

**Are Not the Lands Our Own?
Tunica Diplomacy in Spanish Louisiana and British West Florida 1763-1783**

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of History.

Chapel Hill
2012

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ABSTRACT

ELIZABETH ELLIS: Are Not the Lands Our Own? Tunica Diplomacy in Spanish Louisiana
and British West Florida 1763-1783
(Under the Direction of Kathleen A. DuVal)

Following the partition of French Louisiana in 1763, Spain and Britain strove to establish control of the Lower Mississippi Valley. Lacking the military might to rule their territorial spoils by force, British and Spanish colonial officials sought to build alliances with local Indigenous peoples, and use economic and political persuasion to press these Indian nations into exclusive imperial relationships. Spain and England hoped that these ties would help them lay claim to the territories inhabited by local nations, and grant them proxy rule over the lands. Despite European efforts to politically and geographically restrict the movements of Indian peoples, smaller tribes such as the Tunicas, recognized that residence along the Mississippi presented them with an opportunity. Rather than limiting their diplomatic relations to only one colony, during the 1760s and 1770s, the Tunicas cultivated alliances with both England and Spain and thereby sought to maintain a position of regional power.

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Introduction

In October of 1772, Lattanash, the Great Medal Chief of the Tunicas journeyed down the Mississippi River to Fort Bute to clear up a misunderstanding. He knew that John Thomas, the English Indian agent at the fort, was frustrated with the Tunicas, and that he suspected that they were thinking of reneging on their alliance with the British and relocating to Spanish Louisiana. Thomas had good reason to question Tunica loyalty to the British, as members of the Indian nation frequently crossed the river into Louisiana and Lattanash himself had engaged in political negotiations with the Spanish officials on the other side. The Tunica Chief hoped that a council with the English would allow him to assuage Thomas's concerns and to explain his motives for meeting with the Spanish at Pointe Coupée. While he intended to convince the British officials that the Tunicas desired their friendship and wished to remain as allies of the British King, Lattanash did not plan to apologize for his people's regular border crossings, or for his attempts to win the favor of the Spanish. Rather, he would explain that for their own safety, the Tunicas desired "to be friends with all the white people near us" in both Spanish Louisiana and British West Florida.¹

Following the conclusion of the Seven Years War, and France's cession of the Louisiana territory to Spain and England, Indian nations within the Louisiana territory had to deal with new groups of "white people" and adapt to a changed colonial landscape. As part of the peace agreements, the great Mississippi, which previously had served to link the

¹ David K. Bjork, "Documents Regarding Indian Affairs in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1771-1772," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 13, no. 3 (1926), 398-410; "Talk Between Charles Stuart and Small Tribes on the Mississippi," October 17, 1772, fr. 806, vol. 74, reel 6, pt.1, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

peoples of the region, was converted into a border between European empires. In his recent groundbreaking work, *Before the Revolution*, Daniel K. Richter argues that the Treaty of Paris of 1763 ended the ability of Indian nations to engage in play-off diplomacy, a dynamic he refers to as “a defining characteristic of the eighteenth-century Atlantean world.”² However, in the Lower Mississippi River Valley the drawing of a European imperial border on the American Indian landscape did not hinder the ability of native groups to shape European empires and develop relationships with dual colonial powers. Although most of the indigenous peoples who resided along the river were initially upset by the prospect of losing their French allies, this change proved advantageous for many of them.³ Whereas the Tunicas had had access to only one European colony during the first half of the eighteenth century, the Treaty of Paris provided them with two.

This division of land claims following the partition of French Louisiana in 1763 was an imperial attempt to impose a new political border on Native Americans living in the Lower Mississippi River Valley. Spanish and British agents struggled to force Indian nations to literally pick sides and bind their political and economic alliances to one bank and one colonial government. Spain and England hoped that exclusive relationships with native peoples would help them lay claim to the territories inhabited by local nations and that alliances with these tribes would give them a form of proxy rule over the lands. Despite European machinations, many smaller Indian tribes such as the Tunicas, recognized that residence along the Mississippi presented them with a unique opportunity. Rather than constricting their activities they carefully cultivated relationships with Spanish and English

² Daniel K. Richter, *Before the Revolution: America's Ancient Pasts* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 406.

³ Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green, *North American Indians: Very Short Introductions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 36.

officials. Although few in number, the Tunicas exploited their position by courting both England and Spain and managed to continue to straddle this fluid border politically, economically, and physically throughout the 1760s and 1770s.

I. The Significance of the Petite Nations

If we consider that in 1764 the population of the entire Tunica nation was about 80 people, one may wonder why the Tunicas should merit scholarly attention, or how focusing on their experience during this twenty year period could enhance our understanding of colonial Louisiana.⁴ To answer this question, let us step back for a moment and examine the trajectory of recent colonial historiography. Over the last thirty years the field of American Indian history has blossomed. Scholars such as James Merrell, Richard White, and Daniel K. Richter have refocused the lens of colonial history on indigenous peoples and rewritten tales of conquest and domination as stories of exchange and encounter. These “new” Indian histories in turn revolutionized modern scholarship on early America. My work expands the scope of peoples included in this scholarship and heightens our understanding of the period. The majority of research on colonial America has concentrated on explaining the experiences of more populous tribes, such as the Cherokees, Choctaws or Iroquois, whose presence is ubiquitous in the documentary record. This large-nation-centric approach omits the experiences of many Indian peoples and can oversimplify the dynamics of Indian and European interactions. In regions where smaller Indian groups abounded, like the Lower Mississippi River Valley, studies of large tribes can only provide a partial view of the colonial experience.

⁴Jeffrey P. Brain, *Tunica Archaeology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 316.

Historian Daniel H. Usner estimates that there were 32,000 Native Americans in Louisiana in 1763. While three larger inland tribes comprised about 25,000 of these people, roughly 7,000 (22 percent) of these Indians were not part of the Choctaws, Chickasaws, or Upper Creeks. Given that the entire non-indigenous colonial population, including enslaved peoples, was only 9,300, small groups of American Indians comprised roughly 17 percent of the total number of residents in the Lower Mississippi River Valley.⁵ In the early eighteenth century, the French referred to the tiny tribes living along the gulf coast as the *petite nations*.⁶ These petite nations were born out of the “shock waves” of disease, warfare, and the slave raids linked to the expansion of the colonial trade system that penetrated the Mississippi River Valley during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, fracturing older and larger political groups.⁷

The Tunicas were one of these groups, and they serve as a prime example of the ability and successes of these small nations in navigating an ever changing political landscape and population in the Lower Mississippi Valley.⁸ The Tunica people first encountered Europeans along the Arkansas River. Although the early history of the Tunicas is somewhat uncertain, scholars agree that Hernando de Soto probably encountered ancestors of this tribe in the Quiz Quiz chiefdom in 1541.⁹ Maps from Soto’s expedition indicate that

⁵ Daniel H. Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 279. See Usner p. 113 for a map of the Lower Mississippi River Valley. For the purposes of this study, the geographic space which I call “the Lower Mississippi River Valley” is the region between the Alabama and Sabine Rivers and roughly below modern day Memphis.

⁶ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy*, 45.

⁷ Robbie Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw: The European Invasion and the Transformation of the Mississippian World 1540-1715* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 117.

⁸ Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*. 133

⁹ Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 21-24; Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 132-133.

this early site, a town called “Tanico,” was located near present day Hot Springs Arkansas, and abutted a salt source, indicating that the people of Tanico were most likely engaged in the salt trade.¹⁰ In the second half of the sixteenth century, Quiz Quiz and the other major chiefdoms of the Mississippi River Basin collapsed. It is unclear if this fracturing was the result of disease spread by Soto’s expedition, warfare, internal conflict or emigration. In any case, by 1673, when French explorers Louis Jolliet and Jaques Marquet entered the Mississippi region the Tunicas were living at the confluence of the Mississippi and Yazoo rivers.¹¹ Archaeologist Jeffery P. Brain argues that the Tunicas can be clearly linked to Tanico based upon archaeological analysis of remnants of “temple mounds” at the Tunica site along the Yazoo and through the continued role of this tribe in the salt trade in the seventeenth century.¹² Either way, by the end of the seventeenth century the Tunicas were a relatively powerful group in the central Louisiana and Mississippi region and had carved out a niche for themselves in regional trade. This economic prominence encouraged the French to seek their alliance, and the Tunicas quickly engaged in the new colony’s goods and services exchange.¹³

At the onset of the eighteenth century less populous tribes like the Tunicas were prevalent along the Gulf Coast and the lower Mississippi. During their time in Louisiana, the French relied heavily on these petite nations for staple goods and for their services as guides,

¹⁰Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 21-27.

¹¹ Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 12, 101; Brain *Tunica Archaeology*, 21-30.

¹² Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 294-297.

¹³ Michael T. Pasquier, *Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities*, “Tunica Tribe” <http://www.knowla.org/>.

warriors, and informants.¹⁴ As the British and Spanish moved into the region after the Seven Years War, both powers quickly realized they too would need the support of local tribes in order to establish political presence in these lands. Ideally these nations would create human fences along the edges of the Spanish and British empires and enforce these borders in regions where the Europeans lacked military presence. In an attempt to secure the alliances of these many Indian residents, English and Spanish officials invested a tremendous amount of effort and capital in courting the nations of this region, large and small.¹⁵

Given the crucial importance of the Mississippi River to Spanish and British colonial ambitions, ensuring security along this waterway was a top priority. Theoretically, control of the Mississippi River would allow England or Spain access to both the Gulf of Mexico and the interior of the continent, either for trade or the movement of troops.¹⁶ Although in 1762 Spain and England had agreed to free navigation for vessels of both nations on the Mississippi, safe passage along the river was by no means assured. Rather, as historian Robert Rea colorfully commented in his 1970 article on Lieutenant John Thomas, European travelers on the Mississippi were “constantly subject to the dangers of redskinned highwaymen.”¹⁷ Rather than committing isolated events of banditry, as the term “highwaymen” implies, tribes like the Tunicas took advantage of their strategic position

¹⁴ “Vaudreuil to Roille,” March 3, 1749, September 22, 1749, February 1, 1750, “Kerlerec to De Machault d’ Arnouville,” September 15, 1754, *Mississippi Provincial Archives. French Dominion* Ed. Dunbar Rowland and A. G. Sanders (Jackson: Press of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1984), 5: 24, 34, 43-44, 143-145.

¹⁵ Bjork, “Documents Regarding Indian Affairs in the Lower Mississippi Valley,” 398-410; Brain *Tunica Archaeology*, 305; “Cedula and Orders 286”, October 30, 1781, Survey of Federal Archives, Confidential Dispatches of Don Bernardo de Gálvez, Fourth Spanish Governor of Louisiana, Sent to His Uncle Don José de Gálvez, Secretary of State and Ranking Official of the Council of the Indies, New Orleans, 1937-1938, 192.

¹⁶ Robert R. Rea, “Redcoats and Redskins on the Lower Mississippi 1763-1776: The Career of Lt. John Thomas,” *Louisiana History*, 11, no.1 (1970), 5-6.

¹⁷ Rea, “Redcoats and Redskins on the Lower Mississippi,” 5.

along the Mississippi to assert power and keep unwelcome Europeans out of their lands. They used their small numbers and riverside location to thwart European imperial goals and to convince the Spanish and English to recognize the Tunicas' rights to use lands on both sides of the border.



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Village of the Tunicas

II. European Land Claims and Indian Ground Control

From their village on the edge of the Mississippi, the Tunicas were able to both monitor and regulate traffic as it moved up and down the river. Tunica Bayou, the location

¹⁸ Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 40.

where the tribe resided on the eve of the repartition, was located at a strategic bend in the river just above Pointe Coupée.¹⁹ At this point, the tortuous Mississippi doubled back on itself making a shape almost like a backwards number “3.” On the eastern bank a narrow portage ran between the top and bottom sections of this flowing “3” shaped curve connecting the two river points via a bayou (labeled “Portage of the Cross” on the map above.²⁰ By crossing through this waterway, travelers could save about thirty miles, a notable distance especially when paddling upriver against the current.²¹ This shallow and swampy crossing was ideal for indigenous pirogues. Narrow, low-lipped and lightweight, these canoe-like vessels were designed for paddling through waters thick with vegetation and could easily be carried short distances across marshes or fallen cypress trees. Using the canes that grew in this region the Tunicas constructed low wattle and daub homes on the gentle bluffs overlooking this portage and cultivated corn in the soil fertilized by the runoff along the river banks. This elevated vantage point allowed the tribe a clear view of all those who struggled to navigate the muddy, churning waters. The strategic cut through meant the Tunicas were in a prime position to ambush travelers, if they were so inclined.²²

The year 1764 was a tense time for the Tunicas. They knew that their old allies, the French, were in the process of leaving the region and that the British were moving into the lands on the east bank of the Mississippi. Historically the Tunicas were no friends of the

¹⁹ *Historical Sketches of the Several Indian Tribes in Louisiana, South of the Arkansas River, and Between the Mississippi and River Grande*. Washington: [s.n.], 1806, 725.

²⁰ This cut through was called “portage de la croix” or “lac de la croix” by the French and “portage of the Cross” by the English in contemporary maps and is also referred to as Tunica bayou by Brain. Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 30-43.

²¹ Robin Fabel and R, “The Letters of R: The Lower Mississippi in the Early 1770s,” *Louisiana History*, 24, no. 4 (October 1, 1983), 414-415.

²² Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 296-297, 304; Robin Fabel and R, “The Letters of R,” 414-415.

British and felt threatened by their presence in the region. Indian allies of the British had conducted raids against the Tunicas throughout the French presence in the region and likely even before.²³ Thus, the Tunicas decided in 1764 to keep the British from establishing a permanent settlement on their lands. In March, a group of Tunicas ambushed British Major John Loftus and his troops as they attempted to ascend the Mississippi River to Fort Chartres, a formerly French fort in the Illinios country. Loftus and his troops were on a mission upriver to set up forts and establish a military presence between the Gulf and the Illinois country. He was traveling with 400 men divided among twelve vessels. Part of the Loftus expedition's aim was to assess the condition of the forts along the Mississippi and Iberville rivers. Beyond reconnaissance, this military venture was also part of a broader imperial strategy to assert British power in the Indian controlled interior. In the Ohio Valley and Great Lakes region, British troops were embroiled in a bitter war against pan-tribal forces headed by Pontiac and other Native American leaders. Loftus's 400 soldiers were to proceed north to assist in this war. Ideally, if the British were able to establish a presence in the Illinois region, they could then attack Pontiac's forces from both the east and the west and prevent the spread of the uprising into Indian nations in the Southeast.²⁴

The Tunicas, who numbered no more than 38 gunmen at this time, attacked Loftus at Davion's Bluff, about eighty leagues above New Orleans (marked as Loftus Cliff on the map on the front page), killing six men and wounding seven others.²⁵ In order to reach this

²³ Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 174-193.

²⁴ *The New York Mercury*, June 11, 1764, American Antiquarian Society/ News Bank, 2.

²⁵ There was some dispute among Loftus's contemporaries as to the number of Indians actually engaged in the assault. The English claimed, as reported by the *The New York Mercury*, that there were 150 warriors engaged in the assault, from the Tunica (Tonika) Ouma (Houma) Chettimafhaw (Chittimacha) and Yaboo (Yazoo) tribes. French governor Jean Jacques Blaise D'abbadie, in addition to insisting that he had no part in orchestrating the attack, debated these claims. French reports suggest that the Houma did not participate in the

location, the boats had passed through the Tunicas' homeland just below this point, giving the Indians time to plan for an assault. As the Loftus expedition entered the portion of the Mississippi in front of the bluffs, the Tunicas and several of their Avoyelle, Choctaw, and Ossagoula allies fired upon the Englishmen. The Major reported that the first volley came from the west bank, where an untold number of Indians were ensconced behind the thick brush. As Loftus and his men tried to maneuver away from the fire and engage their attackers they paddled toward the opposite bank; however, as they did so, a second round of shot rained upon them from the east side. According to *The New York Mercury*, which reported Loftus's debacle in June of that year, "the commanding officer, seeing both sides so strongly guarded, and the river narrow, returned with the stream."²⁶ Surprised and unable to engage their enemies, Loftus and his men were forced to give up their mission and retreat back downriver.²⁷

The success of the Tunicas in preventing the Loftus expedition from crossing through their territory convinced the British that they had to negotiate with the small nations along the Mississippi. They could not risk engaging Indian enemies both on what they considered safe territory as well as in the contested interior of the continent. Although they were few in number, the Tunicas made it known that they could cause major problems for the English if they attempted to bypass negotiating with the tribe. Furthermore the Tunicas had demonstrated their ability to influence and organize other local tribes. By December of 1764

assault and that some Choctaw were involved, they also place the total number of Indian attackers at 50. *The New York Mercury*, June 11, 1764, American Antiquarian Society/ News Bank 1764, 2.

²⁶ *The New York Mercury*, June 11, 1764, American Antiquarian Society/ News Bank 1764, 2.

²⁷ Clarence Edwin Carter, *Great Britain and the Illinois Country, 1763-1774* (Washington: The American Historical Association, 1910), 32-37; David K. Bjork, *The Establishment of Spanish Rule in the Province of Louisiana*, PhD Diss. 1762-1770 (University of California, 1923), 38-42; *The New York Mercury*, June 11, 1764, American Antiquarian Society/ News Bank 1764 2.

the English had decided that the Tunicas were the “leading nation” on this part of the Mississippi.²⁸

By 1772, the British officials were holding regular meetings with the Tunicas to hear the concerns of the chief and reward the tribe’s headmen with gifts. Beyond preventing the British from establishing a fort on their homeland, with the Loftus attack the Tunicas had proven their importance to the new colonial powers and positioned themselves to make demands of those who wished to travel the Mississippi in safety. Essentially, in the 1760s the British and Spanish learned the lesson historians are just now beginning to grasp: they could not afford to ignore small Indian nations.²⁹

Traditional histories of the Spanish and British empires in the Lower Mississippi Valley tend to characterize these Indians simply as “vassals” of the European monarchs and posit that these groups were easy to control as long as they were given adequate gifts. Even some more recent, and Indian-focused, scholarship also supports the notion that Indian efforts to assert power, such as the assault on the Loftus expedition, were usually the result of European political machinations.³⁰ While the presence of the French, Spanish and British influenced the Tunicas, it is equally unjust to ignore the motives of these small Indian tribes and their influence on European efforts to construct colonies. In 1764, the Spanish had not

²⁸ Dunbar Rowland, and Robert Farmar, *Mississippi Provincial Archives. English Dominion*. (Nashville, Tenn.: Press of Brandon Printing Co., 1911), 267.

²⁹ David K. Bjork, *The Establishment of Spanish Rule in the Province of Louisiana*, PhD Diss. (University of California, 1923), 38-42; *Talk Between Charles Stuart and Small Tribes on the Mississippi*, October 17, 1772, fr. 806 vol. 74, reel 6, pt.1. Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

³⁰ *The New York Mercury*, June 11, 1764, American Antiquarian Society/ News Bank 1764, 2; Rea, “Redcoats and Redskins,” 6; Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 303; Other scholars, such as Clarence Carter, have also suggested that the written correspondence between Gage and Abaddie does not indicate that the French were responsible for inciting the Tunicas to attack Major Loftus. However, it is clear that the French were not particularly upset with the Tunicas as the result of the attack, as the Tunicas were publicly received by the governor. Clarence Edwin Carter, *Great Britain and the Illinois Country, 1763-1774* (Washington: The American Historical Association, 1910), 32-35.

arrived to occupy Louisiana, so French governor Jean Jacques Blaise d'Abbadie was still in place in New Orleans. Trying to keep the transitions peaceful, he told Lattanash he was angry with the Tunicas for attacking Loftus. In detailing his reasons to Governor d'Abbadie, Lattanash passionately explained his conflict with the English:

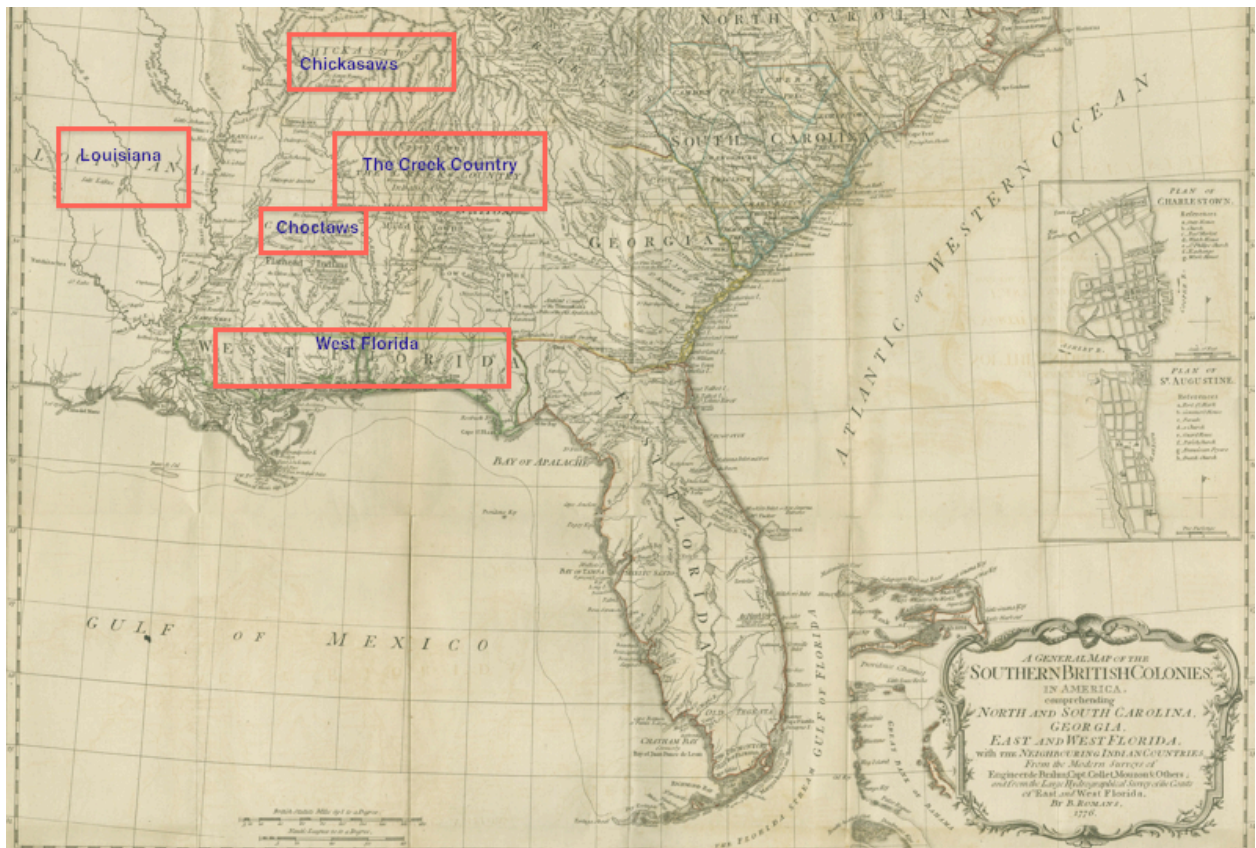
the English have always destroyed the nations. They have given them to drink liquors which have made them die. When I knew that they were coming into *our territory* I said: they will make us die, it is better to kill them.³¹

Lattanash then told d'Abbadie that he realized that the French were angry with the Tunicas because of this attack, but that he believed he had to prevent the English from coming into Tunica territory to protect his people. While this assault was certainly a risky move, the Tunicas knew the English as the Europeans who controlled the Indian slave markets in the east, and they determined that they simply could not permit them to establish a military presence so near the nation. Additionally, the Loftus attack may have been simply a power-play on the part of the Tunicas. Lattanash and the other leaders recognized an opportunity to prove to the British and Spanish colonists that despite European land claims, they controlled the land along the Mississippi, and could pose a threat to European security if their alliance was not obtained. Not only was Lattanash not controlled by French imperial aims, he and his people flatly rejected their French ally's requests for peaceful relations with the English. They pursued their own course of political negotiations.

Although it may be easier to uncover the goals of English Indian agents than of the Indians themselves, the documentary record shows that the Tunicas or other small groups never blindly obeyed the requests of their Spanish and English allies nor even that the Europeans were the only ones making demands. While historians have traditionally paid

³¹ David K. Bjork, *The Establishment of Spanish Rule in the Province of Louisiana*, PhD Diss. (University of California, 1923), 38-42. (italics mine)

more attention to European attempts to regulate Indian diplomacy, at least through 1783, it is evident that the Tunicas also attempted to manipulate the English and Spanish, and at times they succeeded.



Major Powers Along the Mississippi ³²

III. A Fluid Border

The end of the Seven Years War in 1763 marked the termination of France's status as a dominant state in the struggle for empire in mainland North America. The Treaty of Paris, which officially concluded the conflict, resulted in a reconfiguration of international

³² Bernard Romans, *A General Map of the Southern British Colonies in America* (London: R. Sayer and J. Bennett, 1776).

boundaries within the continent. The British and their Indian allies emerged victorious from this war, and consequently the Crown was able to claim sizable territorial spoils in North America. As part of the peace agreements, French King Louis XV ceded all of his colonial land holdings east of the Mississippi to the British. In an effort to convince the Spanish to surrender, France made a covert deal to give its wartime ally the western half of the Louisiana territory, plus the Isle of Orleans. Louisiana had few European settlers and a large indigenous population, produced no cash crops, had a minimally profitable fur trade, and was prone to floods and hurricanes. In spite of these unappealing aspects, Spanish King Carlos III agreed to take this landmass because it would serve as a buffer between the English colonies and Spanish holdings in Texas and Mexico. Spanish fear of English expansion and English concerns over another war with Spain created a climate of tension in the Lower Mississippi Valley. In the subsequent decades both powers struggled to find policies that would secure these newly acquired lands and prevent external incursions by other Europeans and their Indian allies. Thus, England and Spain sought to convert the muddy, Mississippi, which had long linked the peoples of this region, into a firm border.³³

As declared in 1767 in an official brief given to the Spanish Council of the Indies, His Catholic Majesty King Carlos III envisioned this river as a “fixed and definite boundary for

³³Gilbert C. Din, “The First Spanish Instructions for Arkansas Post November 15, 1769,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (October 1, 1994), 312-319; “Francisco Rendon to Carondelet,” May 4, 1795, Survey of Federal Archives, Louisiana, Dispatches of the Spanish Governors of Louisiana 1766-1792 (New Orleans, 1937-1938) 5: 218; Gilbert C. Din “Protecting the ‘Barrera’: Spain’s Defenses in Louisiana, 1763-1779,” *Louisiana History*, 19, no. 2 (April 1, 1978), 183-211; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy*, 105-107; Arthur S. Aiton, “The Diplomacy of the Louisiana Cession,” *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History: Vol II. The Spanish Presence in Louisiana 1763-1803*, Ed. Gilbert C. Din (Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1996); David K. Bjork, *The Establishment of Spanish Rule in The Province of Louisiana*, 11-12; Alan Taylor and Eric Foner, *American Colonies*, (New York: Viking, 2001), 385-386.

his royal possessions in North America.”³⁴ However, creating an impermeable border was far more difficult than issuing a decree. In addition to indigenous peoples, who regularly crossed the Mississippi, the Spanish struggled to prevent British traders from traveling into Louisiana. Throughout the 1760s and 1770s, Spanish colonial officials ineffectively tried to enforce trade laws that were designed to limit Indian contact to traders whom the Spanish government approved. Ideally, and in combination with Spanish attempts to halt Indian border crossing, this policy would limit the spread of British political influences among tribes in Spanish territory and force the indigenous peoples to cooperate with the Spanish if they desired access to European goods.³⁵ Spanish officials reasoned that if Indians did not have access to another European political and economic partner they would be more likely to support the Spanish presence.

While Spain was particularly slow to occupy its forts, the English proved more anxious to tackle the task of governing their new western possessions. It is perhaps indicative of Spain’s reticence that it was not until 1765 that Antonio de Ulloa was appointed the first governor and Captain General of Louisiana, and began the task of establishing political and economic control in the colony.³⁶ England moved into the region more rapidly and within a year of the treaty was in the process of establishing forts and outposts along the edges of West Florida. Both England and Spain recognized that if the two powers were to go to war again, a strong frontier defense would be essential, and whichever nation held control of the Mississippi would have tremendous military advantage. They also realized that only with the

³⁴ David K. Bjork, *The Establishment of Spanish Rule in The Province of Louisiana*, 100.

³⁵ Lawrence Kinnaird, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794*, (Washington: U. S. Govt. Print. Off., 1946-1949.) xxiii-xxvi. As previously mentioned, Usner calculates that there were 9,300 Europeans and Africans (including enslaved persons) in the Lower Mississippi Valley in 1763. Usner, *Indians, Settlers and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy*, 279.

³⁶ Kinnaird, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794*, xv.

alliances and military support of the Indian peoples along the river would either Spanish or British forces be able to control the Mississippi. Thus, in order to secure this strategic waterway, and to provide frontier security for their territories, the Europeans would need to gain native support. Therefore, although Spain and England each initially tried to minimize dependence on the native peoples of the region, both colonies were shortly forced to deal with Indian nations, as the French had before them.

Correspondence from the 1760s demonstrates that the British understood local Indian nations to pose very real threats to colonial security. In a letter dated March of 1764, English Major Robert Farmar wrote to the Secretary of War from Mobile that he and his men were surrounded by large numbers of armed Indians, and that his powder and provisions had all been soaked and rendered useless. As he explained, “the fort and the garrison [are] so very weak as makes it impossible to be supported or kept teneable in case of Rupture, so that every means of support for the Troops are at present expos’d to the ravages of the Savages.”³⁷ Farmar’s correspondence indicates that the English forces did not have control of the territory. The post at Mobile was roughly half way between the eastern and western edges of the province of West Florida and located along the Gulf coast. If the British felt threatened and weak at Mobile, they absolutely were not in control of the lands further north. What they called “West Florida” was actually the dominion of the Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Flatheads, Tunicas, and many other Indian groups. Thus, much like Loftus, Farmar discovered that it was impossible to accomplish military missions in the former French Louisiana territory without the support of the native inhabitants. Since they were unwilling to send substantial military forces to West Florida, an expenditure which would have been

³⁷ “Major Robert Farmar to The Secretary of War,” August 1, 1764, Dunbar Rowland and Robert Farmar, *Mississippi Provincial Archives. English Dominion* (Nashville, Tenn.: Press of Brandon Printing Co., 1911), 115.

especially taxing as the British were currently involved in fighting Indian uprisings in the Ohio country and recovering from the Seven Years War, the English in the Mississippi Valley had to learn to negotiate with and appease the indigenous peoples, including the Tunicas.

On the other side of the river, the Spanish were also struggling to develop a workable relationship with Indians. Unlike in Florida or Texas, the Spanish did not attempt to establish missions or encomiendas in Louisiana. Rather, they assessed that the most effective policy for retaining colonial possession of the less densely populated lands was to adopt the French practices of establishing alliances with the local Indian nations and providing them with annual gifts and trade in exchange for political alliance and military support. However, as early as 1768, Ulloa was already complaining that these friendships were entirely too expensive. He insisted that the “Indians cannot be despotic in their demands, and that they must not be given everything they are minded to ask for.” He particularly resented their “threats of attack if they are not gratified every time they come to the forts.”³⁸ Although Ulloa wanted to reduce the amount spent on the Indians each year, his protest demonstrates that local tribes were capitalizing on the military weakness and economic opportunities of the newly arrived Spanish colonizers. In recognizing that the Spanish were desperately in need of their support, in some instances tribes basically bullied Spanish officials into giving them “everything they are minded to ask for.”

Within the first decade of occupation, Spanish officials came to acknowledge their reliance on the assistance of Indian nations to support the colony and protect this

³⁸ “Ulloa to Grimaldi,” August 4, 1768, Lawrence Kinnaird, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794* (Washington: U. S. Govt. Print. Off., 1946-1949), xviii-xix, 61.

international border.³⁹ Just one year after Ulloa's initial insistence that excessive generosity was bad policy, the new Spanish Governor Alejandro O'Reily provided the Tunicas, who were then living on the east side of the Mississippi, with twice as many presents as the Petite Nations residing in Spanish territory.⁴⁰ By 1770 the Tunicas were listed among the top expenditures for smaller tribes along the Mississippi in Spanish statements of expenses for Indian presents in the "Ylinueses" (Illinois) region.⁴¹ Evidently, the new Spanish governor had decided the Tunicas *were* worth the expense.

Spanish aims to befriend the Tunicas and other local tribes were part of bigger plan to establish a human fence around Spanish North America. Ideally the Louisiana territory would serve as a buffer zone for English expansion from the east and Britain's Indian allies from the north. As the Spanish could not muster sufficient manpower to control northern Texas, they relied upon Indians they called the "Norteños" to keep out the English.⁴² Using similar tactics to those the French had employed in the region, the Spanish attempted to lure the Norteños into settling closer to Spanish settlements with gifts and trade opportunities.⁴³

³⁹ N. Bruce Duthu, "The Houma Indians of Louisiana: The Intersection of Law and History in the Federal Acknowledgment Process," *Louisiana History*, 38, no. 4 (1997), 421; Jack D. L. Holmes, "Juan de la Villebeuvre and Spanish Indian Policy in British West Florida," *Florida Historical Society*, 58, no. 4 (1980), 387-388; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy*, 96-100, 130-131.

⁴⁰ Robin F. Fabel, *Colonial Challenges: Britons, Native Americans, and Caribs, 1759-1775* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 104.

⁴¹ In 1769 the Tunicas received presents from the Spanish amounting to 121 pesos 6 reales, and 33 maravedis of silver. *Statement of Payment for Indian Presents*, January 9, 1770, Kinnaird, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794*, vol.II (Washington: U. S. Govt. Print. Off., 1946-1949), 154-155.

⁴² Norteños, literally "northerners," were mostly semi-nomadic, raiding peoples who conducted extensive trade along the Texas and Southwestern frontier. Included in this group are the Caddos and Comanches, two of Spain's most important allies in the region.

⁴³ Colin G. Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen : 1763 and the Transformation of North America*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 144; F. Todd Smith, "A Native Response to the Transfer of Louisiana: The Red River Caddos and Spain, 1762-1803," *Louisiana History*, 37, no. 2 (April 1, 1996), 171-175.

Although, as Ulloa noted, the practice of gift giving and hosting Indian groups at diplomatic conferences was expensive, Spanish officials came to understand that it was not as costly as war. As such, the Spanish governors determined that the most frugal and effective way to ensure the creation of this barrier was to court the Indian nations with promises of gifts, trade, and military alliance.⁴⁴ In his instructions to his nephew Don Bernardo de Gálvez as he became governor of Louisiana, Minister of the Indies José de Gálvez emphasized the importance of winning the alliance of local Indians.⁴⁵ He charged Bernardo de Gálvez not to neglect any reasonable effort to win over the local Indian groups, and to make sure to attend Indian councils and hold meetings with the tribes on a regular basis. As the Minister wrote, “one of the very essential objects of your attention should be to attract the neighboring tribes of Indians to alliances and good relation with the Government and Colonists of Louisiana.” He told Governor Gálvez to increase spending on Indians in order to achieve alliances “upon which may depend for the most part, the security of that colony, and so that in time the Indians may be reduced to our holy Faith and Dominion.”⁴⁶

Official correspondence between Minister José de Gálvez and Governor Bernardo de Gálvez also reflects Spanish anxiety about being outdone by the English, whom the Spanish

⁴⁴ Colin G. Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen: 1763 and the Transformation of North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 140-145; Highlighting the importance of the Indian trade and the need for gifts for local tribes of the Spanish governor Don Bernardo de Gálvez explained “Experience has demonstrated that the conservation and prosperity of this province and west florida depend principally on the friendship of the Indian nations who inhabit them, and this can only be done by means of gifts and a well established trade, which at proper time provides them with articles from Europe for which they need a ready outlet for their hides and furs.” see, “Edicts and Despatches No. 286,” March 18, 1782, Survey of Federal Archives, *Confidential Dispatches of Don Bernardo de Gálvez*, Fourth Spanish Governor of Louisiana, Sent to His Uncle Don José de Gálvez, Secretary of State and Ranking Official of the Council of the Indies, (New Orleans, 1937-1938), 211.

⁴⁵ “Apunte de las Instrucciones para el G^{or} G^l de la Luissiana que pasio a su majestad en la Granja a 1 de Octubre de 76,” Section II- Spanish Colonial Period, 1769-1803, Rosamonde E. and Emile Kuntz Collection 1655-1878, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, #600-3-64.

⁴⁶ “Royal Instruction from Jose Gálvez to Don Bernardo,” Section II- Spanish Colonial Period, 1769-1803, Rosamonde E. and Emile Kuntz Collection 1655-1878, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, #600-3-66.

blamed for Native Americans' extravagant gift expectations. José de Gálvez requested that his nephew observe and monitor the English and their interactions with the local tribes and send back reports of their behavior. Governor Gálvez's assignment also included explicit instructions to attempt to win the allegiance of those tribes who were allied with the British.⁴⁷

The British, who were well aware of the efforts of the Spanish, simultaneously made efforts to draw the "little nations" along the Mississippi onto their side. During the 1760s British fears of pan-tribal uprisings such as Pontiac's War and the creation of the Shawnee coalition at Scioto, shaped imperial Indian policy.⁴⁸ In the early 1770s concerns about the possibility of war between England and Spain over the Falkland Islands re-energized Spanish and English efforts to court local tribes of all sizes along the border.⁴⁹ Then in the mid 1770s, as a possible rupture between England and the Atlantic colonies loomed, Spanish and British officials again readied for a multi-theater confrontation. Clearly, by the 1770s, the alliance of the nations along the Mississippi was at a premium, and the Tunicas were in an ideal position to exploit the anxieties of the Spanish and English colonists.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ "Royal Instruction from José Gálvez to Don Bernardo," Section II- Spanish Colonial Period, 1769-1803, Rosamonde E. and Emile Kuntz Collection 1655-1878, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University. #600-3-66; "José Gálvez to Bernardo de Gálvez," Section II- Spanish Colonial Period, 1769-1803, Rosamonde E. and Emile Kuntz Collection 1655-1878, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University #600-3-63; It is worth noting that Governor Ulloa was not a particularly effective colonial Governor, and that he was ousted shortly after he arrived in New Orleans during a bloodless uprising against the Spanish colonial government in 1768. see John Preston Moore, "'The Good Wine of Bordeaux': Antonio de Ulloa," in *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History* vol. II, Ed. Gilbert C. Din (Lafayette, University of Southwestern Louisiana 1996), 59-70.

⁴⁸ The British correctly perceived Shawnee efforts to unite militant tribes through congresses at Scioto in 1769 and 1771 to be a very real threat to the stability of British presence in the Southeast. Fabel, *Colonial Challenges*, 108.

⁴⁹ Fabel, *Colonial Challenges*, 108,132.

⁵⁰ "John Stuart to William Howe," October 6, 1777, Carleton Papers, Library of Congress, 695-696.



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Sauvage Matachez en Guerrier

IV. Tunica Evolutions

Whether the petite nations could manage to hold onto their homelands, support their members, and wield substantial power over the political and economic situation in the

⁵¹ Alexander de Batz, "Sauvage Matachez en Guerrier, Nouvelle Orleans, 1759," Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography.

seemingly ever shifting political landscape of the Lower Mississippi Valley in the eighteenth century was largely determined by their political adaptability and diplomatic finesse. The ability of the Tunicas to forge multiple alliances while simultaneously maintaining neutrality allowed them to make demands of the Spanish and British, which were remarkable given their small size, and to reduce the amount of violence they suffered at the hands of larger tribes.

In 1772, British Deputy Superintendent Charles Stuart was irritated. The Spanish, it seemed to him, had been all too successful in convincing the little tribes along the Mississippi to re-settle on their side. Although it is evident that both British and Spanish officials were aware of each other's covert efforts to coax local nations on both sides of the border into alliances, technically, the European powers had promised not to interfere with Indians outside of their respective territories. In 1772, in a letter to his cousin, Indian Superintendent John Stuart, Charles Stuart complained that he could find no reason, other than devious Spanish influence, that the Tunicas had moved to the west bank given the "local attachment Indians are known to have to their Mother Ground."⁵² Perhaps if the English had been aware of the Tunicas' history of relocation and re-invention they would have been less surprised by their willingness to leave their homelands and move across the river. In the two centuries before the Revolutionary Era, the Tunicas had moved at least five times, been part of large chiefdoms and tiny bands, and had been identified by colonial settlers as salt traders, hunters, soldiers, agriculturalists, guides and even Christian converts.⁵³ In short, the Tunicas

⁵² "Charles Stuart to John Stuart," December 2, 1772, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. fr. 793, v. 74, rl. 6, pt. 1.

⁵³Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 288-305.

were a highly adaptable people, a characteristic which helps us to understand the success of their diplomatic efforts in the eighteenth century.

Throughout the 1700s, the Tunicas sought to use the French, Spanish and English presence to protect their people from inter-tribal violence and their lands from aggressive settlers. Although they had enjoyed successes in the indigenous and colonial trade networks, the Tunicas were in a precarious position at the beginning of the eighteenth century. During the first decades of French colonization, other Indian nations, not Europeans, posed the largest threats to the tribe. Firstly, Native Americans from the east continuously raided the small tribes of the south for prisoners to sell to English slave traders. The Chickasaws in particular posed a serious threat to the petite nations, as a major part of their political and economic ties to the British centered around their role as suppliers of Indian slaves for the Atlantic colonies.⁵⁴ The second threat came from other small tribes within the region, who also frequently attacked the villages of their enemies.⁵⁵ Endemic small scale violence fostered a climate of instability in the region. Although the Tunicas numbered roughly one thousand in 1700, they still were small enough in comparison to larger nations, like the Chickasaws, that they struggled to defend themselves from larger nations and therefore welcomed French offers of protection.⁵⁶ We can see the effect of this chronic raiding in the Tunicas' flight south to Portage de la Croix in 1706. Early alliances with the French probably had made the Tunicas a prime target for the Chickasaws, whose extensive slave trade

⁵⁴ Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville and Jean-Jacques-Blaise d'Abbadie, *A Comparative view of French Louisiana, 1699 and 1762: the Journals of Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville and Jean-Jacques-Blaise d'Abbadie*, Trans. and Ed. by Carl A. Brasseaux (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1979), 111,116.

⁵⁵ Pénicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 25.

⁵⁶ Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 316-317; George Edward Milne, *Rising Suns, Fallen Forts, and Impudent Immigrants: Race, Power, and War in the Lower Mississippi Valley*, PhD Diss. (University of Oklahoma, 2006), 44.

networks moved indigenous peoples from the Lower Mississippi Valley to English markets on the Eastern seaboard. In an effort to move closer to the French settlements, where they hoped to be better protected from the Chickasaw raids, the Tunicas fled downriver and moved into the town of the Houmas at Portage de la Croix.⁵⁷ From this better protected location the Tunicas were able to expand their trade networks to include French traders and they exchanged salt, staple foodstuffs, and limited numbers of furs, for European guns and material goods.

The Tunicas remained at this location until 1731 when Natchez raids forced them to move again. In addition to furnishing the French settlers with food, the Tunicas also provided their services as guides, informants and warriors. During the 1710s and 1720s Tunica men participated in the French military campaigns against the Natchez Indians.⁵⁸ Under the brutal assault, the Natchez nation as a cohesive group collapsed. The remaining Natchez refugees were absorbed by other nations or fled the region. In June 1731, the Tunicas adopted a group of these Natchez into their nation. Adoption was a crucial practice for the Tunicas and other petite nations in this violent and unstable land.⁵⁹ By incorporating outsiders into the tribe they strengthened numbers and expanded kinship networks; however, this process was not

⁵⁷ Usner, *Indians, Settlers and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy*, 62-63; Max E. Stanton, *Southeastern Indians Since the Removal Era* "The Houma Indians of Southern Louisiana," Walter L. Williams (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1979), 94; Workers of the Writers' Program of the Works Project Administration in the State of Louisiana, *Louisiana: A guide to the State* (New York: Hastings House, 1945), 34; Dave. D. Davis, "A Case of Identity: Ethnogenesis of the New Houma Indians," *Ethnohistory* 48, no. 3 (2001), 480.

⁵⁸ Milne, *Rising Suns, Fallen Forts, and Impudent Immigrants*, 133-135; For a more in depth explanation of the growing animosity between the Tunica and Natchez peoples see Milne, 223-225; Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 299.

⁵⁹ *Mississippi Provincial Archives*. vol. 1, 441-446; du Pratz, xxxix, 23, 65, 80, 103; Pénicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 159; d'Iberville and d'Abbadie, *Journals of d'Iberville and d'Abbadie*, 29-37.

without its risks.⁶⁰ By 1726 the Tunicas had experienced a massive population decline and according to the Governor of Louisiana's estimate, could muster only 120 warriors. Given what must have been a traumatic period of loss, the Tunicas were most likely seeking to expand in 1730, and hoped the Natchez would help strengthen their small community. However, within a month of their arrival, the Natchez refugees launched a stealthy dawn attack on the Tunica people. At the end of the bloodshed, the Tunicas had lost half of their warriors.⁶¹ Once again, in the wake of tremendous violence the Tunicas fled downriver. The tribe consolidated into a single village and settled on Tunica Bayou. From here they could easily access New Orleans via the Mississippi, their old lands at Portage de la Croix and the Red River. They continued to engage in small scale trade with the French and to work for them as guides and soldiers, now more than ever eager to use the French military presence to ensure their security.⁶²

Although the Tunicas were relatively few in number, they excelled at marketing themselves as steadfast friends and strategic allies of the French. During the French period the Tunicas had limited options for engaging in the play-off diplomacy with other European powers. Due to their small size and limited geographic range they did not have ready access

⁶⁰ In 1706, the Tunicas had temporarily joined nations with the Houmas living at Portage de la Croix, only to later attack the tribe. In an effort to move closer to the French settlements where they hoped to be better protected from the Chickasaw raids, the Tunicas fled downriver and moved into the town of the Houmas at Portage de la Croix. Shortly thereafter, tensions between the two tribes flared, and the Tunicas massacred their hosts, causing the surviving Houmas to flee downriver, hoping, like the Tunicas, that closer proximity to the French settlement would protect them from further Indian attacks; Usner, *Indians, Settlers and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy*, 62-63; Max E. Stanton, *Southeastern Indians Since the Removal Era* "The Houma Indians of Southern Louisiana," Walter L. Williams (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1979), 94; Workers of the Writers' Program of the Works Project Administration in the State of Louisiana, *Louisiana: A guide to the State* (New York: Hastings House, 1945), 34; Dave. D. Davis, "A Case of Identity: Ethnogenesis of the New Houma Indians," *Ethnohistory* 48, no. 3, (2001), 480.

⁶¹ Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 30-31, 299-300.

⁶² Usner, *Indians Settlers and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy*, 62-63, 85; Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 33-34, 300-301.

to the Spanish or British and therefore were unable to rely on the classic European competition tactics which worked so well for the larger nations in the Mississippi River Valley.⁶³ However, the Tunicas were certainly among the most successful in courting the French settlers. In 1730 the Governor of Louisiana Etienne Perier complained that the Tunicas were “the only Savage Nation truly friends of the French.”⁶⁴

Although the Tunicas may have successfully convinced the French of their devotion, and seemed limited in their options for European alliances, it is evident that the Tunicas also cultivated relationships with others whose alliances might be advantageous, including powerful indigenous nations. In 1713 the Tunicas conducted a calumet ceremony with British trader Price Hughes while he was touring the region, simultaneously reminding the French that they had alternative diplomatic options and probably seeking to demonstrate to the Chickasaws that they were friends of the British.⁶⁵ Calumet ceremonies were formal rituals that cemented friendship and political alliances between two groups.⁶⁶ Again in the 1730s the Tunicas raised French hackles when they were implicated in a scheme among the Red River tribes to form an alliance with the Chickasaws.⁶⁷ By uniting themselves with the Chickasaws, the Tunicas could gain access to English trade goods through Chickasaw

⁶³ The Choctaw, for example, were extremely successful in negotiating with the English and French colonial powers. For an in depth study of their success with play off diplomacy see James Carson’s Searching for the Bright Path. James Taylor Carson, *Searching for the Bright Path: The Mississippi Choctaws from Prehistory to Removal* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 26-50; For a more general view of Choctaw and Chickasaw diplomacy, and French and English attempts to manipulate these tribes see Daniel H. Usner’s Indians Settlers and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy Chapter 3 “The Indian Alliance Network of a Marginal European Colony”; Usner, *Indians Settlers and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy*, 77-105.

⁶⁴ Milne, “Rising Suns, Fallen Forts, and Impudent Immigrants,” 225.

⁶⁵ Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 299.

⁶⁶ Pénicaud, *Fluer de Lys and Calumet*, 25-27; Usner, *Indians Settlers and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy*, 26; “O’Reilly to Arriaga,” October 17, 1769, Kinnaird, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, vol. II, 101.

⁶⁷ Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 303.

networks, but perhaps more importantly, they would not have to fear assaults by the Chickasaws. The French and some historians have interpreted these events as British power plays which were intended to “seduce” the Tunicas and other small nations into abandoning their French allies.⁶⁸ However, given the pressure the Tunicas were facing from the Chickasaw, and their efforts to emphasize their importance and loyalty to the French, these negotiations were most likely driven by the Tunicas’ desire to stymie Chickasaw attacks. Although the Tunicas may well have wanted to establish relationships with the British, their diplomatic maneuverings probably had more to do with the tribe’s desire for security within its homelands than the influences of British subversion. Additionally, historians should not interpret these exchanges as a purely European centered diplomatic incidents. Rather, the Tunicas’ actions indicate that they were seeking to engage in a type of play off diplomacy between the French and the Chickasaws, thereby using their alliance with a European nation not for leverage with another colonial power, but with a formidable Indian group.

Similarly to the English and Spanish, the Tunicas were also searching for a workable diplomatic policy in the 1760s and 1770s. Given the Tunicas’ experiences with the widespread violence and instability fueled by the British slave trade, one can understand why the Tunicas reacted so violently to a British presence on their doorstep. Following the Loftus skirmish, the Tunicas first “fled” to Mobile, claiming fear of English retribution and then in April turned to the French for assistance. After reprimanding the Tunicas for their attack D’Abbadie resettled the Tunicas by Bayou Lafourche. However, the tribe did not remain there for more than a few months before returning to their old location. Given the rapid relocations of the Tunicas, it appears that they were not actually as frightened of the English as they perhaps wanted the French governor to believe and that this movement was likely

⁶⁸ Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 303.

part of an elaborate diplomatic plan. Once they had settled their grievances with the British they moved back to the east side about a league above Pointe Coupée.⁶⁹ Based upon their extremely brief stays in both Mobile and Bayou LaFourche, therefore it is reasonable to conclude that the Tunicas had planned on moving out of their homelands for just long enough to let British anger dissipate, before returning to negotiate.

This move marks the beginning of the delicate diplomacy the Tunicas managed to conduct for the next decade. They regularly crossed the Mississippi throughout this period. The Tunicas farmed on the western side, but kept their houses on the eastern side and relied upon their traditional hunting lands there. As a result, Tunica peoples regularly came into contact with both Spanish and English subjects. Despite the best efforts of the Spanish and English officials, the petite nations mostly refused to abide their requests to remain in either West Florida or Louisiana. In 1772 Charles Stuart explained that many of the small nations lived on the Spanish side, but continued to hunt and plant on English territory. In fact his comment that “the Alibamons I found to be the only indians at present residing on one side of the river,” signifies that this transnational travel was the norm.⁷⁰ The frequency of “border” crossings among the petite nations shows that the Treaty of Paris did not fundamentally change the way these smaller tribes saw their lands or cause them to recognize European claims in the region. The border was clearly not a division that they acknowledged.

⁶⁹ Charles Stuart, “List of Several Tribes,” 1772, vol. 74, reel 6, pt. 1, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress, 801-802; Bjork, *The Establishment of Spanish Rule in Louisiana*, 38; Brain, *Tunica Archaeology* 39, 42, 303.

⁷⁰ In 1772 the Biloxis Pascagoulas and Tunicas all lived on Spanish side but planted corn across the river. In this missive Stuart decides that they must have been lured from their homelands to move across the river by Spanish slander of the English and promises of gifts; “Charles Stuart to John Stuart,” December 2, 1772, vol. 74 rl. 6 pt. 1. Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

V. Medals and Alliances

By 1772 Lattanash was an old man. Perhaps the soldiers at Fort Bute would have been able to recognize him from a distance. Most likely he was dressed in European clothes and worn both European and indigenous jewelry for the formal occasion, and of course his prestigious medals of alliance. No one would have mistaken him for a European, however, as his skin probably was heavily marked with ceremonial tattoos and ritual scarification created by dragging sharpened fishbones across the skin. He arrived with a group of Tunica leaders, who were dressed and scarred similarly, although most likely wearing fewer European garments. As Lattanash spoke to the English during the Indian council, he remarked that he expected to die soon and wished that his nephew would succeed him as Great Medal Chief of the Tunicas. Lattanash had served as a tribal headman since at least 1731. Initially he and Bride-les-Boeufs, another Tunica and possibly the war chief, shared power. During the early eighteenth century the political leadership within the nation was commonly shared among several men. However, when Bride-les-Boeufs died in 1763, Lattanash took the opportunity to secure a position of political dominance. Lattanash was an imposing figure. A shrewd negotiator and a proud man, he would not bend to European desires, or play the role of lackey as the colonial officials had hoped. This wizened, tattooed and scarred, tough old Indian was the man with whom the English would have to negotiate.⁷¹

During the ten months preceding this Indian council, relations between the English and Spanish colonial officials had become especially strained as the result of the Tunicas' diplomatic maneuvering. The Tunicas, who were residing about a league above Pointe

⁷¹Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 320, 326-327; Fabel, *Colonial Challenges*, 127; "Talk Between Charles Stuart and Small Tribes on the Mississippi," October 17, 1772, vol. 74, reel 6, pt.1, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

Coupée, but on the eastern side, had been courting both Spanish and English officials and had made efforts to gain the friendship of both powers. Lattanash realized that if they could maintain alliances with both of these nations, the Tunicas would be able to comfortably move back and forth across the Mississippi as they wished, and exploit dual trade and military partnerships. However, as we have seen, neither the English or Spanish officials were eager to share the affections of Indian nations living within the boundaries of their empires.⁷²

International tensions over securing the allegiance of the Tunicas came to a head in December of 1771, when Lattanash reported to Indian Agent John Thomas that Bathazar de Villiers, the Spanish commanding officer at Pointe Coupée, had attempted to wrest an English medal from his neck. While this may seem like a minor misunderstanding, the practices of giving and wearing medals carried great significance for Indians and colonial officials in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Essentially, by attempting to remove this medal, which was a physical marker of Lattanash's alliance with the English, the Spanish officer was trying to force Lattanash to sever his ties with the British. Given the severity of this gesture, John Thomas would have would have recognized this move as nothing less than a international provocation.⁷³

The practice of presenting indigenous leaders with medals was a cardinal component of colonial Indian diplomacy in Spanish Louisiana. The presentation of these medals was generally part of a more elaborate process of securing alliances with native peoples. Typically the Spanish governor, or other government officials, would host a gathering of the headmen of one or more Indian nations, such as the reception Governor Alejandro O'Reilly

⁷²Charles Stuart, "List of the Several Tribes Inhabiting the Banks of the Mississippi," 1772, v. 74, rl. 6, pt. 1, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁷³David K. Bjork, "Documents Regarding Indian Affairs in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1771-1772," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 13, no. 3 (1926), 398-410.

hosted for the Tunicas, Taensas, Pacanas, Houmas, Bayagoulas, Ofogoulas, Chaouachas, and Ouchas in 1769. This type of ceremony generally involved feasting, smoking, distribution of presents to the chiefs, extensive speeches by both Indian and Spanish leaders, and music. These formal gatherings could last for days, and blended European and indigenous diplomatic routines. At the aforementioned conference of small local tribes, leaders from each nation waved fans over Governor O'Reilly and symbolically laid their weapons at his feet. In return O'Reilly presented each chief with a Spanish medal.⁷⁴

Medals were markers of external alliances and of authority within Indian nations. Spanish medals, literally metal discs, were clearly marked with symbols of imperial Spain and laced with ribbon so they could be worn around the neck. Only the leaders whom the Spanish recognized as figures of authority within indigenous groups received these medals. Therefore, to have a medal was essentially to be recognized as being in charge of tribal foreign relations. Furthermore, the Spanish distributed large medals to those Indian leaders who seemed to wield the most power within the region, and they gave smaller medals to those whom they considered to be of lesser import. These medals helped affirm political power and prestige within native groups as well as to other Indians and Europeans. Similar to the practice of flying a Spanish, French or British flag over a village, the practice of wearing a medal was an obvious and portable marker of Indian friendship with a colonial power. Alternatively, refusing to wear a Spanish medal, or to relinquish a French or English medal, would signify a rejection of allegiance to Spain.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Carondelet, 1795, Works Progress Administration, *Dispatches of the Spanish Governors of Louisiana 1766-1792*. vol. 5, 85; Usner, *Indians Settlers and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy*, 131; "O'Reilly to Arriaga," October 17, 1769, Kinnaird, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 96-103.

⁷⁵ Kathleen DuVal, "The Education of Fernando de Lebya: Quapaws and Spaniards on the Border of Empires," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, LX, no.1 (2001), 1-29; "Talk Between Charles Stuart and Small Tribes on the Mississippi," October 17, 1772, vol. 74, reel 6, pt.1, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of

Upon hearing of this incident, Thomas composed a scolding letter to the Spanish Governor Don Luis de Unzaga y Amezaga. In this missive he warned Unzaga not to interfere with the Tunicas or other small tribes who resided on British territory. Thomas wrote that “it is a well known fact that the Indians have been urged to kill and pillage His Britannic Majesty’s subjects on the Mississippi River since the peace.” Thomas threatened that if the Spanish continued to try and turn the tribes against the British “a proper reprisal will take place.” Furthermore, he insinuated that if the Spanish should attempt to pry away the loyalties of the Indians, the English would also begin to court the indigenous peoples living on the opposite side of the river, a tactic which could destabilize Spanish control of the region. Bathazar de Villiers promptly responded to Thomas, dismissing Lattanash’s story as a fabrication and flatly denying that he had attempted to take the medal by force. In closing he advised Thomas that “if we wish to conserve the tranquility necessary to the well-being of the subjects who are under our care, it is necessary that we resolve not to put any trust in the talk and promises of the different nations. Their only purpose is to gain the greatest advantages for themselves.”⁷⁶

It is impossible to tell from these hearsay accounts whether Villiers actually attempted to tear the medal from Lattanash’s neck, or if the chief simply gave Villiers the medal, as the commandant claimed. What is clear from Villiers’s account is that Lattanash indeed “considered only his own and his people’s interests.” Thus when Lattanash came down to participate in the “talks” at Fort Bute in October, he aimed to calm and re-affirm his

Congress; In his speech to Charles Stuart at Fort Bute in 1772, Mingo Tallaija, the Small Medal Chief of the Tunicas (noted as Tonicas in this document) informed the English that he was very attached to his French medal and that he had no intention of giving it up as he had always had good relations with the French, and the medal itself “makes me of weight with my people.” fr.806.

⁷⁶ David K. Bjork, “Documents Regarding Indian Affairs in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1771-1772,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 13, no. 3 (1926), 398-410.

friendship with the British, but *not* to fold under British pressure to convince the Tunicas to abandon their relations with the Spanish. As he said to the British

I heard you was angry at my having this Medal + Spanish Colours why would you be angry at that, I had the medal before the English Come here and as for the Colours I gave my old one to the Arkansas and the Commandant at Pointe Coupe give me another for it.

We are freemen and never heard that the English wanted to make slaves of us. *We want to be friends with all the White People near us*, as we live amongst them and *are we not free to go to which side of the River we please are not the lands our Own?*⁷⁷

As the record of his speech to the English made clear, he was using this opportunity to re-affirm his nation's power in the region and reject English and Spanish attempts to impose a European border on Tunica lands. While Lattanash recognized that the Spanish and English officials each claimed control of the lands on one side of the Mississippi, Lattanash did not believe that those borders applied to the Indian inhabitants of the region. Rather, he understood them as European borders that restricted Europeans only.

In his lifetime Lattanash witnessed tremendous political and demographic change in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Surely he had grown up hearing stories of Mississippian times, of life when the Tunicas numbered more than ten times the size of their population in 1772. He had seen the French come and go. He was clearly aware of the strained relationship between the Spanish and English, and he probably realized this dynamic was likely to lead eventually to war and another political re-mapping of the region. Lattanash surely recognized the transience of the European powers, and was trying to sculpt a diplomatic policy that would aid the Tunicas both in the short and long term. In developing amiable relations with both the British and Spanish, the Tunicas gained political alliances, annual presents, and trade connections in the short term. Perhaps more importantly though, by remaining “neutral”

⁷⁷ “Talk Between Charles Stuart and Small Tribes on the Mississippi,” October 17, 1772, fr. 806 vol. 74, reel 6, pt.1. Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.(italics mine)

the Tunicas were preparing for the next power restructuring, and ensuring that they would not be punished for allying with the wrong power.

Alliances with European powers also aided the Tunicas in inter-tribal politics. In his speech at Fort Bute Lattanash explained that the Tunicas must be able to use the lands across the river in Spanish territory because “the hunting grounds on this side are poor because we [fear] offenses of the Creeks⁷⁸ we are glad to be friends with every white man + if the Enemy drive us from this side, as they have already done to some of my Red Brothers, what must become of me where must I go. If I am not friends with those on the otherside.”⁷⁹ Similarly to the Chickasaws, the Creeks had far reaching trade networks and moved through vast portions of the southeast, from their homelands in Georgia and Alabama. Also like the Chickasaws, Creeks frequently went on both hunting and raiding excursions as far west as the Mississippi River and came into contact with the tribes located along there. Given their small size, these petite nations made ideal targets for the Creeks. Clearly, fear of raids from large interior tribes, like the Creeks and Chickasaw, was a primary factor in determining both where the Tunicas lived and who they allied with. Little tribes relocated not out of love for the Spanish, or because they hated the British, but rather because the European international boundary along the Mississippi provided them with some protection from other Indians.

⁷⁸ This portion of the document is unclear, Knuth has translated this phrase simply as “because we fear the Creeks” although it appears that it could also be “warfare of friends of the creeks” or “we fear of friends.” In any case, it is clear that the Tunicas feared the violence and slave raids from the Creeks on the eastern shore. David K. Bjork, “Documents Regarding Indian Affairs in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1771-1772,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 13, no. 3 (1926), 409.

⁷⁹ “Talk Between Charles Stuart and Small Tribes on the Mississippi,” October 17, 1772, fr. 806 vol. 74, reel 6, pt.1. Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.



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The Lower Mississippi River Valley in the 1770s

⁸⁰ Bernard Romans, *A General Map of the Southern British Colonies in America* (London: R. Sayer and J. Bennett, 1776).

VI. Negotiating Borders

Contrary to traditional approaches to colonial history that focus exclusively on European struggles for empire in the Lower Mississippi River Valley, Lattanash's speech indicates that throughout the 1770s European land claims remained highly contested and contingent upon the cooperation of native peoples. As is evidenced by the failed Loftus expedition and early struggles of the Spanish and British to cement land claims and establish an international boundary, borderlands diplomacy was negotiated among Spanish, English, *and* indigenous groups.

Rather than stifling opportunities to exploit European rivalries and improve material wealth, the attempted creation of the Spanish-English border in the Lower Mississippi Valley created a unique opportunity for smaller tribes to engage in play off diplomacy in ways that had been previously unavailable. The Tunicas and other small riverside nations seized the opportunity to form alliances that they hoped would protect them from other Indian nations and allow them to hold onto their lands in the face of a growing settler population. By incorporating the experiences of small and large nations into the colonial narrative, it is also possible to avoid developing a universal declension narrative for all peoples of the region after 1763. In fact, as a result of their adaptability and successful political maneuvering, many descendants of the petite nations have been able to remain in their native lands through the present. The Tunicas, now combined with some Biloxis, Ofos, and Avoyelles are a federally recognized tribe, and currently reside in Marksville Louisiana.⁸¹

As we can see from the tremendous population declines during the second half of the eighteenth century, the petite nations certainly faced many challenges. These tiny groups

⁸¹U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Federal Acknowledgment, Summary of the Evaluation of the Tunica-Biloxi Indian Tribe by the Criteria in Part 54 of Title 25 of the Code of Federal Regulations , no. TBT-V001-D004.

struggled against territorial pressure and attacks from their Indian neighbors and the aggressive European and then American settlers. In the face of violence and political uncertainty, the Tunicas and other small Indian groups did their best to use their small population base coupled with their proximity to multiple European nations to their advantage. Unlike a larger tribe, or confederacy, such as the Creeks, small nations like the Tunicas and Biloxis seem to have been able to push the limits of this border more easily. The Mississippi served as a protective barrier for the Tunicas against Creek raids precisely because the Creek warriors would not cross the international boundary for fear of generating a conflict with Spain. Both because the petite nations were minimally taxing on the environment itself and not as threatening a presence as a large and powerful Indian group, they were able to move between empires without provoking as serious political or military backlash as a larger tribe would. This is not to suggest that Tunica efforts to construct relationships with both colonial powers did not rankle some feathers; clearly they did. However both Spain and England recognized that it would not be worth the cost or effort to conduct a military campaign against these tiny tribes close to their forts and settlements, and that it was better to try to coax them into alliances with gifts and offers of protection. As long as the Tunicas could market themselves as minor threat to colonial stability, as with the Loftus campaign, as potential military allies, and as a population base who could physically block foreign expansion, they remained valuable to the Spanish and English. The Tunicas' abilities to adapt and wisely negotiate with new colonial groups allowed them to avoid removal and survive, and even prosper through the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁸²

⁸² Jack D. L. Holmes, "Juan de la Villebeuvre and Spanish Indian Policy in British West Florida," *Florida Historical Society*, 58, no. 4 (1980), 391; Gaytha Carver Thompson, "An Account of the Indian Tribes

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