

Louisiana's Antebellum Politics, Commerce, and Culture

Louis Moreau Gottschalk was born in New Orleans in 1829. His father was a businessman who had immigrated to Louisiana from London. His mother was native-born, but his grandmother had fled Saint-Domingue before settling in New Orleans. Louis spent his childhood in the area known today as the French Quarter. Nearby was an open field where slaves gathered on Sundays.

On this traditional day of rest for slaves, they socialized, held their own market, played drums and homemade instruments, and performed dances that had their origins in Africa. These lively Sunday gatherings resulted in the area being called Congo Square.

Gottschalk not only heard but was inspired by the music and dancing in Congo Square. In his early teens, he wrote a song for piano titled “Bamboula: Danse des Nègres.” Its call-and-response rhythms paid tribute to the African drumming and singing he heard in Congo Square as a child.

Gottschalk was also an exciting concert performer who made his public debut at age eleven. His family realized he needed additional training, so

Chapter Preview

People

Thomas Robertson, Pierre Derbigny, André Bienvenu Roman, Edward Douglass White, James Dakin, Zachary Taylor, Robert Fulton, Metoyer family

Places

Donaldsonville

Terms

antebellum, franchise, universal manhood suffrage, internal improvements, head and master statutes, factor, holding, coffee, veranda, overseer, slave quarters





they sent him to Paris at age thirteen. However, when he sought admission to the Paris Conservatory, the director reportedly turned him away. He commented that no great artists could come from the United States, which was “only a country of steam engines.”

The director was right that by the 1840s America had become a place of great economic drive and innovation. But he was wrong about Gottschalk, who in a few years' time became internationally celebrated. He traveled tens of thousands of miles across Europe and to various countries in Central and South America, sometimes playing two or three concerts a day. In 1869, he collapsed during a performance in Brazil and died three weeks later of a malarial infection he had contracted in his travels.

Gottschalk's short life displays many themes that also characterized life in Louisiana during the years before the Civil War. As with his background, the state's population became even more diverse in the years between 1820 and 1860, as native-born and immigrant people mixed and mingled. Louisiana's economy, which had struggled in the colonial era, also began to thrive. In fact, in these decades, the state's economy grew at astounding rates, and many people became fabulously wealthy.

It is impossible to understand the years between 1820 and 1860 without appreciating how the state's people shaped one another. Free and slave, native-born and immigrant, though Louisianians did not always interact peacefully, they shaped one another's lives, fortunes, and cultures. Through his music, Louis Moreau Gottschalk shared the variety and diversity of Louisiana life with music lovers around the world.

In this chapter, we will examine Louisiana's politics, economy, and culture in the years between 1820 and 1860. We will explore the debates that shaped politics, and review the diverse activities that generated economic growth. Finally, we will consider the social conditions that made Louisiana a place of promise but also of peril for those who came here, whether seeking opportunity or because they had no choice.



Background: *Dance in Congo Square* in the late 1700s by E. W. Kemble.

Top Left and Right: Congo Square.

Opposite Page, Bottom Left: Louis Moreau Gottschalk. **Opposite Page, Bottom Right:** Advertisement for Gottschalk's farewell American concerts.

Signs of the Times



U.S. Expansion

Between 1845 and 1853, the United States achieved its “manifest destiny.” With the addition of Texas (1845), the Oregon Territory (1846), the Mexican Cession (1848), and the Gadsden Purchase (1853), the United States controlled a vast area of land between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Journalist John L. O’Sullivan first used the term “manifest destiny” in an 1845 story encouraging continent-wide expansion. New states added to the Union between 1836 and 1859 were Arkansas, Michigan, Florida, Texas, Iowa, Wisconsin, California, Minnesota, and Oregon.

Exploration

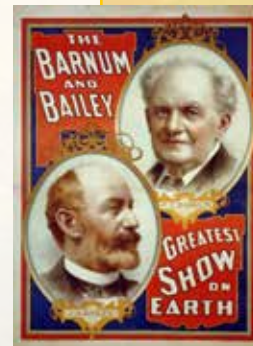
In 1826, the first U.S. warship to circumnavigate the world, the *Vincennes*, left New York. In 1840, Captain Charles Wilkes explored Antarctica and claimed it for the United States. In 1853, the U.S. Navy under Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Japan, which had previously been closed to foreigners.

Music

Slave songs and spirituals were sung in the field to communicate and pass the time. Many songs, like “Go Down, Moses,” had religious meaning. Other songs, like “Follow the Drinking Gourd” and “Wade in the Water,” had secret messages that told slaves how to escape to freedom on the Underground Railroad. Stephen Foster composed his most famous songs—including “Camptown Races,” “Oh! Susanna,” and “Old Folks at Home”—during this era.

Entertainment

In 1835, P. T. Barnum began the first circus tour of the United States. In 1850, he introduced singer Jenny Lind, the “Swedish Nightingale,” to America. In 1851, the United States participated in the first World’s Fair in history, in London. In 1853, the first World’s Fair in the United States opened in New York City.



Architecture

This was the time in the South of beautiful white-columned plantation homes. Prime Louisiana examples that were built or remodeled during the antebellum period are Oak Alley, Houmas House, Evergreen, San Francisco, St. Joseph, Rosedown, and Greenwood. Nottoway, completed in 1859, is the largest antebellum mansion in the South.

Education

Ohio’s Oberlin College, founded in 1833, was a pioneer in the education of women and African Americans. It admitted women from its founding and regularly admitted African American students from 1835.

Inventions

Many practical inventions that are in use today were invented during the antebellum period. Cyrus McCormick invented a mechanical reaper for harvesting grain in 1831. Samuel F. B. Morse first demonstrated a practical telegraph system in 1844. Elias Howe patented the sewing machine in 1846. The safety pin was patented in 1849.

Background: This 1872 John Gast painting, *American Progress*, symbolizes the concept of “manifest destiny.” **Top Right:** A Barnum and Bailey circus poster.



1820 - Thomas Robertson elected governor

1825 - Legislature authorized moving capital to Donaldsonville

1828 - Pierre Derbigny became governor

1829 - Louis Moreau Gottschalk born in New Orleans

1830 - Legislature passed a law requiring free people of color who had arrived after 1825 to leave or be imprisoned

1831 - André Bienvenu Roman became governor
Railroad between New Orleans and Lake Pontchartrain completed

1835 - Edward Douglass White became governor

1845 - Constitution of 1845 adopted

1847 - Baton Rouge selected as new capital

1852 - Constitution of 1852 adopted

1853 - Worst antebellum epidemic of yellow fever

1859 - Legislature passed a law ordering free people of color to become slaves for life

1820

Timeline

1820-1860

Missouri Compromise - **1820**

Mexico gained independence from Spain - **1821**

Andrew Jackson elected president - **1828**

1830

Slavery abolished in the British Empire - **1833**

Texas gained independence from Mexico - **1836**



1840

Texas became an American state - **1845**

Mexican-American War began - **1846**

Zachary Taylor elected president - **1848**

Gold discovered in California

Women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York

President Zachary Taylor died; succeeded by Millard Fillmore - **1850**

Compromise of 1850

1850

1860

Above: Thomas Robertson.
Right: The Alamo, San Antonio, Texas. **Background:** U.S. Senator Henry Clay introduced the Compromise of 1850.

Section 1

Antebellum Politics

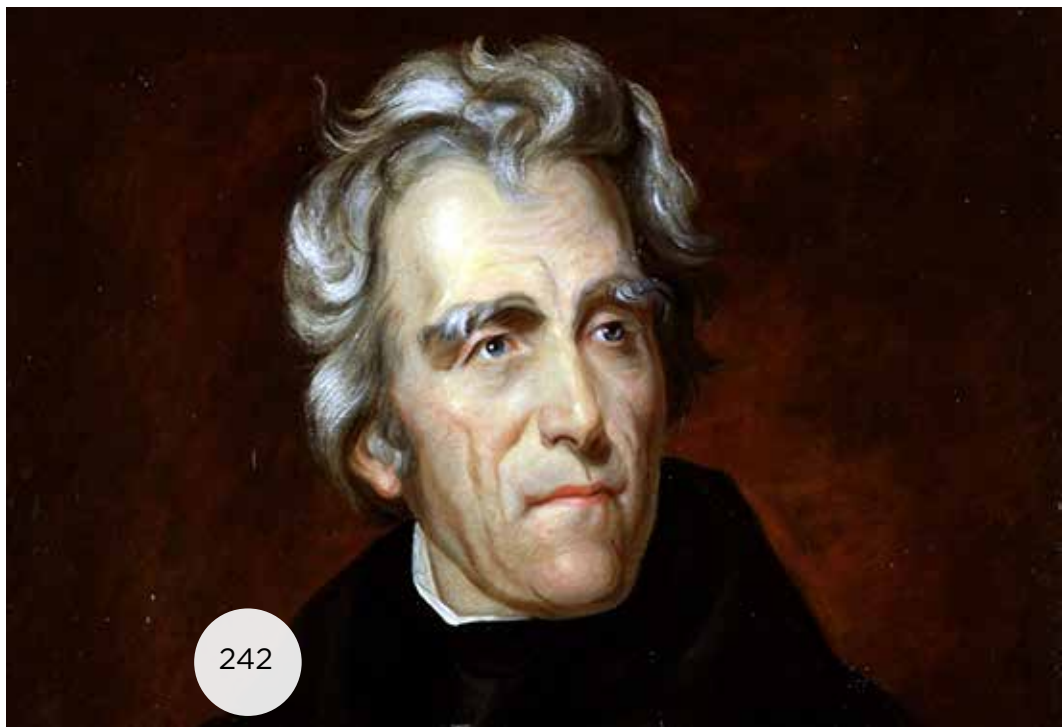
As you read, look for

- ▶ how ethnic rivalries between Creoles and Americans and between people in different regions shaped Louisiana politics in the antebellum era;
- ▶ the changing location of Louisiana's capital;
- ▶ characteristics of the Democratic, Whig, and American Parties;
- ▶ limits placed on women's right to vote and to control their property;
- ▶ two constitutions of the antebellum period;
- ▶ terms: **antebellum, franchise, universal manhood suffrage, internal improvements, head and master statutes.**



The word *antebellum* comes from two Latin words: *ante* meaning "before" and *bellum* meaning "war."

Andrew Jackson served as president of the United States for two terms (1829-1837) and changed the nation's politics in profound ways. He was so influential that some historians have come to call this period the Age of Jackson. Other historians refer to the years between 1820 and 1860 as the **antebellum** (before the war) period, because they are the decades that preceded the American Civil War. During this eventful era, Louisiana's politics sometimes followed national trends. On the whole, however, the state remained a place where politics were shaped principally by concerns, conditions, and cultures that were specific to Louisiana.



Right: Andrew Jackson was our nation's seventh president.

Politics and Ethnicity

Creoles and Americans remained the leading competitors for political power throughout the antebellum period. But the informal power-sharing arrangement, through which the office of governor would alternate between an American and a Creole, fell apart during the 1820s. For the eight years between 1820 and 1828, Americans dominated the office. Thomas Robertson, who was born in Virginia and first came to Louisiana as an appointee of Thomas Jefferson, was elected in 1820. Many Creoles thought he focused on adopting laws and policies that favored Americans. Robertson resigned the governorship in 1824 but was followed in office by two more Americans.

The Creole-American rivalry became even more complicated when a member of a new immigrant group gained the governor's office in 1828. Pierre Derbigny was born in France and was "foreign French," the term used to describe French-speaking immigrants who came to Louisiana directly from France beginning in the 1820s. Like the Acadians and refugees from Saint-Domingue before them, the foreign French were fleeing warfare and political unrest. They were drawn to Louisiana because of its still-thriving French language and culture.

Derbigny died in a carriage accident shortly after taking office. The next elected governor was the Creole André Bienvenu Roman, who served two full terms (1831-1835 and 1839-1843), separated by the term of the American Edward Douglass White. Roman is credited with being one of the state's most effective antebellum governors. In his first term, he focused on improving the quality of levees and the state's *rudimentary* (basic, undeveloped) system of roads. He also supported the development of the state's first railroads.

Lagniappe

Governor White's son, Edward Douglass White Jr., was also a prominent statesman. He was appointed to the U.S. Supreme

Court in 1894 and served as chief justice from 1910 to 1921. Justice White is one of two Louisianians honored with statues in the National Statuary Hall Collection in the U.S. Capitol.



Left: Pierre Derbigny.

Above: André Bienvenu Roman.

Below: Views of the State Capitol in Baton Rouge, built between 1847 and 1852. The stained-glass dome and the grand staircase were added when the building was restored in 1882, years after its destruction by fire in 1862.

Regional Tensions

Besides the ethnic rivalries among Creoles, Americans, and the foreign French, there were other tensions that affected the state's politics. Major disagreements developed between people who lived in different areas in the state. Voters in North Louisiana believed that New Orleans, which they saw as the Creole capital, had too much influence over the state's politics. They tried to address this unfairness by moving the capital away from New Orleans, in the belief that this would reduce the city's power. In 1823, English-speaking legislators made their first attempt to change the capital's location. They were not successful until 1825, at which time they were able to pass legislation moving the capital to Donaldsonville. It took five years to complete the construction of a facility in which they could meet. Despite these efforts, the legislature met in Donaldsonville for only one term, and returned to New Orleans the following year.

In 1847, the rural legislators tried again to move the state government. This time, they selected Baton Rouge as the new capital. In order to protect their political victory, they allocated funds for the design and construction of an impressive capitol building. Architect James Dakin designed the distinctive, castle-like building that still stands on a high bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. Although the building's design received mixed reviews, it would remain the state's capitol until the Civil War sent the state government into exile. The building was occupied by Union troops and was badly damaged by fire in late 1862.



Spotlight

Mark Twain's Description of the Louisiana Capitol

Samuel L. Clemens wrote many books under the pen name Mark Twain, including *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, published in the 1870s. Twain took a long trip down the Mississippi River in the years after the Civil War and recorded his thoughts about people and places along the river. His account included a humorous but unflattering description of Louisiana's Capitol building, which was still suffering from the fire damage of 1862. Twain wonders why such a *sham* (fake) castle could still exist in a time of factories and locomotives. Then he gives his suggestion for how the "whitewashed castle" should be destroyed! Here is how Twain expressed his feelings about the building in his memoir, *Life on the Mississippi*, which was published in 1883:

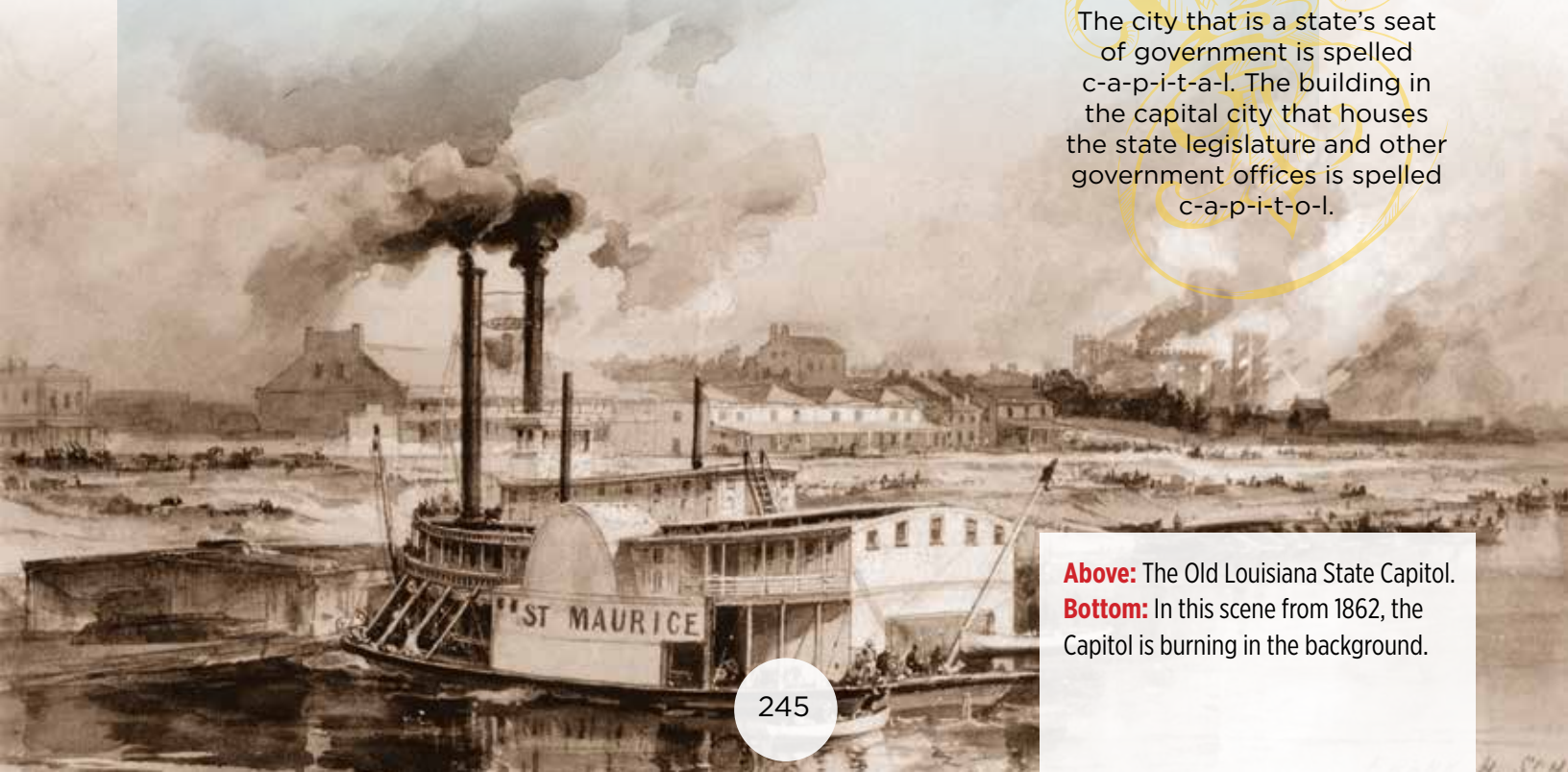
It is pathetic enough, that a whitewashed castle, with turrets and things—materials all ungenthine within and without, pretending to be what they are not—should ever have been built in this otherwise honorable place; but it is much more pathetic to see this architectural falsehood undergoing restoration and perpetuation in our day, when it would have been so easy to let dynamite finish what a charitable fire began, and then devote this restoration-money to the building of something genuine.

Despite his suggestion, the building still exists and is known today as the Old State Capitol. It houses a museum dedicated to the state's political history.



Lagniappe

The city that is a state's seat of government is spelled c-a-p-i-t-a-l. The building in the capital city that houses the state legislature and other government offices is spelled c-a-p-i-t-o-l.



Above: The Old Louisiana State Capitol.
Bottom: In this scene from 1862, the Capitol is burning in the background.

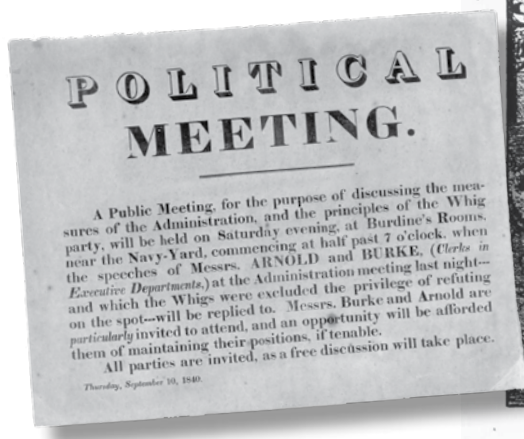
Separate Municipalities

Political tensions were not confined to disputes between New Orleans and the rest of the state. In fact, competing ethnic and neighborhood identities within the city splintered city governance and led to the creation of three separate municipalities. The French Quarter, largely inhabited by Creoles, became the first district. The second district was composed of neighborhoods above Canal Street and was the area identified with Americans who had settled there in large numbers. The third district was downriver from the French Quarter and was identified with working-class people, many of them recent immigrants. Each district had its own separate council. Thus, the state's biggest city was essentially administered as though it were three distinct entities between 1836 and 1852.

Political Parties

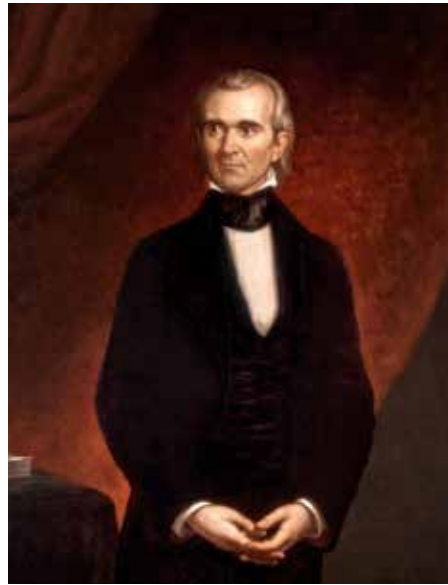
Ethnicity and regional identities were two factors that shaped political alignments. But as the 1830s began, identification with political parties also played a role in how voters made their decisions.

Right: Strong feelings about President Andrew Jackson contributed to the rise in political parties in the 1830s. Many of his critics felt Jackson behaved more like a king than a president.



Democrats

Andrew Jackson's presidency lasted only eight years, but differences in how people felt about Jackson and his policies defined the nation's political party system through the late 1850s. Those who supported Jackson came to be known as Jacksonian Democrats or Democratic Republicans. Over time, they came to be known simply as Democrats. Members of that party tended to favor smaller government and programs designed to support common people and their interests, rather than the interests of businesses or banks. Democrats also tended to prefer widespread political participation rather than a narrow **franchise** (right to vote) that favored property owners and the wealthy. They sought a broad franchise with few, if any, requirements for voting, so long as one was a free white man who had reached the age of twenty-one. This approach to granting voting privileges to the masses of American men is referred to as **universal manhood suffrage**.



Whigs

The main faction that emerged to oppose the Democrats *coalesced* (came together) into the Whig Party in the mid-1830s. In contrast to the Democrats, the Whigs tended to favor business and banking interests over the rights of the common man. Whigs also sought government support for the development of the *infrastructure* (roads, bridges, canals, etc.), which they referred to as **internal improvements**. Whigs believed internal improvements would make doing business easier and make the nation more prosperous. In Louisiana, many sugar planters were drawn to the Whig Party because of its support of a sugar tariff. Sugar planters liked the idea of a tax on imported sugar that would make their locally grown sugar more competitive. The Whigs remained a viable political party until the mid-1850s, when tensions over sectional politics and the expansion of slavery into new territories split the party into northern and southern factions.

Lagniappe

The Whig Party took its name from a British political party that opposed the power of the king. In choosing this name, the Whigs were criticizing Andrew Jackson, implying that he had assumed the power of a king, rather than that of an elected president.



Above: James K. Polk, who was elected in 1844, was the last of the “Jacksonian” presidents. Polk served one term and was succeeded by Louisiana’s Zachary Taylor. **Left:** Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore were the Whig presidential and vice-presidential candidates in the 1848 election.

Special FEATURE

Zachary Taylor

To date, Zachary Taylor is the only Louisiana candidate to be elected president of the United States. Taylor, who was born in Virginia and raised in Kentucky, first came to Louisiana in 1809 in the service of the U.S. Army. He was posted to several different areas of the state before being assigned to Fort Robertson, near Baton Rouge, in 1822. While serving in the heart of Louisiana's plantation region, Taylor saw the wealth that was possible from a well-run plantation. He purchased several parcels of land in both Louisiana and Mississippi, including a 380-acre plantation in Feliciana Parish. At one point he owned more than three hundred slaves.

Taylor generally hired overseers to run his plantations while he continued his military service. He served in the War of 1812 and also fought in several conflicts against Native Americans in the 1830s. His most notable military successes came in the Mexican-American War. This conflict, which began in 1846, had its roots in the contest over Texas.

Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821. To protect its own independence, Mexico offered land grants in Texas to Americans who were willing to become Mexican citizens and Catholics. Over time, many of these settlers decided they wanted to break away from Mexico. Tensions began in the early 1830s and resulted in the outbreak of open warfare between Mexico and the Anglo-American settlers in late 1835. That conflict was resolved in early 1836, but the question of whether Texas would be independent or become a part of the United States remained.



Above: Zachary Taylor was called “Old Rough and Ready” because he was willing to share his troops’ hardships. **Below Left:** Zachary Taylor brought his beloved horse, Old Whitey, with him to Washington, DC. The former war horse became a common sight grazing on the White House lawn. When President Taylor died, Old Whitey marched in the funeral procession behind the wagon that carried the president’s casket.





Top Left: General Zachary Taylor in the Battle of Buena Vista during the Mexican-American War. **Top Right:** Monument to Zachary Taylor adjacent to his mausoleum. **Middle Left:** Bird's-eye view of General Taylor's camp near Corpus Christi, Texas, 1845. **Bottom Left:** Zachary Taylor's Mausoleum in the Zachary Taylor National Cemetery, Louisville, Kentucky.

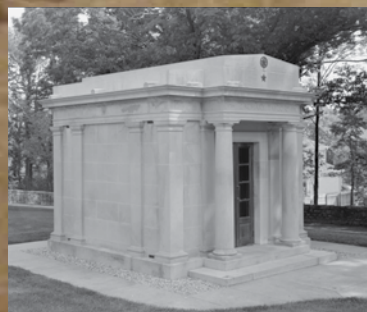
Although Americans disagreed about whether Texas should be slave or free territory, the United States annexed Texas and declared it an American state in December 1845. Mexico's leaders were angry, not just because of the annexation but also because they disagreed about where the border was located. The United States marked its territorial claim at the Rio Grande River. Mexico insisted that the border was 150 miles further north, at the Nueces River.

Zachary Taylor was in charge of American troops in Mexico when the Mexican-American War began in 1846. The war continued for sixteen months. American victory was achieved in part because of a series of impressive military triumphs led by Taylor.

Taylor's successes against the Mexican military earned him great praise and national prominence. Taylor's fame led to the White House, much as Andrew Jackson's fame had led him there. Taylor was elected in 1848 and inaugurated the nation's eleventh president in 1849.

In part because of his own *ambivalent* (indecisive, contradictory) views about slavery, Taylor took a hands-off approach to congressional debates about its expansion into new territories. And though he ran and won as a candidate of the Whig Party, he insisted that his first loyalty was to all the nation's people rather than to any political party. Taylor died in office early in 1850 and was succeeded by his vice president, Millard Fillmore.

Although Taylor's life was extraordinary, his settlement and successes mirror those of many other Anglo-American migrants. Taylor came to Louisiana on the nation's business, and stayed to enhance his own economic opportunities. A military man and a planter, Taylor became a Whig and a president, the only one elected from the state of Louisiana. . . at least so far. Do you think another Louisiana citizen will be elected president in this century?





The American Party

The American Party, called the “Know Nothings,” emerged as a party hostile to new immigrants. As citizens who were born in the United States, they believed that people who had been here a generation or longer should have a greater say in politics than newly arriving immigrants. They also believed Democrats exploited immigrants, particularly working-class Germans and Irish, in order to expand their voting base. Because most of the Irish who immigrated to the United States in the antebellum period were Catholic, members of the American Party were also known to be anti-Catholic. Party members were called Know Nothings because, when asked about the party and its priorities, the members often replied, “I know nothing.”

By the late 1840s, large numbers of new immigrants played a tremendous role in the nation and in Louisiana. Irish and German immigrants made up half the population of New Orleans by 1850. Despite the American Party’s numerical disadvantage, its candidates, who employed a combination of force and voter intimidation, controlled politics in New Orleans from 1854 until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861.

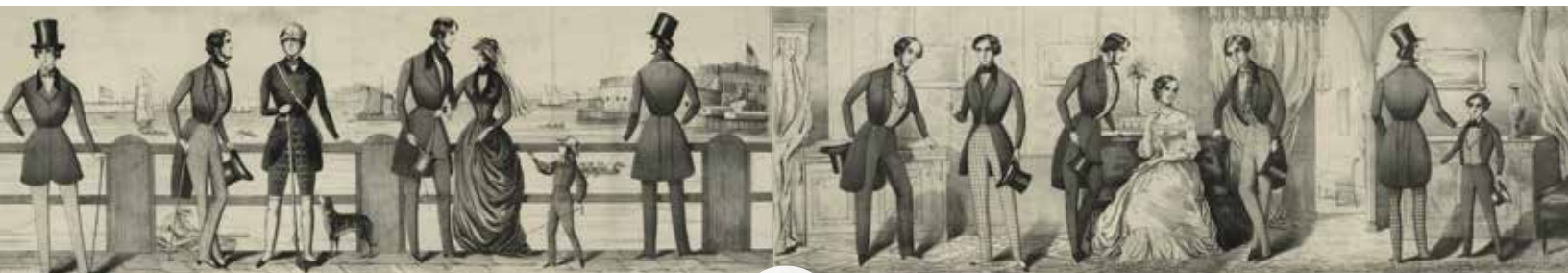


Top: This portrait of “Citizen Know Nothing” represents the ideal of a native-born American. **Above:** American Party member John Edward Boulingy represented Louisiana for one term in Congress. **Below:** Spring and summer fashions for 1841.

Few Rights for Women

Even with universal manhood suffrage and a growing diversity in political parties, the vote for women was nearly a century in the future. Although virtually all free white men gained the vote during the antebellum period, women were not believed to be interested in politics or capable of understanding political issues. The small numbers of women who did seek the vote were largely confined to the urban North. Most people believed that a woman’s proper place was in the home. In Louisiana, this belief took the form of **head and master statutes**. Under these laws, when a woman married, her husband became her head and master, as her father had been before the marriage.

Due to civil law practices dating from the colonial period, a woman or her family did have the option to obtain a separate property agreement before marriage, through which the property and wealth she brought to the marriage would remain her own. If a woman failed to make a separate property agreement beforehand, all of the property she brought to the marriage became community property, and a husband could dispose of it without his wife’s knowledge or permission.





Two State Constitutions

The two state constitutions adopted during the antebellum period reflected the tense competition among political parties and between New Orleans and the rest of the state. The Constitution of 1845 reflected the Democrats' desire to write universal manhood suffrage into the state's fundamental law. Democrats also succeeded at limiting state aid to private enterprises.

The tensions between New Orleans and the rest of the state were also reflected in the 1845 document. Democrats in New Orleans preferred to use the total number of registered voters to determine the *apportionment* (distribution) of seats in the state legislature. Planters preferred that total population numbers, including slaves, be used as the basis for determining those numbers. The 1845 Constitution came to a compromise by allocating seats in the state House of Representatives based on registered voters and in the Senate based on total population, including slaves.

As a compromise document, the Constitution of 1845 pleased almost no one, so a new constitution was adopted in 1852. Although the new constitution retained the Democratic priority of universal manhood suffrage, it reasserted Whig priorities like government support for business endeavors, particularly those related to banking and internal improvements. Whigs argued that roads and railroads would expand opportunities for commerce and the development of wealth.

Reviewing the Section

1. Define in sentence form: antebellum, franchise, internal improvements.
2. Why did voters in North Louisiana want to move the capital away from New Orleans?
3. Which political party favored the "common man" and which favored "big business"?

Top : Louisiana slaves performed the difficult work of cutting sugarcane. The state's sugar crop was a source of livelihood for 500,000 people. **Above**: Planters wanted their slaves to be counted as population for the purposes of apportioning seats in the legislature.

Section 2

The Antebellum Economy

As you read, look for

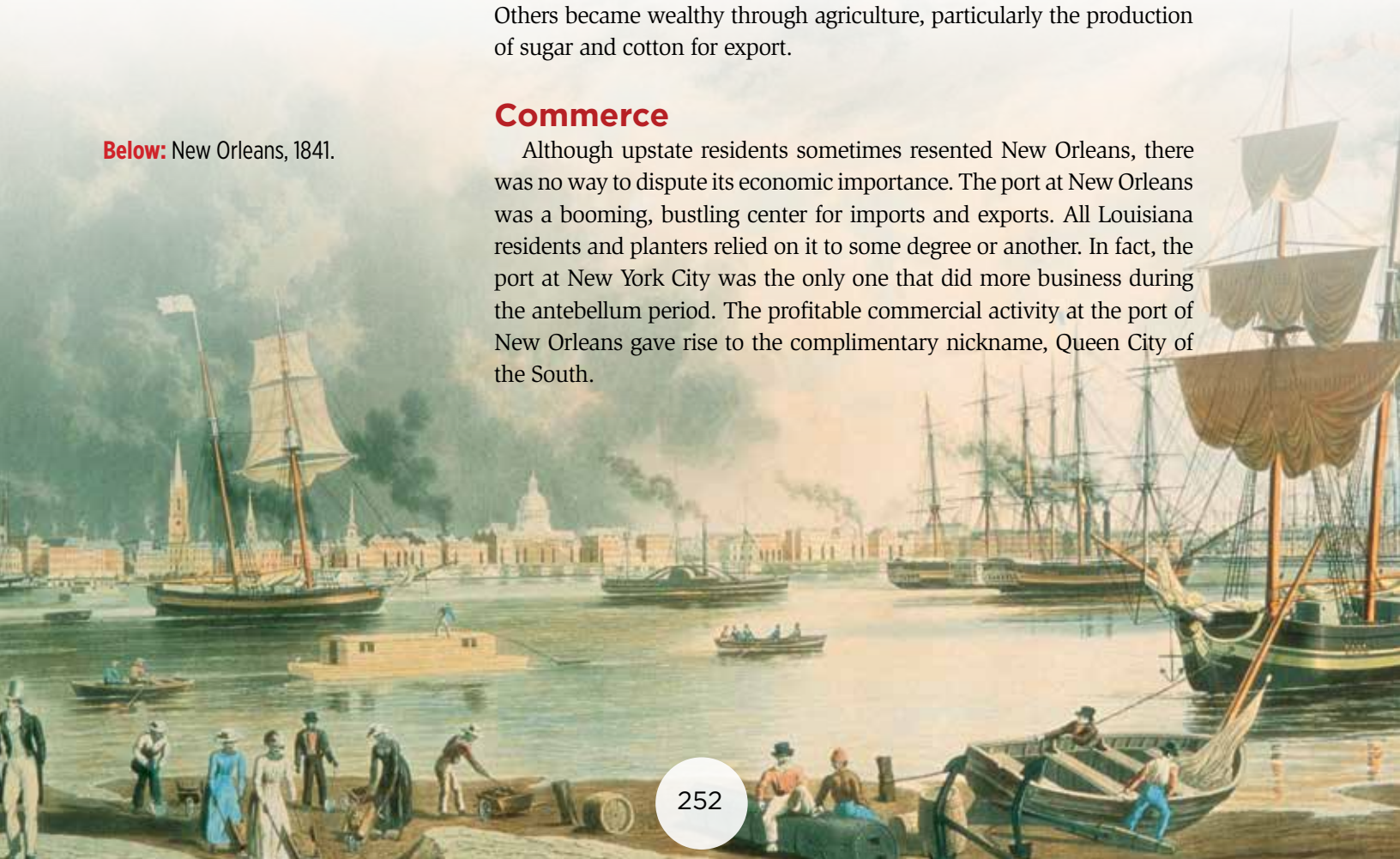
- ▶ how the development of the steamboat helped New Orleans become a leading U.S. port;
- ▶ the importance of factors and bankers in Louisiana's antebellum economy;
- ▶ different climate and labor conditions for growing sugar and cotton;
- ▶ the growth of slavery as both a labor force and an economic phenomenon;
- ▶ terms: **factor, holding, coffle.**

Whether one supported Democratic, Whig, or Know Nothing economic policies, no one could dispute that the state's economy thrived during the antebellum period. During this era, New Orleans became one of the nation's largest cities and most economically important ports. Some people made vast fortunes in *facilitating* (making possible) this trade. Others became wealthy through agriculture, particularly the production of sugar and cotton for export.

Commerce

Although upstate residents sometimes resented New Orleans, there was no way to dispute its economic importance. The port at New Orleans was a booming, bustling center for imports and exports. All Louisiana residents and planters relied on it to some degree or another. In fact, the port at New York City was the only one that did more business during the antebellum period. The profitable commercial activity at the port of New Orleans gave rise to the complimentary nickname, Queen City of the South.

Below: New Orleans, 1841.



Factors

Planters and their families often spent a part of the year in New Orleans, especially during the winter social season, but plantation business went on year-round. When planters returned home, they relied on the skills and knowledge of financial representatives called factors. A **factor** oversaw the arrival of shipments of sugar and cotton, advised the planter on the best moment to sell, and arranged for boats to ship their client's crop to its final destination. Some even arranged for the purchase and shipment of building materials and furnishings for those luxurious plantation homes.

A knowledgeable factor was key to a planter's success. He often loaned the client money for seeds and supplies. However, if a planter's crop failed and he could not repay the loan, the factor could foreclose on the planter's property. After the economic downturn of the late 1830s, many factors also became planters when they acquired the land and slaves of their former clients.

Banks

Banks and bankers were also essential to Louisiana's antebellum economy. The banking system that developed was critically important in making capital resources available to support the development of businesses in both urban and rural parts of the state. Banks made the loans or sold the bonds that made the construction of public and private buildings and infrastructure projects possible. They also loaned money to planters so they could buy new land and equipment, or build upgraded production facilities like sugar houses.

Transportation

Well into the twentieth century, water routes remained the preferred method for transporting people and goods from one part of the state to another. Although Louisiana had always depended on water travel, those routes became more productive in the antebellum period, due principally to the development of the steamboat.

Below: Two scenes of the New Orleans waterfront in the 1850s.



Steamboats

Between 1769 and 1811, multiple men developed the technology that led to the age of steamboat travel. In 1811, Robert Fulton and Robert Livingston designed and built a steamboat they named the *New Orleans*. After successfully navigating the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, the *New Orleans* arrived in its namesake city on January 10, 1812. Only 20 steamboats arrived at the port in 1814. By 1834, that number had risen to 1,200 arrivals, suggesting how important the steamboat was in the growth of the port of New Orleans.

Due to the development of canals, steamboats also began to *ply* (travel regularly over) smaller bodies of water. Private investors were the first people to construct canals in this period. They took the

risk and planned to make their money back by charging users a transportation-access fee called a toll. By the 1830s, the state was actively supporting the development of new canals. In 1831, public and private investors worked together to establish a bank whose primary purpose was to *underwrite* (finance, bankroll) the construction of the New Basin Canal in New Orleans. The canal was designed to provide easy access for boats and barges between Lake Pontchartrain and the interior of the city, opening an alternate route for trade and transportation.

Railroads

Railroad development also began during the antebellum period. A six-mile route between the city of New Orleans and Lake Pontchartrain was completed in 1831. Still, even on such short routes, there were many glitches. Trains often derailed, and passengers were often forced to get out and help return the train to its tracks. As with the development of canals, the state began to assist or work together with private businesses to develop railroad lines in Louisiana. The hope was that, by connecting Louisiana with economic centers in other states, even more business could be created. However, railroad development remained in its infancy in the antebellum period. Much of the progress that had been made was lost during the Civil War when Union and Confederate forces fought over access to railroad routes, or destroyed them to keep their opponents from benefiting from their use.

Agriculture

Although all kinds of people and goods traveled into and out of the port of New Orleans, sugar and cotton were the two main crops that underwrote the port's success and made so many Louisiana planters prosperous.

Lagniappe

Robert Livingston, who partnered with Robert Fulton to build the steamship *New Orleans*, was the same man who, as U.S. ambassador to France, had helped negotiate the Louisiana Purchase. He and Fulton experimented together on steamboat design in France. Back in America, Fulton married Livingston's niece. Together, the men built the first U.S. commercial steamboat, the *Clermont*, and later built the *New Orleans*.

Top: A steamboat was propelled by a large paddlewheel. **Opposite Page, Bottom:** Oak Alley (originally named Bon Sejour) was a prosperous sugar plantation in St. James Parish belonging to the brother of Governor André Bienvenu Roman.



Sugar

Because it needed a longer, warmer growing season, sugar tended to be raised no further north than Alexandria. It also tended to be grown in a plantation setting because it required more land, labor, and infrastructure to be grown profitably. Thus, sugar planters needed a certain amount of capital to purchase the land and labor force and to develop the facilities for turning sugarcane into granulated sugar. Sugar cultivation was labor intensive at all stages, but harvesting and processing it were particularly difficult. Louisiana planter Joseph Dubreuil de Villars wrote that sugar cultivation required “large plantations, long and hard work, expensive equipment, and such a quantity of men that anyone undertaking its cultivation by day-laborers would be ruined within a year.”



Cotton

It was possible to raise cotton in all parts of the state, but its cultivation was concentrated in the cooler region north of Pointe Coupee. Cotton production more than doubled in Louisiana between 1840 and 1860. In the latter year, the state’s farmers and planters produced one-sixth of the nation’s cotton.

Cotton was raised in plantation settings, but because it required less investment in infrastructure, it could also be grown profitably on smaller farms. Whether cotton was grown by slaves or farm families, its production continued for much of the year. As soon as the weather grew warm, cotton was planted by hand. Then the near-constant hoeing began to keep the rows free of weeds. By late summer, picking began, and once the cotton was cleaned and processed into bales, it was shipped to New Orleans for sale to domestic and international markets.



Plantations and Small Farms

While we tend to associate the antebellum period with large plantations and slavery, only about a quarter of southern families actually owned slaves. Although slave owners were not a majority of the population, owning slaves was a central economic *aspiration* (ambition, goal), and many people believed it was the surest route to prosperity.

Slightly more than half of all slaves in Louisiana lived on plantations, but the agricultural output from plantations far exceeded the output of small farmers. While only 52 percent of slaves lived and worked on plantations, their labors produced 75 percent of the export crops produced in Louisiana and other slave-holding states.



A bale of cotton weighs about 500 pounds.



Slavery as a Labor System

In the antebellum period, slaves were legally classed as property, and the plantation labor system was shaped around the assumption of slave labor. Work lay at the center of a slave's existence, but the particular labor that a slave did depended on a number of different circumstances.

Plantation Slavery

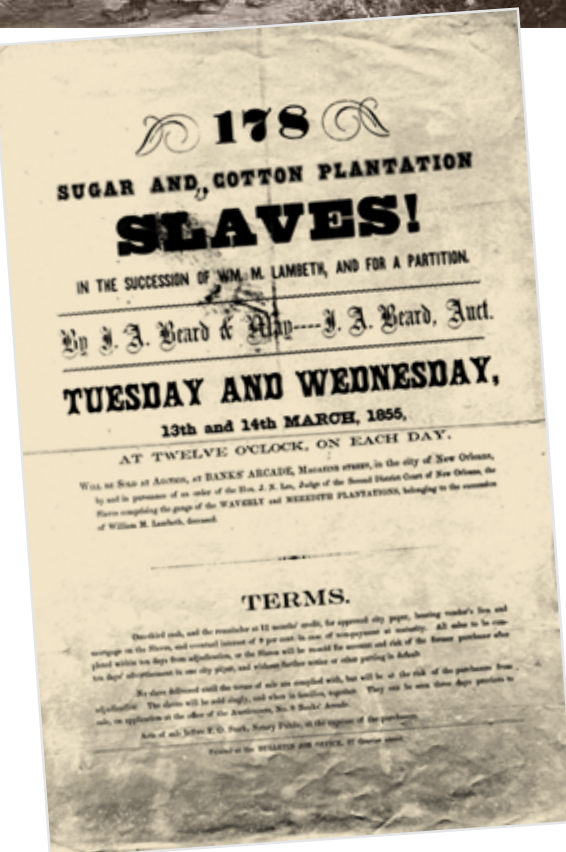
Work routines for plantation slaves varied considerably based on the kind of cash crop they produced. The size of a holding also played a role. A **holding** refers to the number of slaves who lived and worked for a single master. If a slave was part of a large holding, individuals tended to work in a more specialized fashion. Thus, on a large plantation, a slave might be trained to do very specific work as a blacksmith or horse trainer. Other slaves were assigned to perform domestic tasks like cooking, cleaning, or taking care of large plantation homes and the master's family. Only one percent of planters owned one hundred or more slaves.

If a slave was part of a smaller holding, individuals were expected to perform a number of different jobs depending on the needs of their owners at various points in the year. Most slaves lived in small rather than large holdings. In very small holdings, farm families sometimes labored alongside their slaves during the busiest times of the year.

Urban Slavery

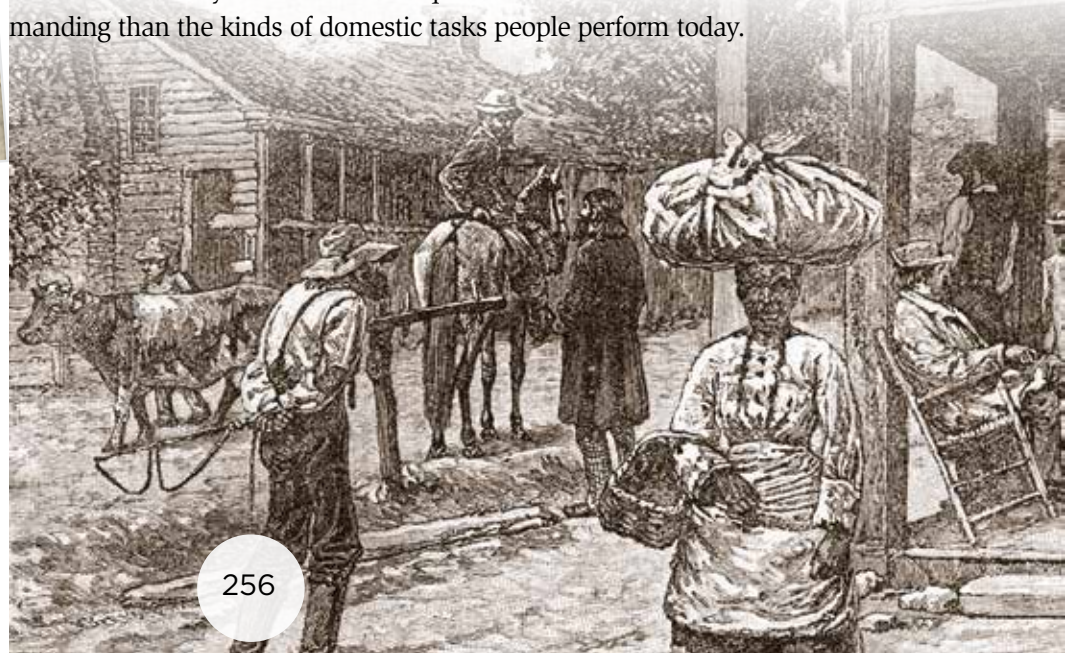
In an urban area like New Orleans, slaves did a dizzying *array* (assortment, range) of jobs. Some slaves worked on the waterfront, loading and unloading boats with cotton, sugar, and other imported and exported goods. Others were rented out by their masters for day labor tasks or were assigned to run businesses, like rooming houses or taverns. Sometimes slaves were hired out for a year or more. During that time, the master took the majority of the earnings, but in some cases, slaves kept a small percentage of their rental fee.

Female slaves, who in New Orleans were the majority, often did domestic work, caring for a home and the needs of its family. However, nineteenth-century housework was quite different and much more demanding than the kinds of domestic tasks people perform today.



Top: Cotton fields required extensive slave labor throughout the year. **Above:** This notice advertises the auction of slaves of a deceased plantation owner. These slaves could be purchased on credit, with 1/3 down and the remainder paid within 12 months.

Right: Urban slaves did a wide range of jobs.



Special FEATURE

Factors That Affected Slave Pricing

Here is a description of the four domestic slaves held by a wealthy New Orleans family. When the family's estate was inventoried, the slaves were listed alongside the family's other personal property. The ages, skills, and prospects for freedom helped to determine the relative value of each slave.

Manette, mulatress, aged around thirty nine to forty years, Creole of this State, good servant proper for everything, good cook, good laundress, good presser, dry plaiter, and good subject - \$2,500

Delphine, daughter of the said Manette, quadroon, aged around nineteen years, good servant and seamstress, before becoming free when she shall have acquired or attained the age of thirty years, Creole of this state - estimated under the consideration of her future liberty - \$800

A negress named Maranthe, called Emerance Africaine, aged around forty seven years, cook and laundress, good servant, good subject - \$1,200

A negress named Louise, daughter of the said Emerance, Creole of this state, aged around thirteen years, servant and seamstress - \$1,200

The terms *mulatress* and *quadroon* are no longer used today. However, in nineteenth-century Louisiana, they were terms that described a person's racial heritage. A mulatress was a woman who had one white parent and one black parent. A quadroon had one mulatto parent and one white parent.

Household servants performed the kinds of skills we associate with housework today, and they also performed tasks like sewing. Dry plaiting described the ability to do fancy sewing work by braiding and attaching ribbons and decorative borders to women's hats and clothing. Why do you think a skilled person like Delphine was worth so much less than other women with similar skills?



Top: Slave cabin, San Francisco Plantation. **Second from Top:** A slave father sold away from his family. **Above:** *The Sale*, color lithograph by Henry Louis Stephens. **Left:** Frogmore Plantation slave cabin interior.



Lagniappe

The term *coffle* comes from the Arabic word *qāfila*, which means “caravan.”

Top: Scenes in the life of a plantation slave. **Below:** Men in a coffle were chained together to keep them from escaping.



Buying and Selling Slaves

The buying and selling of slaves became an additional and important part of the state's economy, particularly in New Orleans, which was home to the South's largest cluster of slave markets. As people moved west, large numbers of new slaves were required to clear the land and raise the cash crops. Because the external slave trade had been outlawed in 1808, slaves often had to be moved to the Deep South from states of the Upper South. Sometimes they were marched overland in a large group called a **coffle**. Men, who were considered more likely to escape, were chained together, while women and children walked unchained but closely supervised.

Other slaves were shipped southward on boats from port cities like Norfolk and Charleston, or they traveled downriver toward New Orleans. In fact, the commonplace phrase “sold down the river” emerged in this period when many slaves literally were transported down the river to be sold in the slave markets at New Orleans.

Slave Markets

Because of its key location and many commercial and banking establishments, New Orleans became the center of the slave trade in the Deep South. The slaves of a master who died were often sold in a group at a public auction to pay off any remaining debts. In this scenario, a master's entire holding could be sold off in the same way that personal property—like paintings, furniture, and real estate—were sold.

While many people think of slave sales being conducted by an auctioneer, with slaves going to the highest bidder, most slave sales took place between a broker and a single buyer in private slave markets concentrated in the business district just above Canal Street. The season for slave selling was September to April. This avoided the hottest and most disease-prone months of the year. Illustrations from the period show slaves on display in front of slave markets. Many were dressed in simple suits and calico dresses. Slave brokers kept detailed records that have allowed historians to better understand what this process was like for all the parties involved.

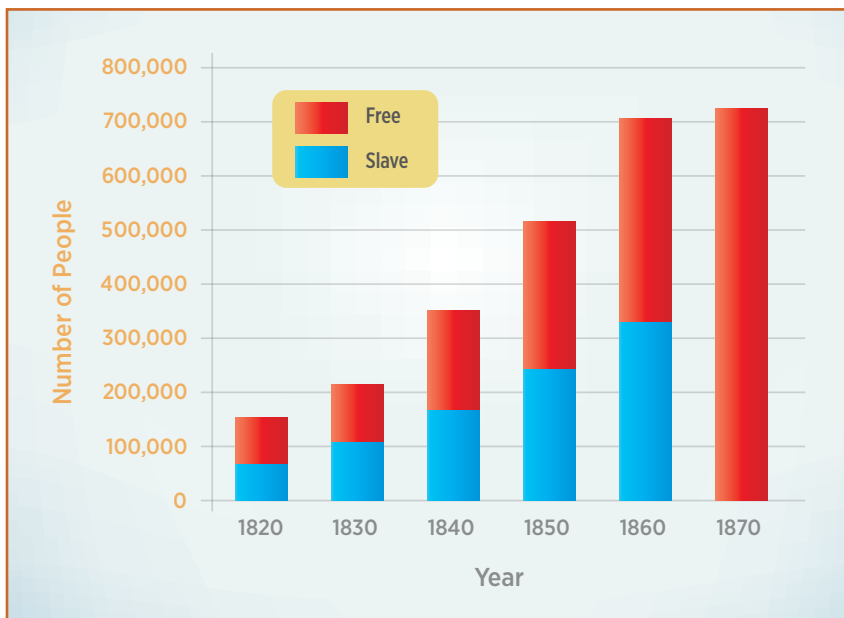


Figure 9.1

Population of Louisiana, 1820-1870

Why were all Louisianians free by the 1870s?

Slavery as an Economic System

This points to an important aspect of slavery that is often overlooked. Although slavery was a labor system, it was also an important economic *phenomenon* (an observable fact, occurrence, or circumstance). Slaves were used as financial assets as well as laborers. If a plantation owner went into debt, he or she was more inclined to sell a slave rather than land. Because slavery was such a thriving business, new slaves could be purchased if a master's financial situation improved.

As antislavery sentiment grew in the North, the market for slaves grew ever more active in the South. As the demand rose, the prices of slaves rose steadily. In some places, the prices paid for slaves tripled in the years between 1810 and 1860.

Reviewing the Section

1. Define in sentence form: factor, holding, coffer.
2. Why was sugar grown only in South Louisiana, and why was it grown on plantations?
3. What types of jobs did urban slaves perform?

Above: Slaves were considered property and were bought and sold in private slave markets or at auctions, as seen in this engraving of the Rotunda in New Orleans.

Section 3

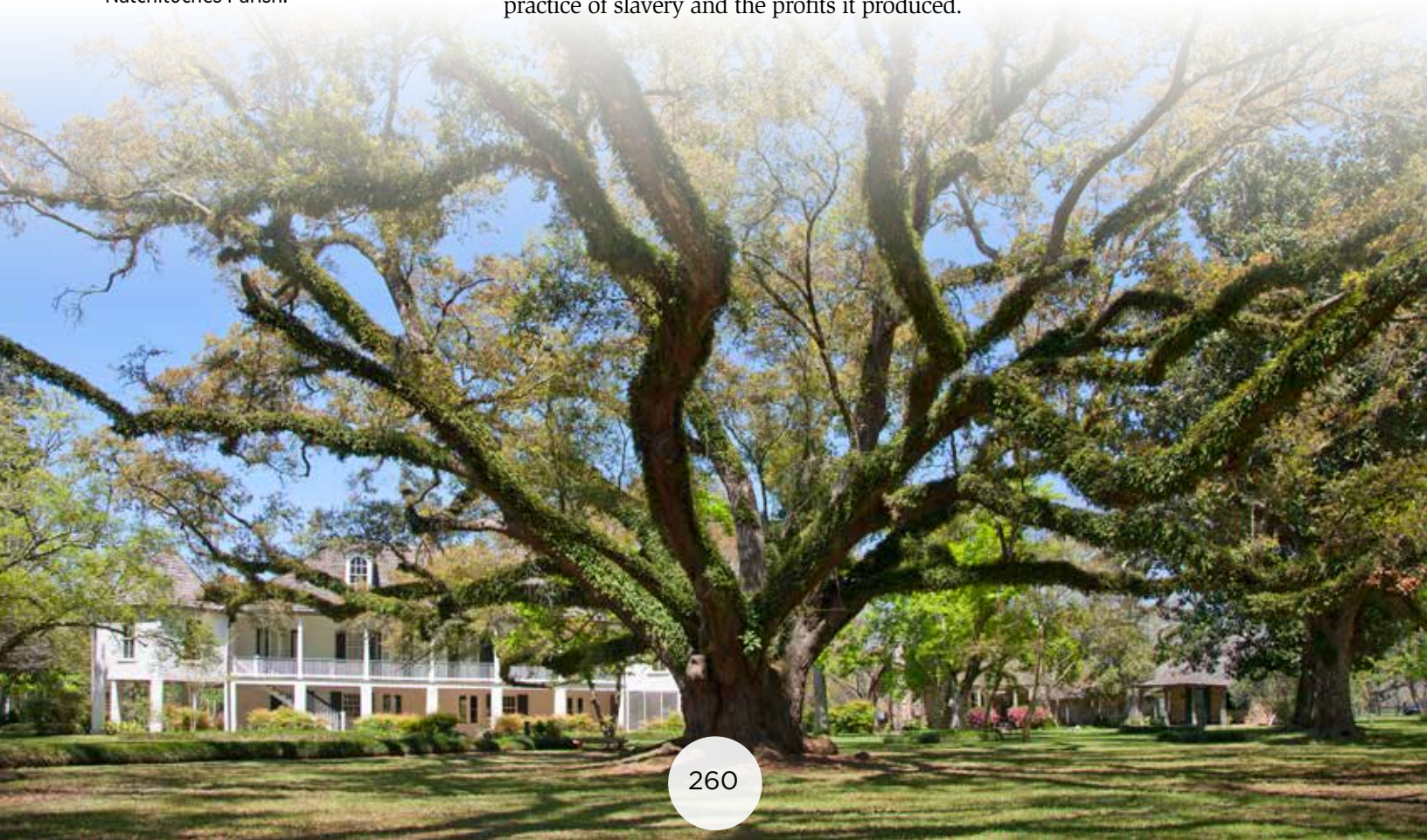
People and Culture in Antebellum Louisiana

As you read, look for

- ▶ contrasting cultures of plantation owners, slaves, and free people of color;
- ▶ controversies and contributions of newer immigrant groups;
- ▶ dangers and pleasures of life in antebellum Louisiana;
- ▶ terms: **veranda**, **overseer**, **slave quarters**.

Below: Melrose Plantation, also known as Yucca Plantation, is located in Natchitoches Parish.

Slavery was certainly a business, and the business of cash-crop agriculture depended on it as a labor system. However, the people on both sides of that system developed distinctive cultures that grew out of the practice of slavery and the profits it produced.



Plantation Culture

The wealth generated through the cultivation of sugar and cotton allowed many plantation owners to build large homes. These plantation houses varied in architectural style, but many of them had two stories and columns, either along the front or all around the house to support a **veranda** (a long open porch, usually with a roof). The master's home was sometimes called the big house, and it generally sat in a prominent place near the front of a plantation, often facing the nearest river or road.

Planters prided themselves on their hospitality, and they were expected to entertain visitors in grand style. Because plantations were often distant from one another, owners also hosted overnight house parties for fellow planters and their families. Day-long meals and entertainments were followed by evening parties and balls featuring music, dancing, and elaborate ball gowns for the ladies.

The women of a plantation family were expected to raise large families and oversee the domestic activities in the big house and in the service buildings surrounding it. This included the kitchen buildings, which were almost always separated from the main house in this era because of the great risk of fire. The plantation owner and his sons were expected to oversee the business aspects of the plantation. Planters who could afford to do so hired full-time **overseers** (white men who acted as managers of the slaves and farming operations of plantations) and spent much of their time pursuing their favorite leisure activities.

Frogmore Plantation in Concordia Parish, like most plantations, had numerous buildings in addition to the main house. **Far Left:** Cotton gin. **Below:** Dogtrot bedroom. **Middle Left:** Slave quarters. **Bottom Left:** Cane mill. **Bottom Right:** Cotton gin building.





Above: This painting by John Antrobus, *A Plantation Burial*, depicts slaves mourning the loss of a loved one.

Below: *A Portrait of Betsy*, painted by François (Franz) Fleischbein in 1837, shows a free woman of color in an elaborate headdress. The number of free people of color in Louisiana reached a peak of 25,000 in 1840.



Slave Culture

Like their masters, enslaved people developed distinctive cultural forms. Except for domestic slaves who lived alongside the family in the main house, most slaves lived in small but nearby houses arranged in an area referred to as the **slave quarters**. The level at which masters or overseers monitored the slave quarters varied, but in their quarters slaves gathered to cook, talk, sing, dance, mourn, and

share their lives with one another. Although slaves needed the permission of their master to marry, some chose their own partners. Families developed in the quarters, and generations passed down their knowledge and cultural practices. Some slaves still had memories of ancestors and beliefs dating back to Africa.

Teaching slaves to read was illegal, so most slave culture was oral, passed along in songs and stories. As the antebellum period proceeded, the slave population became more Americanized and English-speaking, though some slaves continued to speak French along with their masters. Both masters and slaves pursued religious beliefs, but slaves tended to have a distinct interpretation of Biblical texts and religious practices that were separate from their masters.

Free People of Color

Although the population of free people of color became significant as early as the Spanish period, the population of this group did not reach its height until 1840, when their numbers reached 25,000. Free people of color occupied a legal and social middle ground between free whites and slaves. They had some of the same rights as white people, but as their numbers grew, the legislature began to pass laws that restricted their rights. In 1830, the legislature passed an act that required free people of color who had come to the state after 1825 either to leave or be imprisoned. In 1859, the legislature even passed a law ordering free people of color to select a master and become a slave for life. Such laws proved difficult to enforce, but they show how this population seemed problematic to some.

Some free people of color were also slave owners. The best-documented case is of the Metoyer family who were descended from a slave named Marie Thérèse and a Frenchman named Pierre Claude Thomas Metoyer.

Special FEATURE

From Slave to Slave Owner: Marie Thérèse Coincoin

Marie Thérèse Coincoin was born in 1742 as a slave to the founder of Natchitoches, Louis Juchereau de St. Denis. Later, a French soldier named Pierre Claude Thomas Metoyer purchased her. Together, they would have ten children during their long relationship. In 1786, Metoyer bought Marie Thérèse her freedom along with the freedom of their surviving children. He also gave her a parcel of land at Cedar Bend on the Cane River in Natchitoches Parish.

With the help of her children, Marie Thérèse began growing tobacco on their small plantation. She trapped wild animals and sold their byproducts. She also produced medicines, using skills that she had apparently learned from her African-born parents. Marie Thérèse started a cattle ranch on her land and hired a Spanish man to manage it. As the plantation grew, Marie Thérèse needed help to run it, so she eventually bought three slaves, one female and two males.

By the time of her death in 1816, Marie Thérèse's plantation covered over one thousand acres and she owned sixteen slaves. Her children would continue to work and expand the plantation and eventually become the wealthiest free family of color in the nation. Her descendents formed one of the main branches of the Cane River Creole community.

Today you can explore sites associated with the Metoyer family along the Cane River. Marie Therese's son, Augustin Metoyer, donated the land for the community's St. Augustine Church. His brother, Thomas Metoyer, was the architect and builder of the original church building. Though Thomas's building has been replaced, its original bell still rings in today's church tower. Thomas Metoyer also built Melrose Plantation, starting with Yucca House, African House, and a barn in the years between 1810 and 1815. He began construction of the plantation's "Big House" in 1832 but died during the building process. His son completed the house. Today Melrose Plantation is listed as a National Historic Landmark and is open to visitors.

Think about the time period in which Marie Thérèse Coincoin lived. Why do you think she continued to buy and own slaves even though she was once a slave herself?

Top to Bottom: Augustin Metoyer, a Metoyer descendant, Melrose Plantation, the cemetery at Melrose.



Lagniappe

Construction of the New Basin Canal, which began in 1832, was done almost entirely by Irishmen. Desperate for jobs, they were willing to work for little pay. More than eight thousand workers died of illnesses during the six years of construction. By the 1950s, the canal was no longer needed and was filled in. In 1990, a Celtic cross was erected at the foot of West End Boulevard in memory of the workers.



Right: Pleasure boats dock in the only remaining section of the New Basin Canal. **Bottom:** New Basin Canal in 1915.

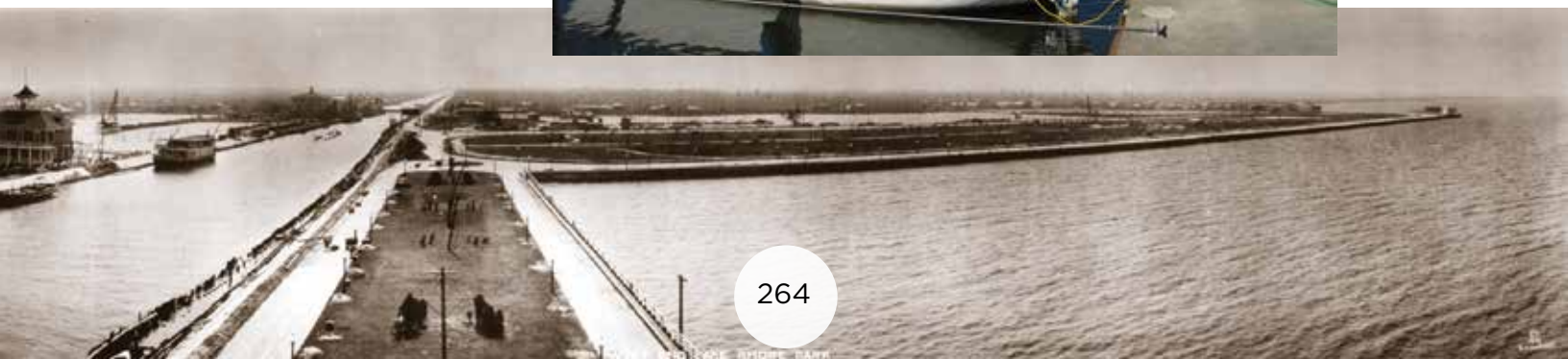
Newer Immigrant Groups

Free people of color were not the only population whose presence proved controversial in the final years of the antebellum era. The large numbers of Germans and Irish who came to Louisiana upset social conventions. Most Germans immigrated in family groups. Yet they *rankled* (annoyed, upset) many Protestants with their distinctive culture of socializing at beer gardens with their families after Sunday worship.

The Irish had an even less favorable reputation than the Germans. The Irish tended to arrive poor if not penniless since most were fleeing a devastating potato famine. Those who made it to the United States were often willing to take the worst jobs imaginable. Slave owners sometimes hired Irish laborers to clear land or do projects they considered too dangerous or risky for their own slaves. Although they were often criticized for being dirty, *unkempt* (untidy), and hard drinking, by the late nineteenth century the Irish had fully assimilated into the state's cultural fabric, particularly in and around New Orleans.

Risks

New immigrants faced more than economic challenges. The conditions of plumbing and drainage were poor in most American cities, and diseases were often spread through contaminated water. Standing water also provided a breeding ground for mosquitoes that could spread yellow fever to humans. In more than half the years of the nineteenth century, yellow fever outbreaks plagued New Orleans, sometimes killing thousands of people in a single summer. The worst antebellum outbreak occurred in 1853. In August alone, more than one thousand people died each week. By the time the epidemic ended, one in twelve New Orleanians had died. Casualties were much higher among recent immigrants, especially the Irish. Twenty percent of the city's Irish immigrants died that year.





Today, Congo Square is an open space in the southern corner of Louis Armstrong Park.

Daily Life

Despite disease and the challenges brought about by ethnic tensions, political infighting, and the inequality inherent in a slave society, Louisianians continued to find ways to enjoy and find meaning in life. In rural areas, churches served as community centers where like-minded people met, worshipped, married, and formed new families. Even as politics became more partisan, political party gatherings provided social opportunities. Although speakers sometimes talked for several hours, competing parties sponsored barbecues and served special treats like lemonade and, for the men, hard liquor.

The City

On the eve of the Civil War, New Orleans was one of the nation's largest and wealthiest cities. All kinds of people—slave and free, native and immigrant, visitor and citizen—mixed and mingled on its streets. Those streets were sometimes dangerous, but were also filled with the potential for hearing strange languages and experiencing unique cultural events like the Sunday slave dances in Congo Square. As Louis Moreau Gottschalk's childhood and subsequent career remind us, despite its inequality, Louisiana's mixing and mingling of its people created riches that were cultural as well as economic.



Reviewing the Section

1. Define in sentence form: veranda, overseer, slave quarters.
2. What laws of 1830 and 1859 affected the lives of free people of color in Louisiana?
3. What kinds of jobs did Irish immigrants perform?

Top Left: Political rallies were enjoyable social occasions for the audience, as artist George Caleb Bingham showed in his painting, *Stump Speaking*. **Above:** Girod House (also called Napoleon House) is one of the oldest buildings in the New Orleans French Quarter.

Chapter Review

Chapter Summary

Section 1: Antebellum Politics

- Louisiana political rivalries during the antebellum period included ethnic competition among Americans, Creoles, and the foreign French. There were also regional tensions between voters in northern Louisiana and New Orleans.
- The location of the state capital changed from New Orleans to Donaldsonville, back to New Orleans, and then, in 1847, to Baton Rouge. The movement of the state capital reflected regional tensions in the state. James Dakin designed the castle-like state capitol building that still stands on a high bluff overlooking the Mississippi River.
- The city of New Orleans was divided into three districts during the years 1836 to 1852. The first district was the French Quarter, largely inhabited by Creoles. The second district was the neighborhoods above Canal Street, largely settled by Americans. The third district, downriver from the French Quarter, was identified with working-class people, many of them recent immigrants.
- From the mid-1830s to the 1850s, the major political parties in the United States were the Democratic Party, which favored smaller government and programs to serve the common people, and the Whig Party, which favored internal improvements and business and banking interests.

Section 2: The Antebellum Economy

- The port of New Orleans flourished during the antebellum period. New Orleans became one of the nation's largest cities and second-busiest port, where large quantities of sugar and cotton were exported.
 - Robert Fulton and Robert Livingston helped develop the steamboat. They first built the *Clermont* and later the *New Orleans*, which successfully navigated the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. By 1834, 1,200 steamboats were arriving in New Orleans on an annual basis.
 - In the 1830s, the state began to support the digging of canals including the New Basin Canal. At this same time, the first railroads in Louisiana were built.
- The two most profitable crops in Louisiana were sugar and cotton. Sugar production required a long, warm growing season. Sugar required large tracts of land, many laborers, and expensive equipment. Cotton could be grown profitably on small or large tracts of land with lower equipment costs.
 - Slaves were legally classified as property. Slaves performed a variety of tasks depending on circumstances. Slaves on large plantations might be assigned a specialized task while slaves in a smaller holding performed a variety of tasks, often alongside their slave owner.
 - The importation of slaves was outlawed in 1808. However, slaves were still bought and sold within the United States. New Orleans became the center of the slave trade in the Deep South. Slaves were viewed as both a source of labor and an important financial asset.

Section 3: People and Culture in Antebellum Louisiana

- The cultivation of sugar and cotton led to great wealth for large plantation owners. They built large homes, many with two stories and large columns. Plantation owners entertained visitors in grand style with day-long meals, entertainment, parties, and balls.
- Most slaves lived in slave quarters. In these meager quarters, they gathered to cook, talk, sing, dance, mourn, and share their lives. Slaves needed the permission of their master to marry. Slaves developed an oral tradition because it was illegal to teach a slave to read.
- In 1840, there were 25,000 free people of color in Louisiana. This group occupied a legal and social middle ground between free whites and slaves. Some free people of color also owned slaves.
- A large number of German and Irish immigrants came to Louisiana during the antebellum period. Most Germans immigrated in family groups. The Irish tended to arrive poor because they were fleeing a devastating potato famine. These immigrant groups were especially impacted by the yellow fever outbreaks that often killed thousands during the summer months in New Orleans.

Activities for Learning

Understanding the Facts

1. What were the years of the antebellum period?
2. What three cities served as Louisiana's state capital during this period?
3. What were the two major political parties during this period?
4. Which political party controlled politics in New Orleans in the late 1850s?
5. Who gained the right to vote during this period?
6. What was the nickname given to New Orleans because of its profitable commercial activity?
7. What two transportation developments improved water travel?
8. Which transportation improvement was in its infancy in the 1830s?
9. What percentage of southern families owned slaves?
10. What tasks were performed by urban slaves?
11. How did most slave sales take place?
12. What were the responsibilities of women of a plantation family?
13. Which types of slaves lived in the main (or big) house?
14. Which two groups immigrated to Louisiana in large numbers during this period?

Developing Critical Thinking

1. Why did wealthy planters need the assistance of representatives called factors to run their plantation business?
2. Compare and contrast the production of sugar and cotton.

Writing across the Curriculum

You have been hired by Robert Fulton and Robert Livingston to advertise the arrival of a new invention in Louisiana—the steamboat. Research this invention and develop a pamphlet that includes an advertising slogan, the credentials of the inventors, and the features and advantages of traveling by steamboat.

Exploring Louisiana on the Internet

Go to <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/gaines/gaines.html#p9>. Read pages 7-19 about William Walker's experience as a slave in Louisiana. List ten things you learned about slavery by reading this excerpt.

Building 21st-Century Skills: Identifying the Main Idea

Identifying the main idea in a paragraph will help you both organize information and recall more of what you read. The main idea or topic is often stated in the first sentence of a paragraph. The other sentences in the paragraph provide supporting details. Read the following paragraph, which is an excerpt from an interview of Mary Reynolds (recorded in dialect), who was enslaved in Louisiana from 1832-1865:

Slavery was the worst days was ever seed in the world. They was things past tellin', but I got the scars on my old body to show to this day. I seed worse than what happened to me. I seed them put the men and women in the stock with they hands screwed down through holes in the board and they feets tied together . . . Solomon the overseer beat them with a big whip and massa look on. The [other slaves] . . . better not stop in the fields when they hear them yellin'. They cut the flesh most to the bones and some . . . they taken them out of stock and put them on the beds, they never got up again.

What is the main idea of this paragraph and what are the supporting facts?