THE BIRTH OF NEW ORLEANS

New Orleans is one of the most unusual cities in the USA. Over the years, people from across the world have come to live here and brought a unique mix of cultures to the city.

French Louisiana

New Orleans is in a good position near the mouth of the Mississippi River. Native Americans lived in this part of the country first.

In 1718 French settlers started to build the city of New Orleans. King Louis XIV was a famous king of France, so the area was named Louisiana. Settlers from other European countries moved to the city, and the French also brought slaves from Africa – 1300 in the city's first ten years.

Creole culture

In the 1700s, many different people came to live in New Orleans. Spanish settlers, French-speaking Cajuns from Canada and people from the Caribbean island of Haiti all brought very different cultures to the city.

The city's French and Spanish settlers became known as 'Creoles'. At first the word was used to describe people of French or Spanish origin who were born in Louisiana. But it soon became the name for the special mix of cultures that lived there.

New Orleans, 1718

A dance group practises in Congo Square

What's the history of your town?

In 1803, New Orleans became part of the USA, but many people spoke French and the city had some French and some Spanish laws. Creole culture had made it very different from any other American city.

Creole musicians

What do these words mean? You can use a dictionary.
settler   origin   rights   slavery

SLAVES IN NEW ORLEANS

The first African slaves were brought to the USA around 1619. By 1790, around 20% of the country's people were African-American (born in the USA, but of African origin).

Unusually, New Orleans introduced the *Code Noir* (Black Code) in 1724. This gave rules for slaves in Louisiana to follow, but it also gave them some rights. Slaves could meet to play music and dance at the city's Congo Square market. Some slaves were freed after many years of work and New Orleans had thousands of free African-Americans a long time before the end of slavery in 1865.