

Louisiana Social Studies: A look into the culture,
history and business of our state

by

Ava Borskey

Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

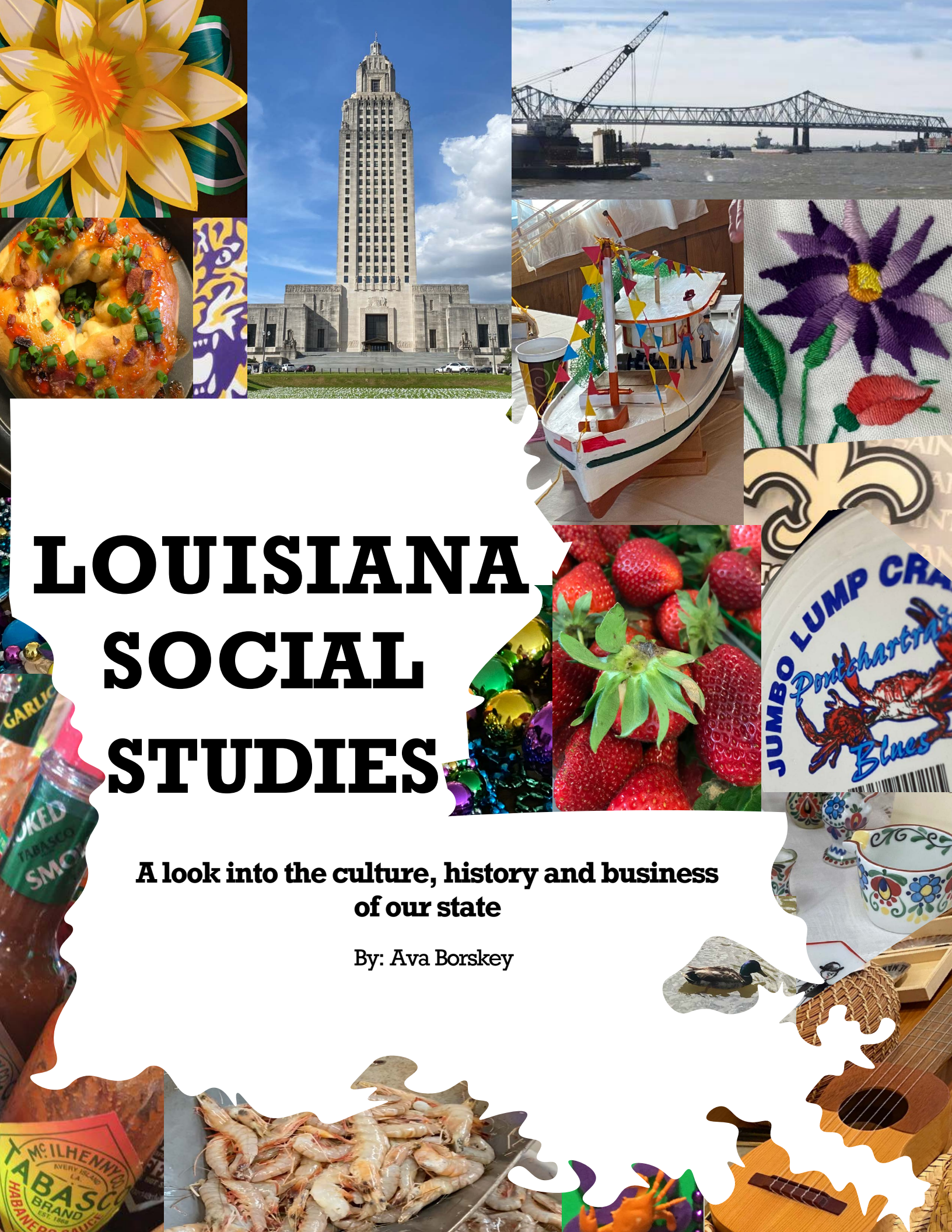
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LOUISIANA SOCIAL STUDIES

**A look into the culture, history and business
of our state**

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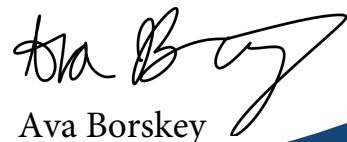
EDITOR'S NOTE



When it was time to start my thesis, I knew I wanted to do something different than your average paper. As a journalism major with minors in English and history, I had two passions: writing and education. I decided to create a portfolio of articles to emulate just that. I hope the writing, pictures and interactive pieces found in these pages will spark students' interest and create a love for learning.

For the teachers: The articles are inspired by the [key themes](#) in the [K-12 Louisiana Student Standards for Social Studies](#). The stories are simple, yet detailed, so that any student, regardless of age, can connect with some part.

For the students: It wasn't long ago that I sat in a desk, thinking history was some far away past written in textbooks. But that's not true. History happens every day. Look around you and see. The stories in these pages are about real people from your home state. They are a part of history, and so are you.


Ava Borskey

CONTENTS

4

SOCIETY & CULTURE

Saving Louisiana's Native Language Kouri-Vini

6

POLITICS & GOVERNANCE

Living Like A Citizen And Becoming One

8

CONTINUITY & CHANGE

Then & Now: The Science Behind Sweet Sugarcane

10

ECONOMICS & TRADE

Louisiana Shrimpers Fight To Stay Afloat In The Market

12

PHYSICAL & HUMAN SYSTEMS

How The Mississippi River And Levees Shaped Life In Louisiana

14

MIGRATION & SETTLEMENT

The Patchwork of Louisiana



ISSUU

SOCIETY & CULTURE

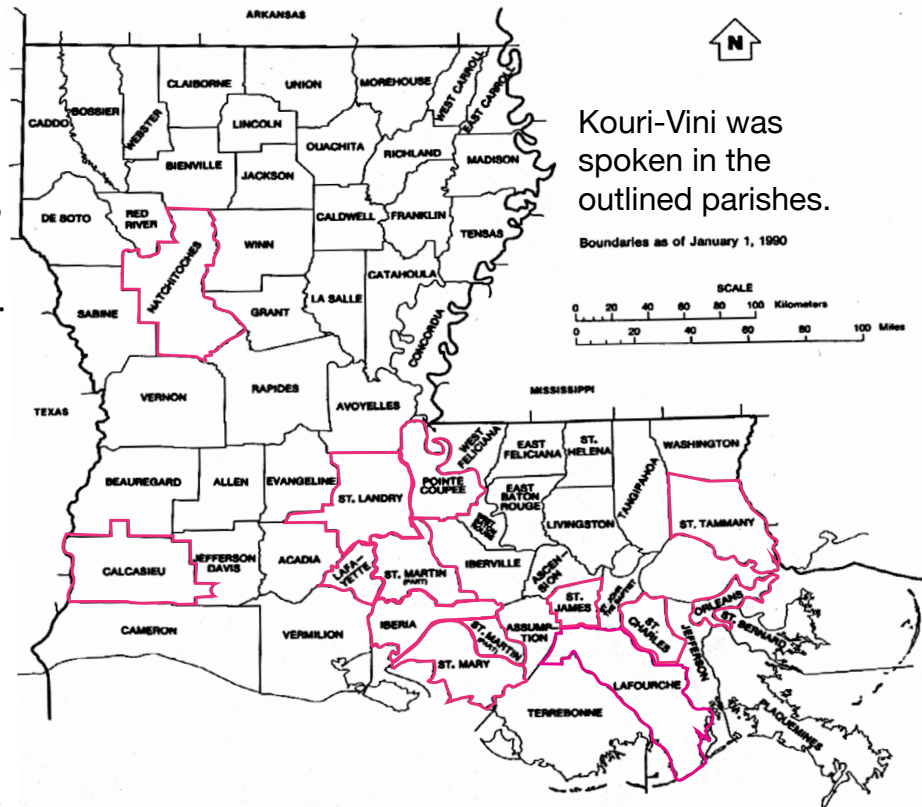
Saving Louisiana's Native Language Kouri-Vini

In the 18th century in Louisiana, a new language was forming. Settlers were arriving and enslaved people from Africa were being brought to work on plantations. A diverse group of people found themselves needing a common language to live and work.

Louisiana was a French colony, so many living in the territory tried to learn French. They actually learned an approximation, or a similar style of speaking that was not exactly the same as French. It blended French with several different West African languages. As generations passed, this blend evolved into its own language known as Louisiana Creole, or Kouri-Vini.

Oliver Mayeux, a linguist, or person who studies languages, calls Kouri-Vini "Louisiana's gumbo language."

In the vocabulary of Kouri-Vini, you find a lot of French influence, West African influence and even a handful of Native American words.



Kouri-Vini was spoken in the outlined parishes.

Boundaries as of January 1, 1990

Kouri-Vini was once spoken widely across Louisiana. Speakers lived along the Bayou Teche, in and around Lafayette. You could find Kouri-Vini speakers along the Mississippi River from Pointe Coupee down to New Orleans. Today, fewer than 10,000 people speak Kouri-Vini.

A community of people is working to save Kouri-Vini from going extinct.

MAIN IDEAS

- » Kouri-Vini is a language born in Louisiana. Kouri Vini is also known as Louisiana Creole.
- » Kouri-Vini was created through contact between French colonists and enslaved people from West Africa.
- » The language is disappearing.
- » A small group is trying to save it.

Adrien Guillory-Chatman, a middle school teacher in Chicago who is from Lafayette, Louisiana, remembers hearing her mother and grandmother speak Kouri-Vini.

"That was my grandmother's first language," Adrien said.

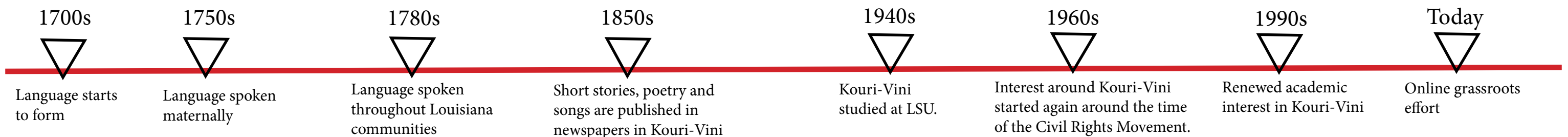
Kouri-Vini was spoken daily across communities in Louisiana, but French was used for business and religion. As time passed, the focus turned to English. Many people believed English was more important for school and business. Learning other languages was discouraged.

Languages also became racialized. Creole traditionally meant born in Louisiana. Kouri-Vini was spoken by white and black Louisianans alike. Around the time of World War I, however, Louisiana identity branched. Creole began to mean a black identity. A focus on French, and later Cajun, meant a white identity.

Kouri-Vini was not passed down to Adrien when she was growing up. As she got older, she became interested in genealogy and started learning Kouri-Vini.

Christophe Landry, a researcher at Ancestry, studies genealogy, history and language.

TIMELINE:



“Once you start talking about genealogy, then it’s easy for you to apply how you fit in this tree,” Christophe said. “It helps people to see themselves, place themselves and see themselves, in the history and the culture that’s all around them.”

Certain phrases you heard growing up could have roots in Kouri-Vini. If your grandparents ever called their pals “padna,” that word is the Kouri-Vini translation for friend.

Kouri-Vini is a phonetic language, meaning the words are pronounced exactly as they are spelled. Some words are directly similar to French. For example, in French, the word for fish is “poisson.” In Kouri-Vini, the word for fish is “pwason.”

Oliver said that through studying language, clues about heritage can be found everywhere in Louisiana from the names of streets to towns to food.

Jonathan Mayers, an artist from Baton Rouge, has included Kouri-Vini in his work. Jonathan writes stories in Kouri-Vini to go along with his paintings. The stories create myths about the creatures in the paintings and help preserve Kouri-Vini, the language of his ancestors.

Oliver, Adrien, Christophe and Jonathan have all been involved in efforts to renew interest in Kouri-Vini and stop the language from disappearing forever.

They are part of the Kouri-Vini revitalization movement, a group working to build learner’s guides and other resources so that future generations can get in touch with their heritage.

“To make contact with this language, which is disappearing, is a really powerful way of connecting with the sense of who you are and with your history and your family’s history,” Oliver said.



Jonathan calls this painting “A Calm Day at Lake Peigneur.” In Kouri-Vini, that translates to “In Jounné trankil a Lak Péñoer.”

Click inside the picture to hear what Kouri-Vini sounds like, as Jonathan reads the story that goes along with the painting.

You can follow along in Kouri-Vini with the text on the left and see the English translation with the text on the right.

In jounné trankil a Lak Péñoer

ékri é tradwi par Jonathan J. Mayers
édité par Michaël Gisclair

In manifik jounné endsi dolo trankil a Lak Péñoer. Lèr fré k’ap shatouyé pendan l’ap pasé pardési lapo é difil. Ré manta kròsh-yé k’ap glisé atravè dolo san traka. In Jédri vè k’ap imité yé tandi in nòt ap admiré vu-la disi lak-čila ki pi ba enkò.

“Ké bonnè, bougo-çála k’ap fé li tendé!”

“Non, shæ... yé çé groñmen toufé-yé ki sòr dê finfifon troub.

A Calm Day at Lake Peigneur

written by Jonathan J. Mayers
edited by Michael Gisclair

It’s such a beautiful day out on the calm waters of Lake Peigneur. The chilled air tickles as it passes over flesh and fiber. The knotty manta rays glide effortlessly through the water. A Green Guédry mimics them while another enjoys the view of the once shallow lake.

“How wonderful! That sound of a tug boat horn!”

“No, cher.....those are muffled wails from beneath them murky depths.”

Want to explore the language?



[Learn words and phrases in Kouri-Vini on Memrise.](#)



[Learn numbers, colors and other sounds in Kouri-Vini with Jonathan, Adrien and others.](#)



[Google’s endangered language exploration app. Point your phone camera to an object and get a translation in Kouri-Vini.](#)

POLITICS & GOVERNANCE

LIVING LIKE A CITIZEN AND BECOMING ONE

For people born in the U.S., citizenship comes along with a birth certificate. It can sometimes be taken for granted.

But for people born in other countries who immigrate to the U.S., citizenship can be a long process.

Fred Ledent moved to the U.S. from Belgium in 1996 to teach French in Louisiana schools. He had just graduated college and applied for a work permit. His parents always encouraged him to travel.

“When I was in elementary, my father would call us in the small kitchen of our home for a family group hug,” Fred said. “He would always say that for now, we all stand in the kitchen, but in 20 years, we would all be in a different continent.”

Louisiana would become Fred’s home. He liked his job, made good friends and loved the hot weather. He embraced the community, and it embraced him back.

In 2005, Fred started the French Café at Maurepas School. The idea was part of a project in a teacher’s guide Fred was using in his fifth-grade French class. Fifth grade students would be “waiters” in a French Café. Parents and other students would order snacks, like cookies or cake, by using French vocabulary. The money used to buy the goodies would go to charity.



Photo courtesy Fred Ledent

Fred gives a speech during the 2021 French Café.

The French Café was supposed to be a small event where students could interact with others while speaking the French language. But Fred’s French Café quickly grew.

Fred held the first French Café during an after school event, so that students in all grades and members of the community could participate. He set up 16 seats in the basement of the main school building where Literacy Night was hosted.

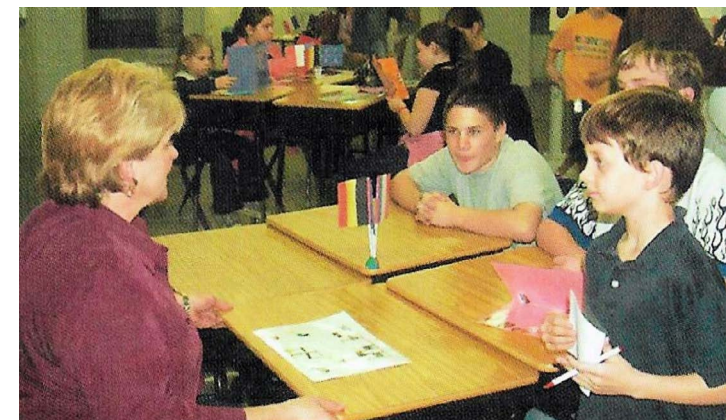
“I had one big table with all the food and my pocket money in front of me, and I was giving out the food,” Fred said. “It was crazy. It was busy.”

The first French Café earned \$177. The latest French Café in 2021 raised \$12,900.

“It is unbelievable, and it’s all because of the response of the community,” Fred said.

MAIN IDEAS

- » People born in other countries who are living and working in the U.S. can apply for citizenship.
- » Citizens have a responsibility to participate in their local communities, help solve local issues and make their towns a better place.
- » Fred Ledent, a French teacher from Belgium, is a leader in his community. He became a U.S. citizen.



A student takes a teacher’s order at the first French Café.



Photos courtesy Fred Ledent

What the French Café looks like today. Students perform on stage for community members eating at lines of cafeteria tables.

The students and people of Maurepas loved the French Café and the fact that the money raised went back to the children in the community. Fred used all the money raised to buy Christmas presents for less fortunate children in the community.

Lori Hess, a teacher at Maurepas School, knew the French Café would become a tradition.

“The French Café embraces things the community values: family time, supporting the school, including local businesses, nurturing our students, and of course, enjoying food,” Lori said.

As the French Café grew, it moved into the main building of the school.

“I needed help to organize everything, and so we started a little French Café committee. We decided what can we do to bring more money?” Fred said. “We want more to give.”

As the French Café committee grew, the event grew right along with it. Committee members brought new ideas, like adding a silent auction, cake walk, and entertainment. Every grade at Maurepas School plans a performance for the French Café, which is now hosted on its own night each December.

“The proud and generous spirit of helping others is glorified in the works of Mr. Fred’s French Café,” Lori said. “He never seeks recognition, only demonstrates the importance and value of good citizenship.”

After Fred got his Green Card to become a permanent resident of the U.S., his goal was to get his citizenship. In 2017, when immigration laws became a hot topic in Washington, Fred decided it was time to become a U.S. citizen. The whole process would take Fred about 10 months.

Fred filled out the paperwork and paid the \$725 fee to file it. Then, he waited for his file to reach the top of the pile. After that, he had to go to an interview at the Immigration Office. At the interview, Fred had to answer questions about American history and laws.

To prepare for the interview, Fred was given a folder with 100 questions and answers, a CD that read the material and a link to an app to quiz himself.

“I used all of them,” Fred said. “I read the questions and answers several times, I listened to the CD in my car, but mainly I studied with the app.”

At the interview, Fred would only be asked five of those questions. The questions are chosen at random so the person applying for citizenship must study them all. Fred studied

for about 3 months, right up until he walked through the door of the Immigration Office.

“I remember sitting in the waiting room for my interview, using the app over and over to review all the questions,” Fred said.

Quiz Yourself

If you were taking the naturalization test to become a citizen, here’s some of the questions you might get asked:

1. Why does the flag have 13 stripes?
2. What is one right or freedom of the First Amendment?
3. How many amendments does the Constitution have?
4. What territory did the U.S. buy from France in 1803?

1. to represent the 13 original colonies 2. freedom of speech, religion, press, petition and assembly 3. 27 4. Louisiana

Within a few weeks, Fred received his authorization and an appointment for a naturalization ceremony.

On January 26, 2018, Fred swore his oath to the U.S. Fred and around 60 other people from 31 different countries received their citizenship at the Department of Homeland Security Offices in New Orleans.

After teaching in Louisiana schools for two decades and leading the French Café for 13 years, Fred officially became a U.S. citizen.

He said the naturalization ceremony was very nice.

Lori agreed. She attended the ceremony and took plenty of pictures of her friend. She said she got a little teary-eyed watching Fred wave his miniature USA flag and receive his certificate.

“Fred’s smile was beaming from ear to ear the remainder of the day, and his first official meal as a U.S. citizen was gumbo,” Lori said.

She was proud of her friend then and remains proud of him today.

“Fred is the epitome of what a good citizen should be,” Lori said. “He absolutely makes the world a better place with his caring and selfless spirit. And he does not take any of our freedoms and privileges for granted.”

Fred said he truly hopes the French Café will continue for years to come, even after he eventually decides to retire.

“I can imagine coming as a guest to enjoy the good food, and still contributing a little bit to the cause,” Fred said.



Photos from Fred’s naturalization ceremony. Students and teachers at Maurepas School decorated Fred’s classroom to celebrate. (bottom left)



Photos courtesy Lori Hess

CONTINUITY & CHANGE

THEN & NOW: THE SCIENCE BEHIND SWEET SUGARCANE



This picture shows the Sugar Experiment Station in 1894 in Audubon Park in New Orleans.

One word: Science.

Science has touched nearly every part of sugarcane farming in Louisiana.

Matt Gravois, a fourth-generation sugarcane farmer, saw the way science and technology changed his family farm in St. James Parish as he grew up.

“When I was smaller, it was a lot of sweating,” Matt said. “We had open cab tractors.”

Today, Matt gets to ride in an air-conditioned cab, and every tractor has a computer inside.

“When the computers work, it takes a lot of guesswork out,” Matt said.



This picture gives a modern-day aerial view of the LSU AgCenter's Sugar Research Station in St. Gabriel.

GPS guides help tractors drive straight, creating more precise rows. Computer technology helps farmers figure out the exact amount of fertilizer and chemicals the cane needs to grow. Data about soil and crop records are kept on computers.

“That's things that were all done by hand and paper and pencil 15 years ago,” Matt said.

Beyond the day-to-day differences in the work, over time science improves the sugarcane itself. And there are members of the Gravois family who help make that happen.

Kenneth Gravois grew up with a love of agriculture and a love of learning. He decided to combine the two and got a college degree in plant breeding.

MAIN IDEAS

- » Sugarcane has been grown in Louisiana for nearly 300 years. Some families have been farming sugarcane for generations.
- » New technology has changed the way sugarcane is planted and harvested. Much of the work is done mechanically rather than by hand.
- » New varieties of sugar are created through plant breeding and scientific research. Varieties give farmers new and improved types of sugarcane.

Plant breeders cross different types of sugarcane to create new varieties with better qualities. New varieties can be sweeter or more resistant to disease.

New varieties have helped sugarcane farmers increase their yields, or the amount of sugarcane harvested. Since the 1930s, sugarcane yields have multiplied by four. In 1931, the average farmer harvested 2,119 pounds of sugar per acre. Today, farmers harvest anywhere from 8,000 to 9,000 pounds of sugar per acre.

“What's done that?” Kenneth said.
“Research. Science. New varieties of sugar.”

Kenneth works as the statewide sugarcane specialist at LSU's Sugar Research Station, where new sugarcane varieties are made. The Sugar Research Station was started in 1885 by sugarcane growers. Kenneth said even then, farmers knew they needed science.

They know it now too.

“Research is the only way we can get better,” Matt said.

The 1,000-acre farm where Matt works is a secondary station for the Sugar Research Station. Developing a new sugarcane variety takes close to 12 years. But when new varieties are ready to go to growers, LSU sends the seed cane to Matt's farm first.

“We try them out to see how they work,” Matt said. “It's nice to be able to see which one we think will do good before anybody else even gets a chance to have it.”

After the cane has grown for a year, Matt shares the seed cane with other farms across the state.

Louisiana is the northernmost place you'll find sugarcane growing. Because of the unique environment, all sugarcane varieties

grown in Louisiana are created in Louisiana.

Sugarcane has been part of Louisiana agriculture and economy since Jesuit priests first brought the crop to the state in 1751.

The Gravois family has been farming sugarcane since 1914 when Charles Gravois Sr. started Blackberry Farms.

The farm has been passed down over the years with brothers, sisters, cousins and more working side by side. With so many generations involved in the same family business, there’s sometimes talk of the old days and what the founder of the farm would say if he could see the changes of today.

Sugarcane used to be hand-cut with machetes. It’s all harvested mechanically now. It’s not unusual for farmers to talk on cell phones while riding in tractor cabs. Podcasts share information about the latest sugarcane news and technology.

Kenneth’s dad is 93 years old and still around Blackberry Farms. He lived through and adapted to many of the changes technology brought to sugarcane.

“Sometimes he still can’t believe it when he’s looking at it,” Kenneth said. “Change kind of sneaks up on you.”

Kenneth called sugarcane research a slow and steady progress, but he is certain it will continue.

“It’s scary to think how in the world we’re going to double the yields of today,” Kenneth said. “But we will.”

From the field to the factory

PLANTING

Sugarcane is not grown from a tiny seed. Whole cane stalks, or smaller sections of stalk called billets, are planted in August. This “seed cane” is laid down in trenches and covered with soil. New varieties have increased the number of crops farmers can harvest from a single planting. Farmers now harvest around four crops before they need to replot and replant.

GROWTH

In the spring, tractors stir the soil on top of the cane. Then, the farmer adds fertilizers.

CULTIVATION

Just like the grass in your yard, sugarcane does not grow much during the winter. When temperatures heat up, sugarcane can grow more than an inch per day.

HARVESTING

One year later, in the following August, the cane is cut and collected by harvesters, like the one shown on the right. Matt said cutting cane is the hardest part of the work.

TRANSPORT

The cane is brought to raw sugar factories, or mills.



A then and now comparison of farm equipment on the Gravois family sugarcane farm, Blackberry Farms, in St. James Parish.



Photos courtesy of Kenneth Gravois

DID YOU KNOW?

Technology has also helped mills become more precise. Machines use computers to monitor milling processes. Better knives and filters mean less sugar is lost in processing.

From the factory to your kitchen

MILLING

Farms bring a set amount of sugarcane to mills every day during harvest season. The cane is weighed and washed. Then, it is chopped and crushed to extract juice. The juice will be turned into sugar. The leftover woody cane is used to make paper.

CLARIFICATION

The sugarcane juice is strained and heated. Lime is added to separate any mud mixed with the juice.

EVAPORATION

The juice is boiled. Boiling removes the water in the juice and leaves a thick syrup.

CRYSTALLIZATION

The syrup is boiled again. Sugar crystals grow. The leftover syrup is called molasses and is used to feed cows. The sugar crystals are sent to refineries.

REFINING

The sugar crystals are melted and purified to create the white sugar you buy in the store.

ECONOMICS & TRADE

LOUISIANA SHRIMPERS FIGHT TO STAY AFLOAT IN THE MARKET



Fresh-caught shrimp is weighed at B&J Seafood in Hammond.

Photo by Ava Borskey

Louisiana is known for its seafood.

The state has more than 125,000 miles of rivers, bayous and swamps. Another 7,720 miles of the state stretches along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Within all that water, there's a world of seafood, from crabs and oysters to fish and shrimp.

Acy Cooper has been shrimping for over 40 years.

"We do this because we love it," Acy said. "It's in our blood."

Acy leaves his house in Plaquemines Parish at 5 p.m. He goes out into the Gulf and works through the night catching shrimp.

He said it's hard work, but he loves the freedom of being out on the water.

That feeling of freedom is something he's not afraid to fight for. Acy fought his way back to the water after Hurricane Katrina destroyed his home in 2005. He's bounced back time and time again as more hurricanes hit the coast. Today, he's president of the Louisiana Shrimp Association and a vocal advocate for the industry. One of his biggest battles: low shrimp prices.

"Everything else in this country is going up," Acy said. "Our shrimp just went down."

In 2021, Acy and other shrimpers caught less shrimp than usual. Because of Hurricane Ida,

MAIN IDEAS

- » Louisiana is part of a bigger economy, including other states and countries across the world.
- » Even though seafood is caught locally, the state imports seafood from countries in Asia. This creates competition.
- » Competition, along with supply and demand, affects prices.
- » Louisiana fishers are finding creative ways to make their catch stand out.

they lost valuable time to go out on the water during shrimp season. Normally, a shortage would make prices go up. But shrimp that was imported, or brought in from foreign countries, was still on the shelves in Louisiana.

"It's so much shrimp in the country that even when we go to work, they've got a surplus of shrimp sitting there," Acy said.

Rex Caffey, a marine resource economist, said the U.S. began to import more foreign seafood in the '80s. Importing seafood from foreign countries ensured seasonal products, like shrimp, would always be available, even during the off season.

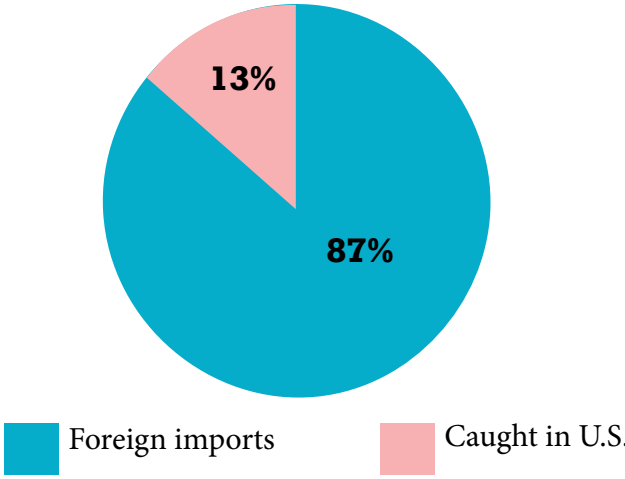
"It was seen, at the time, not so much as a threat but a complement," Rex said.

Since the '80s, however, the U.S. moved from importing about 20% of the seafood it consumed to more than 80%. Today, the U.S. produces about 13% of the seafood in the country.

This unbalance increased competition between local seafood and imports from places like China and India. Foreign countries have lower labor costs and fewer environmental regulations than the U.S.

"They can harvest farm raised shrimp, for example, ship it to the U.S. and still sell it cheaper than shrimp that we just catch with a net," Rex said.

2020 SHRIMP ORIGINS



*Import and landings data from NOAA Fisheries

With shrimp prices low at the docks, Acy is opening his own seafood market. He'll sell the shrimp he and his sons catch. He said, hopefully, he'll be able to get a little bit more money by doing it all himself.

“You have to do that,” Acy said. “When you’re a fisherman, you have to explore every avenue to make a living.”

Rex said in the past, many fishers had their own markets. Without global or even regional trade routes, fishermen promoted their products based on the basin where they fished.

“We got away from that where everything was commoditized,” Rex said. “Then slowly, we started seeing, across the U.S., a return to more local branding.”

Local branding helps fishers connect their catch to the community.

Emphasizing the local, wild-caught qualities of Louisiana seafood can help fishermen sell for higher prices. It also helps Louisiana seafood stand out on the shelves.

“People know the difference between a shrimp raised in a pond in Thailand and shrimp captured in the Gulf of Mexico,” Rex said.

Beyond creative marketing, Louisiana SeaGrant works with local fishers to help them reduce costs. Louisiana SeaGrant looks at ways fishers can become more efficient through things like ice use and delivery timing.



Photo by Ava Borskey

Acy's seafood market (above) is close to opening in Franklinton. On the far wall, you can see pictures Acy (right) took while shrimping out on the Gulf of Mexico.



Vermillion Bay Sweet is a brand of Louisiana seafood owned by the Port of Delcambre in Vermillion Parish. The vintage label makes it clear the seafood is local, wild-caught and fresh.

Photo courtesy of Rex Caffey and Louisiana Direct Seafood

Rex said it's about finding balance. He said globalization, or international trade, is likely here to stay.

Acy and other local fishers are asking the government to support fair trade. Fair trade does not stop imports. Instead, it creates a partnership in international trade. It requires higher standards for imports. Fair trade certifies the products have good quality and come from places with safe working conditions that pay employees fairly.

Acy hopes this will help more money find its way back into the industry and encourage younger people to join the business.

The number of commercial fishers in Louisiana is less than half of what it was before Hurricane Katrina. The average age of fishers in the state is 56.

“The true facts of what’s really happening in the industry, you know, we’re dying,” Acy said. “We have a lot of things coming at us that just really affects us to the core. It gets to be a battle, and that’s where we at. We’re in a battle right now to survive,” he added.

To Acy, the industry is something worth saving. He said he’s never once thought of hanging it up. The seafood industry is as much a part of him as it is a part of the state.

The seafood industry brings up to \$2 billion to Louisiana each year. But Rex said it brings much more than money. It adds to the culture. Seafood is something that’s thought of by tourists who visit the state. And it’s something that’s important to the people who live here year round.

“It’s an iconic aspect of our culture and our state,” Rex said. “You think about Louisiana on a national level, what comes to mind? Well, seafood.”

ECONOMICS VOCAB DASH

SUPPLY

The number of products for sale.

DEMAND

The number of people who want to buy the product.



“Supply and demand should be and are the main factors that determine price and affordability and accessibility,” Rex said.

IMPORT

A good brought in from another country.

EXPORT

A good sent to another country to be sold.

NET IMPORTER

A country that imports more than it exports. The U.S. is a net importer of seafood.

NICHE MARKETING

Promoting products to a smaller audience with specific preferences. Local branding is an example of niche marketing.

INFLATION

The prices of goods increase over time so that a dollar has less spending power.



Shrimpers get about \$1.50 per pound at the dock, around the same price they were paid in the '80s. Because of inflation, that \$1.50 only has about 50 cents worth of spending power today.

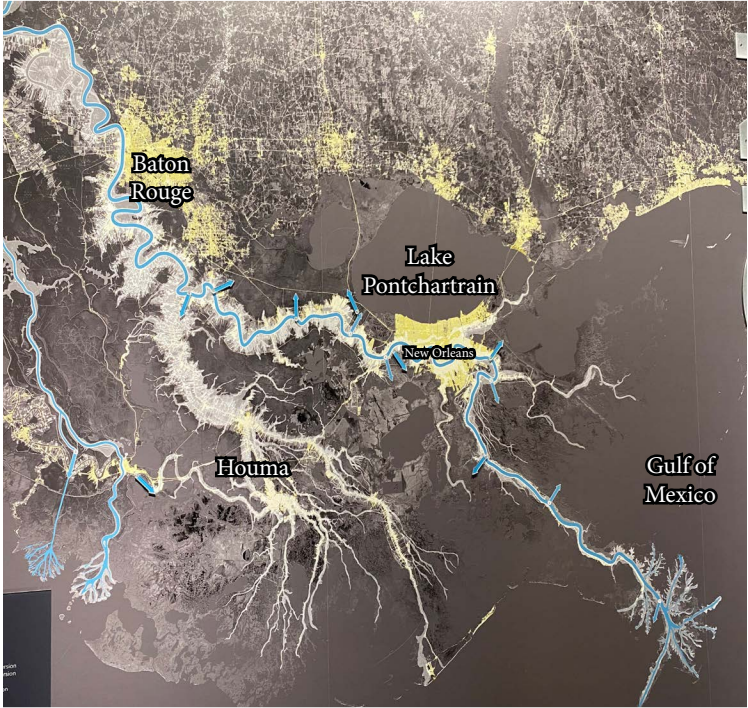
PHYSICAL & HUMAN SYSTEMS

HOW THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER AND LEVEES SHAPED LIFE IN LOUISIANA

The Mississippi River has shaped the state of Louisiana.

Quite literally, the river creates the border between Louisiana and Mississippi. The river built much of the land that gives Louisiana its iconic boot shape.

Clint Wilson is an LSU professor who researches the Mississippi River. Clint explained that in the past, the river’s path wandered across the state. At one point, the water flowed out into the Gulf of Mexico through a channel near Houma. At another point in time, the Mississippi River exited the state near Lafayette. At each location, the river deposited sediments, which built land.



This map shows the southeastern part of the state. The current path of the Mississippi River is shown in bright blue. The white areas show river paths of the past. The yellow areas represent cities. The blue arrows show possible sediment diversions.

Today, the Southwest Pass in Plaquemines Parish is the major river channel leading into the Gulf. Man-made levees keep the river running through this single course.

The levees protect people and places from floodwaters. At the same time, the levees prevent the river from reaching wetlands. The river can no longer deposit sediment or build new land in the same way.

The existing land is sinking, through a process called subsidence. With no new sediment to make

MAIN IDEAS

- » People in Louisiana have been trying to control the Mississippi River since the French founded New Orleans.
- » The government built levees along the Mississippi River to protect cities from flooding.
- » This had many effects on the environment and the people who live in the state.
- » Engineers still work on levees today.

up for the loss, Louisiana’s coast is eroding, or gradually slipping away.

“Most people talk about it as something that happened after 1927, after the big flood of ’27,” Craig Colten said. “But it was started much earlier, and it’s a process that continues.”

Craig is a geographer. He studies historical geography, or how the physical features of the past still affect the present.

Levee construction began as early as the 1700s. The French built levees along the riverfront to protect New Orleans. People built their own levees around their property.

“They weren’t all consistent, and they broke with frightening frequency,” Craig said.

In the 1870s, southerners asked the U.S. federal government to build a levee system.

WHAT IS A LEVEE?

A levee is a wall that blocks water. The goal of a levee is to stop water from going places people don’t want it to go.

Levees run parallel to, or alongside, the water. Levees can be natural or man-made.

Natural levees are made from sediment that the river pushes into piles on its bank.

The French Quarter in New Orleans is built on a natural levee. The natural levee is about 12 feet above sea level.

Man-made levees are built by engineers. Man-made levees are built with metal, wood, sand, rocks or concrete.

The man-made levees in Baton Rouge are over 20 feet tall.

The purpose of this first levee system was to improve navigation and trade. Trapping the water between two levees would deepen the river. Bigger ships could sail up and down the Mississippi.

By the early 1900s, the purpose of the levees was redefined as flood protection. Engineers began building things like the Bonnet Carré Spillway. When the river gets too high, spillways are opened to control the release of water and prevent flooding. You may have driven over a spillway. Spillways often double as bridges on maps.

The Mississippi River has shaped Louisiana in ways that go beyond maps too.

Craig taught geography at LSU for 21 years. At LSU, the geography and anthropology departments are combined. Anthropology is the study of human societies. Geography is the study of places. By combining the two, there is a special focus on the relationship between people and place.

Craig said that without levees, the lives of people along the lower half of the river would be different. Very few of the chemical plants along the river would exist because it would regularly flood. Farmers would plant rice, a crop that needs flooded soil, instead of sugarcane, a crop that likes dry soil. More homes would be built on stilts, high above the ground.

“We have invested billions of dollars in this levee system that supports the current complex of industry, agriculture and urbanization,” Craig said. “Without that, the landscape would be very different, and it’s all very much connected to our relationship with the environment.”

Louisiana’s relationship with the land has been one of loss. Ever since the first levees were built in the 1700s, the people of Louisiana began to starve wetlands of new sediment and increase land loss. Louisiana loses a football field’s worth of land every 100 minutes.

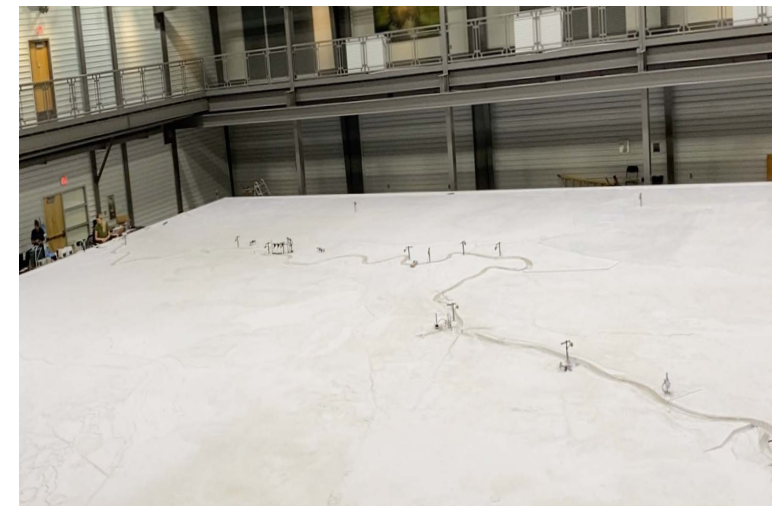
“That’s a geographical issue,” Craig said. “We’re losing land. We’re losing the coast. How do we deal with the changing geography of coastal Louisiana?”

That’s a question that Clint’s research is trying to answer. Clint runs the LSU Center for River Studies. The Center for River Studies is home to a model of the lower 190 miles of the Mississippi River.

“The physical model studies how the river water and sediment, sand, moves down under different flows — under sea level rise, if you open and close diversions or spillways — how that impacts it,” Clint said.

The research hopes to help scientists and engineers understand the best way to use the river to restore the coast. The model river can reproduce what’s happening to sediment in the real river. It can also make projections for the future.

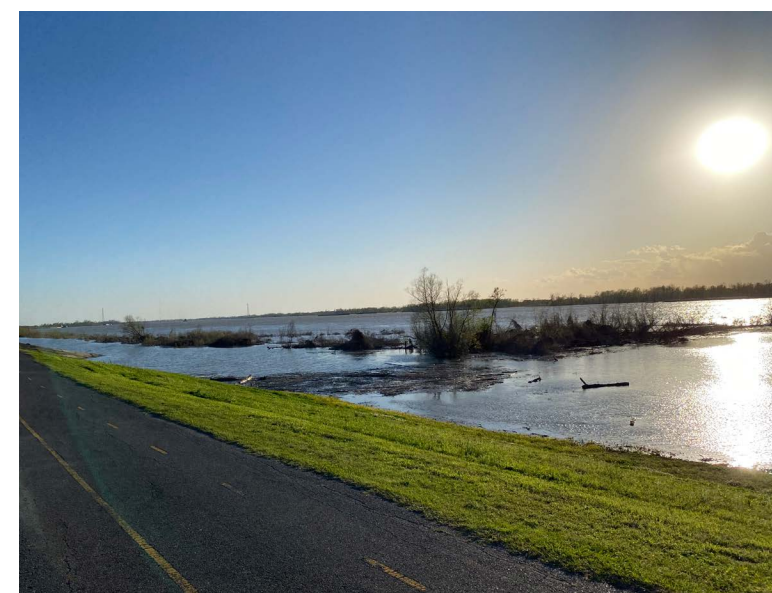
Clint and other researchers are looking into possible river sediment diversions. Sediment diversions would replace sections of the levee with gates. The gates could then be opened to reconnect the river to the wetlands. This would allow sediments to reach distributaries again and slow down land loss.



The Center for River Studies’ model Mississippi River is made of 216 panels.



The Mississippi River’s path from Donaldsonville to the Gulf of Mexico is carved into the panels. The trench is the river. The thin ridges represent the levees. Clint and other researchers at the Center for River Studies run water and plastic particles representing sediment through the river model.



Just as controlling the river with levees impacted the future, so will changing the flow of the water with sediment diversions. It will affect not only the future geography of the coast, but the people who live along it.

Adding sediment to the wetlands could help reduce storm surge in some communities. It could increase flooding in others. When new sediment reaches wetlands through diversions, freshwater comes with it. Changing the salinity of the water would impact oysters, shrimp and the fishers who depend on the areas to make a living.

“The river is dynamic,” Clint said. “There’s a lot of things you need to consider just from an engineering perspective, let alone an ecological perspective.”

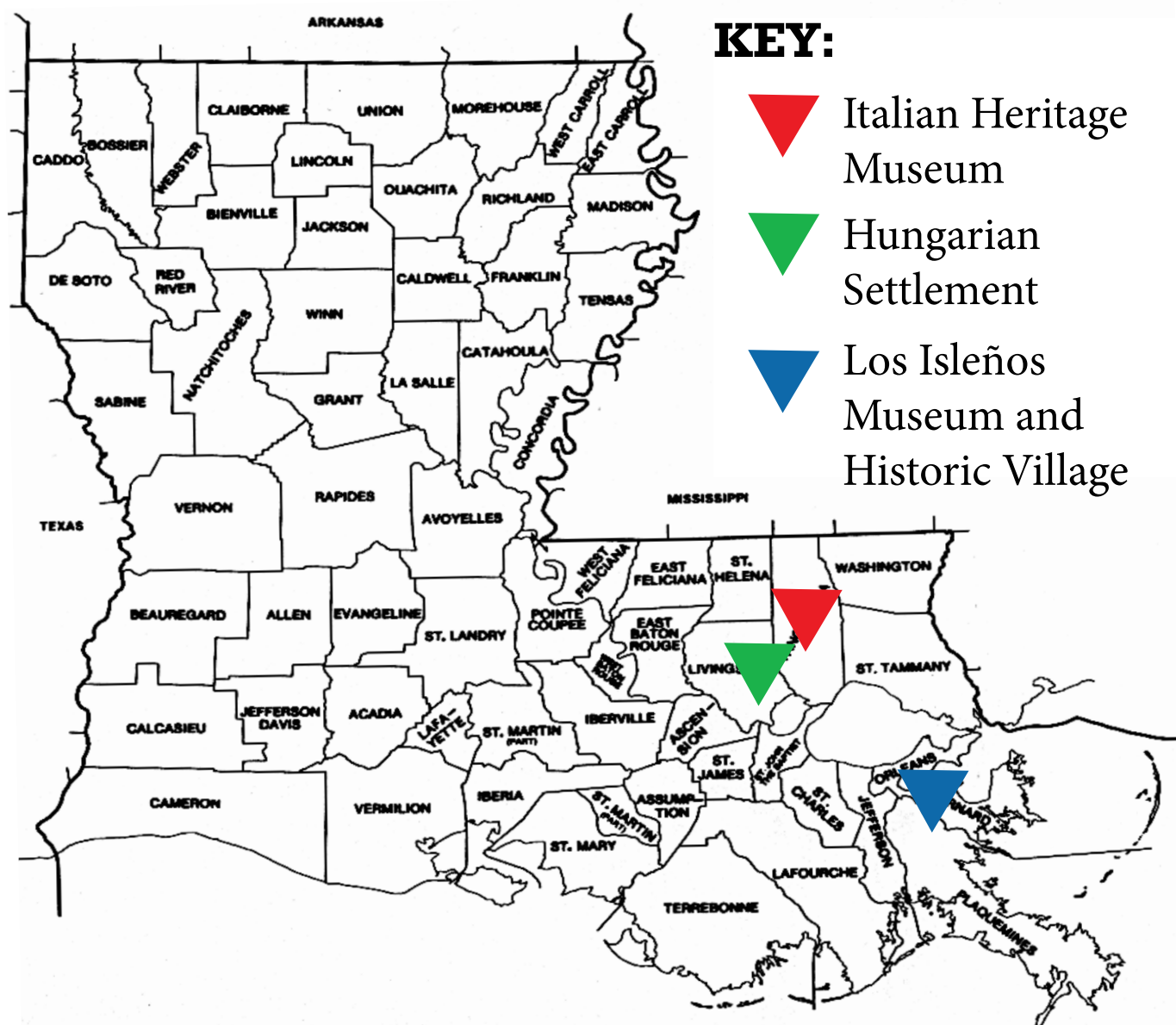
The ecological perspective considers the relationship between living things and the physical environment. It considers everything from plants to animals to people and how each is connected to the world around it.

Craig said it’s important to give attention to how we not only protect the coast but protect coastal cultures and coastal communities. He said the connection between people and place in Louisiana is undeniable.

The photo on the left is taken from the top of the levee near the LSU campus. A paved road on top of the levee gives bikers and runners a place to exercise. The grass side of the levee slopes down to the Mississippi River.

MIGRATION & SETTLEMENT

THE PATCHWORK OF LOUISIANA



MAIN IDEAS

- » Many ethnic groups settled in Louisiana and continue to live in the state today.
- » Each group brought their culture with them. Strong influences of these cultures can still be seen in communities today.
- » Three examples are the Hungarian Settlement in Albany, the Los Isleños village in St. Bernard and the Italian community in Independence.

Louisiana is a gumbo pot of cultures.

You don't have to look far to see the influences left by early settlers. From last names and road signs to food and traditions, the people of the past left their imprint on the present.

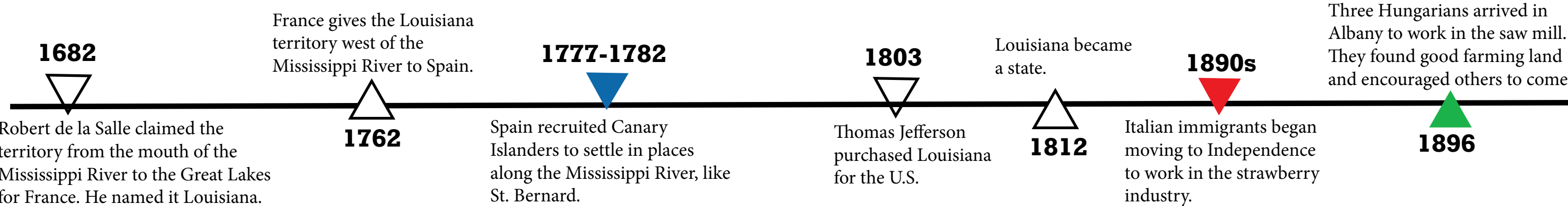
Before Louisiana was a state, it was a French territory. When most people think of Louisiana, French culture comes to mind. One of the most famous stories of Louisiana settlers is that of the Acadians. The Acadians, who would later become Cajuns, were French colonists who were exiled from British colonies in Canada.

But the French Acadians were far from the only settlers who came to Louisiana.

At one point, part of the Louisiana territory was owned by Spain, which brought many settlers of Spanish heritage. Other diverse groups, like Italians, Hungarians, and more, moved to Louisiana.

Each group has its own story — all different, but with certain similarities. And each added to the roux of the gumbo, creating a mix of cultures that can only be described as uniquely Louisiana.

TIMELINE



ITALIANS PLANT STRAWBERRIES AND ROOTS IN LOUISIANA



Photo by Ava Borskey

This mural sits high in an alcove at the Italian Heritage Museum in Independence. The silhouettes represent an Italian family immigrating to Louisiana. The family is standing on the deck of a ship, looking out at St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans. Underneath hangs an American flag, framed by two Sicilian flags.

If you go to Sicily in southern Italy, you'll find family names similar to the ones in Independence, Louisiana — like the Orlandos and LaMarcas.

Donnie Orlando and Libby LaMarca Rose run the Italian Heritage Museum in Independence.

“I’m very proud of my heritage,” Donnie said. “My great grandfather, my grandfather came here not knowing if they were going to make it.”

Donnie’s grandparents migrated to New Orleans from Sicily and eventually found their way to Independence. They were two among many.

“One of the amazing parts of the story is how similar everybody’s story is,” Libby said. “We grew up with Italian grandparents who didn’t speak English or spoke very little. Then, our parents were integrated into the society.”

Thousands of Italian immigrants came through New Orleans in the 1880s and 1890s. Chief among them were Sicilians. Times were bad in Sicily — violence and poverty plagued the people. They left in search of a better life in America.

Many Italians found work on sugarcane plantations in Louisiana. Others worked on strawberry farms near Independence. They eventually saved enough money to buy their own land and start their own berry farms.

By the 1920s, Independence was the state’s primary shipping center for strawberries. Today, one of the state’s biggest strawberry farms is owned by an Italian: Anthony Liuzza of Liuzza Farms.

Though the Italian immigrants pulled up roots to move, they planted them back down.

“They brought their culture with them into the U.S.,” Donnie said.

That culture remains strong, especially through the Italians’ Catholic faith.

Every March, the community hosts a St. Joseph’s Altar. The St. Joseph’s Altar originated in Sicily as a way to honor St. Joseph on his feast day.

Marie Guzzardo’s family helps organize the altar, which is a community effort. All the food on the altar is donated. Local farmers provide strawberries and families cook their signature recipes. “Saints,” or chosen people from the community who are battling illnesses, eat first. Then, the rest of the community can join the meal.

“It’s just a tradition thing,” Marie said. “As Italians, we try to keep our traditions going.”

Italian traditions are alive throughout the state through things like red gravy and muffalettas. But it’s celebrated, defined and documented in Independence by people like Donnie, Libby and Marie.



The Independence Klondyke strawberry was said to be one of the sweetest berries and was shipped as far away as Alaska.



The Guzzardo sisters prepare the St. Joseph’s Altar at the Mater Dolorosa Catholic School. The sisters make sure everything on the altar is symmetrical, so if you were to fold it in half, it would match perfectly.



The “carutta gaza” is an Italian cart used for parades and special occasions. This cart shows the old Mater Dolorosa Church in Independence, which was turned into the Italian Heritage Museum after the new church was built.

SPAIN RECRUITS CANARY ISLANDERS TO SETTLE IN LOUISIANA

Every March, the Fiesta De Los Isleños brings to life the history of the early settlers of St. Bernard.

After the French and Indian War, Louisiana became a Spanish territory. In 1777, Spain began recruiting colonists to send to Louisiana. More than 3,000 colonists came from the Canary Islands, a group of eight Spanish islands located close to Africa.

Canary Islanders, also known as Isleños, settled at four spots along the Mississippi River. The San Bernardo, or St. Bernard settlement, was the most successful.

“They were asked to settle here,” Mary Montgomery said. “They did, and they never left. And that’s why they have this festival.”

Mary first came to the festival looking for a pair of earrings made from Tenerife lace, a style of embroidery from the Canary Islands.

After attending the festival, Mary began taking Tenerife lace lessons at the



A Canarian flag hangs above other objects from the Canarian culture.

Los Isleños Research Library. While there, she read about the culture.

Many of the early Isleños were farmers, like Albert Estopinal. Albert went on to be the first Canary Islander descendant to serve in the House of Representatives. He was also a Louisiana lieutenant governor.

The house where Albert grew up is part of the Los Isleños Museum Complex. Albert’s descendants are still found in St. Bernard, like Jerry Estopinal.

Every festival, Jerry sits in the Estopinal house. He tells anyone who passes by the story of his ancestor.

“He was a person that worked all over, and he was from right here,” Jerry said. “Just a farm boy, essentially.”

Isleños who didn’t farm worked as fur trappers and fishers. Many in the community continue the tradition of fishing, like Mike Martin.

“I don’t remember how old I was the first time I worked on a fishing boat,” Mike said.

Beyond working on boats, Mike even built a few of his own. Now, he’s retired and spends his time making model boats.

“The same way you make the model, you make the big one,” Mike said.

Traces of Spanish influence are seen in jambalaya and New Orleans architecture.

But in St. Bernard, the people hold a direct connection to a specific group of Spaniards, the Los Isleños. Every year they gather to promote the heritage and culture and to keep the legacy of Spanish colonial Louisiana alive.



Click the picture to hear Felip Martín play the timple, a traditional instrument from the Canary Islands. Felip is from the Canary Island Lanzarote. He is a luthier, or person who makes stringed instruments. Felip travels across the Atlantic Ocean to attend the Fiesta De Los Isleños in St. Bernard every year.



Teneriffe lace is a style of needlework from the Canary Islands. In this design, the colors alternate between the Canarian flag and colors of other Louisiana groups.



Mike Martin tells festival goers about his model boats at the Los Isleños Fiesta on March 12, 2022.



El Museo de Los Isleños, or the Los Isleños Museum, is one of nine buildings on the 22-acre property of the Los Isleños Museum and Historic Village in St. Bernard.



The bedroom inside the Estopinal House.

THREE HUNGARIANS JOURNEY TO LIVINGSTON PARISH AND START A SETTLEMENT

In 1896, an ad for a Louisiana lumber company ran in the newspapers of Hungarian communities in the northern U.S.

Three men, Julius Bruskay, Adam Mocsary and Tivador Zboray, traveled south to Albany to work in the Brackenridge sawmill.

They found newly cleared, farmland, bought 20-acre plots and wrote back for other Hungarians to join.

“They were Hungarians that wanted to get back to the soil and get back to owning their own property,” Alex Kropog said. “To get out of the coal mines and to get out of northern steel industries.”

Alex’s grandfather was one of those Hungarians. He left the coal mines of Virginia to settle in Albany, which would become the largest rural Hungarian settlement in the U.S.

“Isn’t it strange how things happen?” Alex said.

Today, Alex and his wife, Royanne Kropog, chair the



A quilt pattern depicting Hungarian life in Albany hangs on the outside of the Hungarian Settlement Museum.

Hungarian Settlement Museum. The museum includes donations from 145 people hoping to preserve the stories of the Hungarian settlers.

When the Hungarians arrived in Louisiana, they named their settlement Árpádhon, after Árpád, a ruler who united Hungarian tribes into one nation in the ninth century.

Since Árpád united Hungary, the country has suffered several wars. Each bout of violence scattered Hungarians from their homeland.

The Hungarian Settlement in Albany is part of the diaspora, or scattering, of Hungary.

The Hungarian culture and community in Albany was held

together by two local churches that are still around today, St. Margaret Catholic Church and the Hungarian Presbyterian Church.

The churches hosted gatherings, like the Hungarian Harvest Dance.

“The harvest dance was brought here with the people,” Alex said. “They brought the music in their heads.”

Settlers passed the harvest dance down. It is still performed in Albany today. In traditional fashion, grapes and apples are hung from the ceiling to symbolize an abundant harvest.

Though no grapes or apples are harvested in Albany, the original Hungarian settlers made a good living farming strawberries.

“Everybody raised strawberries,” Alex said. “The Hungarians and the non-Hungarians, all the immigrants, all of the people that were here already would raise strawberries.”

A few small Hungarian strawberry farms remain in the community.

Despite its distance from central Europe, the Hungarian Settlement has a close relationship with Hungary.

Alex and Royanne have traveled to Hungary several times to visit family. Hungarian ambassadors often visit the Louisiana settlement and museum. Four people in the Hungarian Settlement, including Alex and Royanne, became dual citizens of Hungary and the U.S., through a Hungarian nationality program.

In 2019, Alex and Royanne received the Gold Cross of Merit from the Hungarian government for the work they’ve done to keep Hungarian culture alive in the U.S.

Alex said the award was for the entire Hungarian Settlement community, who all work together to preserve the Hungarian heritage.

Royanne defined the museum’s focus in one word: “Authenticity.”

FUN FACT

A E I O U ... and More?

The English alphabet has 26 letters total. The Hungarian alphabet has 40 letters and 14 vowels.

A Á E É I Í
O Ó Ő Ö U Ü U Ű



The case above is filled with Hungarian porcelain, like the handpainted Herend porcelain below.

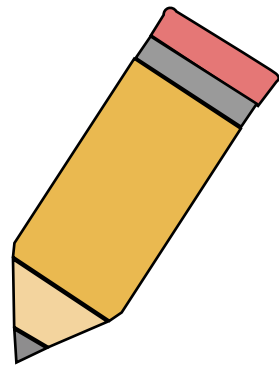
Hungarian embroidery hangs on the wall. Royanne Kropog embroidered the tablecloth below.



Alex and Royanne Kropog stand in the main room of the Hungarian Settlement Museum in Albany.

APPENDIX

TEACHERS' RESOURCES



“To be productive members of society, students must be critical consumers of information they read, hear and observe.”

The above quote is found at the top of Louisiana’s year-long social studies overviews for nearly every grade level. From third grade onward, students are expected to use primary and secondary sources to learn content. As students grow and mature, most of the informative content they consume will shift from textbooks to news articles and digital media posts. By exposing students to journalism at a young age, they can not only learn school material but valuable life skills, like evaluating a variety of sources, forming educated opinions and making connections across people, time and place.

This project transforms the curriculum of the K-12 Louisiana Student Standards for Social Studies into dynamic pieces of journalism with interviewed sources, researched writing and ancillary content, like vocabulary sidebars, maps and timelines.

While the key themes of the state’s curriculum (referred to in the articles by the large bold headings) offer broad overviews of the content students are expected to learn, I tailored my writing to the specifics found in the Louisiana Department of Education’s companion documents and scope and sequence overviews. Within the units and essential content provided in those supporting materials, I found countless story ideas and angles. I focused on six ideas and created pieces of journalism to illustrate the curriculum in a stimulating way.

With the 2022 updates to the standards, Louisiana history will now be embedded in world and U.S. history throughout all grade levels. Before writing, I sifted through the grade level expectations, key connections and primary content and concepts for third through eighth grades. In this appendix, you’ll find a synthesized list of the content, concepts and connections on which I based each of the stories.

With so many units across so many grades, these are not the only connections to the curriculum, but the ones I personally kept at the forefront of my mind while writing. Some articles briefly introduce other related topics in the curriculum or offer an opportunity for a larger classroom conversation. I noted a few of these jumping off points in all caps at the bottom of the lists. I hope the pieces prove to be valuable classroom resources that open doors for teachers and students alike.

SOCIETY & CULTURE

Saving Louisiana’s Native Language Kouri-Vini

- Explain how historic and cultural elements are represented through symbols, landmarks, food, **language**, traditions, and festivals/celebrations
- Describe the impact of different groups on Louisiana’s culture
- Explain how the French influenced Louisiana through their cultural influences of religion, education, government, **language**, food, and music
- Explain ways African cultures influenced culture in Louisiana (food, **language**, art, music, spirituality)
- Give examples of how Native Americans, Europeans, and free and enslaved Africans adapted to living together
- Describe how various social movements and reforms in Louisiana resulted from groups and individuals who exercised their rights and responsibilities to seek change

POLITICS & GOVERNANCE

Living Like A Citizen And Becoming One

*Combines standards found in the Conflict and Compromise key theme

- Describe the qualities of a good leader and citizen
- Discuss how good leaders and citizens help others
- Understand the role an individual plays in a larger community
- Explain how citizens can help their communities by solving local issues
- Explain the rights and responsibilities of individuals in making a community and state a better place to live
- Identify the key requirements to become a U.S. citizen
- Explain what naturalization is and determine the qualifications for becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Then & Now: The Science Behind Sweet Sugarcane

- Explain how technology has changed family and community life in Louisiana over time
- Recognize that some producers use natural resources to produce goods to sell to consumers
- Explore ways people are producers and consumers and why they depend on one another
- Explain how inventions and new processes affect the lives of people
- Explain the importance of technology and innovation and how it impacts people every day
- Explain how growth and production in Louisiana agriculture was influenced by technology, machinery and methods

ECONOMICS & TRADE

Louisiana Shrimpers Fight To Stay Afloat In The Market

- Discuss Louisiana’s big industries (oil production, agriculture, **seafood**, tourism) and the reasons for those industries existing in Louisiana
- Recognize that citizens can earn income from careers related to the state’s natural resources
- Discuss cultural elements as reasons people would want to visit Louisiana (**food**/language/music, Louisiana cities and regions, festivals and events, geography/hunting/**fishing**)
- Recognize that Louisiana is part of a bigger economy
- Differentiate between imports and exports in Louisiana
- Explain what factors impact the price of a good or service, and how they impact the price (competition, supply, demand)
- Explain how supply and demand affect Louisiana products and industries (price, exports, domestic and international trade, jobs/employment)
- Explain why individuals and businesses engage in trade
- Explain how domestic and international competition affects Louisiana industries
- Explain how economic concepts relate to personal economic decisions
- Explain how civic engagement can solve issues

JUMPING OFF POINT: A larger conversation about globalization

PHYSICAL & HUMAN SYSTEMS

How The Mississippi River And Levees Shaped Life In Louisiana

- Illustrate how natural processes have created and/or changed the physical characteristics of places in the U.S. (the geographical and historical influences of the Mississippi River)
- Describe the impact of geography on the history, culture, and economy of places in Louisiana
- Explain how humans have adapted to the physical environment in Louisiana
- Describe how people have changed the land to meet their basic needs over time
- Analyze ways people have tried to control the Mississippi River and the effects on Louisiana’s environment and people
- Describe how levees meet people’s needs (protect cities, towns, homes, and crops from flooding)
- Understand the impact humans have on the environment
- Evaluate proposed solutions to coastal erosion (sediment diversions, marsh creation)
- Analyze and predict consequences of environmental modifications on Louisiana and its inhabitants

JUMPING OFF POINT: A larger conversation about Louisiana industries and what physical factors support each

JUMPING OFF POINT: Great Mississippi River Flood of 1927

MIGRATION & SETTLEMENT

The Patchwork of Louisiana

- Recognize many factors influence the movement and settlement of people, such as physical features, climate, and gaining land or seeking opportunities
- Identify the causes and effects of migration on Louisiana
- Recognize patterns in migration to identify the push-pull factors that led cultural groups to move and settle in Louisiana
- Analyze how the physical features and natural resources of Louisiana affected the migration patterns of cultural groups
- Compare and contrast the influence of cultural groups in Louisiana. Describe the causes and effects of cultural diffusion and its impact on diversity in early Louisiana
- Describe the contributions early settlement groups made to Louisiana (French, Spanish, Africans, **Acadians**, **Canary Islanders/Islenos**), and explain how those contributions influenced the development of Louisiana
- Examine how diversity can be seen through different foods, language, and customs today
- Describe ways cultural groups influenced Louisiana’s culture, customs, and traditions (language, religion, food, music, festivals)

JUMPING OFF POINT: Timber booms (Brackenridge Lumber Company in Hungarian article)

JUMPING OFF POINT: Importance of railroads (Strawberry shipping by Independence Italians)

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