We hear a lot about how different we are. Louisiana is different from
other states: Lafayette is different from New Orleans, or Shreveport,
or New Iberia. Cajuns are different.
The French are different.
It is, therefore, probably important to our comprehensive cultural
identity every once in a while to remember that, although we recognize various cultural differences, we're all part of a generally American tradition, too. And that

American public which believed in "hands-off" government that New Deal programs were justified to relieve human suffering. The Standard Oil of New Jersey project was designed to introduce oil company operations to the postwar American public in a positive way, while visually connecting the link between the presence of Standard Oil and material prosperity.

Both projects focused on the American family as representations of either poverty (FSA) or prosperity (Standard Oil). The images took aim at the American heart and scored a direct hit. Adding to the impact is the fact that the images are self-consciously realistic. They are "documentary," therefore, they are true.

How exotic Louisiana must have How exotic Louisiana must have

looked to the photographers of the Standard Oil of New Jersey project in the 1940s. Priests in cassocks

plows his cotton field in a torn shirt. Another man earns his living selling fish from an old boat that is slowly
filling with water. Unpainted wooden houses are everywhere. Sometimes there's even a cistern, hardly a "modern" fixture.

Material prosperity and things that are "new" are related to Standard Oil. A little girl sits in her pret

ty, wallpapered bedroom. Dotted Swiss curtains frame the window, and it is noted that she has 21 dolls. It is also noted that she lives at Chocatw Field, Louisiana, and that outside her bedroom window one can see a nearby oil derrick and storage tank.

Mrs. Louis Brunet sits on her porch in Bayou Cane, crafting a hat out of palmetto leaves—hardly a "modern" thing to do. The photographer calls the rocking chair she sits in "old." By contrast, the home of "refinery employee" James L.

Stirling contains old furniture, too, but here the photographer calls it "antique."

Just in case you haven't gotten the message that oil industry work brings prosperity, there's one image that says it all very plainly. It's a photograph of oilfield workers at the pay window.

The Standard Oil of New Jersey photographic project is an example of our visual culture. The photographs reflect both a historical reality and the shape that reality acquired in our minds. "Oil" would equal "prosperity" in our collective mind for a long time to come.

The photographs also placed the Louisiana experience in the context of the national postwar mentality. America was on a roll, and so was Louisiana. A prosperous future was ahead, and the agent of prosperity would be the oil industry.

—ANN WAKEFIELD

From the "Postwar to Prosperity" exhibit:
Creating a hat of palmetto leaves;
Children of the bayou taking a boat to school.