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Midterm Essay 1

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History is the documentation and study of the past within an ever-changing world. Most periods of historical significance involve grand changes that create volatile outcomes. These outcomes, for better or worse, are analyzed by historians to draw conclusions or create theories on. Hence, historical value is loosely correlated with how much influence or sway the people, places, or things within a region had on the consequential changes that occurred within their period of time.

French colonial Louisiana was a rough and rugged time for the territory. The region, river, and basin were first claimed for France by René-Robert Cavelier, sieur de La Salle while on an exploratory expedition down the Mississippi River. It was given the name Louisiana after the reigning French King, Louis XIV. However, the region was much more difficult to settle. The landscape, climate, and wildlife were among the numerous deadly obstacles that they would face. For example, *Aedes Aegypti*, a mosquito spread diseases, ravaged settlers, and drained populations from upstart settlements, and killing many important administrative leaders. The wilderness and marshy borders were completely undeveloped leaving settlements to build their infrastructure from the ground up. The entire region was different than anything the Europeans had ever encountered, hindering expertise. The first significant shipment of African slaves came to the colony under French rule in 1719. The French established the Code Noir, “Black Code,” as a law system for slaves. This period was also witness to many issues with local governance

despite trying three different methods: Colonial, Proprietorship, and a joint stock company. These governmental issues were magnified by the tense situations between the French, British, Spanish, and the numerous Native American tribes in the area. These hardships did not concern France extensively though as Louisiana always took a backseat to the issues closer to home in Europe. The French did still hold a claim on the area for a significant amount of time and created a lasting sense of French identity.

The recanting of French colonial Louisiana could not be complete without making extensive mention of the brothers D'Iberville and Beinville, specifically the latter. The young brothers were French Naval Officers from Montreal, Canada or "New France." Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, sieur de Bienville was just 18 years old, and a grizzled war veteran, when he and Iberville started down the river to establish Southern French colonies. They first erected Fort Maurepas where Beinville was made second in command for his leadership abilities and his aptitude at communicating and negotiating with Native American tribes. He would later become renowned for his linguistic skills with the natives, hosting gatherings for local chiefs. He even covered his body in Native-style tattoos even though they were taboo. After successfully assuming command of the fort for some time, Iberville appointed Beinville the governor of the Louisiana territory. He went on to establish other forts and posts but none more influential than a settlement he placed near the mouth of the great river named New Orleans. This would go on to become, arguably, the most important settlement within the Louisiana territory for its versatility and trade potential. It was named the capital of the colony in 1722. Beinville was not without trouble, though, as he was removed from governance to be investigated for pious and financial corruption. Although he returned to his titled position, he would be removed twice more for not being acceptably efficient at policy making. However, he must have been secretly exceptional as

all the attempts to remove the colony from his care led to complete disaster where he would be reinstated. Beinville would leave the office for the last time of his own accord with his resignation in 1742. He died in Paris in 1776. Although Beinville had many challenges and shortcomings, he did a better job than most others did or could do. His unquestionably far-reaching influence during the French Colonial Period earned him the title, Father of Louisiana.

France lost the French and Indian War, or 7 Years War, from 1756-1763. New Orleans and territories West of the river were given to Spain in the 1762 Treaty of Fontain Bleau to keep it from Great Britian. The Treaty of Paris in 1763 furthered Frances' losses as Great Britain acquired all the lands to the East of the river, leaving France with only St. Domingue. The French influence made it difficult for Spain to assume administrative control of the area, so they tried a hands-off approach for some time. There was even a failed Creole rebellion in 1768 in which the first Spanish Governor, Antonio De Ulloa, was ousted from the colony. The Spanish responded with a strong military envoy under Alejandro O'Reily. They put the most egregious conspirators to death on the present-day Frenchman Street. After making strong changes to the governmental structure and the law system, O'Reily left. The successive Spanish Governors, such as Luis De Unzaga, strengthened their relations with the creoles and secured the colony. It was during this time that the Eastern colonies revolted and broke away from Britian to form the Untied States. Spain used this opportunity to seize lands northern lands from Britain. Slave revolts in St. Domingue encouraged France to outlaw slavery and raised tensions in all slave states. There was even a failed revolt in Point Coupee. Spain saw to many diverse waves of migrants including Acadians, Canary Islanders (islenos), Malaguenos, Protestants, and Anglos. The slave population increased ten-fold and new laws were put into place during the Spanish rule. Spain was successful and integrated into Louisiana through blood relations and cultural melding, but the

territory mostly kept its French culture and identity. Louisiana was ultimately turned back over to the French when Napoleon invaded Spain in the early 1800's.

The Cabildo building in the French Quarters of New Orleans was a very important venue for the colonial Spanish Period of Louisiana. It is also a sterling, symbolic representation of how the Spanish presence in Louisiana was received by the territory in the long run. It was built in 1769 and housed the Spanish governing body of the same name. This was the political center from which the colonial system shaped out Spanish Louisiana and all the advancements that came with it. The French Quarters are surprisingly composed of mostly Spanish architecture as there were multiple large fires that destroyed up to 88% of the original French buildings. The Cabildo was later reworked to add French inspired faux chambers and roofs so that it would appear less Spanish. This is exactly why this building personifies Spanish rule in the territory. This durable building was erected to house the colonial Spanish government, which was more effective, efficient, and successful than its French predecessors. Despite this, the creoles' persistence of French identity continued long after the Spanish had left, just as the Spanish architecture was made over to better suit the French culture.

The American colonial period began with one of the largest land acquisitions in the history of the world, the Louisiana Purchase. As the name suggests, the newly formed United States of America purchased the territory from France in 1803. President Thomas Jefferson was only seeking to buy New Orleans and lands with access to the gulf. However, France needed money for war, so they offered to sell most of their holdings in America for a great price and Jefferson's delegate agreed to the deal. In 1804 the Territory of Orleans was formed that included most of present-day Louisiana. These subdivisions of land made the areas easier to govern. There was political infighting between the French-speaking francophones and the rapidly rising Anglo

English-speaking citizens. In 1812 Louisiana was officially signed into law as the 18th state of the Union. The state borders would settle into their permanent state after with the Transcontinental Treaty. Louisiana also kept some of its French civil law practices as opposed to the common law systems in the other states. The cultural tensions between the different white ethnic groups were kept at bay by a common belief in white superiority and the fear of a slave uprising. As a result, restrictions tightened on the vast slave population and the Free People of Color in Louisiana.

The War of 1812 was the ultimate test of Louisiana's ability and desire to remain part of the United States. U.S. citizens in Southern territories began have small battles with the British their allied Natives. All these squabbles came to a head at the largest battle of the war on January 8th, 1815, The Battle of New Orleans. After a failed attack on Mobile, the British troops attempted to block the United States' access to the mouth of the Mississippi River by taking New Orleans. Andrew Jackson led the American counterattack where the two sides met at Chalmette, five miles south of New Orleans. After a decisive win, Andrew Jackson's popularity grew rapidly within the states, and he would later become the seventh President of the Unites States. This battle was a starch example of capability of and commitment between Louisiana and the Union. These events took place and held real conviction even though the war had unknowingly been ended by the Treaty of Ghent just a couple weeks before the battle.

Louisiana underwent deep cultural and societal changes during these changes in colonial power. Although it created much strife and struggle, it also laid the foundation for the rich multicultural state that it is today. It is important to reflect on these periods to identify the early roots of Louisiana's modern traditions and how they were formed. The French brought and undeniable determination to settle the harsh land that manifested in a permanent French identity.

The Spanish added a lot to the political and physical infrastructure while embodying the idea of leaving the past behind to embrace the melting pot of creole culture. Lastly, the American colonial period allowed Louisiana to exist as its own forever-unique entity within an even larger multicultural society.

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