



## Economic Timeline

### *Selected Historical Events that Shaped the New Orleans Economy, 1700-2010*

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New Orleans, like most cities, exists because of its economic function, which is tied to its strategic position between the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. River traffic has always been crucial to New Orleans' economy, and ultimately to the nation, as the Mississippi connects the richest valley on Earth with trading partners abroad. Innovations such as steamboats and jetties increased river traffic over time, while technological breakthroughs such as the cotton gin, sugar granulation, and refrigeration increased cargo flowing through the port. Higher education became an important economic driver for New Orleans in 1834 when the institution that later became Tulane University was founded—later to be joined by other prestigious universities and colleges. Tourism, a natural beneficiary of river and later railroad traffic, was actively promoted as early as 1884. The discovery of oil at the turn of the 20th century further diversified New Orleans' economy. Even today, the main drivers of the regional economy derive from the geographical assets associated with New Orleans' original strategic advantage.

<b>Early 1700s</b>	New Orleans becomes trading colony of Company of the West (later known as Company of the Indies), and establishes barter economy with Native American population to export primarily pelts, lumber and tobacco.
<b>1718</b>	Bienville founds New Orleans at present-day French Quarter; outpost becomes company headquarters in 1722.
<b>1719</b>	First large group of Africans arrives, commencing fourteen decades of slavery.
<b>1755-1785</b>	French settlers, exiled by British from Acadia, (Nova Scotia) find their way to Louisiana. Most Acadians or "Cajuns" settle west of New Orleans where they form an economy based on sugar, rice, produce, fish, game, and lumber.
<b>1780-1790</b>	With settlers trickling into Ohio and Mississippi river valleys, river traffic begins to flow southward to Louisiana.
<b>1791</b>	French Market founded along riverfront. Vending opportunities in this and future municipal markets help launch generations of poor immigrants to financial independence. French Market also gives birth to American tropical fruit industry.
<b>1793-1795</b>	Eli Whitney invents cotton gin and Jean Etienne de Bore granulates Louisiana sugar, helping launch plantation economy. New Orleans serves as transshipment, marketing hub and processing center for region's cotton and sugar exports. These two commodities enormously increase port traffic, while entrenching slavery in region.
<b>1803</b>	United States purchases Louisiana territory for \$15 million.
<b>Early 1800s</b>	Primitive vessels develop into flatboats (for downriver travel) and keelboats (for returning upriver) to deliver commodities in and out of American interior. New Orleans begins to benefit from emerging agricultural production in Ohio and Mississippi river valleys.
<b>1812</b>	First Mississippi River steamboat arrives, eventually replacing slower moving keelboats. With hinterland under intensive cultivation, steamboat transportation positions New Orleans to become principal Southern city.
<b>1830</b>	Sugar handling and trading creates "Sugar District," which remains until around 1930.
<b>1834</b>	Medical College of Louisiana founded; becomes Tulane University in 1884.
<b>1840</b>	New Orleans is "rated...as the fourth port in point of commerce in the world, exceeded only by London, Liverpool, and New York."
<b>1850s</b>	Cotton factors and merchants form "Cotton District," which survives until 1950s.
<b>1861-1865</b>	Louisiana secedes from Union. War ends early for New Orleans as federal troops occupy city in 1862. Region's slave-based plantation economy collapses forever; human enslavement ends after nearly 150 years. Southern agriculture devastated; shipping commerce to New Orleans interrupted.
<b>1868</b>	Enterprise successfully manufactures and sells ice in New Orleans, one of first in nation. Refrigerated shipping allows food industries to enlarge to national scale and expands list of commodities transshipped at New Orleans.
<b>1869</b>	Straight University and Union Normal School founded; later renamed Straight College and New Orleans University; they merge to form Dillard in 1930.
<b>1875-1880</b>	With sedimentation delaying shipping traffic at mouth of Mississippi, Capt. James Eads constructs parallel jetties at South Pass. Structures deepen channel and allow ocean-going vessels to enter river promptly. Coupled with development of barges and new railroads, Eads' jetties help port rebound from post-war slump.
<b>1885- Early 1900s</b>	First local cookbooks published, helping form national recognition of New Orleans cuisine. Publication coincide with rise in tourism, fueled by World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exhibition, growing leisure class, railroad

	travel, and "local color" literary genre.
<b>Early 1900s</b>	Tug-barges and other petroleum powered vessels replace steamboats for freight shipping.
<b>1901-1920s</b>	Dock Board modernizes port facilities with new riverside warehouses, grain elevators, canals, and dock space.
<b>1901</b>	Oil discovered and produced commercially starting in 1906.
<b>1904</b>	Loyola College opens; chartered as Loyola University in 1912.
<b>1907</b>	Loyola's first permanent building completed next to Tulane campus; "University area" forms, creating opportunities for knowledge spillovers between the two institutions.
<b>1915</b>	Xavier established as high school; four year college added in 1925.
<b>1918-1923</b>	Dock Board excavates Industrial Canal to connect river and lake, and create new private deep-water wharf space.
<b>1922</b>	Association of Commerce Convention and Tourism Bureau promotes New Orleans as "America's Most Interesting City," reflecting increasing sophistication in tourism marketing effort.
<b>1940s</b>	Port traffic increases thanks to barges, intracoastal waterway, railroads, freight lines and air transportation. Leading exports include petroleum products, iron, steel, corn, and cotton; imports are sugar, bananas, coffee and bauxite.
<b>1940</b>	Expanded airport is established at current site of Louis Armstrong International Airport.
<b>1941-1945</b>	New Orleans plays important role in WWII as ingress and egress for troops and materials, base for ships and aircrafts and manufacturing center for Higgins landing craft.
<b>1950s-1960s</b>	Containerization technology radically alters port, diminishing labor needs while empowering smaller ports like Mobile and Gulfport to compete with New Orleans.
<b>1956</b>	Louisiana State University in New Orleans established; becomes University of New Orleans in 1974.
<b>1959</b>	Southern University of New Orleans opens its doors.
<b>1960s</b>	Petroleum industry rises; coastal and off-shore oil brings investment and professionals to New Orleans and triggers construction of skyscrapers.
<b>1960-1964</b>	Civil rights movement, court orders, and Civil Rights Act of 1964 hasten end of <i>de jure</i> segregation. White flight, followed by general middle-class exodus, sends New Orleans population into its first long-term decline, which ensues for decades.
<b>1958-1968</b>	Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) constructed, dredging through shallow bays, coastal marshes and cypress swamps in Orleans and St. Bernard parishes.
<b>1963</b>	New Orleans Chamber of Commerce forms Greater New Orleans Tourism and Convention Commission (now named New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau) to coordinate and promote tourism industry.
<b>1965</b>	Hurricane Betsy hits New Orleans, pushing storm surge through MRGO, causing levee failures and substantial flooding in parts of New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish.
<b>1966</b>	National Football League awards franchise to New Orleans Saints; sets stage for future Super Bowl hosting and other major events.
<b>1970</b>	Jazz and Heritage Festival held; soon grows into major event. Era witnesses formation of numerous other festivals currently punctuating local calendar. First Super bowl hosted in New Orleans.
<b>1972</b>	One Shell Square rises as tallest structure in the city, symbolizing oil boom of 1970s.
<b>1980s</b>	Worldwide oil crash devastates region's economy; some downtown office buildings are eventually converted to hotels for growing hospitality industry.
<b>1985</b>	Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, built for previous year's World's Fair, opens for business tourism.
<b>1990s</b>	Rise of tourism sector augments hotel capacity to 37,000 rooms, accommodating ten million annual visitors.
<b>1999</b>	Harrah's Casino officially opens.
<b>August 2005</b>	Hurricane Katrina strikes region; surge ruptures levees and floodwalls at multiple points, flooding 80 percent of urbanized portions of city east of the Mississippi.
<b>August 2005-Present</b>	In collaboration with local citizens, a steady stream of religious groups, students on break, and civic and professional organizations from across nation come to New Orleans to help gut houses, clean parks, and build homes.
<b>2007-2009</b>	Louisiana "Road Home" Program distributes more than \$8 billion in federal rebuilding grants to underinsured homeowners in New Orleans metro area. FEMA distributes nearly \$4 billion in debris removal and infrastructure repair grants throughout metro area. Army Corps spends approximately \$15 billion to improve region's flood control system.
<b>February 2010</b>	New Orleanians elect new city government and witness beloved, beleaguered Saints football team win first-ever Super Bowl in same weekend. Historic election of Mitch Landrieu as mayor, with landslide support across racial and demographic lines, is overwhelmed by citywide jubilation over Saints victory.
<b>April 2010-Present</b>	Deepwater Horizon oil rig, fifty miles southeast of mouth of Mississippi River, explodes and unleashes vast quantities of oil into Gulf of Mexico. Effects on regional environment and economy are felt in coastal and marsh communities by May, and shortly thereafter in New Orleans proper, as seafood prices rise and long-operating oyster processors close.

*Excerpted and abridged from Bienville's Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans, by Richard Campanella (University of Louisiana Press, Lafayette, 2008). Selections and additions by Ana Rios and Denise Ross.*