

New Orleans

Lagniappe

Definitions

- **Banquette:** Sidewalk.
- **Bayou:** Choctaw for “small stream.” It’s a creek with a slow current, flowing from a river or lowland lake, often through swamp areas, usually in a delta region. Among its many nicknames, Louisiana is called “The Bayou State” for its beautiful wetland regions.
- **Cajun:** Nickname for Acadians, the French-speaking people who migrated to Louisiana from Nova Scotia, starting in 1755.
- **Cities of the Dead:** New Orleans cemeteries. Because of the high water table, we spend the afterlife buried above ground instead of six feet under it. Elaborate monuments cluster together like small communities.
- **Directions:** There is no West, East, North, or South in New Orleans. We head up-town, downtown, lakeside and riverside. And anywhere the music is.
- **Fais-do-do (fay-doe-doe):** It means, “Put the kids to sleep.” And party hearty. In the old days, when Cajuns would celebrate, they brought the kids with their blankies so the little ones could snooze while adults would eat, drink, and dance their way through the night.
- **Faubourg (foe-burg):** As in “Faubourg Marigny.” Originally suburbs, they are now neighborhoods near the French Quarter. (The Vieux Carré once defined the entire city of New Orleans.)
- **Gris-gris (gree-gree):** “X” marks the spot. Voodoo spells, often indicated by Xs, are still found on tombs like that of legendary voodoo queen Marie Laveau.
- **Gumbo ya-ya:** “Everybody talking at once.”
- **Isleños (iz-lay-nyos):** Islanders; in this case, Spanish settlers from the Canary Islands. Since 1799, they’ve been fishermen, trappers, and master boat builders in Louisiana. You can find them downriver, in St. Bernard Parish.

Definitions (continued)

- **Jazz:** Louis Armstrong said, “If you gotta ask, you’ll never know.” So much for a definition. As for origin, some say it was a New Orleans barber named Buddy Bolden, who in 1891 blew a few hot notes with his cornet and invented a new form of music that’s been an American favorite since the Jazz Age of the ‘20s. Jazz mixes African and Creole rhythms with European styles. Surprisingly, the Irish, Germans, and Italians contributed the brass bands.
- **Krewe:** Members of a carnival organization, as in Krewe of Rex. A variation of “crew,” the word was invented by 19th-century New Orleanians, who privately bankrolled the balls and parades (as is still the case).
- **Lagniappe (lan-yap):** A little something extra. A free coffee or dessert or a few extra ounces of boudin put the “bons” in “bons temps.”
- **Laissez les bons temps rouler! (less-say lay bon tonh roo-lay):** Let the good times roll.
- **Makin’ groceries:** Shopping for groceries. What you do before whipping up some gumbo.
- **Neutral ground:** When the Americans arrived in New Orleans after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, Europeans and Creoles who inhabited the French Quarter (then, the entire city of New Orleans) considered them unwelcome interlopers. So the immigrants settled across Canal Street and established what is now the Central Business and Arts District. Canal Street became the “neutral ground” in the clash of cultures. Ever since, New Orleans has been a city sans medians. Here, we have only neutral grounds. In case you’re wondering, cars parked on the raised neutral grounds mean only two things: nearby parades or a forecast of rain.
- **New Orleans:** Pronounced noo aw-lins or new or-lins or new or-lee-yuns, but not new or-leens. Unless referring to the street or the parish of or-leens. Or when you’re singing. Confused yet?
- **Parish:** Equivalent of a county in the other 49 states.
- **Pass a good time:** Live it up.
- **Picayune:** Old Spanish coin, 1/8 of a dollar. Connotes something really small or petty.
- **Pirogue:** Shallow canoe used in the bayous.
- **Pro bono publico:** “For the common good,” motto of Rex, King of Carnival.
- **Secondline:** The people who follow a brass band on the street while swinging a handkerchief in a circle over their heads. These second-liners also have a special shuffle step or dance they do when following the band. This is called “secondlining.”

