, a linguistic adaptation by local anglophones to their own inability to pronounce the French *coquetière*, or egg cup. This was the vessel in which various mixed drinks were served in the nineteenth century. The most famous of the New Orleans drinks is the Ramos Gin Fizz, first concocted in 1880 in a local bar by Henry C. Ramos. The Sazerac, named after the bar where it was invented, consists of sweetened rye or bourbon whiskey subtly flavored with anise and bitters. The Hurricane, a fruit punch and rum-based libation, is named for the glass in which it is served; it has the shape of a hurricane lamp. Hurricanes tend to be a tourist trap, inasmuch as they are typically long on punch and short on rum. Nonetheless, the bars and nightclubs on Bourbon Street appear to sell thousands of them in any twenty-four-hour period.

## **The Gourmet in New Orleans**

I have always counseled my friends and acquaintances who are about to visit New Orleans for the first time to eat Creole-Cajun meals whenever possible while there. The point is, why squander a rare opportunity to sample the unique food of this city by eating cuisines that can be readily found elsewhere?

For the most part, New Orleans food seems to have escaped the commercialism otherwise so pervasive in the



tourist zones of the city. The heavy doses of pepper in so-called New Orleans dishes prepared outside South Louisiana could, however, be interpreted as an expression of this commercial trend. In this regard, the gourmet's rule about hot spices in food is that they should never dominate. If other flavors are masked by the cayenne or the curry, for example, then the cook has put in too much. However, where superhot food is consumed primarily as a display of bravado, such a rule is plainly irrelevant.

Yet, even in New Orleans, it is possible to be served poorly prepared Creole-Cajun cuisine, either in someone's home or in a restaurant. Not everyone is equally adept at the art of cooking. Fortunately, good New Orleans food is available at reasonable prices in a wide variety of establishments. The tourist is hardly limited to the grand old restaurants, even if they do provide a special culinary experience.

To understand Creole-Cajun cuisine at its most profound level, we should try our own hand at cooking it. The New Orleans bookstores sell a variety of cookbooks, and cooking courses of a half-day or so in length are widely available in the French Quarter. True, preparing the cuisine of this city is difficult in certain ways, and even *cuisine bourgeoise* often requires several hours in the kitchen. The neophyte must learn numerous tricks of the trade, while putting up with all manner of frustrations, the first of which is almost invariably that of preparing a roux. But, as I noted in a recent book on serious leisure, any activity of this sort has its troublesome moments, which are nonetheless worth it when, in the case of cooking Creole-Cajun food, we can savor delicious eggs Sardou or seafood gumbo prepared with our own hands in our own home.

# 5

## **New Orleans Architecture**

The city of New Orleans is one of America's greatest outdoor museums. Its streets boast a treasury of architectural types and styles of local origin as well as magnificent examples imported from throughout the United States and other parts of the world and adapted to the city's subtropical climate and unique geographical conditions. (Lloyd Vogt, *New Orleans Houses: A House-Watcher's Guide*)

It is rare today to find a guidebook on New Orleans whose cover is not graced with either the St. Louis Cathedral standing at the edge of Jackson Square or the intricate ironwork on the balconies adorning the French Quarter townhouses. The architecture of this city is one of its most enduring and eye-catching trademarks. Moreover, it has served as the physical environment within which the other four cultural areas have developed and have been played out.

Visitors to New Orleans say that, as they make their initial entry into the Vieux Carré, it is the architecture they notice more than anything else. The narrow streets, embraced by continuous lines of low-rise buildings abutting the sidewalks, many with balconies and cast-iron balustrades, is a sight most have never seen, and one many say they will never forget. Finally, the architectural environment of the old city forms the background for exploring the city's music, cuisine, history, and lifestyle. Even if these four cultural areas receive more attention in the tourist literature, the true connoisseur could hardly ignore architecture, the fifth area.

Architecture is the art or practice of designing and building edifices for human use. This chapter is mostly about the residential architecture of New Orleans and about its influence on local social and cultural life and vice versa. Nevertheless, reference will be made occasionally to the community's built environment, to some of the other human-made constructions affecting social and cultural life there. Buildings are

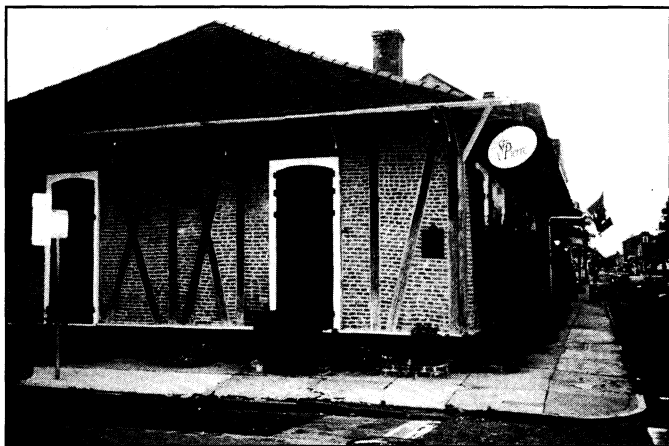
only part of the larger built environment albeit, in cities, an extremely important part. Because the built environment can endure, sometimes for centuries, we must, to understand it in the present, examine its beginning in the past and its evolution from there to modern times.

## **The French Colonial Period**

Literally none of the earliest structures in the French colonial period has survived. Few would bemoan their passing, for initially the community consisted of little more than rude, single-room, wooden huts on the order of those of the nearby Choctaws. The wood – it was cypress – rotted quickly. Moreover, besides being almost completely incapable of withstanding the fury of the hurricanes, the structures tended to sink in the water-logged soil. Once a brickyard was established at the edge of the settlement (approximately 1725), the colonists began planning more solid and permanent buildings.

The earliest buildings were erected on wooden sills laid directly on the damp soil, a practice that faded as soon as bricks became available. Before long the colonists were constructing brick foundations on which they could raise brick-between-posts walls, a mode of construction fashionable in Europe at the time. Now larger, sturdier homes could be built with thick wood and sloping roofs, two design characteristics copied from the Normand houses being erected at this time in French Canada. Moreover it became possible to construct more substantial municipal buildings, such as the two-storey barracks that went up in the 1730s on the upriver and downriver sides of the Place d'Armes. Thus, very early in the French Colonial period, the construction of buildings had evolved in complexity to a point where the services of trained architects and engineers were indispensable.

Bricks are heavy, however, which means that the soggy land could bear a brick building amounting to no more than one level above the ground. The closest to bedrock one gets in New Orleans is the layer of compacted clay found on average seventy feet below the surface. Accordingly, two-storey buildings consisted of an all-brick ground level, on which carpenters raised a much lighter brick-between-posts second level. Both levels were covered with either a cement stucco or some sort of wooden siding. This helped prevent moisture



*Brick-between-posts construction on Creole cottage*

from penetrating the bricks which, because of the nature of the local soil, were soft and highly porous. Despite this external covering, however, many of the buildings decayed with the passing years. This was one of the reasons for constructing the second Ursuline Convent in 1745.

Many of the early brick homes had high ceilings, which allowed hot air to rise and cool air to settle. Full-length galleries, or porches, covered by an extended roof, although absent at first, soon became fashionable. Their advantages were obvious: Occupants could sit outdoors protected from sun and rain. They could also open the vertical board shutters on their windows to ventilate the interior during the hot, rainy periods of the year. Rarely were such principles of comfortable living conceived in New Orleans. Rather, they were typically imported from France and Spain, often by way of the Caribbean where both countries maintained colonies.

The French colonial plantation house – the first European-style house in the area – was built along these lines; it incorporated ideas brought to New Orleans from the West Indies where both French and Spanish architecture had left their mark. To accommodate their large dimensions, the plantation houses were raised on massive brick posts to keep the second, inhabited, level dry when flooding



*Madame John's Legacy*

occurred. The first, or ground, level was used strictly for storage and cooking. In those days, the only cold storage was afforded by Mother Nature herself through use of suitably dug holes in the earth. Only two examples remain in New Orleans of this style of French Colonial architecture: the Pitot House on Bayou St. John (built 1799) and Madame John's Legacy on Dumaine Street (originally built in 1726 and rebuilt in 1788).<sup>1</sup> The roofs of these two plantation houses have a low, sloping pitch, a singular characteristic of most domestic construction of the period.

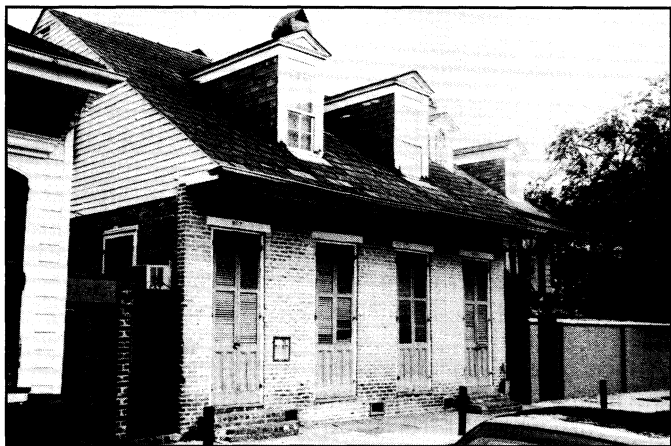
### **The Spanish Colonial Period to 1830**

The greatest change in architectural style in New Orleans came in the wake of the devastating fire of 1788. Curt Bruce reports that the fire also had its positive side:

In a physical sense, the fire was actually beneficial to New Orleans. The buildings that replaced the irregular, asymmetrical, poorly planned structures dating far back into the French era

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1 The name Madame John's Legacy is the invention of author George W. Cable, who wrote about it in "T'tite Poulette," one of his many short stories about Creole life.



*Raised Creole cottage with dormers and gabled roof*

were of a more sophisticated and gracious sort. The motifs and patterns of the architecture that rose from the ashes of the French city created a markedly different ambiance; rebuilt New Orleans had a more elegant, enjoyable, and suitably European face.

In particular, the appearance of the rebuilt city was now unmistakably Mediterranean and southern European. Many of the townhouses, a distinctive feature of today's French Quarter, were constructed at this time. Nevertheless, several established techniques continued to be used, including those of solid brick and brick-between-posts construction, both faced with cement stucco. The courtyard, another distinctive feature, was also introduced at this point. It had the effect of shifting the focus of domestic life from the street to the rear of the building. The decorative use of wrought iron on the facade became a third prominent feature. It would be replaced in the 1840s by the more fashionable and the still more decorative cast iron. Initially, the townhouses were constructed with flat roofs which, however, showed a marked tendency to leak. Consequently, they were replaced before long with the sloping variety. The high ceilings from the French colonial period were retained, but with longer doors and windows added to create a roomier and better ventilated domestic environment.

Two main types of houses were constructed during this

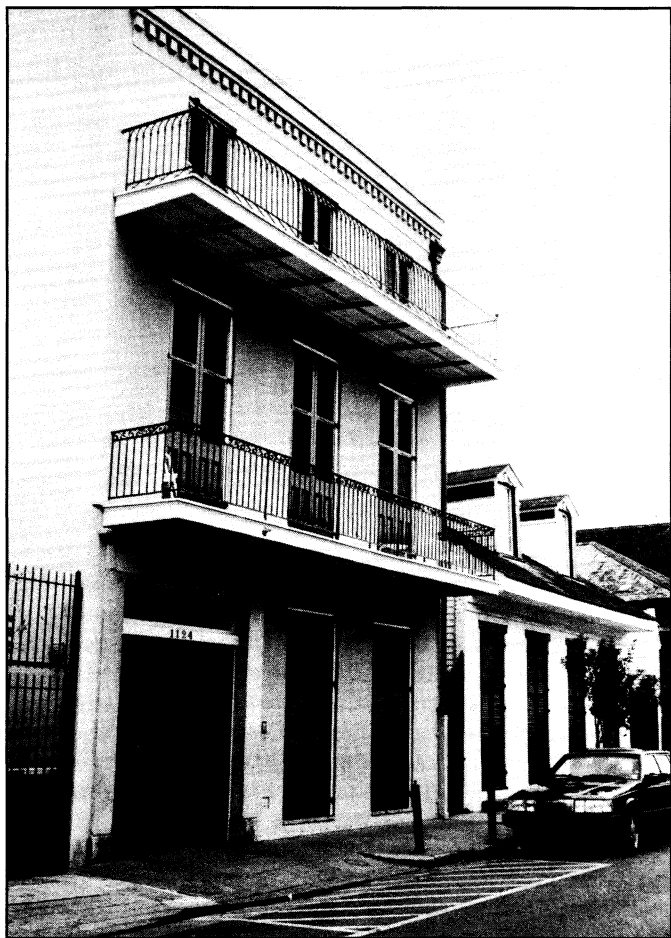
period: the Creole cottage and the New Orleans townhouse. The latter soon evolved into three subtypes: the Creole townhouse, entresol townhouse, and porte cochère townhouse. Many examples of each type and subtype are available in the present-day French Quarter and adjacent Creole faubourgs.

Vogt believes Haitian refugees may have brought the concept of the Creole cottage to New Orleans. It does date to approximately 1790, the time of their arrival in the city. This single-storey dwelling is built flat to the ground and flush with the banquette. It is capped with a moderately steep hipped or gabled roof, often fitted with one or more dormers on the front and perhaps on the rear for ventilating and illuminating the attic. Vertical board shutters affixed with wrought-iron strap hinges cover the doors (almost invariably French) and windows (always rectangular). They protect against sun, wind, rain, and intruders.

The early Creole cottages were constructed using the brick-between-posts technique. Later, builders began to erect solid brick walls, a type of construction that made the gabled sidewall possible. This wall protrudes a foot or two above the roofline and, in this fashion, serves as a fire barrier. It is common for cottages with gabled sidewalls to have eaves extending several feet over the banquette to shield their occupants from the elements.

The Creole townhouse is a rectangular structure extending far to the rear and rising between two and four stories (not including attic) with a facade of two to four bays (i.e., doors and windows). Like the Creole cottages, these houses are usually placed directly on the ground, flush with the banquette. Often they form a continuous line of dwellings running an entire city block, although they are sometimes built in much smaller sections of two or three houses. The first level may feature an arched doorway with fanlight transom set over a French door, thought by certain historians to be evidence of the Spanish influence. As with the cottages, the door is usually protected with vertical board shutters. The upper-level windows are rectangular; the preferred protective device here being the louvered shutter. One or more of the upper levels have cantilevered balconies and, depending on the time of construction, wrought- or cast-iron decorations on the balustrades. With the return of

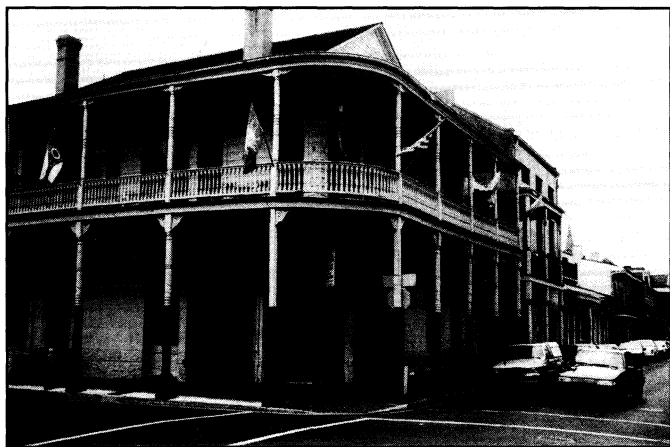




*Creole townhouse decorated with Greek revival dentils*

the sloped roof on these dwellings, a dormer was often added to ventilate and illuminate the attic.

The Creole entresol townhouse was in most instances a corner store, where the ground level contained an enterprise of some kind. Business-related items were stored on the second level (necessitated by the absence of a basement), while the owner occupied the third level. Sometimes



*Entresol townhouse with wooden balustrade*

the second level had no windows whatsoever; alternatively, it was illuminated along the floor by windows extending slightly above it from the first level. Otherwise the doors, roofs, windows, shutters, and balconies were designed in ways similar to those of the Creole townhouses. Many entresol townhouses in the French Quarter still serve a commercial function, although the owner may now rent out the third level while living elsewhere in the New Orleans area.

The Creole porte cochère townhouse provides an interesting variation on its entresol cousin. The first is differentiated chiefly by its archway and carriage-width gate constructed at one side or in the middle of the house. The controlled passage leads to the courtyard and, in earlier examples, the service buildings and stables at the rear. Many of these coach doors and passages are used today as pedestrian walkways or as driveways for the narrower cars. It is not uncommon to find the coach door permanently fixed, with a smaller, human-sized door cut in the middle. Some porte cochère townhouses also had businesses at ground level, even though they were rarely built on a street corner.

Many of the cottages and townhouses have service buildings either constructed at the rear of the courtyard or at-



*Porte cochère townhouse with cast iron grillwork  
(in the foreground), Creole townhouse with wrought iron  
grillwork (in the background)*

tached to the back of the main structure. These vary in height from one to four levels and take the shape of a half-building; that is, they have a carpenter's-chisel roof and gabled sidewalls. Normally, there is a cantilevered gallery equipped with a railing on the front side, the side facing the courtyard. The external finish matches that of the main house, ordinarily brick covered with stucco.

At one time the family's slaves and servants occupied these buildings, cooking meals and heating water on the first level while residing overhead. In addition, many of the larger structures were once used for stabling horses and storing household items. Today, most of these units serve as apartments or single-family dwellings.

The free-standing building was popular from the early 1800s to approximately 1860. After this time its functions were more and more often incorporated in the rear of the main structure. These arrangements illustrate in concrete terms the observation made in chapter 2 that, historically, New Orleans blacks and whites lived in proximity to one another.

The starkness of the old French colonial town disappeared in the flames of the 1788 fire, replaced with a style of housing more harmonious with and facilitative of

the pursuit of the emerging leisurely style of life. The courtyards with their fountains, foliage, and seclusion became one important center of this new lifestyle. The other important center, where available, was the balcony; it gave a commanding view of the activities on the street below and, for that matter, on other balconies. Although certainly less private than in the courtyards, lounging outside on the balcony was, and still is, in New Orleans a main way of relaxing and keeping abreast of some of the routine activities of the neighborhood.

The fine way of life was often reflected in the external decorations of the post-1788 dwellings. In particular, the nineteenth-century townhouses and cottages were likely to be adorned with dentils (along the eaves) and to have elaborate cast-iron railings and balcony supports, designs in the brickwork, and similar embellishments, all added according to the taste and social position of the owner. He might even have had his initials inscribed in the iron work. Some of these can still be seen today.

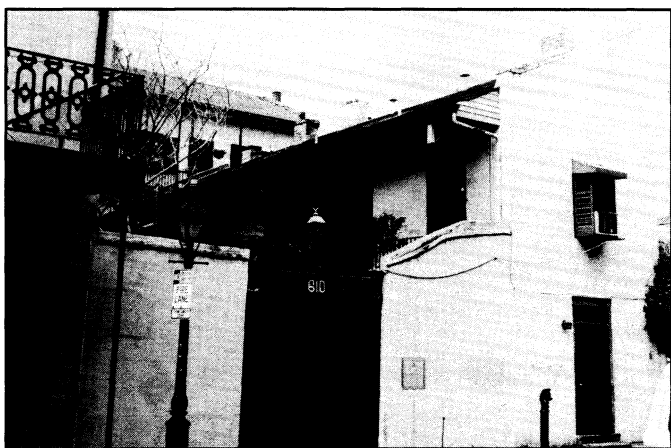
This new architecture is widely believed to have been heavily influenced by the tastes and designs of the Spanish. Jerah Johnson, who doubts the validity of this belief, explains how it might have developed:

It is understandable that visitors to the city – few if any of whom were more astute architectural observers than most tourists today – knowing they were in a Spanish colony, or former Spanish colony, hearing a bit of Spanish spoken in the street, and not knowing that stucco, roofing tile, patios, and wrought iron were not exclusively Spanish architectural features but common to many of parts of France as well, would have reported that they saw “Spanish” buildings.

Sifting through the research on the matter, Johnson could find no record of even one Spanish architect working in New Orleans during the Spanish colonial period. But a number of French architects were known to be there at the time, along with a handful of their American colleagues.

## **1830-1865**

This was the period of Greek revival in New Orleans housing, meaning that the style was simply more popular than other styles being built at this time. “Greek revival”



*Service building located at side of townhouse*

refers to columns – boxed, fluted, plain – slightly overlapping lintels over the doors, and decorations such as leaves, dentils, and egg-and-dart molding (alternating egg-shaped and triangular figures). Doors and windows in the Greek revival style, rather than being arched at the top, are rectilinear. Since this style was popular in many American cities during this period, it is less the style itself that sets New Orleans apart than the type of house on which it is expressed.

The humble Creole cottage was transformed during the Greek revival period into the considerably more charming American cottage, although it did remain basically a single-storey structure. By this time, housing was set back somewhat from the street and likely to be “raised,” built as much as a half or even a full storey off the ground to reduce moisture and provide ventilation. The American cottage, which was common in the faubourgs, is identified by, among other features, its full-length raised gallery, or porch, extending across a wide, five-bay front, with a roof supported by columns. By adding some of the usual decorative features of Greek revival architecture, the American cottage appears relatively elegant when compared with its plain-Jane parent, the Creole cottage. It is also a somewhat more spacious structure, in general, and, unlike its predecessor, has a center hall.

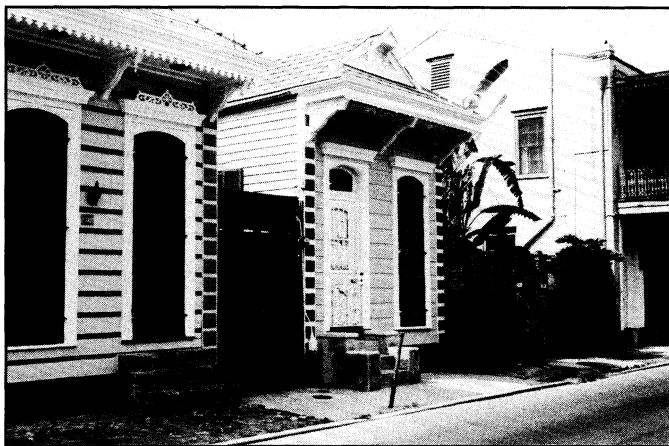


*Raised American cottage in the Faubourg Marigny District*

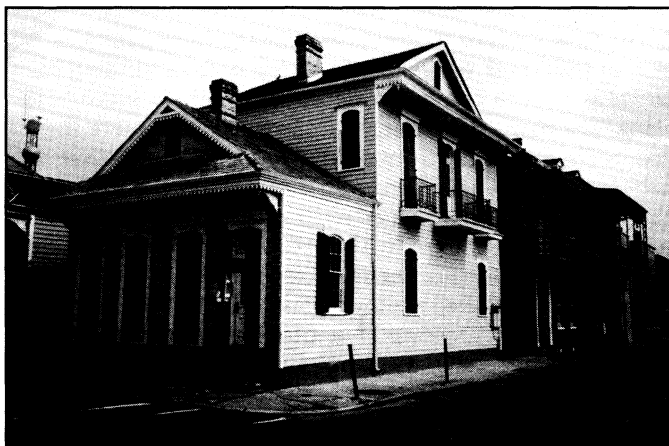


*Greek revival townhouses on Orleans Street in the French Quarter*

Townhouses built during this period were endowed with similar stylistic modifications, notably flat-topped doors and windows. Designers of these houses also made ample use of the newly available cast iron to adorn the brackets, balustrades, and support posts along the facades. Although thick wooden columns were out of the question here, second-floor balconies, instead of being cantilevered, were



*Single shotgun house (on left) and double shotgun (on right)*



*Double shotgun house with camelback*

supported by cast-iron posts set on the banquette. The Greek revival townhouse has become an international symbol of New Orleans as a unique community; pictures of it are omnipresent in the tourist literature, convention promotional brochures, and other representations of the city. The style leaves the first-time visitor with a vivid impression of New Orleans's difference.

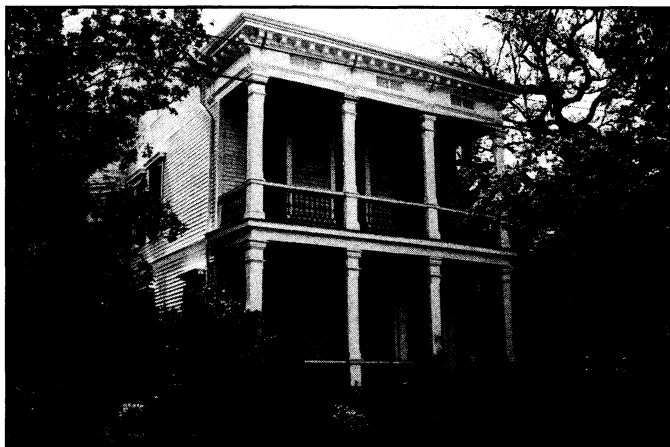


*Garden District mansion with Victorian trim*

The New Orleans shotgun house made its appearance during the Greek revival period. It is a style of housing that, so far as anyone knows, presently exists only in South Louisiana. The name describes the internal layout, where the rooms are arrayed in a line from front to rear such that, in principle, the owner sitting at the rear could fire a shotgun through the open doors of each room to strike an unwanted caller at the front. The facade of the shotgun runs from two to four bays, the four-bay dwellings usually serving as duplexes called shotgun doubles. What the shotguns lose in width they recover in length, for these houses are deceptively deep, and some are elongated even further with service extensions at the back. Many later models have low, four-sided hip roofs. As with the Creole cottage of this period, the shotguns are raised off the ground and, outside the French Quarter, usually set back several yards from the street. Most of these houses were built with wood and finished with clapboard siding.

A shotgun house with a second storey rising near the middle of the structure is poetically referred to as a camel-back shotgun. One speculative explanation for this curious addition is the owner's desire to avoid taxation, for during this period the value of a house was assessed on its height





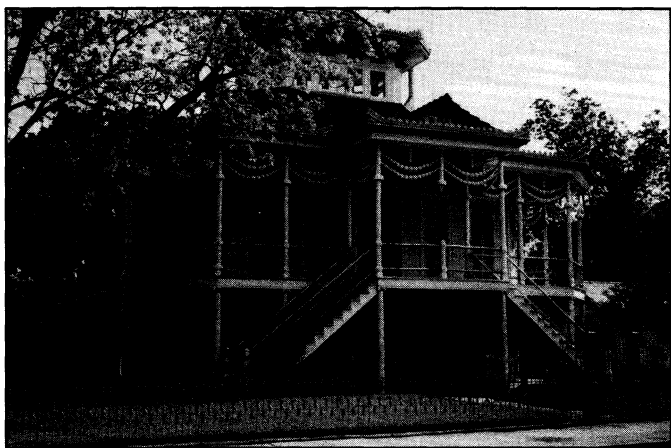
*Double-gallery house in the Garden District*

at the street rather than at the rear. But it is also possible that some builders now preferred to attach the two-storey service building to the house itself, rather than separate it at the end of the lot as they had done earlier.

The origin of the shotgun house is unknown. Vogt writes that some analysts believe the idea may have come to New Orleans from Haiti or Africa. Since these houses are also extremely common in the rural areas outside New Orleans, it is possible they were not originally an urban dwelling. Still, they are found in nearly every neighborhood in this city, making them one of the most popular housing styles there.

Since many of the shotgun houses were built during the Greek revival period, they often have features of this architectural style. Some have front porches covered by extended roofs supported by columns. Dentils are common, as are the flat-topped doors and windows. The omnipresent louvered shutters on the windows are, however, a carryover from the preceding colonial periods.

Why this unique style of housing in New Orleans? One important reason is that usable land in this city was in short supply until the pumping system was installed early in the twentieth century. Even today, suburban expansion in the New Orleans metropolitan area is unusually expensive. Con-

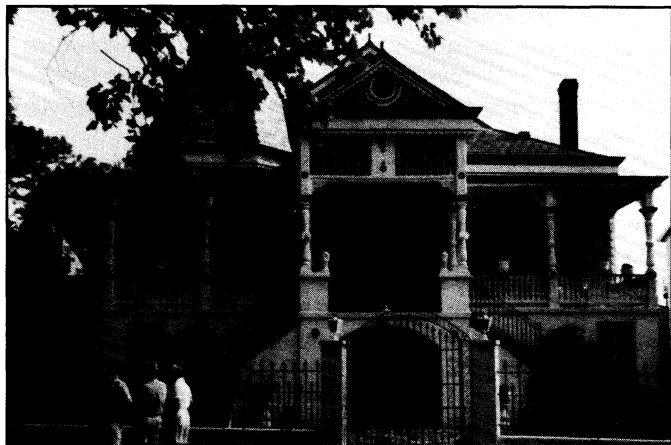


*Victorian architecture at its extreme: Doullut house*

sequently, a clear need existed, and still exists to a significant degree, to economize in every way possible on housing space.

Another reason for the unique housing is that most Europeans have long been accustomed to high-density residential living in apartments and townhouses. To the extent that Orleanians have cultural roots in Europe, they can be expected to have similar tastes in housing, tastes that are effectively expressed in their shotgun houses. Finally, rapid population growth has certainly contributed to the trend toward greater residential density. Vogt observes that New Orleans "has always been a crowded city by southern standards."

The most dramatic expressions of the Greek revival style are found in the Garden District and along St. Charles and Esplanade Avenues, among other areas of town. Here housing lots are much larger than in the French Quarter, enabling the expansive growth of trees, shrubs, and gardens. Some exceptionally large American cottages have been constructed here, as well as a good number of two-storey, double-gallery houses (see below). But many of the most lavish homes in these areas are mansions. They were specially designed for individual clients desiring spacious-



*Victorian-style house on Esplanade Avenue*

ness and distinctiveness, even if externally their homes bore many features of the popular Greek revival style of the day. Thus the most elaborate housing in these areas is often unclassifiable as to type, even if its style of architecture is, in most cases, commonplace for the period.

## **1865-1900**

This twenty-five-year span approximates New Orleans's Victorian period of architecture. The essence of this style lies in its ornate, sometimes excessive, construction and decoration, as manifested in pointed arch windows (Gothic style), turrets and octagonal Queen Anne towers, jigsaw work along the eaves and on the gables, and beveled or stained glass windows and doors (Italianate style). Columns continued to be favored, although they were now, according to Italianate style, more lavishly decorated. Intricately designed brackets were used to support the eaves and similar constructions. Ornate cast iron found an enthusiastic clientele at this time. Turned wood balustrades were also in vogue. Finally, the French mansard roof, fitted with a dormer on each face, is associated with the Victorian style.

The four most common types of New Orleans housing were well established by this point: the Creole cottage and

its variant the American cottage, the townhouse and its subtypes, the shotgun and its variants, and the double-gallery house. All four types, when built during the latter half of the nineteenth century, were likely to be externally decorated according to Victorian principles.

The double-gallery house is the most recent of the four types, the first examples appearing around the time of the Civil War. This two-storey, wooden-framed structure is covered with wood-siding and fronted by a first-level and a second-level gallery supported with thick wooden pillars or columns running the length of three or four bays. The double-gallery house might be no more or no less than a large, blocky, elongated rectangle or, as common, an elongated rectangle with various protrusions or even wings extending to either side. It lends itself especially well to the expression of the Greek revival and Victorian architectural styles. The only examples I know in the French Quarter are located on Esplanade Avenue. Otherwise, double-gallery houses abound in the Garden District and in several other neighborhoods.

In New Orleans, the Victorian style reaches its extreme expression in the two quaint Doullut "steamboat" houses, situated adjacent to the levee at the corner of Egan and Douglas Streets, a considerable distance downriver from the French Quarter. Captain Paul Doullut built these two identical cube-shaped structures in 1905, in an attempt to recreate his cherished world of steamboating and his countless trips up and down the river. They are extraordinarily ornate, boasting some unusual features such as smokestacks (in lieu of brick chimneys), a pilot house, and boat-style railings. The captain's descendants, who presently occupy the houses, have maintained them well.

During the course of the twentieth century, after the Victorian period drew to a close, several new architectural styles appeared on a national scale. The most prominent of these were the Spanish style, bungalow style, ranch house style, and flat-roofed international style. All fall beyond the scope of this book, however, for their expression in New Orleans was largely the same as elsewhere in the United States. Moreover, they are already familiar to many readers, and the neighborhoods in which they typically appear are architecturally dull when compared with some of the inner-

city neighborhoods of New Orleans. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the eternally versatile shotgun house was often adapted in certain of its external aspects to the bungalow style when the latter became popular during the first half of this century.

## **Lifestyle and Housing**

The epigraph at the beginning of this chapter portrays New Orleans as an architectural museum. The different types of housing and styles of architecture examined here attest the considerable variety in this museum. But there is even more to the New Orleans built environment than these structural and decorative differences. The intermingling of the types and styles in each neighborhood and the contrasts that this engenders provides a satisfying experience in its own right. Pleasing comparisons of this sort exist everywhere in the city of New Orleans, but only rarely in its suburbs. And in some parts of the city unique local styles mingle and, in this manner, contrast with different national and international styles as well as with local adaptations of the latter two. Variation is the very spice of environmental life, whether built or natural, and in New Orleans there is no shortage of such variation.

I find that New Orleans tourists see not only the difference of this city's built environment from most but also its diversity. In a neighborhood such as the French Quarter, the Creole cottages, townhouses, shotgun houses, and their subtypes combine to offer a great deal of architectural variety. Here there is far more variety than most North Americans are accustomed to seeing in their cities. And in this regard many other New Orleans neighborhoods are no less varied.

Thus, when it comes to lifestyles in New Orleans, visitors and residents alike share an important and, by North American standards, a highly unusual experience: their daily passage through this variegated cityscape. Moreover, in the course of this passage, they are fulfilling, in part, their need for variety in their physical environment. A study by David Stea suggests that when this need is fulfilled people are less restless than when it is not. In other words, when in the Big Easy we are, for this reason alone, more relaxed.

# 6

## **The City that Care Forgot**

4

The Carnival season in New Orleans is not a manufactured tourist attraction with parades and balls scheduled almost every night for more than a month. It is rather a celebration for and by the people of New Orleans, which happens to attract a multitude of onlookers. (St. Leger Joynes and Jack DuArte, *The Insiders' Guide to New Orleans*)

To my knowledge, no one has systematically studied the contemporary lifestyle, or more accurately, lifestyles of the people of New Orleans. Scattered impressions on the subject written by journalists and authors of tourist literature do exist. But these impressions tend to center more on the lifestyle of the tourists than on that of the city's inhabitants. Furthermore, nicknames such as The Big Easy, The City that Care Forgot, and the *ville sans souci* only seem to nurture this tendency, inasmuch as they stress the party atmosphere of New Orleans while ignoring the deeper meanings of the everyday lives of its residents.

Although these limitations are a handicap, they are not sufficient to prevent us from exploring the general lifestyle led by Orleanians, an approach, by the way, that leaves no space in this book for considering the many sub-lifestyles they also lead. I define lifestyle as a distinct set of routine patterns of behavior of a group of people that they justify with certain values, attitudes, and orientations and that they consider a special identity. This chapter centers on the present-day patterns of behavior distinguishing New Orleans from other North American cities and on the values, attitudes, and orientations justifying them. As before, we must not neglect the historical antecedents of the cultural area being considered.

## Survivals to the Present

Several patterns (more accurately, sets of patterns) have survived in one form or another, some of which were examined in earlier chapters: eating habits, listening to jazz, participating in festivals, tolerating difference, life as Carnival, preserving tradition, and high-density living. This list may be incomplete, for it is possible that other patterns remain to be identified and described. Furthermore, some significant patterns have not survived. They will be briefly discussed at appropriate points in this chapter.

### Eating Habits

In the realm of eating habits the general lifestyle of Orleanians stands out in at least two ways: when at home they often eat Creole or Cajun dishes and when dining out they often patronize restaurants serving New Orleans food. As we saw in chapter 4, many Orleanians dine at home from time to time on such local *cuisine bourgeoise* as catfish, rice calas, jambalaya, Creole gumbo, Creole cream cheese, red beans and rice, and plates of crab, shrimp, and crawfish prepared in robust, pepper-enhanced stocks and roux-based sauces. These repasts are frequently complemented with a bread pudding or caramel custard dessert. Moreover, consuming their unique local dishes is only one aspect of the domestic eating scene. For the cook, the many hours required to prepare them is almost a way of life itself.

As noted earlier, these dishes and preparations such as the beignets, muffulettas, and poor boy sandwiches are also available in restaurants. But it is the consumption of haute Creole cuisine that best illustrates for Orleanians the practice of dining. Garvey and Widmer say that "because their food is so good, Orleanians like to make a ceremony out of dining out. They enjoy and expect good service, elegant surroundings, a leisurely atmosphere, excellent cocktails, and of course, superb food." Dining out for those who can afford to do so regularly, then, is another distinctive New Orleans eating habit, which owes its existence to the local tradition of fine cuisine, both at home and in restaurants, both haute and bourgeoise. The exuberance with which Orleanians eat is still another component of this way of life – the messiness, the loud talk, the general enthusi-





*Dining out in New Orleans*

asm for the occasion. Lastly, the nucleus of established restaurants figures prominently in this lifestyle. These restaurants create an atmosphere that generates exuberance, while their quality sets the pace for culinary excellence in their genre of cuisine.

### **Listening to Jazz**

There is a certain amount of evidence to support the proposition that a significant number of Orleanians regularly listen to jazz and, in this fashion, give substance to the claim that the music is still very much part of the city's soul; it is much more than a celebrated tourist attraction. The evidence is found in *Offbeat*, an established monthly periodical devoted to New Orleans and Louisiana music in general and to jazz in particular. It is also found in the vital New Orleans Jazz Club, which has been operating since 1949 and which sponsors the Jazz Collections in the Old Mint Building. Further, the jazz lifestyle is evident in the number of local people attending the annual Jazz and Heritage Festival. Finally, it is evident in the large number of jazz venues in the city, many being located outside the French Quarter and therefore not generally sustained by tourists.

True, many Orleanians have other musical tastes. Moreover, some who like jazz listen to it at home some of the time, even all of the time. Nevertheless, New Orleans is a rare city: jazz, especially traditional jazz, is in the air, you might say, and it is there to an extent unknown in any other city in the world. In the words of one of the people interviewed by writer Carol Flake: "Every morning I hear the school kids out on the street practising their horns on the way to school. You don't hear that in other cities." A substantial number of Orleanians identify with this aspect of their community's culture, an aspect in which they immerse themselves to the point where it becomes part of routine life. And, although some may even play jazz as amateurs at informally arranged jam sessions, most of the people whose lifestyle includes listening to jazz, are apparently not also players of it.

### Participating in Festivals

Festivals are occasions of celebration marked by special festive community observances. John Kelly defines them as "communal play [that] celebrates the meaning of being together – the community, the social order, the culture, and even the universe." As Kelly's definition suggests, festivals are normally events created and produced by and for the inhabitants of the communities where the festivals take place. Clearly, the vast majority of the twenty-odd festivals held annually in metropolitan New Orleans were initially organized for this reason.

But, today, some of the festivals are also tourist attractions; originally created by Orleanians for themselves, they are now designed for outsiders as well. Just how amicably tourists and locals mix at these festivals is unknown. Nonetheless, one thing is clear: Orleanians as a group participate in all their city's festivals, although rather few people have the time or the interest to participate in every one of them.

Introduced and briefly annotated here in order of their appearance during the year are sixteen annual festivals whose themes relate in diverse ways to the uniqueness of the New Orleans region. Those recommended for the connoisseur are listed in chapter 7. The two enjoying the widest reputation are then discussed in greater detail.



*Dancing at a "traditional jazz" concert*

### ***Mardi Gras Season:***

The season begins on the sixth day of January known as the Feast of Epiphany, or the Twelfth Night, and lasts until Ash Wednesday in February, when Lent begins. It is the longest, oldest, and most famous of all New Orleans festivals. It comprises balls, parties, parades, and celebrations.

### ***Cajun Music Festival of New Orleans:***

It is held for one day in mid-January. Although Cajun music is not native to New Orleans, the music has become a popular urban attraction across North America, certainly including this city.

### ***Louisiana Black Heritage Festival:***

This two-day event celebrates the State's black history and the cultural contributions blacks make through art, food, crafts, and music. It is held at the Audubon Zoo in early March.

### ***Tennessee Williams Literary Festival:***

This three-day smorgasbord of readings, lectures, and theatrical productions is presented in honor of the late New Orleans playwright. The festival takes place in late March or early April.

***French Quarter Festival:***

This three-day festival is held in early April to observe the importance of New Orleans art, food, and music. Twelve sound stages are set up in various parts of the French Quarter. The event, capped with a display of fireworks, is designed for the family.

***Spring Fiesta:***

The Spring Fiesta, offered in early to mid-April, consists of five days of tours of historic homes, courtyards, and plantation homes. It opens with the presentation of the Spring Fiesta Queen and a horse-drawn parade. Young New Orleans women, dressed in ante-bellum attire, guide tourists through French Quarter courtyards, various Garden District homes, and selected plantations southwest of the city. This intentionally tourist-oriented festival began in 1947.

***New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival:***

This ten-day festival running from late April through early May celebrated its twenty-fifth year in 1994. It attracts approximately 400,000 people annually to hear over 4,000 musicians, view an immense display of heritage crafts, and consume platefuls of assorted heritage foods. It is city wide, with a concentration of activity at the New Orleans Fair Grounds.

***Great French Market Tomato Festival:***

Each year in early June the French Market conducts a two-day celebration of the Creole tomato and its culinary diversity. The festival features cooking, tasting, and music.

***Reggae Riddums Festival:***

In mid-June for three days in City Park, festival participants listen to soca, reggae, and calypso musicians from around the world. Authentic African and Caribbean art, food, and drink is available. The festival started in 1987.

***Festival des Cadiens:***

This festival, celebrating Cajun culture, is held in late June. As with Cajun music, Cajun culture (e.g., cuisine, theater, artifacts) is not native to New Orleans, but has nevertheless found a ready local and tourist market here.

***La Fête:***

La Fête, also known as the National Festival of Food and Cookery, takes place in late June or early July. It calls attention to New Orleans as the culinary capital of the world. It comprises tours, river cruises, wine tastings, music performances, cooking contests, cooking demonstrations, spaghetti-eating competitions and, as a finale, a gourmet dinner. It is held at various locations throughout the city.

***African Heritage Festival International:***

An early September festival lasting four days and featuring the art, crafts, food, and dance of the local African heritage community, this celebration is also a family affair with rides and activities for children.

***Swamp Festival:***

This festival, contained in two weekends in early September, features Cajun food, crafts, and music. It is held at Woldenberg Park and the Audubon Zoo. At the latter the adventuresome can experience hands-on contact with live Louisiana swamp animals.

***Gumbo Festival:***

This three-day, early to mid-September orgy of gumbo eating takes place in Bridge City, immediately southwest of the city of New Orleans. As a family event it includes art, crafts, games, rides, and entertainment.

***New Orleans Film & Video Festival:***

The festival takes place during the second week of October, in recognition of New Orleans's prominence as a film location. In recent years, the festival has been held at the Canal Place Cinema and other venues. Here film devotees view local and international films as well as award-winning films and videos.

***Destrahan Plantation Fall Festival:***

On the western exurban fringe of New Orleans lies the community of Destrahan and its 203-year-old plantation home by the same name. The fall festival has been held there each year in mid-November since 1972. It includes an art show, a food tent, and an antique village, as well as

continuous music and over one hundred craft booths. All events take place in the shade of a stately grove of live oaks. The home is also open for viewing.

Also of note are several festivals of somewhat lesser prominence, among them the French Louisiana Heritage Festival, the St. Rita Pecan Festival held in suburban Harahan, and the Jeff Fest (for Jefferson Parish) held in Metairie, also a suburb. Additionally, the Greeks, Italians, Latin Americans, and other ethnic groups mount their own annual festivals.

Besides all this, a number of annual celebrations occur that are not really festivals, but that are nonetheless seen by many in the community as highly significant. One is the Celebration of the Oaks. It draws huge crowds to City Park during the Christmas season to view the ancient oaks and botanical gardens dressed up in more than 750,000 lights and to enjoy the accompanying music and refreshments. Within the compass of Creole Christmas, Orleanians are treated to Christmas teas, candlelight tours, caroling in Jackson Square, levee bonfires stretching for miles along the Mississippi, and *réveillon* dinners consumed late in the evenings on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. All Saints Day (November first) brings thousands of Orleanians to the cemeteries with flowers and prayers for deceased friends and relatives. Such tasks as sweeping sidewalks, pulling weeds, and whitewashing tombs have been dutifully performed over the preceding months. Just in advance of this solemn occasion, Orleanians have scheduled some levity known as "Boo at the Zoo." Designed for children, it involves two evenings of games and entertainment at the Audubon Zoo, where the brave can tour a haunted house and ride the Zoo Ghost Train.

## **Mardi Gras**

Mardi Gras is by far the oldest, longest, and most prominent of all the New Orleans festivals. Its title is a French word meaning "fat Tuesday," which, in the Christian religion, is Shrove Tuesday, the day immediately preceding the beginning of Lent on Ash Wednesday. Since, historically, Lent was a time for fasting, Mardi Gras was accordingly the last day before Easter during which a Christian could eat with impunity. Mardi Gras is also known as Carnival in many

countries. It is a moveable day, falling somewhere between 3 February and 9 March, or the forty-eighth day before Easter. It follows that the Mardi Gras season varies in length from year to year.

Since the arrival of the French in Louisiana, sporadic observances of Shrove Tuesday have occurred, typically in the form of masked balls and carriage processions. The Americans looked askance on masquerading, however, apparently because its anonymity encouraged deviant and disorderly activity. For this reason they banned public use of masks between 1806 and 1823. But by 1827 the Creoles had regained the right to mask themselves in the streets. And before long they had established several private clubs, one of which held a parade in 1837. In 1839 another club paraded a papier mâché float. But, in the years to come, both the paraders and the crowds grew more disorderly, sometimes even violent, giving rise to calls, even from some Creoles, for an end to all public celebrating and parading in the name of Mardi Gras.

Strange as it may seem, it took six young Anglo-Saxon men from Mobile, Alabama, recently settled in New Orleans, to save Carnival and transform it into a dignified affair. This happened on Mardi Gras night in 1857 when, by introducing the practices of the ball, parade, banquet, and masked tableau integrated by appropriate costumes and a fanciful theme, they started the modern New Orleans Mardi Gras tradition. The masked tableau is an adaptation of the theatrical tableau, wherein actors represent the action at a particular point in a play by assuming a specified posture and remaining motionless. The group gave itself the designation of Mistick Krewe of Comus; it was a secret society named after the jolly, friendly, mythical figure and patron of festive mirth. Their tableau that year was based on Milton's *Paradise Lost* in which Comus is one of the characters. Their intention was to ennoble a tradition that had fallen into disrepute. Except when deemed inappropriate because of war or natural disaster, Mardi Gras parades have occurred every year since.

Comus is still around today, although it presently shares the festival limelight with more than fifty other krewes, excluding those that have come and gone. Today, the word "krewe," whose etymology Samuel Kinser says remains obscure, refers to any Mardi Gras society. Kinser also reports

that the six men brought the concept with them from Mobile, where a "mystick krewe," or private society, had been organizing balls, parades, and banquets since 1831, although not on Mardi Gras.

The oldest New Orleans krewes are, like Comus, all male and secret. They draw their members from the local elite, each new member being carefully screened and selected through family connections. The famous old-line krewes have enjoyed long lives and enduring privileges. They include the Twelfth Night Revelers (1870), Rex, the King of Carnival (1872), Knights of Momus (1872), and Proteus (1882). The Twelfth Night Revelers still open the Mardi Gras season on the sixth of January with a prestigious ball (they no longer hold a parade). To be named Rex, King for a Day, is the highest local honor to which a male Orleanian can aspire. Momus always parades on the Thursday night before Mardi Gras; Proteus has acquired the right to the Monday evening before.

The tradition of crowning a queen as well as a king was introduced in 1871 by the Twelfth Night Revelers. They also inaugurated the practice of throwing trinkets to the crowd during their parades. Today, paraders, responding to the call of "throw me something, mister" toss out candy, doubloons, chewing gum, plastic trinkets, and Mardi Gras beads to the thousands of people who line the parade route. In fact, each krewe has its own route, although in many instances it is a variation of St. Charles Avenue, Jackson Street, and Canal Street, finishing at the Municipal Auditorium. Parades are no longer permitted in the French Quarter. Doubloons are aluminum coins minted in about the same dimensions as a U.S. half-dollar and engraved with words and images related to the krewe's theme that year. In New Orleans they are collectors' items.

Although some krewes hold no parade and others no ball, any group can form a krewe and any can organize a parade, providing it can obtain a city permit. There is no coordinating or certifying body or procedure for Mardi Gras, only a common song – "If Ever I Cease to Love You" (dates to the 1872 parade) – and a common set of colors – purple, green, and gold, which stand for justice, faith, and power (dates to the 1882 Rex parade and its theme "Symbolism of Colors"). As a result, krewes have proliferated



and diversified enormously in the course of the twentieth century. Their sheer number has forced some to schedule their balls even before Christmas Day. And, whereas the parade period now spans two full weeks, it is not unusual to have several parades the same day. Those held at night are illuminated by *flambeaux*, or torches.

One of the leading twentieth-century krewes is Zulu, the first black krewe. Founded in 1909, it is still going strong. It now accepts white members, has a wide socioeconomic base, and enjoys the honor of leading off the festivities on Carnival day. After World War I, the proliferation of krewes accelerated, leading to the establishment of several women's krewes, among them Venus and Iris. Gay krewes also began to appear – the oldest is Petronius – which some observers say are the most imaginative, artistically and theatrically. Today, the list includes children's krewes, krewes representing civic organizations (e.g., the Elks Orleanians), and those representing nearby parishes.

Last but not least are the "walking clubs" and the Mardi Gras Indians. The first are uptown neighborhood krewes that parade without floats (e.g., Jefferson City Buzzards, The Garden District Marching Club). Members assemble in costumes and partial masks, then walk from one neighborhood bar to the next where they receive free drinks from the proprietors. The second also have a vicinal basis. They are, in reality, black Orleanians, who have organized themselves in tribes under such names as The Red White and Blue and The Wild Magnolias. The tribes march in their own parts of town dressed as Indians.

Bacchus was founded in 1968 in response to the need to inject new life into Carnival, by this time an increasingly stagnant affair. To this end, they broke with tradition, selecting for their kings such international celebrities as Danny Kaye, Bob Hope, and Englebert Humperdinck. Heretofore, kings were chosen from the ranks of local civic and business leaders. Endymion, founded the same year, parades on Saturday night to the reputation of assembling each year by far the largest procession of the Mardi Gras season.

Whereas many of the newer krewes are public – new members are not normally chosen through family connections as in the old-line krewes – the balls are invariably private. An exception is made when a small number of female

outsiders may receive a "call out" card, entitling them to view the ball tableau from reserved seats. During the dancing the woman is "called out" to dance by the man who gave her the card. Cowan and his colleagues say that the average ball attracts about 250 members of the sponsoring krewe.

Carnival is part of the New Orleans lifestyle in still other ways. For instance, throughout the Mardi Gras season many Orleanians hold or attend king cake parties, where they serve or are served a king cake, a circular ring made of coffee-cake dough sprinkled with colored granulated sugar. The guest who gets the doll, ring, or bean hidden inside, wins the privilege of giving the next party.

It is said that half the town watches while the other half parades. More realistically, in 1982, 45,000 Orleanians were estimated to have participated actively in the krewes, parades, and walking clubs. According to Joynes and DuArte, the average cost of participation was estimated at \$1,000 per person, including costumes, ball tickets, and parade expenses. Preparations for the various events begin months in advance.

### **New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival**

The first New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival was held in 1970 in Congo Square (now Louis Armstrong Park), inspired by New Yorker George Wein, father of the famous Newport Jazz and Newport Folk Festivals. Thus, like Mardi Gras, this, the second major New Orleans festival, was also started by an outsider, who nonetheless knew the city well. Wein believed that an outdoor festival featuring jazz and folk music, perhaps combined with other kinds of music, would likely succeed and that New Orleans was the place to try out his plan. He had the good sense, as well, to form a local advisory committee and to invite Orleanian Quint Davis to chair it. Davis persevered through five years of deficit operations and movement of the Festival to the Fair Grounds in 1972. Nevertheless, by 1976 it could be proclaimed that "the event had become a local success offering the best weekend of music and food to be found in the area."<sup>1</sup>

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1 "New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival Program," 28 April – 7 May, 1989, p. 23.

Today, the "Jazz Fest" enjoys an international reputation, something George Wein, an avowed entrepreneur, had undoubtedly hoped for. But the reputation of the event and the business goals of Wein should not mask the substantial achievement of Orleanians themselves in sustaining the Festival for many years through their own New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation. The mission of the Foundation is to support the development and maintenance of the local heritage of music and the arts. Wein continues as Executive Producer, while Davis is next in charge as Producer/Director. Recently, Keith Spera writes, the Festival has been drawing 400,000 people annually to hear 17 categories of music, most notably, jazz, rock, gospel, blues, Cajun, zydeco, and Afro-Caribbean, as well as sample an array of local foods and shop among a variety of craft displays. It is second only to Mardi Gras in local and tourist popularity.

As noted earlier, many Orleanians attend the Jazz Fest where, increasingly, they mingle with crowds of visitors from out-of-town. For the Orleanians, however, the Jazz Fest is a significant part of their lifestyle. To be sure, it only lasts ten days. And by that criterion it is clearly less important than Mardi Gras. Yet, an estimated 92 percent of the 4,000 musicians presently performing at the Festival live in Louisiana, with many of the remaining eight percent being Louisianians now living or working for the most part elsewhere. Notwithstanding George Wein's initiative, Spera believes that it always was and still is an event created by and for Orleanians:

We do feel that the Festival has stayed surprisingly true, and that the balance between the need for a highly sophisticated, professional infrastructure and the informal, indigenous folk nature of the event has really been maintained. If you look at the first brochure from the first year, and saw the people that played, and the food and the crafts, and what the concept of a festival dedicated to the heritage of jazz might be in New Orleans . . . it was never the idea that this festival could be staged to provide entertainment, or to draw someone to town. It was like an old-fashioned rent party.

The rent party atmosphere persists to this day.

## Tolerating Difference

Historically, New Orleans was one of the most tolerant communities, if not the most tolerant community, in North America. French liberalism, Roman Catholicism, urban indifference, population size and density, and the vast influx of immigrants from many different countries, help account for this attitude. Only in New Orleans, when compared with other cities in the United States and Canada, could *plaçage*, Storyville, and gambling halls have gained such easy acceptance.

Nevertheless, limits have always existed. The disgusting behavior of the Kaintocks was too much. The growing violence connected with pre-Comus Carnival concerned many in the community. We have seen how tolerance of racial differences fell sharply after the Civil War, continuing on the same trajectory well into the twentieth century. On the positive side, the rampant political corruption during most of the history of New Orleans eventually became insufferable.

The story of political corruption in Louisiana is, by North American standards, almost unbelievable. Garvey and Widmer quoting Joe Gray Taylor note that "probably the origin of chronic corruption in Louisiana government can be traced back to the French attitude that political office was a form of property from which the holder should profit." By the early 1880s, the entire city of New Orleans was being run by private interests. The only exception was the police force; this the Mayor ran and used to his personal advantage. It is said that Louisianans once had a tolerance for corruption without parallel in any other state in America. Only Louisiana could have elected a political tyrant of the magnitude of Governor, and later, Senator Huey P. Long (1893-1935). The worst aspects of New Orleans's machine politics came to an end under Mayor DeLesseps S. Morrison, whose terms of office ran from 1946 to 1961.

Whether New Orleans is as tolerant today as it was earlier in its history is impossible to say with certainty. Tolerance of political corruption appears to have faded significantly, whereas tolerance of drinking, gambling, striptease, homosexuality, pornography, eccentricity and the like seems to be alive and well. Riverboat gambling is presently experiencing a flamboyant rebirth. And evidently racial



*Carnavalesque behavior at the Jazz Fest*

intolerance never reached the heights in New Orleans it reached in many other American cities. Indeed, in this respect, although some analysts disagree, both Carol Flake and Samuel Kinser hold that New Orleans may be, relatively speaking, the most tolerant American city of our age.<sup>2</sup> As for eccentricity, Flake says it continues to thrive:

After a while, you simply get used to seeing strange things in the streets of New Orleans: cultural cross-dressing, inter-species confusion, religious transvestism, and even outrageous stereotypes. Just as disorienting as orangutan babies, black Indians, or old men in drag is a black Carnival krewa who paint themselves even blacker on Mardi Gras day and daub white rings around their eyes and lips. They wear grass skirts and enormous Afro wigs and hand out gilded coconuts to beckoning crowds.

In conclusion, it is reasonable to argue, however tentatively, that tolerating differences of a wide variety is still a solid part of the New Orleans way of life, part of what it means to be a true Orleanian.

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2 For a dissenting view see Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (eds.), *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), especially pp. 317-19.

## Life as Carnival

Although no Orleanian can be said to lead a carnivalesque life all the time, some Orleanians can be said to lead such a life some of the time. The social atmosphere of New Orleans makes this possible in exceptional measure. It is made possible by the element of gaiety as expressed in balls, holidays, celebrations and, more recently, festivals, an element dating to the days of Bienville and especially Vaudreuil. It is made possible, as we have just seen, by the element of tolerance of gambling, prostitution, drunkenness, political corruption and, on a less controversial plane, eccentricity. The carnivalesque life also owes its existence to the ambiance of lovely courtyards, inviting balconies, and salubrious weather. Finally, that life is fostered by the tendency, inherited from Europe, to blend work and leisure in more equal measure than is typically done in North America.

The phrase "life as Carnival" refers to the part of the New Orleans lifestyle that is influenced – perhaps we could even say explained – by this social atmosphere. Carol Flake observed New Orleans at close range for several years. She concluded that "there is something about the Carnival mentality that suggests a certain reluctance to grow up or get serious." People in New Orleans, natives and tourists alike, feel as though they can let go when they want to. If they are inclined to don a costume and do silly things behind its mask, the city offers many opportunities for such antics. If they want to strut with abandon in the second line behind a marching band or dance with utmost expression before a jazz combo, they can do these things in New Orleans.

Given the attractiveness of the social atmosphere, keeping one's nose to the occupational grindstone in New Orleans requires an exceptional, unfaltering commitment to work. In one way or another, in one degree or another, many an Orleanian backslides here by submitting to the carnivalesque lifestyle that beckons. In the course of it all, he or she, like Orleanians of days gone by, adopts the local balance between work and leisure. In the Big Easy, a person can more easily put aside his cares and woes to partake of the good life as personally defined.



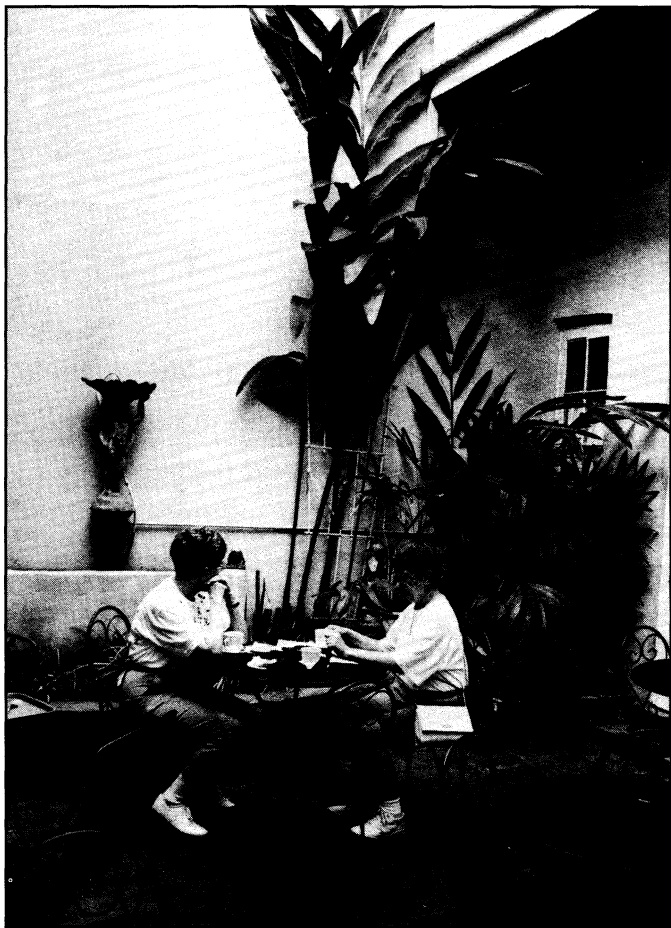
*Life as Carnival in the French Quarter*

### **Preserving Tradition**

New Orleans is a highly traditional city. But then, as Flake points out, it has traditions to preserve, many of which, understandably, endear the place to tourists and residents alike:

Oddly enough it may well be its decadence that has preserved New Orleans. For more than two hundred years, New Orleans has remained as timeless as Venice in its imperceptible descent, defended from floods by levees and from reality by levity, isolated from the frenzy of progress revising the culture and landscape of the rest of America. Even after the city, encased like a cocoon in its old-world Napoleonic code, became an outpost of the Yankee republic, New Orleans continued to observe its own peculiar rites, moving to its own syncopated beat. The Americans began to take over the city, bit by bit, but found themselves succumbing to its rhythms.

Now, in the face of contemporary massification, commercialization, globalization, and similar threats to distinctiveness, traditional New Orleans is in many respects extremely vulnerable. Yet, the aforementioned traditions are surviving there, in significant measure because Orleanians have incorporated them into their everyday lives. They preserve their traditions by participating in them. Eating Creole food



*The courtyard is one of the focal points of domestic lifestyle in inner-city New Orleans.*

and listening to New Orleans jazz are two examples. Yet, both could be quickly submerged in the tide of commercialism already inundating literally every other urban area of North America (e.g., fast food and mass market ethnic food; rock music, commercial folk music, and generic background music).



Listening to jazz and consuming New Orleans food are relatively passive ways of preserving tradition in New Orleans. Serving as a volunteer is an active approach to preservation, as exemplified in working to save historically valuable sites or buildings from urban redevelopment or just plain deterioration. Alternatively, one might sit on a board or a steering committee of a heritage-related project such as the Jazz and Heritage Festival Board of Directors or the New Orleans Jazz Club. The festivals alone – they often bear in one way or another on New Orleans's many traditions – consume an enormous amount of volunteer time. Working to keep from political office parties whose interests are inimical to important traditions, is still another active way to preserve tradition. In short, as I indicate elsewhere, volunteering can become a main part of a person's lifestyle, a serious leisure pursuit in itself.

### High-Density Living

One inescapable fact of daily living for many Orleanians is high-density housing. More in the tradition of urban Europe than in that of urban North America, they must accommodate themselves to comparatively small dwellings, usually abutting one another, and normally situated along crowded, narrow streets. Such conditions encourage a range of intrusions by others. In the past at least, shared-wall housing meant greater risk of fire and noise from the neighbors. In the present, coterminous town houses, Creole cottages and shotgun houses leave little space for offstreet parking and rather little for gardening for those interested in this hobby.

But a good number of Orleanians live quite happily in these circumstances. They would have it no other way, because they also find here, as in the French Quarter for instance, an appealing night life or work life or both. For those living in or near the French Quarter, ample New Orleans food and music are always close at hand. Many of the festivals discussed earlier take place here in whole or in part. Since the Quarter, with its masses of tourists and residents, is the most impersonal area of the city, it is also a good residential location for free spirits yearning to experiment with life as Carnival.



*High-density living in New Orleans*

It is safe to say that the New Orleans of the present and the past would be and would have been very different were all its houses detached and erected on individual lots, as is now largely true for its suburbs. But speculation aside, that would have been impossible, given the shortage of habitable land in the area. Thus we return once again to the primordial role of geographic forces in this city's history, this time putting the emphasis on the way they have shaped the peculiar lifestyle of its people.

## **Conclusions**

Three themes emerge from the foregoing discussion of lifestyle patterns: commercialism, assimilation, and leisure. The music, the festivals, and the traditions are especially vulnerable to commercialization. Since we have already considered this problem in chapter 3 in connection with music, let us turn to its manifestation in the festivals. None of those listed earlier is anywhere near free of the insidious influence of commercial tendencies. The organizers of every one would be pleased to attract still larger crowds, achieve still greater fame, even if their target clientele in this regard were restricted to Orleanians. In trying to reach these goals, organizers may compromise the artistic component of a festival. As Flake points out, this strain is



*Hot dog vendor in Jackson Square*

very strong in Mardi Gras. Some say it began in 1968 with the advent of Bacchus and the celebrity kings or Endymion and the seemingly endless parade. From the standpoint of the connoisseur, it is noteworthy that, because we live in an era dominated by funding cutbacks, popular culture, and superficial entertainment, commercialization of the festivals forever lurks in the wings.

It is easy to imagine how other New Orleans traditions might be commercially transformed. I wonder how often the New Orleans City Council has rejected proposals for a hamburger stand and souvenir shop to be erected in the shade of the dueling oaks in City Park or panel-advertising to be plastered on the sides of the St. Charles streetcars. The omnipresent hot-dog carts that defile the architecture of the French Quarter and the ear-splitting rock and country-western music that monopolize the gaiety of Bourbon Street are already too much.

Assimilation refers in the present case to another persistent strain: in connection with the lifestyle patterns discussed in this chapter, precisely how attractive for Orleanians is the American mainstream? Over the years, the difference of New Orleans has been its saving grace; difference has helped insulate the city against the powerful forces now homogenizing nearly every other North American urban center. But is assimilation not an inevitable

fate awaiting literally every city on this continent, possibly outside those in Quebec? If assimilation is its destiny, how much longer can New Orleans hold out? How much longer before Creole food is replaced with continental cuisine or traditional jazz with mainstream rock? The answer to this question, which would be seriously imprecise at this point, is too complex to tackle in this book. The lesson for connoisseurs, with their enduring interest in New Orleans, is that the threat of significant assimilation is real for this city and that its possible manifestations should be monitored in the coming years.

Lastly, with the exception of certain aspects of tolerance and high-density living, the patterns of behavior considered here can all be defined as leisure, as freely chosen activity seen as pleasant and undertaken for its own sake. In other words, for the most part, it is the leisure component of the general lifestyle in New Orleans that is so distinct. For, when we examine life in New Orleans at school, work, church, and home (excluding leisure there), it appears to be much the same as elsewhere in North America.

Now, it happens that the touristic interests of New Orleans connoisseurs, which I classify as serious rather than casual leisure interests, are in many ways like the distinctive serious leisure interests of committed New Orleans residents, both past and present. It appears, then, that the connoisseur as special kind of tourist and the Orleanian as author of his or her leisure lifestyle share at least one major concern: both are most interested in maintaining the distinctiveness and authenticity of the various cultural areas treated in this book. The areas appeal to the committed insider living in New Orleans; they attract the connoisseur outsider eager to understand and experience the insider's city.

# 7

## **The Connoisseur on the Town**

Fair France still has a quarter of a foot in Louisiana. Villas with columns in different styles, painted white, in gardens of magnolias, orange trees, banana trees, negroes in old clothes – rosy white children in black arms, omnibuses drawn by mules, the tall funnels of the steamboats towering at the end of the main street – that is a bit of local colour – everything is beautiful here in this world of people – Manet would see lovely things here – even more than I do. (Edgar Degas writing from New Orleans in 1872 to artists James Tissot and Henri Rouart, taken from William Woodward, *Early View of the Vieux Carré*)

We have talked long enough about the history and lifestyle of New Orleans and about its special music, food, and architecture. We have come to the point where, to gain the most profound understanding of these cultural areas, we must go forth and experience them directly. The places, events, and establishments listed in this chapter offer such a direct experience. Whereas it is true that the following lists are really enumerations of my favorites, it is also true that some readers will discover on their own other places, events, and establishments they like just as much. Part of the enjoyment of being a connoisseur comes from exploring, from communing with the unknown. New Orleans offers nearly countless opportunities in the five areas for serendipitous discovery. The following lists, then, should be viewed as a start. The page numbers in parentheses indicate where in this book an item or set of items is discussed more fully.

## History

As noted in chapter 2, past history can only be experienced vicariously. New Orleans abounds with museums and historic

sites offering a contemporary view of its past in jazz, cuisine, lifestyle, architecture, and general history.

### ***Jazz***

- New Orleans Jazz Club Collections (formerly the New Orleans Jazz Museum), 400 Esplanade Ave. (The Old U.S. Mint Bldg.), tel.: 568-6968, admission fee (p. 64).

### ***Cuisine***

- Antoine's, Galatoire's, and Tujague's occupy old restaurant buildings dating to the turn of the twentieth century and earlier. See the "Cuisine" section of this chapter for addresses and telephone numbers.
- The Old French Market, N. Peters St. Parts of it were built in 1813, making it one of the oldest urban markets in the United States. The Café du Monde has occupied its location here since the early 1860s.

### ***Lifestyle***

- Mardi Gras costumes, displayed at Arnaud's Restaurant, 813 Bienville St., tel.: 523-5433, no fee for diners.
- Mardi Gras Museum, 400 Esplanade Ave. (The Old U.S. Mint Bldg.), tel.: 568-6968, admission fee.

### ***Architecture***

- Brulator Courtyard, 520 Royal St., free admission. Since station WSDU-TV has offices here, the courtyard is open to the public during business hours only.
- Gallier House Museum, 1132 Royal St., tel.: 523-6722, admission fee. Built in 1857 as a residence for architect James Gallier, Jr.
- Pontalba Apartments, 1850 House, 523 St. Ann St., tel.: 568-6968, admission fee (authentically restored and furnished nineteenth-century luxury apartments).
- Pitot House, 1440 Moss St., tel.: 482-0312, admission fee (authentically restored and furnished French colonial plantation house) (pp. 91-92).
- Beauregard-Keyes House, 1113 Chartres St., tel.: 523-7257, admission fee (a raised cottage built in 1826) (p. 9).



*Café du Monde*

### **General History**

- Historic New Orleans Collection, Museum, and Research Center, 533 Royal St., tel.: 523-4662, free admission to museum and galleries, admission fee for tours (a collection of some of the oldest buildings in New Orleans, housing a museum, several galleries, and a research center for state and local history).
- Chalmette National Historic Park, St. Bernard Hwy. (in Bernard Parish downriver from French Quarter), free admission (p. 36).

### **Jazz**

The jazz clubs listed here either charge an entry fee or enforce a one-drink minimum policy. Normally, reservations are needed at Maxwell's, Pete Fountain's, Snug Harbor, and the Palm Court Cafe. Except for Snug Harbor, a modern jazz haunt par excellence, the clubs here offer either pure traditional jazz or blended traditional and swing styles. Most are discussed on pages 61-63.

- Fritzel's European Bar & Cuisine, late-evening jam sessions, 733 Bourbon St., tel.: 561-0432.



- Palm Court Cafe, featuring various local groups, 1204 Decatur St., tel.: 525-0200.
- Patout's Restaurant, featuring Al Hirt, 501 Bourbon St., tel.: 529-4256.
- Pete Fountain's Club, featuring Pete Fountain, 3rd Floor, New Orleans Hilton, 2 Poydras St., tel.: 523-4374.
- Maison Bourbon, featuring various local groups, 641 Bourbon St., tel.: 522-8818.
- Maxwell's Toulouse Cabaret, featuring Harry Connick, Sr. and the Dukes of Dixieland, 615 Toulouse St., tel.: 523- 4207.
- Preservation Hall, featuring various local groups, 726 St. Peter St., tel.: 523-8939.
- Snug Harbor, featuring Ellis Marsalis and various local and national groups, 626 Frenchman St., tel.: 949-0696.

## Cuisine

In this section, the restaurants are classified according to whether they serve *haute cuisine*, *cuisine bourgeoise*, or a speciality. Those in the first category are in general substantially more expensive than those in the second. Unless noted otherwise, all establishments listed in this section accept at least some of the major credit cards.

### Haute Cuisine (Creole-French)

- Antoine's, 713 St. Louis St., tel.: 581-4422 (p. 74).
- Arnaud's, 813 Bienville St., tel.: 523-5433 (p. 78).
- Bon Ton, 401 Magazine St., tel.: 524-3386.
- Brennan's, 417 Royal St., tel.: 525-9711 (p. 77).
- Broussard's, 819 Conti St., tel.: 581-3866 (p. 77).
- Commander's Palace, 1403 Washington St., tel.: 899-8221 (pp. 76-77).
- Galatoire's, 209 Bourbon St., tel.: 525-2021 (pp. 75-76).
- K-Paul's Louisiana Kitchen, 416 Chartres St., tel.: 524-7394 (p. 78).
- Tujague's, 823 Decatur St., tel.: 525-8676 (p. 78).

### Haute Cuisine (Creole-Italian)

- Pascale's Manale, 1838 Napoleon Ave., tel.: 895-4877 (p. 78).



*Food heritage at the Jazz and Heritage Festival*

- Sal and Judy's, U.S. 190, Lacomb, tel.: 1-882-9443 (p. 78). Located on the north side of Lake Pontchartrain, to the right of the Causeway.

### **Haute Cuisine (Mixed)**

- Stephen & Martin, 4141 St. Charles Ave., tel.: 897-0781.

### **Cuisine Bourgeoise (Seafood)**

- Acme Oyster House, 724 Iberville St., tel.: 522-5973.
- Brunings, West End Park, Lake Pontchartrain, tel.: 282-9395.
- Felix's, 739 Iberville St., tel.: 522-4440.
- Ralph & Kacco's, 519 Toulouse St., tel.: 522-5226.

### **Cuisine Bourgeoise (Poor-Boys) (p. 81)**

- Mother's, 401 Poydras St., tel.: 523-9695 (no credit cards).
- R & O's, 210 Metairie-Hammond Hwy., Bucktown, tel.: 831-1248 (no credit cards).
- Streetcar Sandwiches, 1434 S. Carrollton Ave., tel.: 866-1146 (no credit cards).

**Cuisine Bourgeoise (Muffulettas) (p. 82)**

- Central Grocery, 923 Decatur St., tel.: 523-1620 (no credit cards).
- Napoleon House, 500 Chartres St., tel.: 524-9752.
- R & O's, 210 Metairie-Hammond Hwy., Bucktown, tel.: 831-1248 (no credit cards).

**Cuisine Bourgeoise (Creole-Cajun) (pp. 78-82)**

- Gumbo Shop, 630 St. Peter St., tel.: 525-1486.
- Old Coffee Pot, 714 St. Peter St., tel.: 524-3500.
- Petunia's, 817 St. Louis St., tel.: 522-6440 (dinner crepes also a speciality).

**Late Night**

- Café du Monde, 800 Decatur St., 525-4544, open 24 hours a day (no credit cards).
- Old Coffee Pot, 714 St. Peter St., tel.: 524-3500, open until 2 p.m.
- The Quarter Scene, 900 Dumaine St., tel.: 522-6533, open 24 hours a day except Tuesdays from 11:30 p.m. to Wednesdays 8:30 a.m.

**Breakfast**

- Coffee, Tea or . . . , 630 St. Ann St., tel.: 522-0830, pastries (no credit cards).
- Croissant D'Or, 617 Ursulines St., tel.: 524-4663, pastries (no credit cards).
- La Madeleine, 547 St. Ann St., tel.: 568-9950, pastries (no credit cards).
- La Marquise, 625 Chartres St., tel.: 568-9950, pastries (no credit cards).
- Old Coffee Pot, 714 St. Peter St., tel.: 524-3500, full breakfast menu.
- The Quarter Scene, 900 Dumaine St., tel.: 522-6533, full breakfast menu.

**New Orleans Coffee (p. 84)**

- Café du Monde, 800 Decatur St., tel.: 525-4544, café au lait a speciality (no credit cards).



*Street musicians in Jackson Square*

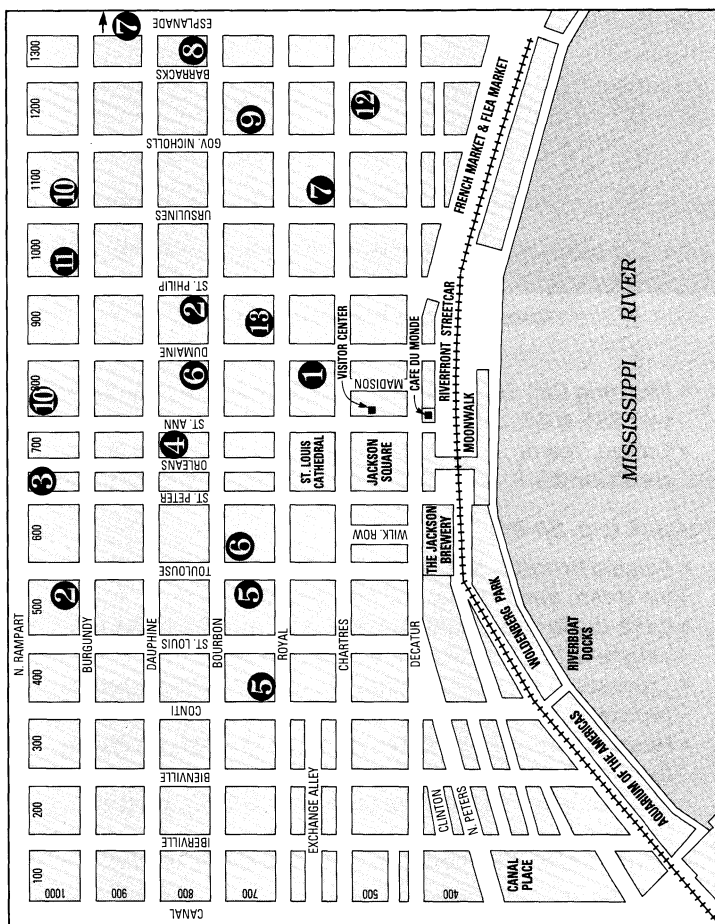
- Morning Call Coffee Stand, 3325 Severn Ave., Metairie, tel.: 885-4068, café au lait a speciality (no credit cards).
- Coffee, Tea or . . . , 630 St. Ann St., tel.: 522-0830 (no credit cards).

### **Dessert (pp. 84-86)**

- Angelo Brocato, 537 St. Ann St., tel.: 526-9676, Italian ice cream and pastries (no credit cards).
- Café du Monde, 800 Decatur St., tel.: 525-4544, beignets, hot chocolate (no credit cards).
- Croissant D'Or, 617 Ursulines St., tel.: 524-4663, pastries (no credit cards).
- Haagen Dazs, 621 St. Peter St., tel.: 523-4001, ice cream (no credit cards).
- La Madeleine, 547 St. Ann St., tel.: 568-9950, pastries (no credit cards).
- Petunia's, 817 St. Louis St., tel.: 522-6440, dessert crepes.

### **Drinks (Sazerac, Hurricane, Ramos Gin Fizz) (p. 86)**

- Pat O'Brien's, 718 St. Peter St., tel.: 525-4823 (no credit cards).
- Rib Room, Royal Orleans Hotel, 621 St. Louis St., tel.: 529- 7045.



Map 5. Architectural Sites

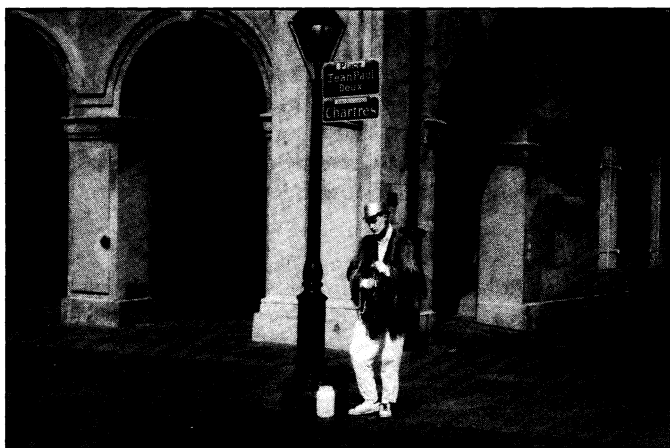
## Architecture

The following examples of New Orleans's styles and types of architecture number among my favorites. Still, many other fine examples exist. These you can discover by walking the streets of the city, one of the connoisseur's most agreeable activities. Each house is located by its number in Map 5.

1. French Colonial Plantation House, 632 Dumaine St. (Madame John's Legacy); 1440 Moss St. (The Pitot House – not on map).
2. Creole Cottage, 941 Bourbon St. (Jean Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop); 541-43 Burgundy St.
3. Creole Townhouse, 1035 St. Peter St.
4. Entresol Townhouse, 700 Dauphine St.
5. Porte Cochère Townhouse, 720-22 Toulouse St.; 401 Royal St.
6. Slave Quarters, 804 Dumaine St.; 608 Burgundy St.
7. American Cottage, 1113 Chartres St. (Beauregard-Keyes House); 905 Esplanade Ave.
8. Greek Revival Townhouse, 1303 Bourbon St.
9. Shotgun House (single), 729 Governor Nicholls St.
10. Shotgun House (double), 1001-1003 Ursulines St.; 1031-1033 St. Ann St.
11. Camelback Shotgun, 1001-1003 St. Philip St.
12. Double-Gallery Houses, 1208-1226 Chartres St.
13. Victorian Style House, 915 Royal St. (The Cornstalk Hotel).

## Lifestyle

Except for recommending certain festivals, there is, apart from what was presented on pages 112-116, little else I can say to guide the connoisseur on the matter of the New Orleans lifestyle. From the standpoint of popularity and community involvement, the two premier festivals are Mardi Gras and the Jazz and Heritage Festival. But several lesser-known festivals also offer a good window on selected aspects of the contemporary way of life in the city. In order of their occurrence during the year, these are the Louisiana Black Heritage Festival, the French Quarter Festival, the Great French Market Tomato Festival, La Fête, the African Heritage Festival International, and the Gumbo Festival. Creole Christmas and All Saints Day are also worth participating in to the extent possible for an outsider.



*Street mime in French Quarter*

This, then, is a suggested list of things to do for those connoisseurs of New Orleans wanting a modicum of guidance on where to start exploring the five cultural areas. Above all, enjoy the experience of serious touring here; it is easy to do in the City that Care Forgot, *la ville sans souci*. The Big Easy and its insistence on a balanced mix of pleasure and obligation has simmered for over 275 years as the stock in the cosmopolitan stew that is this seaport. A true cultural bouillabaisse it is. No American city has such a past. Hence none can lay claim to a contemporary leisure lifestyle as vibrant as that of New Orleans, a connoisseur's delight.

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## Notes





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Robert A. Stebbins grew up in Minneapolis where he worked as a jazz musician and where, at the University of Minnesota in 1962 and 1964, he completed his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in sociology. Since then he has taught at Presbyterian College (South Carolina), Memorial University of Newfoundland, the University of Texas at Arlington, and, from 1976, The University of Calgary. His specialities include the sociology of deviant behavior, work and leisure, and North American French communities. He has written or edited twenty books, including most recently, *Career, Culture, and Social Psychology in a Variety Art: The Magician; The Laugh-Makers: Stand-Up Comedy as Art, Business, and Lifestyle; Amateurs, Professionals, and Serious Leisure; The Franco-Calgarians: French Language, Leisure, and Linguistic Lifestyle in an Anglophone City; and The Barbershop Singer: Inside the Social World of a Musical Hobby*. Fully bilingual in French and English, his present research interests center on the survival and development of North American francophone communities outside Quebec.

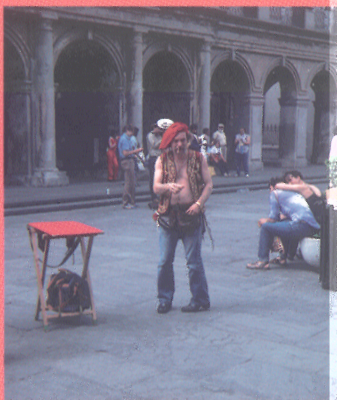
# The Connoisseur's NEW ORLEANS



Here is a great guide to find out where to go, what to do, what to look for, how to get there, and what it all means.

This book describes the essential New Orleans – its history, jazz, Creole-Cajun cuisine, architecture, and lifestyle. The Connoisseur's New Orleans offers newcomers a way through the pervasive commercialism to a deep, lasting understanding of one of North America's most unusual cities.

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