

WHAT
HAPPENED

The state constitution of 1868 made English the official language of the state.



The Canal Street neutral ground, from the roof of the Customs House in 1857 or 1858, with the American side on the left, and the Creole side on the right. The neutral ground was common ground for both Americans and Creoles.

THE HISTORIC NEW ORLEANS COLLECTION



A row of American townhouses in the American section of New Orleans, Julia Street

Americans largely avoided New Orleans until the opportunities here became too big to ignore.

According to historian Lo Faber, little immigration occurred to Louisiana from British Colonies until in the 1790s, when Spain liberalized policies toward American merchants. The policy resulted in a flood of upper-class English-speaking newcomers whom the French called “Anglo-Americans.” Soon, Americans dominated the shipping industry in New Orleans. Some of those merchants started advocating for the Louisiana Territory to become part of the United States. According to Faber, the working-class English-speaking newcomers, sailors and boatmen, were called Kaintocks, rather than Anglo-Americans. After Louisiana transferred to the United States. Americans flooded into the city. As their numbers grew, so did the animosity between the Americans and the Creoles. The Americans gradually segregated themselves Uptown, upriver of Canal Street. While the Americans and Creoles had their differences, many Americans, including Edward Livingston and William C.C. Claiborne, married into the city’s Creole families. The Anglo-Americans would eventually become a dominating force in the city’s commerce and founded, among other things, the Krewe of Comus. More Anglo-Americans came to the city after the Civil War during Reconstruction, and the 1868 state constitution made English the language for governing and in schools.

A group of Protestant Anglo-Americans started the Krewe of Comus to celebrate Mardi Gras, which has its roots in Roman Catholicism, shown here in front of the St. Charles Theatre in 1867.



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Edward Livingston moved to New Orleans from New York in 1804. He married a Creole widow and served in Congress until President Andrew Jackson appointed him U.S. secretary of state, a post he held for two years, before being named minister to France.

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