

French Leave

To take "French leave" is to leave without permission or without announcing your departure. La Nouvelle-Orléans was named after the Duke of Orleans, the Prince Regent of France. No other American city has a feminine gender. You sneak away without letting anyone know you're going. The British say some French soldiers did this. A French letter is a condom; the French pox is syphilis. So is the French disease. When the slaves of Haiti heard about *Liberté, égalité* and *fraternité*, they rose up and cut off their French masters' heads. New Orleans welcomed the survivors. Thomas Jefferson got the Louisiana Purchase because Napoleon needed money to get Haiti back. It had been France's richest colony. A French print is a pornographic picture. Some were taken in Storyville, where pubescent Creole girls were popular. The Storyville blue-books were inscribed with the motto: "Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense." Shame on Those Who Think it Evil. The government shut down the district as a bad influence on soldiers. French kissing, which is not the same as choking someone with your tongue, was not called French kissing until the Roaring '20s. When the levees broke, those who could leave, did. There were 34 who could not leave the nursing home, their numbered beds. They strained to hear the whispers from the other room. French toast is a favorite at many Sunday brunches, even though no self-respecting French restaurant would serve it. A French menu will include things with a set price, called a *prix fixe*. There were 34, whimpering for help. The waters rose. *Leave them*. The FEMA director sent off an email asking if there was anything he should tweak before rushing off to brunch. There were 34, thrashing in numbered beds as the rising water loosened clenched fingers. Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name thykingdomcomethywillbedone. There were 34, strapped to their floating coffins. *Leave them*. Pardon my French is used to excuse an obscenity. Leave. Them.