LOUISIANA'S LONG AFFAIR WITH THE FRENCH

By Bradley Byers

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Louisiana's Long Affair with the French

- The men of Maneu, Louisiana, rise before dawn on a Tuesday in February, don masks and weird costumes, and ride horseback across the countryside to raid a willing farmer's chicken yard of his prize pullets. Rewarded then with a cup of café noir, they ride away to raid another farm of his chickens, ducks, or even sausages, from which their women brew huge pots of gumbo. And after the feast, the Ijams' ola mask starts and they dance until midnight, when Lent begins.

Down in Plaquemine Parish, south of New Orleans, a six-year-old boy with a name like Smith or Regan, too of a newly transferred offshore oilfield worker, comes home sobbing from school. He couldn't understand the teacher, whose name is Fontenot or Venise, and he thinks she called him names.

Ever since Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle, claimed and named the territory for his king, Louis XIV, the French influence—blended with a hearty measure of Spanish and a dash of German, Irish, and Italian—has molded the character of Louisiana, making her the most French and the most romantic of these United States. Even the charm of Mardi Gras with all its many traditions to the misundertoodship and suspicions that flourished when two unlike languages and cultures grew side by side, Louisiana is unalterably linked to her French heritage—and she wouldn't break the bond if she could.

The influence extends far beyond the French Quarter of the South's most playful city and the bayou country of the Acadians; those determined Frenchmen who were driven from their homes in enemy siege to seek refuge for the King of England.

False Swartz, a New Orleans advertising executive who, despite his half-French name, is descended from a La Salle lieutenant who stayed to become an honorary chief of a Choctaw Indian tribe, enjoys pointing out what the Gallic influence has done to the names of many of the old English and German families who settled Louisiana long ago, many of them arriving while the territory was still a French colony.

"You take the name Labranche," said Swartz. "It's a popular one that you'll find in most telephone directories. But some of the early Labranche weren't French at all. They were Germans, with the old German name of "Tug." Their French Louisiana neighbors just changed the tug to a branch."
LOUISIANA

Louisiana, the most heavily populated state, is a land of rough and ready; its people, on occasion, appear rough and ready. This is not to be interpreted as a criticism of the people of Louisiana. It is simply an observation. Louisiana is a state of contrasts. It is a state of abundance and scarcity. It is a state of wealth and poverty. It is a state of contrasts.

The Mississippi River flows from north to south, dividing Louisiana into two distinct regions. The northern region is characterized by rich farmland and prosperous communities. The southern region is characterized by sparsely populated areas and a more rural lifestyle.

The history of Louisiana is rich with events that have shaped the state's identity. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 added approximately 828,000 square miles of land to the United States, including the territory that is now the state of Louisiana.

The state's cultural heritage is a blend of European, African, and Native American influences. This diversity is reflected in the state's music, food, and traditions.

Today, Louisiana is a state that is constantly evolving, adapting to the challenges of the modern world while preserving its unique identity.

*From the Louisiana State Department of Culture, Tourism, and Sport*