

Audio 10: Different Legacies in Texas

Becoming Texas Audio Guides

Ellie H.: There are around 6 million people who identify as native-born French descendants living in the United States, according to the 2020 US Census. Historically, the French left an impact on food, culture, and music in Texas and beyond. Cajuns are descendants of French colonists. They came to Texas in the spring of 1770 by mistake when they were trying to get to Louisiana from Maryland.

They were originally called Acadian but their name was changed to Cadian and then Cajun. Acadians originally came from Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island Provinces in Canada in the 1710s. During and between the two world wars of the 20th century, some came to Texas on the wave of wartime prosperity. The war years were, in general, boom years for Texas rice production, oil refining, explosives manufacturing, and ship building in the Houston-Golden Triangle part of the state. In particular, the Gulf Coast is a modern home for the Cajun language, a French-based creole laced with idioms from English, German, Spanish, Native American, and Black dialects. Cajun cuisine such as gumbo and crayfish boil is a French legacy.

Bennett A.: According to the 2020 US Census, 39.3% of Texans identify as either Hispanic or Latino. While their ancestry may be Spanish, Mexican, Latin American or beyond, this group represents a large portion of Texas citizens.

We can see lasting effects of the Spanish colonization in many areas of Texan life. For example, the Spaniards brought Catholicism and tried to convert the Native Americans. However, many tribes had their own religious beliefs.

They brought architecture. For example, the San Agustín de Laredo Historic District in Laredo, Texas is a 12-square block swath of downtown that encompasses the original Colonial Spanish buildings of adobe and quarried blocks of precisely hewn sandstone. The Alamo, which is an 18th-century Spanish church turned fort, was awarded UNESCO World Heritage status 2015, along with four other Spanish Colonial missions in the San Antonio River basin.

The Spaniards brought animals, cattle, and crops as part of the Columbian Exchange. Unfortunately, they also brought diseases that were new to the Americas.

Spanish was the first European language spoken in the land that was to become the United States. However, the way Spanish is spoken in Texas has a lot of Mexican influence.

Spain joined the colonists to fight the British in the American Revolutionary War by supplying the United States with some soldiers and with war supplies, blankets, shoes, and currency. In fact, the first cattle drive in Texas was to supply beef to Spanish soldiers fighting in the war.

On the grassland of Texas, Spaniards reproduced cattle that had come from Doñana marshes. These cattle needed to protect themselves from animals such as wolves and

Bullock Texas State History Museum

mountain lions, so over time, they developed long horns. That is how the Texas Longhorns came to be.

Julian L.: Native American culture continues to this day in Texas and in the larger United States. While tribes and nations are distinct cultures, their collective legacy is present in modern day life.

Native Americans account for 2.9% of all people living in the U.S. Only three federally recognized tribes still have reservations in Texas, the Alabama-Coushatta, Tigua, and Kickapoo. However, there are people of Native American descent in every aspect of life in Texas from teachers to writers to doctors to artists and everything in between.

There are many sites that you can visit in the American Southwest to see historic Native American ruins and artifacts. Examples of this include Caddo Tribe ancient earthwork platform mounds in Alto, dwelling ruins at the Tuzigoot National Monument, and White Shaman Preserve in Comstock.

In Austin, you can go to the Austin Powwow that takes place every November. This event gives a unique perspective on Texas Native American culture and heritage.

Go to the first floor exit to hear the conclusion of these histories and why they still matter today.