



# New Orleans: A Cultural History (Cityscapes)

*Louise McKinney*

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Founded in 1718 by two French-Canadian brothers for French King Louis XIV, New Orleans grew from its roots as a Euro-Caribbean port city at the nexus of North, Central and South America. Situated at the bottom of the Mississippi River Delta, the city became "Paris on the Mississippi," the fashionable cultural capital of the American South, home to America's first opera house and birthplace of jazz.

Many think of New Orleans, with its antebellum mansions, above-ground cemeteries and ghostly moss-bearded oaks as a haunted place. It is certainly the most un-American of American cities, creating its own laid-back "Big Easy" attitude from the customs of the people who founded it: French and Spanish colonists, *gens de couleur libres*, Northern adventurers, riverboat men, pirates, and Cajuns. From this eclectic mix of influences has evolved a distinctive Creole culture, expressed in language, architecture and cuisine.

Louise McKinney explores the soul of this deeply spiritual and hedonistic place, where every year the pre-Lenten Mardi Gras bursts forth with outrageous excess.



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