

A street scene in New Orleans during Mardi Gras. In the foreground, a horse-drawn parade float is visible, decorated with flowers and carrying several people in traditional costumes. The float is moving down a street lined with buildings, including a prominent two-story building with a balcony. The overall atmosphere is festive and historical.

Since 1699, when French explorers landed at the great bend of the Mississippi River and celebrated the first Mardi Gras in North America, New Orleans has brewed a fascinating melange of cultures. It was French, then Spanish, then French again, then sold to the United States. Through all these years, and even into the 1900s, others arrived from everywhere: Acadians (Cajuns), Africans, indige-