

## CAJUN CULTURE

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### OVERVIEW

Louisiana can be divided into three different regions, based upon folk culture. These regions are (1) New Orleans (2) South Louisiana and (3) North Louisiana.

New Orleans is an urban region that has a complex culture. It is home to French, Spanish, Americans and people of African heritage. The city also has Italians, Irish, Latinos, Greeks, and Haitians etc.

Predominantly Catholic French southern Louisiana has been described as “South of the South” as a result of the Mediterranean-African roots and plantation past of the region. This makes this region similar to societies in the Spanish and French West Indies rather than the American South. The Acadians, or Cajuns who came from what is now Nova Scotia in the late 18th century dominate the rural part of South Louisiana.

North Louisiana is predominately populated by British immigrants and African Americans. This region has two subcultures both of which are mainly Protestant.

Louisiana also has a significant Native American population. It is the largest within the eastern United States. Louisiana tribes have played a significant role in shaping the distinctive culture of the state, both north and south.

According to the 1990 census, 597,729 people claimed their first ancestry was Acadian-Cajun, while 70,542 claimed it as their second. In Louisiana alone, there were over 400,000 who claimed Acadian-Cajun ancestry.

### CAJUN HISTORY

The history of the Cajuns holds much suffering, grief, hardship, sickness, death, and loss of family members, most of which occurred during their migration.

While much of the Cajun culture has become Americanized, elements of the Cajun culture can be found among many people. In some, it's as simple as a style of cooking. In others, you find Cajuns living much as they did generations ago – harvesting natural resources and speaking french while attending the local Catholic Church.

### CAJUN CULTURE/TRADITIONS

- Very generous by nature – even among the poorest Cajun and Creole populations. During 9/11 there were many donations sent from this community as well as volunteers that went to Ground Zero, meals sent etc.

- Faith - A strongly Catholic culture. Priests are often asked to bless several aspects of their lives.
- Importance of Family
- Cowboy culture – rodeos and trail rides
- To Cajuns, Mardi Gras is a “religious cleansing” of the soul – in Cajun culture this is a day to embrace the totality of human life. The women typically make hats and masks – these women who run Mardi gras or make masks see themselves as continuing a prized community tradition.
- Cajuns are known by many as having a “courageous spirit”
- T or “Tee” is a common nickname in the Cajun Culture i.e. Aunt Tee or cousin T-Paul.

## GRIEF AND LOSS

Among the more orthodox population, there is often a prolonged period of mourning. For example, following the death of a family member there may be one year spent without music, TV or other forms of entertainment.

Shrines are regularly built to serve as both a reminder of faith and to help with the grief process. Shrines include statues of the Virgin Mary, white crosses and hand-painted signs that serve as expressions of love toward the deceased.

“La Toussaint” is the Cajun-French name for All Saints Day – Cajuns typically visit cemeteries on this special day to show respect for their loved ones. All Saints Day (November 1) is the Cajun culture’s most respected religious celebration.

On this day, great respect and appreciation is shown for ancestors by painting graves white and decorating graveyards with colorful flower arrangements

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