

# Spanish New Orleans and the Caribbean

Teacher's Guide: grade levels 3-8



## About The Historic New Orleans Collection

The Historic New Orleans Collection (THNOC) is a museum, research center, and publisher dedicated to stewardship of the history and culture of New Orleans and the Gulf South.

## Land Acknowledgement

New Orleans resides in the neutral territory/trading zone/area of changing lands that is called Bulbancha; Choctaw for “place of other languages.” Bulbancha was an important trading area between three significant waterways: Bayou St. John, Lake Pontchartrain, and the Mississippi River. This area has been historically characterized by cultural interactions of people from distinct linguistic communities including, but not limited to the following Nations: Houma, Choctaw, Chitimacha, and Biloxi. Africans, Native Americans, and all mixtures of these two groups were wrongfully enslaved for centuries in these lands.

As museum educators, we are working to undo some of the intentional erasure of Indigenous voices from the historical record and are working to understand our museum’s role in the erasure.

---

## Contact

The Historic New Orleans Collection, 533 Royal Street, New Orleans, LA 70130

## Education Department

Rachel Gaudry, Curator of Education, [rachel.gaudry@hnoc.org](mailto:rachel.gaudry@hnoc.org)  
Collin Makamson, Education Specialist, [collin.makamson@hnoc.org](mailto:collin.makamson@hnoc.org)  
Kendric Perkins, Education Specialist, [kendric.perksins@hnoc.org](mailto:kendric.perksins@hnoc.org)

---

## Cover Image

**Patent of nobility awarded to Bernardo de Gálvez by Carlos III of Spain, in recognition of his victories over England (detail)**

THNOC, 74-78-L.1

# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
Louisiana State Standards and Common Core State Standards .....	5
Glossary of Terms .....	6
Who's Who .....	9
A Family Agreement: Why did Louisiana Become Spanish? .....	14
Catholicism Under Spain .....	17
Native American Slavery Under Spain .....	18
People of African Descent in Spanish Louisiana .....	21
How Fire Shaped the City .....	24
Salazar: Painter of Spanish New Orleans .....	27
Spanish Legacy .....	29

## ACTIVITIES:

Picturing Spanish New Orleans & The Caribbean: A Visual Timeline .....	31
Working with Maps: The Spanish Caribbean World .....	46

## Introduction

About *Spanish New Orleans and the Caribbean*

October 20, 2022, - January 22, 2023

Most people think of New Orleans as a French city, but that is not quite right. The New Historic New Orleans Collection's exhibit *Spanish New Orleans and the Caribbean* explores how four decades of Spanish rule (1762-1803) helped shape the city. During the Spanish period, the city experienced natural disaster, political tensions, and population changes. Still, under Spain, New Orleans changed from a small, poorly managed town into a highly developed capital city that was both racially and culturally diverse.

Spanish Governors like Antonio de Ulloa, Alejandro O'Reilly, Bernardo de Gálvez, and Esteban Miró made new policies that established order, built up infrastructure, and helped with economic growth. The city's population ballooned under Spain. New arrivals from other parts of the Spanish world and Caribbean—as well as Canada, Ireland, and England—joined the Indigenous people, early French colonists, and enslaved and free people of African descent who already lived in New Orleans.

This exhibition brings together 125 rarely seen items from The Historic New Orleans Collection and institutions across Spain and the United States to show the contributions of diverse citizens that helped establish New Orleans as a Spanish city.

## Guiding Questions:

- Why did the colony of Louisiana switch from French to Spanish rule?
- How did this transition of power impact the people who lived in New Orleans?
- What role did New Orleans play in the Spanish Caribbean world?
- How was the city transformed during the Spanish colonial era?

## Louisiana State Standards for Social Studies

- 3.1.1: Create timelines that identify important events in the history of Louisiana
- 3.2.1: Explain how major explorers and leaders contributed to the early development of Louisiana
- 3.4.2: Explain historical patterns of settlement in Louisiana using maps
- 4.1.1: Construct timelines of historical events
- 4.2.1: Explain how early explorations affected the expansion of boundaries and development in the United States
- 5.1.1: Create a timeline of key events in early American history from pre-Columbian civilizations to 1763
- 5.2.4: Explain the course and consequences of the Columbian Exchange, including its cultural, ecological, economic, and political impact on Europe, the Americas, and West Africa
- 5.3.2: Describe cooperation and conflict among Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans
- 6.1.3: Analyze information in primary and secondary sources to address document-based questions

## Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.3: Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.5: Describe the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.7: Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, timelines, animations, or interactive elements on web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.9: Integrate information from two texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.6: Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

## Glossary of Terms

**Acadians** were French colonists in Canada who were deported by the British both during and after the conclusion of the Seven Years' War, which lasted from 1756 and 1763. They were deported to many different locations, including Spanish Louisiana. Descendants of Acadians who settled in Louisiana are members of the modern-day Cajun ethnic group.

**Bulbancha** is the original Indigenous name for the area now known as New Orleans. Meaning "land of many tongues" in Choctaw, Bulbancha was a busy place often visited by people from many different tribes, bands, and language groups for commerce and trade.

**Bourbon** is the name of a dynastic royal house and family that at different points in history ruled over several countries and kingdoms throughout Europe. Both Louis XV of France and Charles III of Spain were members of the House of Bourbon, and both tried to keep control of their monarchies within their own families. Louis XV's successor, Louis XVI, also of the House of Bourbon, was deposed and executed in 1793 during the French Revolution.

**Cabildo** refers both to a Spanish council who governed over a territory and to a physical building where the council met. New Orleans's Cabildo, facing Jackson Square, was built after the two Great Fires. It was home to the Spanish government of the city.

**Catholicism** was the only legal religion allowed in Spain and throughout the Spanish Empire. The Catholic Church was headquartered in Rome and led by the Bishop of Rome or Pope. The Catholic Church wielded great spiritual, military, political, and economic power in the Spanish Empire. Any non-Catholic inhabitant of Spain or the Spanish Empire who did not convert to Catholicism was forced to leave.

The **Chitimacha** Tribe is an Indigenous community living in South Louisiana. One of many tribes living in what would become New Orleans, they were deeply impacted by the arrival of Europeans. Disease, warfare, and the encroachment of colonists pushed them to lands west of the city. The Chitimacha Tribe's reservation today is in Charenton, LA.

**Coartación** was a practice relating to enslavement in the Spanish Empire. Coartación allowed enslaved people to ask for a price to be set to purchase their freedom from their enslavers. Enslaved people purchasing their freedom were known as coartados. Coartación was practiced throughout the Spanish period of New Orleans and Louisiana and contributed to the growth of the population of free people of color.

The **Code Noir** (French for "Black code") was the collection of laws outlining the conditions of enslavement for people of African descent in France's overseas colonies. More generally, it was

a collection of formal and informal rules about the treatment of enslaved people of African descent. When Louisiana entered the Spanish period, new Black codes were established.

A **colony** is an area subject to the full or partial political control of another country or nation, generally one located far away. It can be established for many reasons, but they are designed to provide natural resources and economic power to the colonizing country. The rights and practices of Indigenous inhabitants are typically revoked and ignored.

**Creole** was a term originally used during the French and Spanish colonial periods to describe a person of European descent who was born in the Americas. Over time, the term evolved to include people of African, European, or Indigenous descent or any combination of these groups. Many modern-day Louisiana Creoles are descendants of people who lived in Louisiana during the French and/or Spanish colonial periods and reflect a rich and often diverse heritage.

**Emancipation** is the removal of conditions of restraint, bondage, or servitude. During the Spanish colonial period, emancipation almost always referred to enslaved people of African or Native American descent winning their freedom. Emancipation could be won through escape, through violent struggles such as the Haitian Revolution, or through *coartación*.

**Enslavement** is the condition of a person where they are held, either permanently or temporarily, against their will and are forced to perform labor for the benefit or profit of an enslaver. When speaking of enslavement during the Spanish period of Louisiana, the enslaved individuals referred to are either of African or Indigenous descent.

**Hispanic** is a very broad term used to refer to individuals, groups, countries, and cultures with ties to Spain and the Spanish language. This term is commonly applied to countries and regions with a cultural or historical link to Spain and the Spanish Empire.

**Indigenous** is a term referring to the original inhabitants of a territory. In North America, Indigenous people are sometimes referred to as Native Americans. Indigenous people from many different bands, tribes, and language groups lived in and around Louisiana hundreds of years before any European explorers or colonists set foot in North America.

**Los Isleños**, a Spanish term meaning “islanders,” refers to people from the Canary Islands who first arrived in Louisiana in 1778 at the behest of Bernardo de Gálvez, the fifth Governor of Louisiana. The descendants of this group are the modern-day Isleños. In Louisiana, the Isleño population is concentrated in and around St. Bernard Parish.

**The Louisiana Purchase** was an 1803 agreement between Napoleon Bonaparte and the United States government. France sold the city of New Orleans as well as the entire territory of French Louisiana to the United States. This transaction more than doubled the size of the United States.

**Manumission** is the act of freeing a person or group of people from enslavement. It differs from emancipation in that it is granted, either immediately or over time, to enslaved people from their enslavers. Manumission might be granted after a certain period of years or upon the death of an enslaver.

**Maroons** (sometimes spelled marrons) were formerly-enslaved people who had escaped to freedom. Maroons established their own communities in the outskirts of the colonial world. The word maroon might have come from the Spanish word “cimarrón,” which means “thicket,” describing the deep brush in which they made their homes.

A **Penisular** (plural Peninsulares) was a person who lived in a Spanish colony, but who was born inside the Kingdom of Spain. The European-born Peninsulares were in the upper ranks of Spanish colonial society and used their status to differentiate themselves from the Isleños and Creoles.

A **portrait** can be a painting, photograph, sculpture, or other type of artistic representation of a person, typically with focus on the face and its expressions. During the Spanish colonial period in New Orleans, portraits were mainly paintings that depicted elite citizens of the colony.

**Revolution** is an action or event that causes a significant disruption, interruption and/or change in the behavior of individuals, groups, or governments. Revolutions can be peaceful or violent and can apply to large-scale events such as the American, French or Haitian Revolutions. Revolutions can also represent advancements in things such as science and technology, or even alterations to methods of thinking or beliefs.

The **Seven Years' War**, which lasted from 1757-1763, was a worldwide conflict between Great Britain and France as well as their varied allies. Those allies included not only European countries and kingdoms, but also Indigenous tribes and confederations in what is now Canada and the United States. For that reason, the North American part of the conflict is commonly called the French and Indian War. Great Britain and its allies won the Seven Years' War, and France lost its colonial possessions on the North American mainland.

A **tignon** is a type of head-covering tied or wrapped around the head like a turban. During the Spanish colonial period, creole women of African descent were forced to wear a tignon in public to communicate to others their mixed-race heritage.

A **treaty** is a formal, binding agreement reached between two groups or countries to resolve a conflict. The duration of treaties can be long or short and can be public or secret. The terms of a treaty are subject to change. For example, a country who signs a peace treaty with another country may later decide to declare war again. Examples include the Treaties of Fontainebleau, Paris and San Ildefonso.



## Who's Who

The list below represents a selection of some, but not nearly all of the individuals or groups who played important and influential roles during the Spanish colonial period. For individuals, the years of their birth and death appear after their names.

### Louis XV of France (1710–1774)

Louis XV of France was a member of the royal Bourbon family and ruled France from 1715-1774. Louis XV was king in 1763, when France lost the Seven Years' War and, as a result, its colonies in North America. French territories in Canada were awarded to Great Britain, which deported thousands of French colonists who refused to pledge their loyalty to their new British rulers. These colonists were called Acadians, and many of them later made their way to Louisiana. Today, their descendants are more commonly known as Cajuns. One year before the end of the Seven Years' War, Louis XV secretly transferred control of the Louisiana colony to Spain, which was ruled by his cousin Charles III, through the Treaty of Fontainebleau. Louis XV left behind many debts and unresolved issues that led directly to the French Revolution during the reign of his successor, Louis XVI.

### Charles III of Spain (1716–1788)

Charles III (Carlos III in Spanish) was a member of the royal Bourbon family. From 1759–1788, he ruled Spain and its massive empire in North and South America and beyond. Charles agreed to take control of Louisiana from his cousin, King Louis XV of France, one year before the end of the Seven Years' War in the secret Treaty of Fontainebleau of 1762. As an ally of the United States during the American Revolution, Spain under Charles III retook the territory of Florida from the British. Charles pursued reforms and modernization throughout Spain's overseas territories, all of which were designed to benefit and increase the power of his monarchy. Two of Charles's reforms with the deepest impacts in Louisiana and New Orleans were the census of 1766 and the publication of the Spanish Black codes. The Spanish Black codes offered some additional protections for enslaved people, but the policy's true goal was to establish greater control over enslaved populations and expand agricultural and economic output.

## Alejandro O'Reilly (1723–1794)

Alejandro O'Reilly was a career soldier and later administrator in the service of Spain. Though he was born in Ireland, O'Reilly, like many Irish men of his generation, wanted to make his fortune in the armed forces of Catholic monarchies. He was appointed Governor and Captain-General of Louisiana in 1769. O'Reilly landed in New Orleans and quickly put down the Rebellion of 1768, punishing its leaders and reasserting Spanish control over its new colony and earning himself the nickname "Bloody O'Reilly." O'Reilly made many reforms, most notably outlawing the trade of enslaved Native Americans and introducing the system of *coartación*, a practice which allowed enslaved people of African descent to purchase their own freedom or the freedom of others from their enslavers. O'Reilly also granted formal permission to the Acadians to settle in the Louisiana colony.

## Toussaint Louverture (1743–1803)

Toussaint Louverture is considered the father of his nation, Haiti. He led the Haitian Revolution, which was the first successful revolt of enslaved peoples in modern history. From 1791 to 1802, Louverture organized and mobilized hundreds of thousands of formerly enslaved Black people and free people of color in a war of liberation, first against the French and then against the Spanish and the British. The revolution Louverture led produced waves of fear among enslavers throughout North and South America as well as waves of refugees fleeing the island. Many of the refugees eventually settled in New Orleans, helping to double the city's population.

## Jean Saint-Malo (died 1784)

Jean Saint-Malo, called Juan San Maló in Spanish, was the leader of an armed group of formerly enslaved people who controlled a swath of territory in the swamps and marshes around Lake Borgne in present day St. Bernard Parish. Saint-Malo led raids against nearby plantations in the years between 1773 and 1784. Saint-Malo and others like him were known as maroons. Colonial Louisiana had a large population of enslaved people, and white colonists and enslavers greatly feared that maroons like Saint-Malo could lead or inspire slave revolts. In 1784, Saint-Malo was captured by the Spanish. Saint-Malo's sentence for attempting to win his freedom was death by hanging, however, his example of resistance endured long after his death.

## Bernardo de Gálvez (1746–1786)

Bernardo de Gálvez was Governor of Louisiana from 1777-83. He was a seasoned veteran of many conflicts. Spain was an ally of the United States during the Revolution, and Governor Gálvez used his military experience to lead Spanish and Louisiana colonial forces, including free people of color and even some enslaved people, in campaigns against British Florida, culminating in the capture of Pensacola in 1781. Gálvez's time in office also saw the arrival of the first waves of Spanish immigrants from the Canary Islands to Louisiana, a group today known as los Isleños. Gálvez was awarded many honors during and after his life. Many places in Louisiana are named after him, including St. Bernard Parish. Gálvez is also one of only 8 individuals to ever be declared an honorary American citizen.

## Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821)

After the French Revolution and the fall of the Bourbon monarchy, Napoleon Bonaparte became the political and military leader of all of France. Napoleon's reign marked the end of the Spanish period of New Orleans and Louisiana, as both were re-transferred back to France in 1801. At that time, Napoleon was at war with many other European nations. To fund his military campaigns Napoleon decided to sell the entirety of Louisiana to the United States. This 1803 sale, which came to be known as the Louisiana Purchase, instantly doubled the size of the new United States.

## Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826)

Thomas Jefferson was the third President of the United States and was in office from 1801 to 1809. He is credited as the chief author of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson was alarmed by the transfer of Louisiana and New Orleans from the Spanish back to the French in 1803. As a solution, Jefferson sent representatives to France to negotiate with Napoleon Bonaparte to purchase New Orleans and its surrounding areas. Napoleon needed money to fund his wars against Great Britain and her allies and was eager to sell New Orleans. He shocked the American representatives by offering to sell the entire territory of Louisiana to the United States for \$15 million dollars. For the cost of approximately 61 cents per acre, Jefferson's acquisition, later known as the Louisiana Purchase, more than doubled the size of the United States.

## José Francisco Xavier de Salazar y Mendoza (1750–1802)

José Francisco Xavier de Salazar y Mendoza is considered the first and foremost painter in Spanish Louisiana. His surviving works depict some of New Orleans's most prominent and wealthy colonial residents. Born in New Spain in what is today Mexico, Mendoza migrated to New Orleans with his family in 1782. Salazar established his business in New Orleans at a time when very few other formal artists were active in the young colonial city. Salazar's paintings are the only works from the Spanish period of New Orleans that still exist today. They provide a unique glimpse into the lives of the civic, military, and religious elite of the colony.

## Ursuline Nuns

The Ursuline nuns, also called the Ursulines, are an order of Catholic nuns. The first Ursulines arrived in New Orleans in 1727, less than a decade after the founding of the city. The Ursulines were originally contracted to serve as nurses in the fledgling colony, but they chose to focus on education—especially the education of women. The Ursulines did not serve only the city's French-born elite. They also served the poor, free people of color, and even enslaved people. However, even though the Ursulines offered education to enslaved people, they also profited from the labor of people that they themselves held as slaves. The second Ursuline Convent, completed in 1752, is one of the few buildings that survived both New Orleans Great Fires of 1788 and 1794. It stands as one of the few examples of colonial architecture from the French period still visible in the city.

## Enslaved People

Enslavement was a hallmark feature of every colony throughout the Americas, including Louisiana. Europeans began enslaving people in Louisiana almost as soon as they arrived. The colonial French attempted to enslave Native Americans before turning to the mass use of enslaved captive Africans. Between the time the Spanish took control of New Orleans and Louisiana in 1762 and the end of the Spanish period in 1803, enslavement had both greatly expanded and greatly changed. During the Spanish period, the enslaved population of Louisiana increased from 4,500 to nearly 13,000 individuals. The use of enslaved people's labor was essential to Louisiana's colonial economy, which relied on agricultural goods like indigo, sugar, and, later, cotton. During the Spanish period, colonial law recognized *coartación*, the practice or right of self-purchase. Although most enslaved people had no chance of buying their freedom, a significant number did. These *coartados* joined the growing ranks of free people of color. Because of the large enslaved population, enslavers always feared the threat of uprisings and revolts. These fears grew after the Haitian Revolution started in 1791, failed uprisings on Louisiana's Point Coupee plantations in 1791 and 1795, and the raids carried out by maroon leader Jean Saint-Malo. Under Spain, enslaved men, women, and children in Louisiana continued to endure extremely harsh and inhumane conditions.

## Free People of Color

Free people of color—called “gens de couleur libres” in French—were Black people who were not enslaved. The first free people of color arrived in New Orleans as early as 1722, less than five years after the city was founded. By the end of the Spanish period in 1803, free people of color represented almost 15% of New Orleans’s total population. This dramatic growth in population was due largely to the Spanish system of *coartación*, which allowed enslaved people to purchase their own freedom or the freedom of others from their enslavers. In the racial hierarchy of colonial Louisiana, free people of color were above enslaved people of African descent, but below free white people. While still restricted from the full rights enjoyed by white colonists, free people of color were granted certain privileges denied to Native Americans and enslaved Black people. Free people of color could own property and had access to education and free movement. Many free people of color were wealthy, powerful, and influential. Free people of color played an important role in the Spanish period of New Orleans and beyond, with many occupying positions of wealth and influence.

## Native Americans / Indigenous People

Louisiana was the home to thousands of Native Americans belonging to dozens of different tribes, bands and language groups long before colonizers from Europe reached its shores. New Orleans itself was originally known as *Bulbancha*, which means “the place of many tongues,” because of the many different groups who gathered, lived, and traded there. Throughout the French and Spanish colonial periods, contact between Indigenous groups and the new colonizing arrivals throughout the Americas was marked by violence, slavery, and disease. However, with the consolidation of Spanish rule by Governor Alejandro O’Reilly, new regulations were put in place. Native Americans were still near the bottom of the colonial racial hierarchy, but the enslavement and sale of enslaved Native Americans was outlawed. Native American cultures had a large impact on European arrivals, and Spanish culture in New Orleans and Louisiana evolved as a fusion of French, African, and Native American cultural elements.

# A Family Agreement: Why did Louisiana become Spanish?

## Guiding Questions:

- Why were European countries fighting for lands in the Americas?
- Why did France and Spain join forces against England? Why did Spain take Louisiana from France?



**Flower of France: The family of Louis XV**

This depiction of the family of Louis XV was created in 1765, near the start of the period of Spanish control in Louisiana. It is made of gold, enamel, and watercolor on paper. In the center is the fleur-de-lis, the symbol of the Bourbon kings of France. By J. Glockner de Surchamps  
courtesy of Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid

In the 18th century, several European monarchs were in competition for control of land throughout Europe and the Americas. Strategic alliances between monarchs led to changes in power and governance for colonies in the Americas. An important alliance between the related families of the Bourbon monarchs in France and Spain had major implications in the future of Louisiana.

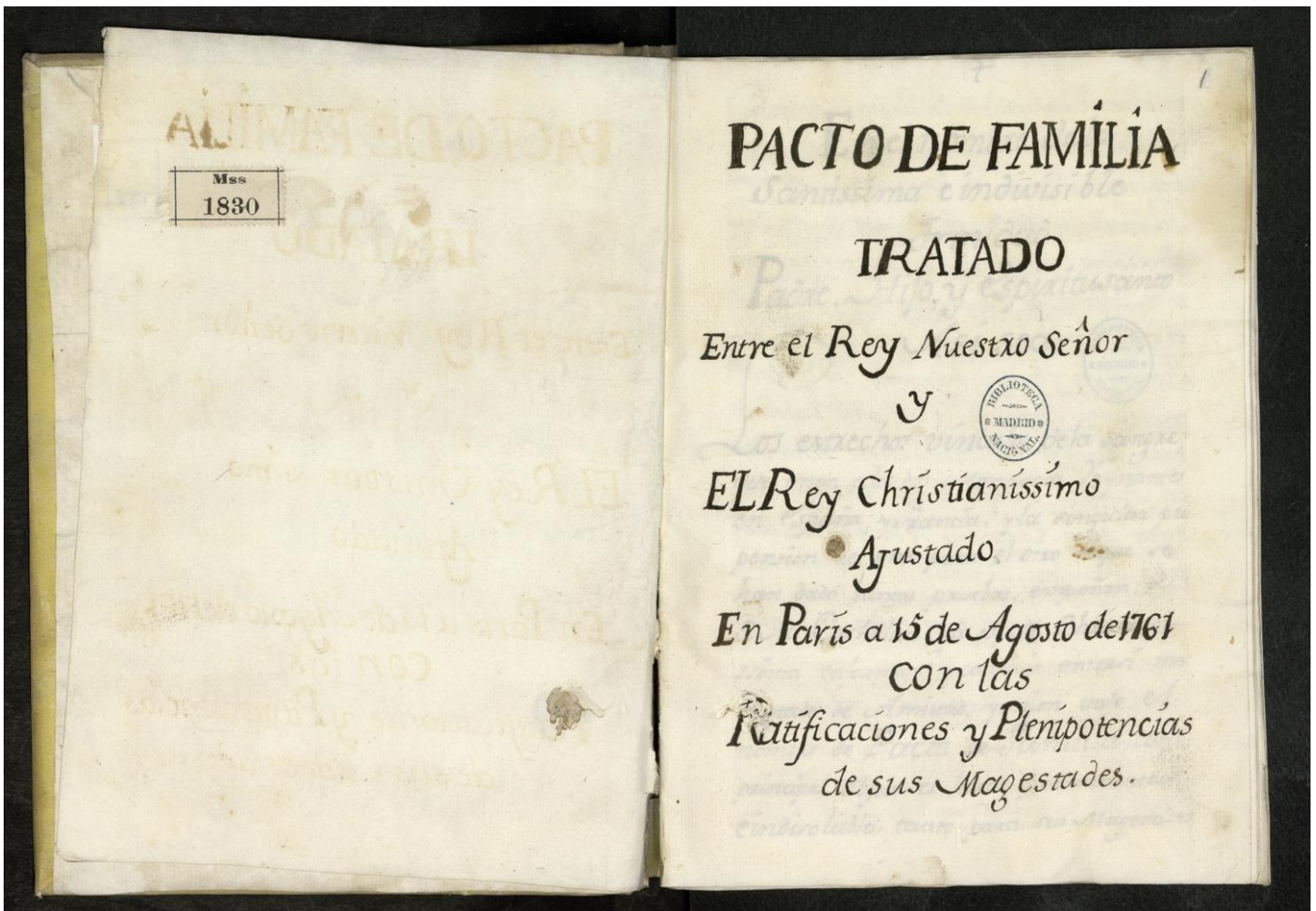
The mid-18th century saw competing claims by European colonial powers that wanted to exploit the economic potential of the peoples and natural resources of the Americas. Spain focused on the silver and gold wealth of Mexico and Peru. France and Great Britain both wanted to control Canada, the Atlantic coast, and the Mississippi River. Their competing claims led to the Seven Years' War, which began in 1756. Both countries sought Spanish support in the war, but Spain declared an official alliance with France in 1761.

Spain entered the war the following year. To keep France's vast province of Louisiana from falling to their British rivals, the Bourbon monarchs of France and Spain secretly agreed that King Louis XV should give Louisiana to King Charles III of Spain. This secret pact was called the Treaty of Fontainebleau and was signed in 1762.

The Seven Years' War ended a year later, in 1763, with the signing of the Treaty of Paris.

### Did you know?

In the 18th century, France and Spain formed the Pactes de Famille (Family Compact). The Pactes de Famille established an alliance between France and Spain. It was called the Family Compact because the rulers of both nations were members of the Bourbon family. The Pactes de Famille consisted of three alliances, which were signed in 1733, 1743, and 1761. Because of the Pactes de Famille, Spain aided France in its wars in Europe and the Americas.

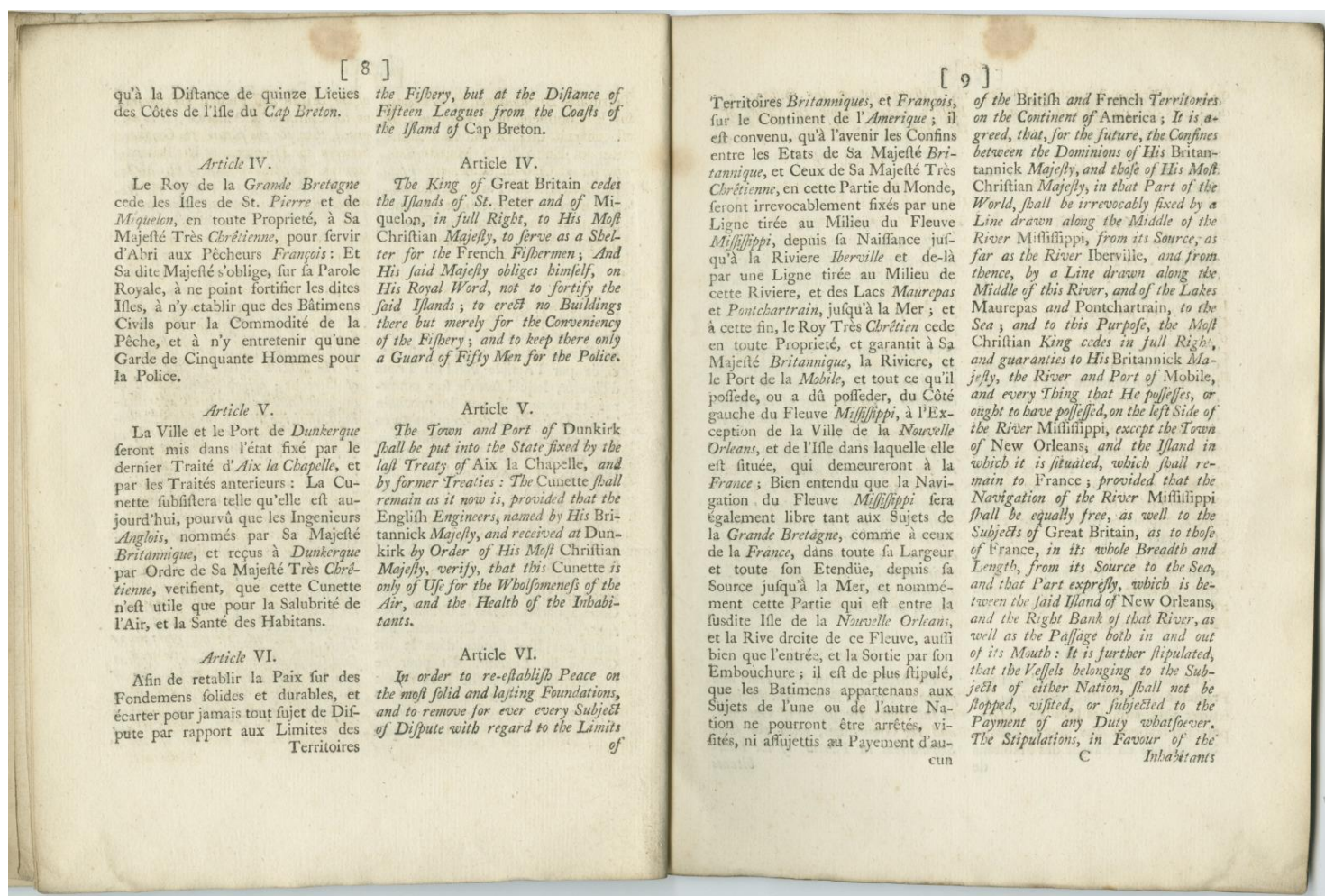


#### Pacto de Familia

This is a Spanish translation of the 1761 Family Compact signed by Carlos III of Spain and Louis XV of France. The Family Pact signed by Carlos III of Spain and Louis XV of France. courtesy of Biblioteca Nacional de España

## Did you know?

Spain, France, and Great Britain were not the only European countries involved in the Seven Years' War. The Kingdom of Prussia, Portugal, and multiple states of the Holy Roman Empire allied with Great Britain. France's allies included not only Spain, but the Bourbon-led Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, Austria, and Sweden.



The secret Treaty of Fontainebleau, in which France secretly turned Louisiana over to Spain.  
THNOC, 2018.0348



### Guiding Questions:

- Why was religion so important to Spanish colonial leadership?
- How did Spanish attitudes towards religion differ from the French?

During the colonial period, Spain and France were both Catholic countries, and many of their monarchs and explorers used the goal of converting Indigenous peoples to their religion as justification for conquest and brutal subjugation. They also established religious orders to serve the population. The Ursuline nuns, for example, arrived in New Orleans during the French period and offered religious instruction and education opportunities to not only the colonial elite, but also to women and enslaved people.

Spain's authorities enforced laws limiting religious freedom more strongly than the French. When Spain took control over a territory, Catholicism became the official religion—and the only religion allowed. All inhabitants of Spain's massive empire in the Americas, which stretched from the tip of modern-day Argentina in the south to parts of modern-day Canada in the north and California in the west, were required to be Catholics.

When Spain took control of Louisiana, it required residents there to practice Catholicism as well. Inhabitants within Spanish Louisiana who were not Catholic—which included other types of Christians as well as Jews—were given a choice between converting or being banished from the land.

### Did you know?

Sephardim, also called Sephardic Jews, are people of Jewish descent who can trace their history back to the Jewish communities of the Iberian Peninsula, in what is today Spain and Portugal. Many Sephardic Jews traveled to the Americas after Spain and Portugal began to persecute and expel Jews in the late 15th century.

The Spanish government also required that enslaved people practice Catholicism and believed that enslaved people possessed a soul the same as other colonists. This belief did not protect enslaved people from the inhumanity of slavery.

Although Spain's rule over Louisiana lasted only forty years, the impact of its religious policies can still be observed today in New Orleans' large Catholic population.

### Did you know?

Three different Roman Catholic church buildings have stood on the site of today's St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans's French Quarter

## Native American Slavery Under Spain

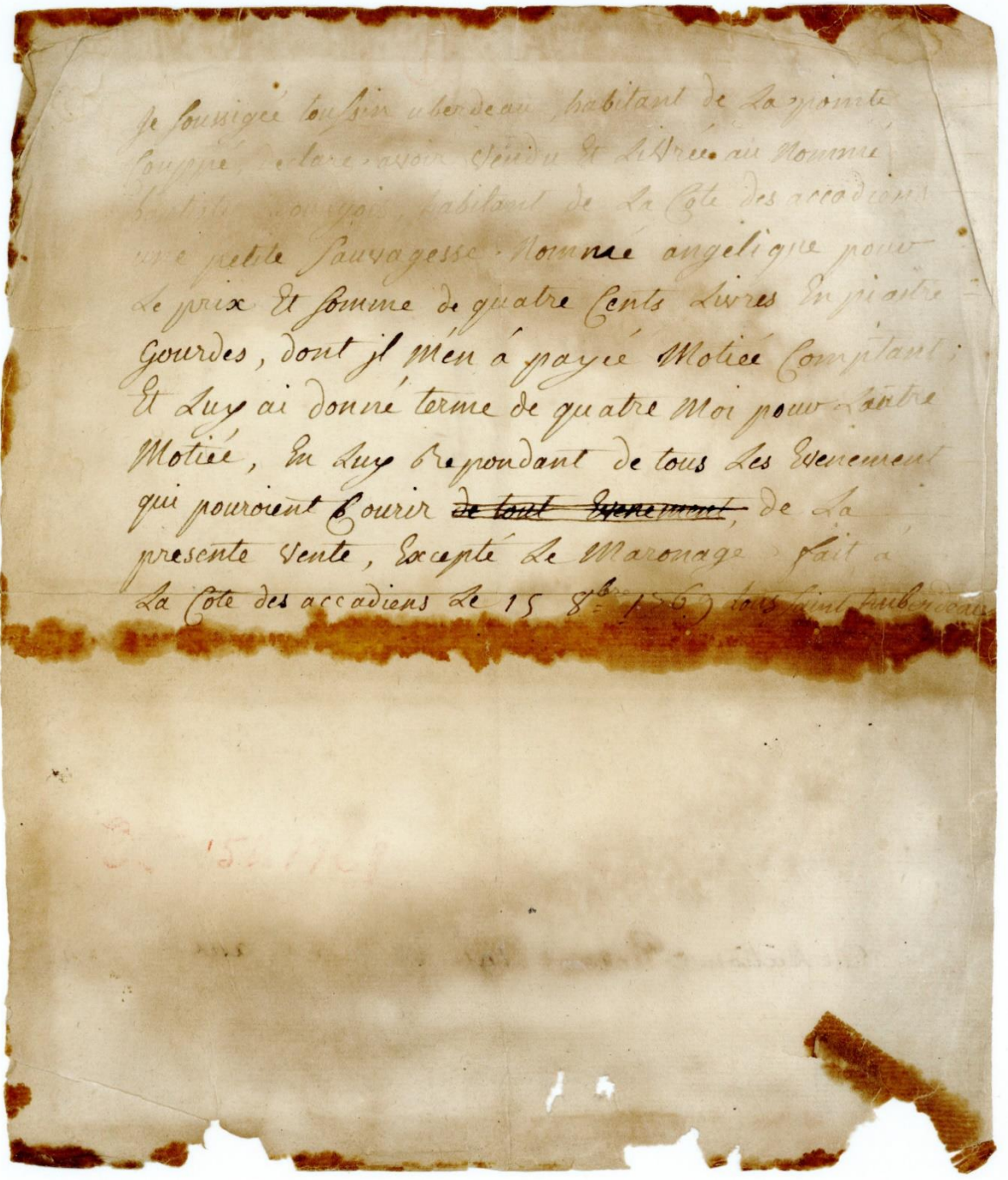
### Guiding Questions:

- How effective was Spain's policy abolishing Native American slavery?
- How did the status of a person's mother affect their status as free or enslaved?

Spain outlawed the enslavement of Indigenous people in the Americas in the 1500s. Seven years after Spain acquired Louisiana, Alejandro O'Reilly issued a decree that extended Spain's policies outlawing Native American slavery to Louisiana. However, this edict was not strictly enforced, and slave traders continued to bring enslaved Native Americans into the colony from Texas.

Spanish law allowed enslaved people to own property, to sue their enslavers, and to sue for their freedom in court. In 1787, three enslaved siblings named Marie, Pierre, and Baptiste went to court in St. Louis, Missouri (then a part of the Louisiana colony) to argue that they should be free. Marie, Pierre, and Baptiste argued that they could not have been born into slavery because their mother was Native American. They demanded that they should be emancipated

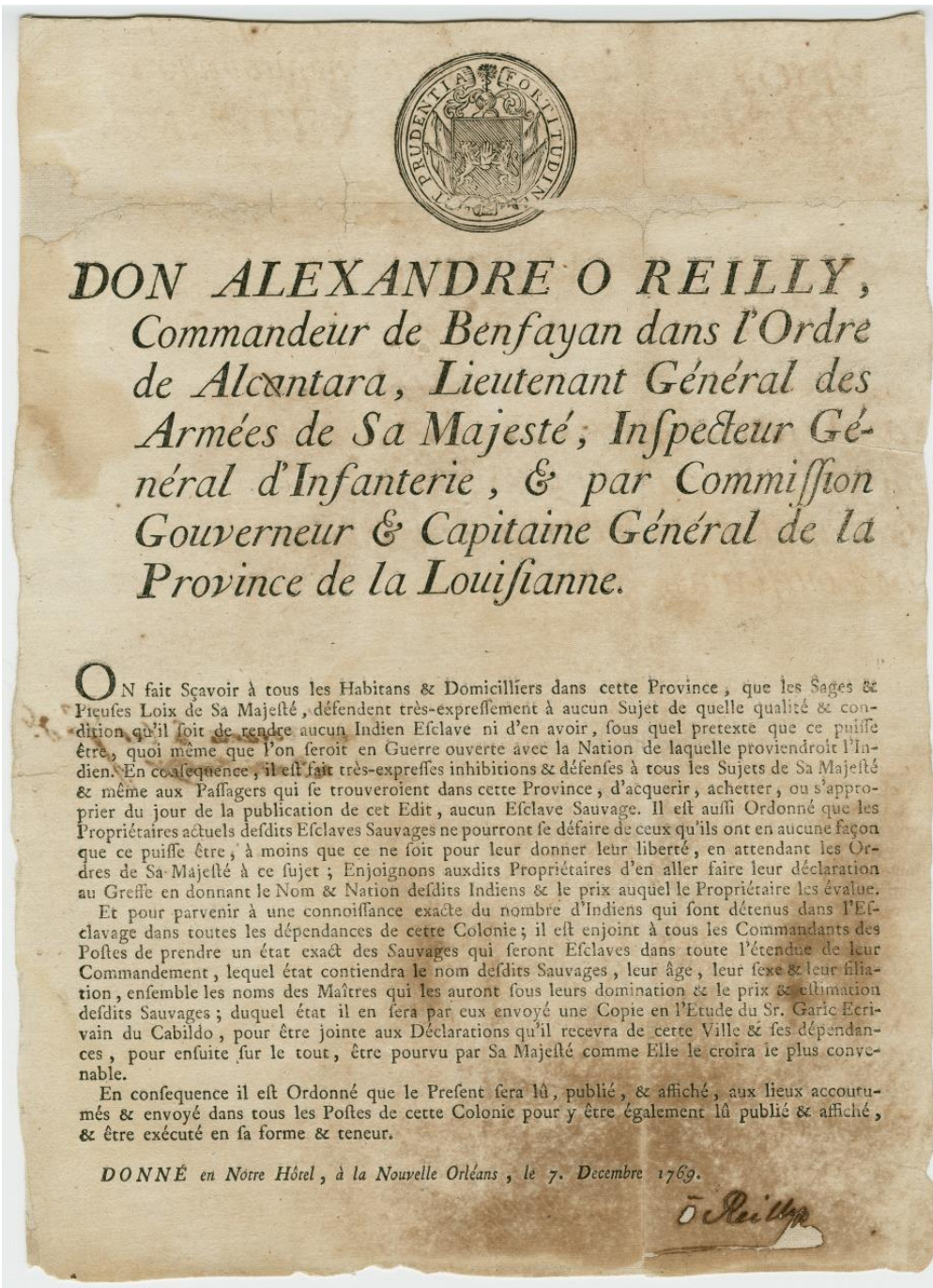
based on the Spanish prohibition on Native American slavery. They won their case and their freedom. Between 1790 and 1794, at least thirteen people used the same argument as Marie, Pierre, and Baptiste to sue for their freedom. Most of them were also successful.



Receipt of payment for the sale of a young Indigenous woman named Angelique in Louisiana. Angelique was sold in 1769, just before Spain abolished the enslavement of Indigenous people in Louisiana. courtesy of the Louisiana State Museum and Louisiana Historical Society

Powerful slaveholders were threatened by the possibility of enslaved people with Native American ancestry winning their freedom. In response to protests led by Julien Poydras, a slaveholder whose plantation was in Pointe Coupée, Louisiana, Spanish governor Francisco Luis Héctor de Carondelet ordered a suspension of court challenges to Native American slavery.

The suspension on court challenges to Native American slavery remained through the end of the Spanish colonial period. When the United States purchased Louisiana in 1803, enslavers worked with the new government to enact laws that dismantled many of the Spanish policies enabling easier access to freedom for enslaved people.



Proclamation abolishing  
enslavement on  
Indigenous people in the  
Louisiana colony.  
THNOC, 67-28-L

# People of African Descent in Spanish Louisiana

## Guiding Questions:

- What was *coartación*?
- What occupations were available to free people of color?

During the Spanish colonial period, Spanish decrees replaced French laws regarding slavery in Louisiana. This created a system that gave enslaved people more protection against mistreatment and more ways to legally gain their freedom.

One important feature of Spanish law allowed enslaved people to purchase their freedom by paying their market price value. This self-purchase system was called *coartación*. If an enslaved person was denied the right to self-purchase by their enslaver, they had the right to sue for their freedom. If there was a dispute about the price of the enslaved person, the court would provide an official who decided. If the enslaved person could afford the court-determined price, they would be set free.

Once manumitted, newly freed Black people often continued to practice the trades that had allowed them to purchase their freedom. Free people of color joined colonial militias and churches, forged kinship networks, and invested in businesses and other property.

Over time, these reforms led to the development of a substantial population of free people of color in Louisiana. While not

## Did you know?

On June 2, 1786, Governor Esteban Miró presented the Edict for Good Government, which comprised 34 laws for the government of the city. One of these laws was the tignon law. The tignon law made it mandatory for women of color to wear a scarf or headwrap—called a tignon—over their hair as a symbol that they were someone of African descent. The law was meant to embarrass free women of color and to be a symbol of their low status. The law, however, did not have its intended effect. Women of color in Louisiana wore these scarves in a way that displayed their creativity, beauty, status, and wealth. They used elaborate fabrics and jewels which allowed them to maintain their standards of fashion and beauty. They effectively reinterpreted the law without technically breaking it.

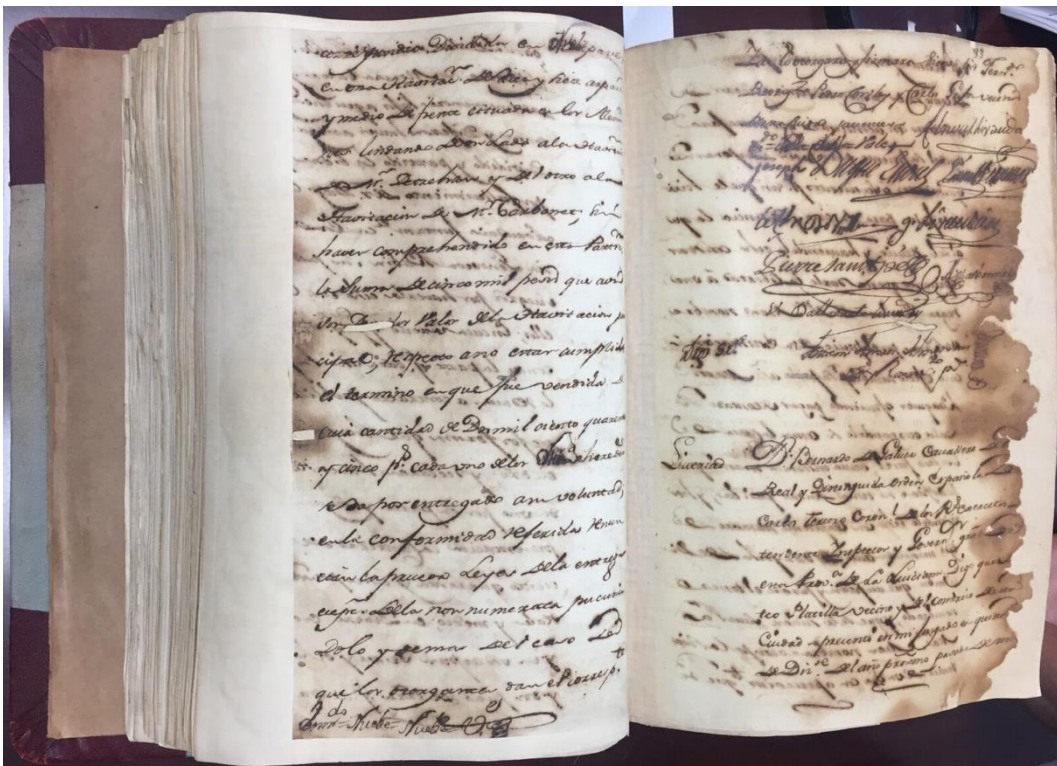
equal in status to white people, free Black people could own property, serve in the colonial militia, and make livings in a wide variety of trades that materially contributed to the growing city.

Another notable feature of Spanish policies towards slavery was the endowment of enslaved people with certain, limited rights. There were also regulations meant to prevent poor treatment of enslaved people. For example, the practice of branding—burning a symbol into an enslaved person's skin with a piece of heated metal—was made illegal. Even so, the anti-branding edict was not consistently enforced, and some enslavers and slave traders continued to brand their captives.

### Did you know?

The linguistic root of *coartación* is “cortar,” which means “to cut” or “to limit.” The name for officials who represented enslaved people was *síndico*, which ultimately derived from the Greek words for “with” and “justice.”

After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, American lawmakers worked with local enslavers to bring Louisiana laws in line with the rest of the American South. Both free and enslaved Black people faced new challenges, and the growth of the free population slowed. Still, the growth of the free Black community during the Spanish period, combined with the identity that they forged, would prove vital during the American period to combat policies bent on strengthening chattel slavery and dismantling of the free Black community's rights as humans.



Agnes Mathieu was born into slavery in Louisiana in 1759 and gained her freedom through *coartación* in 1779. This is Bernardo de Gálvez's order to emancipate her. courtesy of Hon. Chelsey Richard Napoleon, Clerk of Civil District Court, Parish of Orleans



Militia service conferred certain rights and privileges, such as relief from certain taxes, as well as the prestige that came with wearing a uniform. This uniform design was for free Black troops in Havana, Cuba.  
courtesy of España. Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte

# How Fire Shaped the City

## Guiding Questions:

- How did fire impact the city of New Orleans?
- What differences do you notice between Spanish colonial buildings and houses in your neighborhood? What similarities are there?

The Spanish colonial era of New Orleans was marked by natural disaster. Just as they do today, hurricanes swept into the Gulf of Mexico and brought destruction and flooding. But it was fire that reshaped the look of the city, transforming French Creole lines into the iconic brick and swirling Spanish ironwork that we now associate with the French Quarter.

In 18th-century Louisiana, long before the invention of electricity, fire would have been essential for everyday life—for preparing meals, lighting homes, and providing warmth. It was also dangerous. Knocking over a candle or starting a cooking fire could lead to massive fires.

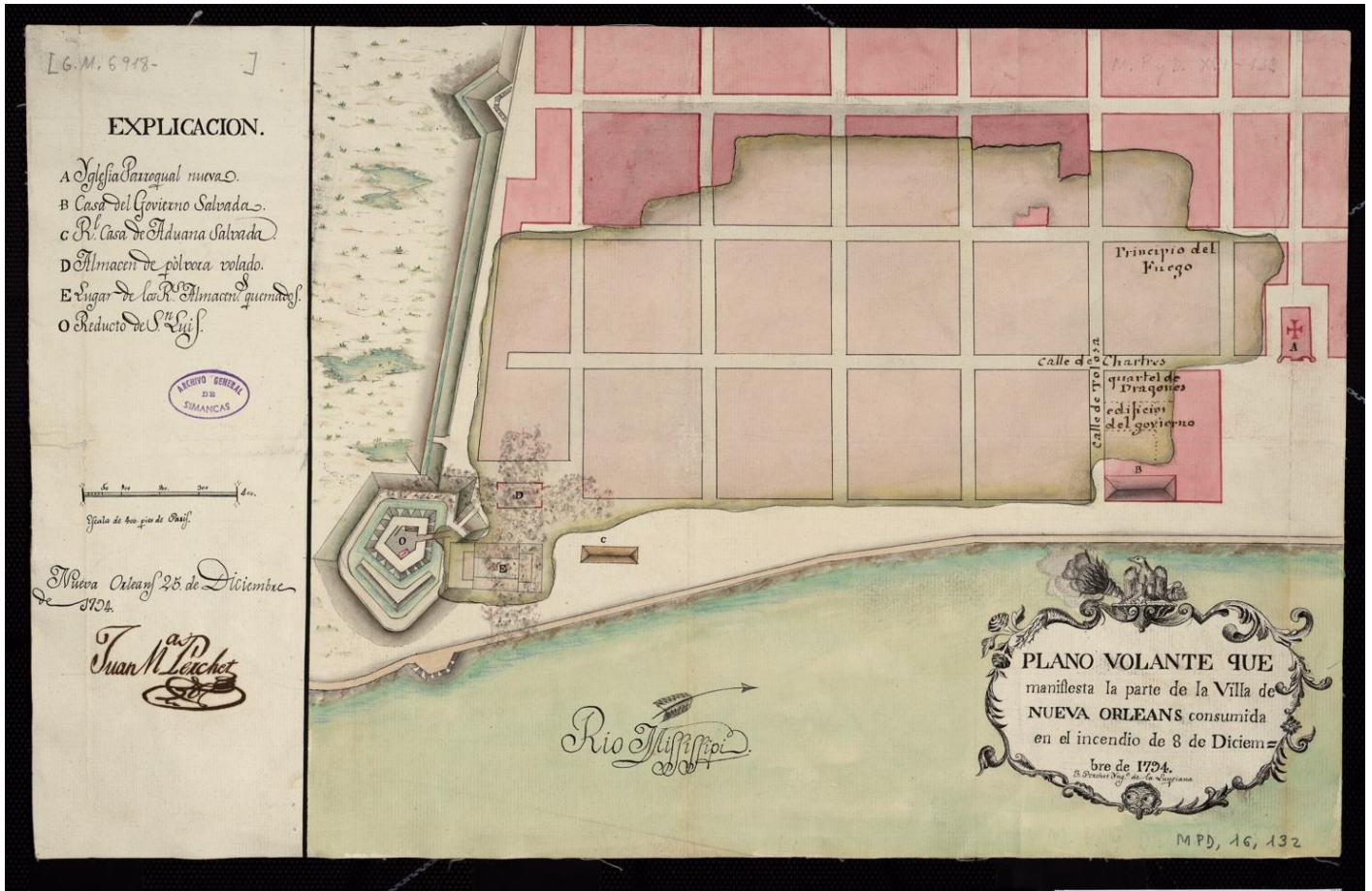
The first of two major fires happened on Good Friday of 1788. In his Chartres Street home, Vincent Jose Nuñez lit a candle, which caught the nearby drapes. This small accident led to the destruction of more than half of the city, including homes, businesses, administrative buildings, and the cathedral. In five hours, many of the original French buildings were ash. Governor Esteban Rodriguez Miró led the city through this devastating time by providing for the impacted citizens and supporting rebuilding efforts.

Only six years later, on December 8, 1794, the city was engulfed in flames again. This time, as the story goes, a group of children in a Royal Street courtyard accidentally set a wall ablaze. Within a matter of hours, the fire destroyed 212 structures, many just rebuilt from the last disaster.

The new buildings that replaced the structures destroyed in the fire were built with fire prevention in mind. Officials demanded that most homes be built with brick and tile instead of wood and thatch. If houses were built of wood, they could not be more than 30 feet deep. Other architectural changes had less to do with fire prevention and more with style. Unlike French architects, the Spanish built structures that were close to the street and featured first-



floor archways and interior courtyards. The iconic ironwork seen on French Quarter balconies today is from Spanish era of the city.



Plan Showing the Part of New Orleans Destroyed by the Fire of December 8, 1794  
courtesy of España. Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte

These images of buildings in the French Quarter show the influence of Spanish architecture. The buildings are made of brick and sit close to the streets. Many of the buildings have Spanish-style wrought iron on their balconies. In one of the images, you can see a Spanish-style courtyard which would not be visible from the street.



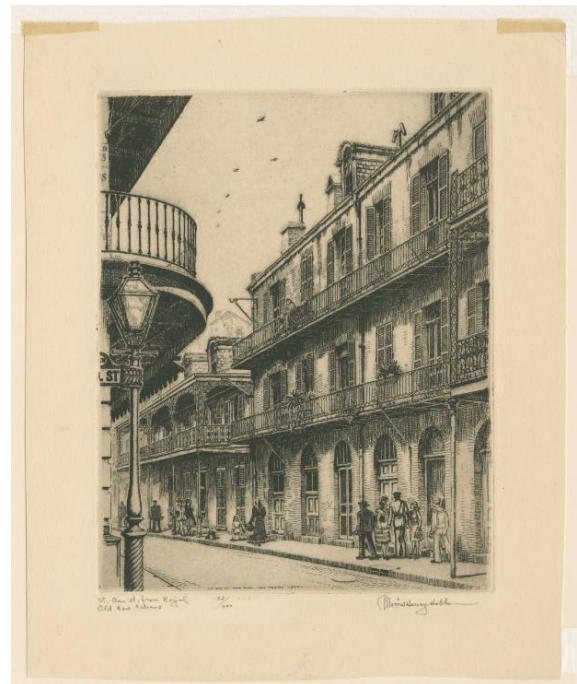
THNOC 1984.189.2833



THNOC 1947.26



THNOC 1984.74.87



THNOC 1959.185.18

## Salazar: Painter of Spanish New Orleans

### Guiding Questions:

- Which citizens does Salazar paint? Which citizens do you not see in his artwork?
- What do Clara de la Motte's clothing and pose reveal about her?



Before the invention of photography in 1826, the only way to capture someone's likeness was through painting, drawing, or sculpting. Wealthy citizens of Spanish New Orleans—those who could afford to hire a painter—turned to artist José Francisco Xavier de Salazar y Mendoza to create their portraits.

Salazar arrived in New Orleans in 1782 from Merida, Mexico. For two decades, he painted Louisiana's prominent civic, military, and religious leaders in formal portraits. Salazar's works are the only portraits still in existence from the Spanish colonial era.

Salazar's portrait of Clara de la Motte, painted around 1795.  
THNOC, 1981.213

One of Salazar's notable paintings is a portrait of Clara de la Motte. Though she is dressed in the elegant style of an upper-class woman in the portrait, de la Motte's story is not simply one of wealth and abundance.

Although Clara de la Motte's heritage was Spanish, unlike the majority of Spanish New Orleanians, de la Motte was not Catholic. Rather, de la Motte came from a Sephardic Jewish family and was born on the island of Curacao in the Caribbean, home to the oldest Jewish community in the New World. De la Motte's family immigrated to New Orleans when Louisiana was still a French colony. Like many other Jewish families, the de la Motte's were exiled when Spain took control of Louisiana. De la Motte moved to Pensacola, Florida then married into the wealthy Monsanto family and moved to Natchez, Mississippi. She returned to New Orleans with her husband in 1794. Her husband died shortly after, and she became very wealthy in her own right, inheriting plantations and the enslaved people who worked on them. It was during this time, when she was a wealthy woman living in New Orleans, that de la Motte sat for Salazar for this striking portrait.

Works like Salazar's portrait of Clara de la Motte give us a glimpse into the lives of elite citizens.

### Did you know?

Spanish New Orleanians enjoyed many varieties of fine arts, especially opera. André Ernest Modeste Grétry (1741-1814) was a Belgian-French composer, and a performance of his comedy, *Sylvain*, was the first documented opera performance in New Orleans. That performance was during the Spanish colonial period, on May 22, 1796, at the Théâtre St. Pierre in the French Quarter. *Sylvain* first debuted in Europe in 1770, and is about the title character who is forced to work as a poor farmer after being disowned by his rich father for marrying a lower-class woman. New Orleans is known as the birthplace of jazz, but since the 1796 performance of Grétry's *Sylvain*, with only a few exceptions, New Orleans has always had a resident performing company for the established opera season.

# Spanish Legacy

## Guiding Questions:

- What evidence of New Orleans's Spanish heritage can we still observe today?
- Why is New Orleans typically thought of as a French city and not a Spanish city?

Although it ended more than two hundred years ago and lasted less than forty years, the legacy of the colonial Spanish period in New Orleans and Louisiana endures to this day in many important ways, some obvious and some less visible.

The most obvious legacies of the Spanish period lie in the names and styles of spaces and places in and around New Orleans. Several of New Orleans's key streets, parks, and thoroughfares still bear the names of the Spanish elite from this period. Carondelet St., North and South Miro St., and O'Reilly St. are all named for Spanish governors. Spanish governor Bernardo de Gálvez is honored as the namesake of St. Bernard Parish, southeast of New Orleans. Louisiana's use of the word parish instead of county for its administrative region owes to the Roman Catholic influence of France, but also of Spain. Finally, even though New Orleans's oldest neighborhood is referred to by the name of its earliest colonizers, the dominant architecture style of the French Quarter, with its flat roofs, galleries and iron work, and street layout featuring a large central square, date from the period of Spanish rule.

Perhaps less obvious on the surface are the ethnic and cultural legacies from New Orleans's Spanish period. This Spanish colonial period saw a fusion of Spanish, French, African and Native American cultural elements. Although New Orleans and Louisiana are now home to a myriad of faiths and religions, New Orleans itself remains a majority Catholic city, continuing in traditions

### Did you know?

In recognition of this victory over the British in the Siege of Pensacola in 1781, Pensacola, Florida has a holiday named after Spanish governor Bernardo de Gálvez. Gálvez Day is celebrated every year on the eighth of May.

dating back to its colonial founding. The members of the Isleños community—descended from the original immigrants from the Canary Islands—maintain community and cultural ties by keeping customs and practices from the 18th century alive. Although New Orleans's racial and ethnic diversity today is a product of many successive waves of

immigration, many of the early pathways to advancement for persons of color in the city were opened by the Spanish.

Although New Orleans and Louisiana will likely continue to be considered culturally French, it is impossible to deny that Spanish history and heritage also shaped the region.

## Activity

# Picturing Spanish New Orleans & The Caribbean: A Visual Timeline

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Timelines are a useful tool for understanding series of related historical events. In this activity, students match a series of images with their corresponding descriptions and arrange them in chronological order. This process allows students to develop a better understanding of the chronology of the period and to think critically about causal relationships between events. Students will also explore the process by which historians select ideas and evidence to create a historical narrative.

GRADE LEVEL: 3–8

TIME REQUIREMENT: 1–2 hour-long class periods

### **OBJECTIVE:**

Students will construct a timeline in order to identify, discuss, and analyze some of the major events of the Spanish colonial period in New Orleans and Louisiana. They will also identify the temporal structure of a timeline, assessing the degree to which some events are caused by others. Finally, students will reproduce the process by which historians select and prioritize events for inclusion or exclusion within their narratives.

### **MATERIALS:**

Images, dates, titles, and descriptions are included on pages 37-45 of this lesson.

Students can assemble their visual timelines at their desks. Alternatively, you can also use string, clothespins, tape, or push pins to display student timelines on bulletin boards or classroom walls.

- Optional: Student worksheet, included on page 34
- Optional: Who's Who in Spanish New Orleans, included on pages 9-13 of this lesson
- Optional: Glossary of terms in Spanish New Orleans, included on pages 6-8 of this lesson

## **PROCEDURES:**

There are several ways to implement this lesson, all of which involve various levels of matching images, titles, descriptions, and dates. Choose the method that works best with your students based on their skill and knowledge levels, or make up your own way. Regardless of which option you choose, start by having students write down everything they can tell about their images using the student worksheet. Make sure students indicate whether their descriptions come from what they can see or from what they previously knew about Spanish New Orleans. Inform students that the descriptive captions do not always describe the actual images, but instead refer to a historic event from the Spanish period.

**Step 1:** Choose from one of the options below:

- Option 1: Give each student or pair of students a random image to study. Next, in chronological order, read aloud each caption and have the student(s) with the matching image bring it to the front of the class and tape it to the wall or clip it to a string with a clothespin. You can then affix the dates and captions to each picture for the class to review.
- Option 2: Break students into groups of three to five, then randomly divide the images, captions, and dates among the groups. Have each group match their images, captions, and dates. Then have all the groups work together to create the full timeline of images. Each group can explain how they were able to match their images to captions and dates.
- Option 3: Give each student one image, one date, and one caption that do not match. Then let them try to find their matching partners in order to complete the full timeline as a class. This exercise will require good teamwork and communication.

**Step 2:** Once students have completed their timelines using the full set of images, dates, and captions, review the events of the period from beginning to end on the timeline, allowing students to explain each event and the corresponding images.

**Step 3:** Explain that historians cannot possibly capture every relevant event or perspective when writing about a broad subject like Spanish New Orleans. Instead, they must select the evidence, perspectives, and events that they believe will provide the reader with the best possible understanding of their topic. You might point out that the students' textbooks do not include every single event from history, but rather a strategic selection of events. Inform students that they too must now be selective in crafting their own narrative about the Spanish colonial era using their timelines. Have each student (or group) select 10 events from the timeline with which to tell the story of the Spanish period of New Orleans. Have students reflect briefly (orally or in writing) about which events they selected and why. If time permits, you may want to repeat this step with five events, or even three.



**Step 4:** Have students share their reflections in order to spark a discussion about the challenges historians face when deciding which facts to include and/or emphasize when crafting historical narratives.

**ASSESSMENT:**

You will be able to assess students based on the accuracy of their image matching and the quality of their written descriptions. You can also quiz them on the chronology following the activity.

**EXTENSION/ENRICHMENT:**

- Have students write alternate, longer captions for each image.
- Have students brainstorm individually or as a class the 5, 10, or 20 additional dates/events from the Spanish colonial period they would add to the timeline and have them conduct research to locate appropriate images to match.
- Have students research one event in greater depth in order to either write a research paper or create a class presentation.
- Have students create a timeline about one topic from the Spanish period of New Orleans.



## VISUAL TIMELINE KEY

**1. 1762**

**The Treaty of Fontainebleau Is Signed**

King Louis XV of France transfers control of New Orleans and the colony of Louisiana to Spain's King Charles III. Louis and Charles are both members of the royal house of Bourbon, and Louis worries that he may soon be unable to defend Louisiana against the British. Carlos likewise wants to protect Spanish territory in the Caribbean and South America from British encroachment. (courtesy of Biblioteca Nacional de España)

**2. 1763**

**The Seven Years' War Ends**

France and its allies, including the Spanish, find themselves on the losing side of the Seven Years' War, commonly known in North America as the French and Indian War. The victorious British take over many French territories including all of present-day Canada. (THNOC, 2002.99.2)

**3. 1769**

**Acadians Allowed to Settle in Louisiana**

French Canadian settlers who were expelled after the end of the Seven Years' War, the Acadians, are allowed to settle permanently in Louisiana by Spanish governor Alejandro O'Reilly. These Acadians are the ancestors of the modern-day Cajun Louisianians. (THNOC, 2008.0359.6)

**4. 1778**

**Los Isleños Arrive in Louisiana**

The fifth governor of Spanish Louisiana, Bernardo de Gálvez, requests the transportation of soldiers and colonists from the Spanish Canary Islands to Louisiana. The descendants of this group are the modern-day Isleños of Saint Bernard Parish. (Public Domain/Wikimedia Commons)

**5. March 9–May 8, 1781**

**The Siege of Pensacola**

Allied with the new United States during the American War of Independence, Louisiana Governor Bernardo de Gálvez leads a force of Spanish soldiers and Louisiana militia to victory over the British at Pensacola, winning control of West Florida. (courtesy of España. Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte)

**6. 1783**

**Jean Saint-Malo Captured**

Jean Saint-Malo, a leader of maroons (escaped and formerly enslaved people) living in the swamps and marshes around Lake Borgne, is captured by the future governor of Louisiana, Francisco Bouligny. Saint-Malo's sentence for attempting to win his freedom is death by hanging. (THNOC, 1953.42)

**7. March 21, 1788**

**The First Great Fire of New Orleans**

A fire starting at 619 Chartres Street quickly gets out of control, spreading across the city and destroying virtually all of the major buildings in New Orleans. (THNOC, 1974.25.11.153)

**8. 1791**

**The Haitian Revolution Begins**

Led by Toussaint Louverture, the enslaved individuals of the French colony of Saint-Domingue (modern-day Haiti) rose up against their enslavers, ultimately winning their freedom and independence after a bitter struggle that lasted more than a decade. Many wealthy people and enslavers leave Haiti as refugees and settle in Spanish New Orleans. Some of those refugees also bring enslaved people with them to New Orleans. (THNOC, 2017.0003.147)

**9. December 8, 1794**

**The Second Great Fire of New Orleans**

Another citywide fire breaks out, destroying hundreds more buildings throughout New Orleans. This fire, combined with the earlier blaze from six years earlier, is largely responsible for the destruction of most French architecture and its replacement with buildings and architecture in the Spanish style. (courtesy of España. Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte.)

**10. December 20, 1803**

**The Louisiana Purchase Is Completed**

Spain has transferred the colony of Louisiana back to France, now led by Napoleon Bonaparte. With the success of the Haitian Revolution and a new war brewing in Europe, Napoleon needs money and wants to focus on other parts of the French empire. He offers to sell New Orleans and the entire colony of Louisiana to the United States. The United States accepts the offer, purchasing Louisiana and more than doubling the new nation's size. (courtesy of Archivo General de Simancas)

## VISUAL TIMELINE DATES

1762

1763

1769

1778

March 9–May 8, 1781

1783

March 21, 1788

1791

December 8, 1794

December 20, 1803

## **VISUAL TIMELINE TITLES**

Treaty of Fontainebleau Is Signed

The Seven Years' War Ends

Acadians Allowed to Settle in Louisiana

Los Isleños Arrive in Louisiana

The Siege of Pensacola

Jean Saint-Malo Captured

The First Great Fire of New Orleans

The Haitian Revolution Begins

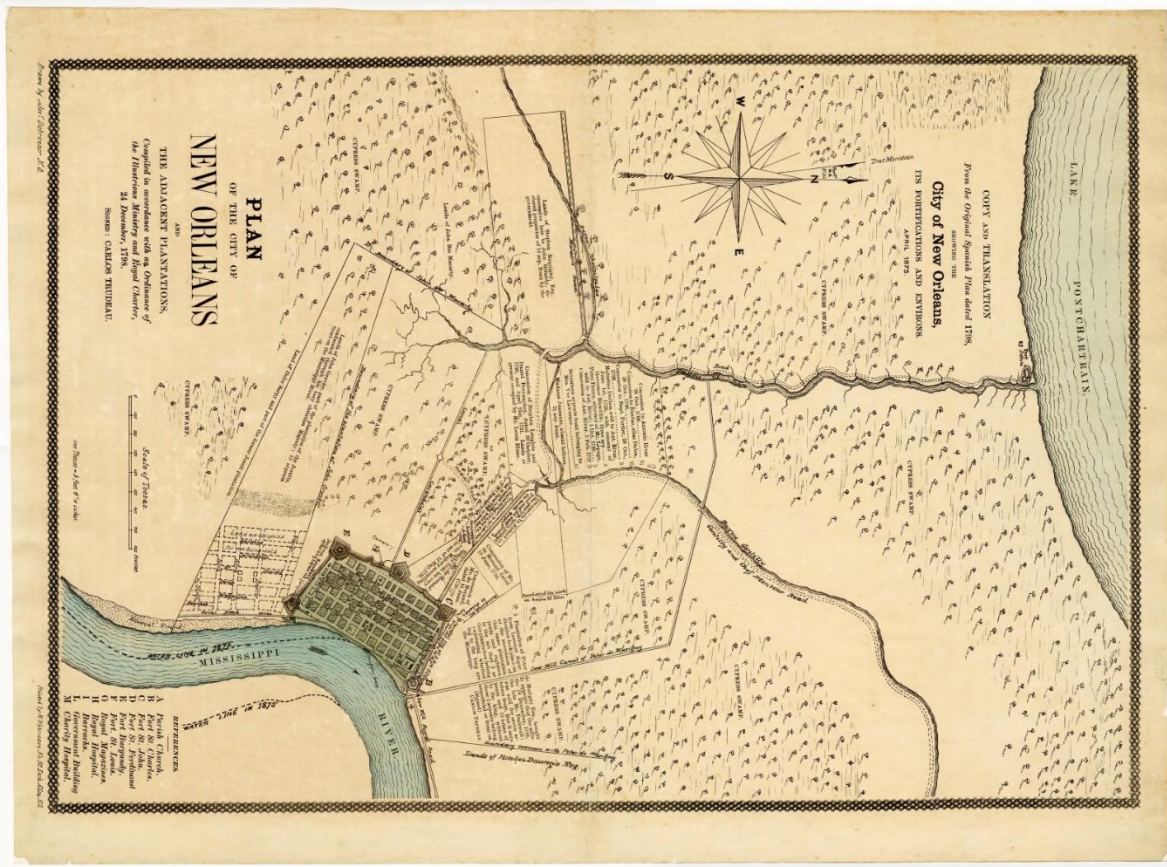
The Second Great Fire of New Orleans

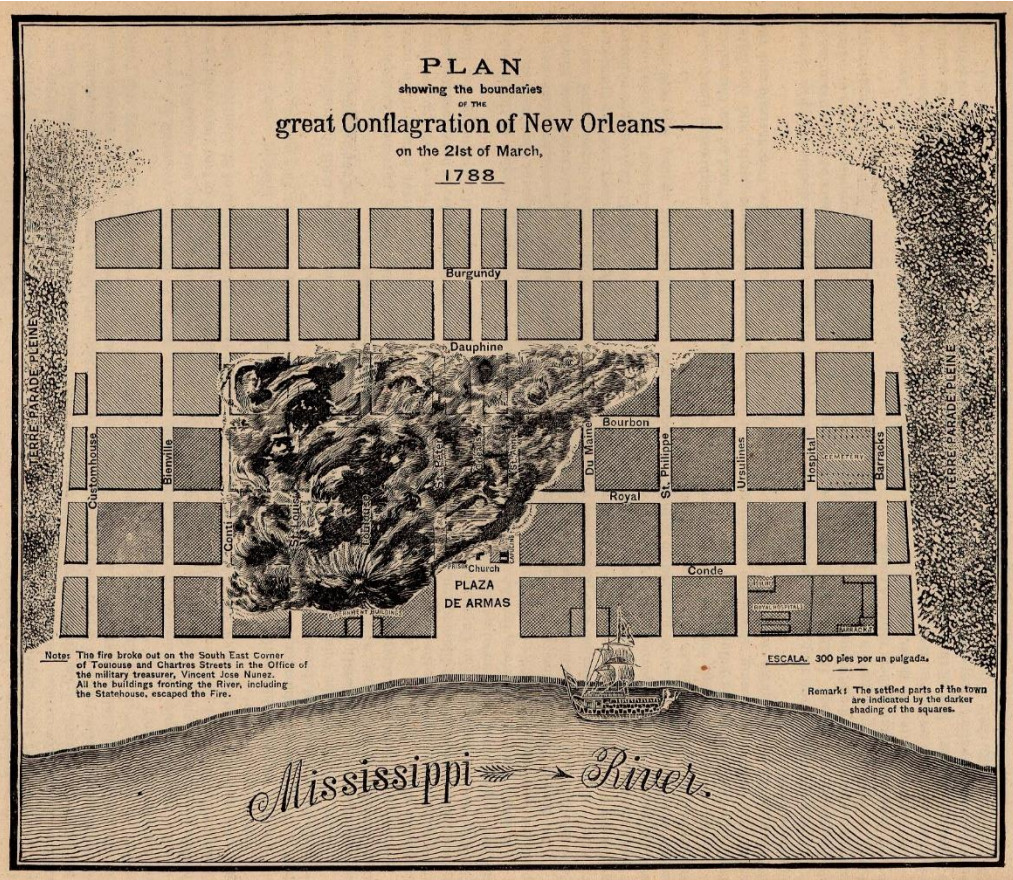
The Louisiana Purchase Is Completed

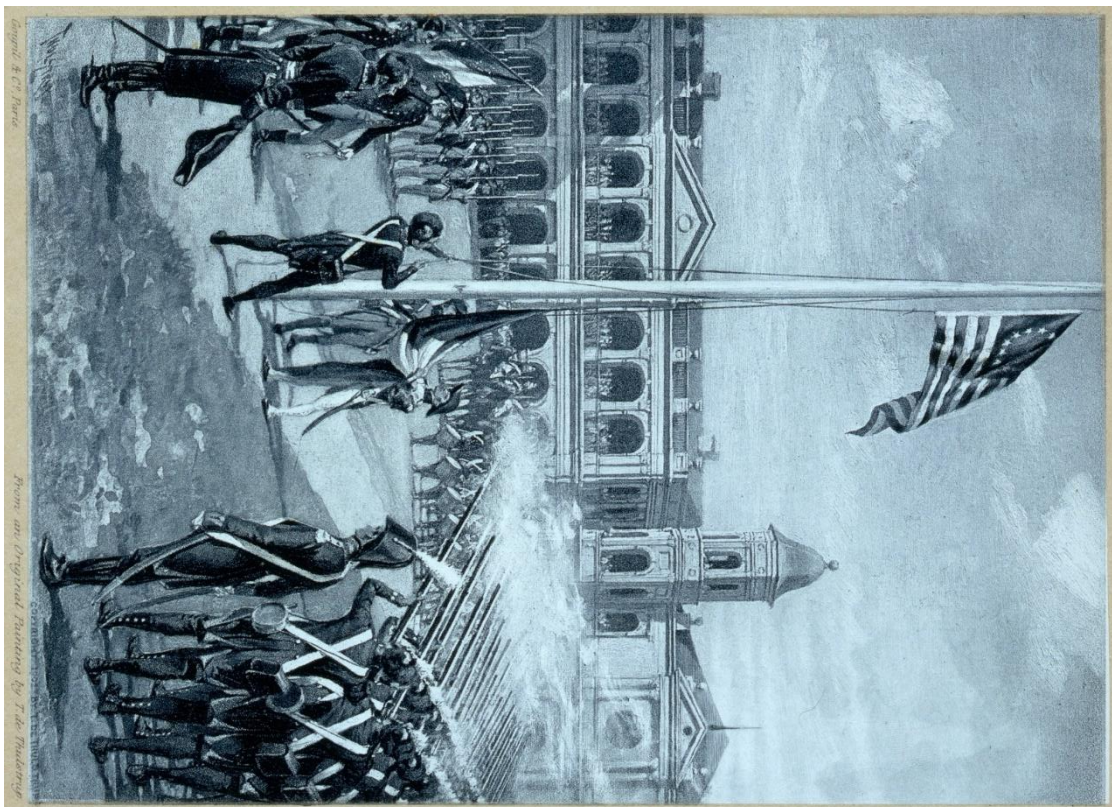
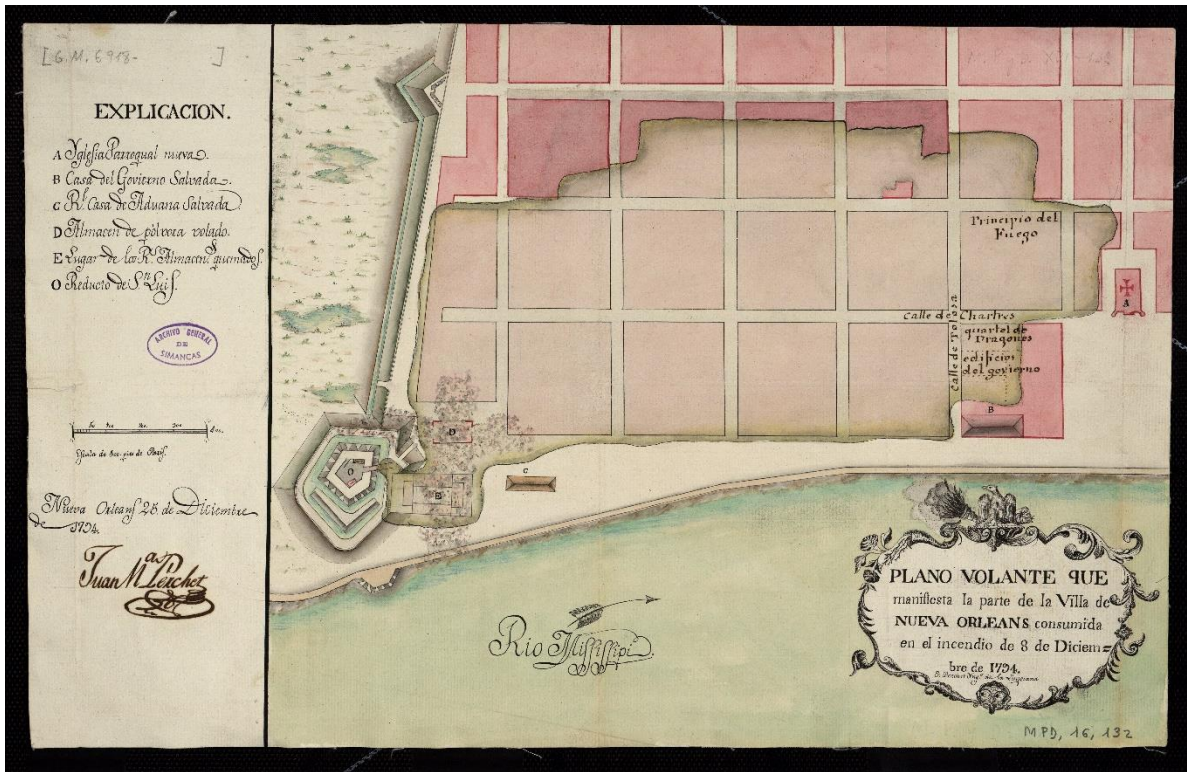












## Activity

# Working with Maps: The Spanish Caribbean World

### OVERVIEW:

These activities use geography to deepen students' understanding of the history of Spanish rule in Louisiana. Students will use Google Maps to locate important places in Spanish Louisiana and the Spanish empire. Activities using Google Maps can also help students move from being passive consumers of information to being active creators of the content.

### ABOUT GOOGLE MAPS:

To complete these activities, students will need internet access and a device with Google Maps. Google Maps is a free tool that uses satellite imagery and other forms of geographic data to create detailed maps of the world.

## Traveling from Spain to the Americas

Maps with accurate depictions of navigable waterways were both necessary and extremely valuable to Spain in the 16th century. We are asking students to read the paragraphs below. After reading, students should use the following map to answer the reading questions:

[Spanish Americas Map Activity](#)

### READING:

Departing from Spain (icon 1 on the map), ships traveled in a fleet for defensive purposes. First, they went along the coast of Africa and stopped in the Canary Islands (icon 2 on the map) for supplies. Turning westward, they crossed the Atlantic and entered the Caribbean southeast of Puerto Rico (icon 3 on the map). Nearing Havana, Cuba (icon 4 on the map), they enjoyed the protection of the Spanish Coast Guard. Departing Havana, they sailed to La Balize, United States (icon 5 on the map) at the mouth of the Mississippi River. The entire journey from Spain to New

Orleans required 60 days, during which passengers suffered the threat of bad weather and enemies while living in cramped, dark quarters with rationed food and minimal sanitation.

Even during the French colonial period, New Orleans enjoyed a close relationship with the Spanish Caribbean World. The Spanish founded the cities of Veracruz, Mexico City (icon 7 on the map), Mexico City (icon 8 on the map), Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (icon 6 on the map), and Havana, which all became critical to the development of Louisiana. The four decades of Spanish colonial administration in New Orleans permanently changed the city and deepened cultural ties to these Spanish port cities.

### **QUESTIONS:**

For each question, locate the numbered icon on the map. Click the icon and read the text that is provided, then answer the question.

Why do you think maritime pilots trained in Seville instead of other Spanish cities?

---

---

What was the name of the group of immigrants who came from the Canary Islands to Spanish Louisiana? Why did the Spanish government encourage them to immigrate?

---

---

What domestic tropical crops did the Indigenous Taíno people eat before the arrival of the Spanish?

---

---

Can you list the two Indigenous groups that were on the Island of Cuba before European occupation?

---

---

What was the natural disaster that destroyed the original French fort at La Balize in 1740?

---

---