American Indians lived in Louisiana for thousands of years. Their lives changed dramatically when Europeans and enslaved Africans arrived. Europeans brought new ideas and materials with them. They also brought different diseases, slavery, and warfare. American Indians strived to live with Europeans while keeping their culture and traditions.

1500s – 1700s
American Indians in Louisiana first met Europeans in the 1500s. As time passed, they adjusted to changes brought by the explorers and settlers. Many Tribes made agreements with colonial governments for trade and support. American Indians traded for clothing, metal cooking pots, and tools. Settlers traded for furs, salt, horses, and more.

1800s – 1900s
American settlers moving west in the 1800s pushed more American Indians from their home lands. Some chose to leave, but conflicts with settlers forced many to move. They took different paths into the state and lived in different places. Many groups moved frequently, struggling to find vacant land to live on.

In the early 1900s, U.S. policy tried to reduce and even destroy Tribes. American Indians resisted this effort. They worked to protect their culture, history, and traditions. In the 1970s, the U.S. changed its position to support tribal self-determination. They began to recognize Tribes as sovereign nations. Tribes must document their history and genealogy to gain recognition.

Today
The U.S. government recognizes four Tribes in Louisiana. This status provides important rights and responsibilities. Each Tribe has a reservation where many, but not all, of its citizens live. They also receive access to government services and control over their trust lands. Nine other federally recognized Tribes in the U.S. have ancestral ties to Louisiana. Louisiana also has eleven state-recognized tribes. State recognition does not provide land or legal rights. It does affirm tribal status for state purposes, and tribal memers qualify for some educational and health benefits. Other groups continue working toward recognition.

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