

**THE MANY TIES OF THE PETITES NATIONS:
RELATIONSHIPS, POWER, AND DIPLOMACY IN THE LOWER MISSISSIPPI
VALLEY, 1685-1785**

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ABSTRACT

Elizabeth N. Ellis: *The Many Ties of the Petites Nations: Relationships, Power, and Diplomacy in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1685-1785*
(Under the direction of Kathleen DuVal)

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the petites nations of the Lower Mississippi Valley survived enormous political, demographic, and social change. By the 1690s, these petites nations, as the region's many small Native polities were collectively known, seemed to be on the verge of destruction. The combined forces of the arrival of British and French colonizers in the Southeast, the spread of devastating epidemics, and the escalation of the Indian slave trade threatened to shatter their nations and annihilate their peoples.

This dissertation compares the diverse experiences of a few of these petites nations—including the Tunicas, Ofogoulas, Biloxis, Koroas, Mugulashas, Bayagoulas, Mobilians, Chitimachas, and Tensas—as they fought to preserve their homelands and protect their peoples. Unlike the more well-known Southeastern Indian nations, these Native groups did not coalesce or confederate into a single larger polity. Rather, these groups developed extensive alliance networks that would allow them to exert sufficient political and military influence to protect their communities while preserving their autonomy as groups of fewer than 1,000 individuals.

The relationships the petites nations forged with their black, white, and Indian neighbors fundamentally shaped the geopolitical structure not only of the Native

southeast, but also of European settlement in the Lower Mississippi Valley. By demonstrating the importance of Indigenous networks on colonial Louisiana, this dissertation highlights the influence of politics within Indian country on the region as a whole. Ultimately by relying on combinations of strategic mobility and violence, social and economic adaptability, and numerous political relationships with both their Native and European neighbors, many of these nations were able not only to survive this tumultuous era, but also to exert tremendous regional power.

To the amazing Sarah McNamara, without whom this would not have been possible.

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Introduction

In late October of 1722, the primary chief of the Acolapissa nation came down with a terrible illness. The Acolapissas had already lost many men, women, and children to the waves of epidemics that plagued the gulf coast, and they feared their chief would be next. As their chief's health declined, they decided to call for external help. The Acolapissas had heard tales of the wondrous cures of the healer of the Ouachas, so they sent urgent messengers to retrieve him from the village of the Tensas where he was treating another patient. These small Native nations all lived within a thirty-five mile radius of New Orleans, and so the medicine man was able to travel quickly to the ailing chief.

Yet rather than saving their beloved leader, the Ouacha healer betrayed the Acolapissas by murdering their chief, and the Acolapissas were forced to seek retribution. Given the medicine man's considerable skill, the Acolapissas reasoned that he must have "put into his [the chief's] body the teeth of serpents and other evil things," as the Ouacha man surely could have saved this chief if he wanted to.¹ The grieving Acolapissa nation sent a diplomat to New Orleans to enlist the support of their French allies in punishing this murderous medicine man. Yet the French governor was also direly ill, and therefore he was unable to receive the diplomat or offer assistance, so the Acolapissas decided to seek retribution independently.

¹ Diron D'Artaquie, "Journal of Diron D'Artaquie, Inspector General of Louisiana, 1722-1723," *Travels in the American Colonies*, ed. Newton D. Mereness (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 36.

The Acolapissas' vengeance was swift. Within a week of the death of their chief, they attacked the Ouacha nation. They sent the Ouacha warriors fleeing and captured dozens of Ouacha women and children whom they took back to their village as prisoners. The Ouachas who managed to escape this raid sought temporary refuge with their neighboring allies, the Chaouchas and the French, pulling them into the conflict. Having distraught and furious Ouacha refugees within the Chaouacha and New Orleans settlements forced both of these nations to confront the Acolapissas and seek resolution of this dispute on behalf of their Ouacha allies.² By the end of November, with the help of the French and Chaouachas, most of the Ouachas had been freed from the Tensa villages, and the peace among the four nations was restored.

In 1722 the Chaouacha, Ouacha, Tensa, and Acolapissa nations were teetering on the edge of crisis. At the turn of the eighteenth century, the gulf coast was home to at least forty small, fiercely independent polities that ranged in size from 50 to 2,000 people. These small polities, or “petites nations” as the French called them, were politically, culturally, and linguistically diverse. Yet the one thing that these nations shared was a desire to protect their communities from the chaos that spilled into the region at the end of the seventeenth century. The vibrant exchange networks and protected settlements that these polities had developed in the fertile Lower Mississippi Valley seemed to be under attack from all sides. Raiders from larger and more powerful Native nations assaulted their villages, and devastating epidemics, like the one that killed the Acolapissa chief, threatened their families. These dangers forced the petites nations to develop creative

² D'Artaquie, “Journal of Diron D'Artaquie,” 35-39.

new approaches to defend their people and rely on traditional systems of networks, alliances, and military strategies to combat powerful outsiders.

When the French arrived in the Lower Mississippi Valley in 1699, they stumbled into a complex geopolitical landscape and quickly found themselves embroiled in conflicts and alliances that they could not control and often failed to comprehend. These outsiders were forced to negotiate with the petites nations, as they had washed ashore lost, poorly provisioned, and desperately outmanned. Throughout their six-decade tenancy in the land they called Louisiana, the French remained dependent on their relationships with these small nations to provide their struggling settlements with food, defense, and critical labor. Although these French were desperately needy and few in numbers, never exceeding 4,000 settlers, the petites nations incorporated these newcomers into their diplomatic networks, into their villages, and sometimes even into their families.³ The petites nations saw potential in the political and economic connections of the French, and these small nations were well aware of the value of added alliances during that tumultuous era.

As the French governor recognized when he found himself caught in a conflict between Louisiana's Ouacha and Acolapissa allies in 1722, there were no clean lines or simple political divisions in the Lower Mississippi Valley. The region's great powers—the Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Creeks—and the small powers—including the Acolapissas, French, and Ouachas—were all intertwined in tangled webs of political, economic, and social connections. In a region where no single nation reigned supreme,

³ Peter H. Wood, "The Changing Population of the Colonial South: An Overview by Race and Region, 1685-1790," *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Southeast* ed. Peter H. Wood, Gregory A. Waselkov, and M. Thomas Hatley (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 79.

these peoples were forced to build relationships with a wide variety of nations in order to exercise power. This is a story of those relationships and of the ways that the political and economic connections of the petites nations shaped the worlds of all of the peoples of the gulf south.

European Declension and Continental Networks

Scholars have long framed the history of the eighteenth-century gulf coast as narratives of declension and failure. The French failed to create a lucrative colony on the Mississippi River. The Natchez executed a disastrous revolt that ended with the destruction of their nation. The Spanish were unable to halt American expansion and usurpation of Spanish “Luisiana.” British officials controlled West Florida for barely two decades before they were forced out, and the region’s small Native nations were wiped out or fell into dependency on these other polities.⁴

Much of the twentieth-century historical scholarship on Louisiana focused on colonial policy and struggles for empire, and from this approach the colony did seem to be a failure, especially in comparison to the British Atlantic colonies. Marcel Giraud and Mathé Allain, who published works on French colonial Louisiana in 1953 and 1989 respectively, are among the most prominent of the francophone historians of this

⁴ Gilbert Din’s 2009 article “Empires Too Far” is an excellent example of a contemporary articulation of this approach. Din, one of the foremost historians of the Lower Mississippi Valley, argues that French, Spanish, and British colonization failed because these powers were unable to commit sufficient men and resources to the colonization projects. Din’s work emphasizes the shortcomings of imperial initiatives and economic development. While he presents a strong analysis of Atlantic connections, he barely mentions the influence of Native peoples except to say that wars with the “hostile natives” were costly to the French empire and that after the Seven Years War their “numbers and possessions continued their precipitous decline.” Gilbert C. Din, “Empires Too Far: The Demographic Limitation of Three Imperial Powers in the Eighteenth-Century Mississippi Valley,” *Louisiana History*, vol. 50 no. 3. (2009), 261-292.

tradition.⁵ These scholars pushed the boundaries of colonial studies and moved beyond the grandiose epics of Justin Winsor, Francis Parkman, and Charles Gayarré, the powerhouses of the previous generation.⁶ Allain and Giraud's meticulously researched studies critique the French colonial venture and highlight its economic struggles. For the Spanish period, the biographical works of Jack D. L. Holmes and the impressive archival-based analyses of Gilbert C. Din have been tremendously influential in English language studies of Spanish imperial tactics and helped situate the gulf coast within Latin American and borderlands history. Among British focused studies, Robert R. Rea's insightful studies of colonial administrators are among the best twentieth-century publications.⁷ Yet the larger scholarship of early America has largely moved beyond policy studies, as the emphasis on imperial policy and the actions of colonial officials tends to obscure or oversimplify the actions of the women, laborers, enslaved and free people of color, and the Indigenous inhabitants of these lands.

In the last 25 years scholars more interested in social and Atlantic histories have revitalized Louisiana history. In 1992 Daniel H. Usner published *Indians, Settlers, and*

⁵ Giraud's five volume *Histoire de la Louisiane Française* was originally published in France between 1953 and 1974 and translated and published in English between 1974 and 1991. Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana*, 5 vols. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974-1991); Mathé Allain, *"Not Worth a Straw": French Colonial Policy and the Early Years of Louisiana* (Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1988).

⁶ Francis Parkman, *France and England in North America Vol 1 & 2*. (New York: Literary Classics of the United States Inc., 1983); Justin Winsor, *The Mississippi Basin: The Struggle in America Between England and France, 1679-1763* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co, 1895); Charles Gayarré, *History of Louisiana: The French Domination* (New York: William J. Widdleton, 1867).

⁷ Mathé Allain, "Colbert and the Colonies," "Colbert's Policy Crumbles," and "In Search of a Policy," in *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History: The French Experience in Louisiana* ed. Glenn R. Conrad (Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1995), 5-31; Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves: The Spanish Regulation of Slavery in Louisiana* (Austin: Texas A&M University Press, 1999); Gilbert C. Din, "Protecting the 'Barrera': Spain's Defenses in Louisiana, 1763-1779," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1978), 183-211; Robert R. Rea, "Redcoats and Redskins on the Lower Mississippi 1763-1776: The Career of Lt. John Thomas," *Louisiana History*, vol. 11, no.1 (1970).

Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy, and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall published *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*.⁸ These two works reinterpreted the Lower Mississippi Valley as the product of not only colonial initiatives, but of the negotiations and influences of Indian and African peoples. Hall and Usner's works also examined the ways that African and Indian peoples and free and enslaved laborers both exercised power and were themselves exploited by European settlers. Their scholarship influenced a new generation of Louisiana studies that returned the long neglected region back into the broader focus of early American studies. The pioneering works of Jennifer M. Spear and Kimberly Hanger brought to life the worlds of African, Native, and French settlers of all classes in New Orleans and challenged assumptions about the connections between legal codes and social practice.⁹ Most recently, the Atlantic turn has connected Louisiana to the French imperial world. The edited volumes of Bradley Bond, *French Colonial Louisiana and the Atlantic World*, and Cecile Vidale, *Louisiana: Crossroads of the Atlantic*, have helped us better understand Louisiana in the greater context of eighteenth-century global developments and have illuminated the multicultural peoples that shaped the gulf coast settlements.¹⁰

Yet for a region that was predominantly Indigenous throughout the eighteenth century, taking a continental rather than Atlantic perspective is more appropriate, if we

⁸ Daniel Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

⁹ Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Jennifer M. Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ *Louisiana: Crossroads of the Atlantic World*, ed. Cécile Vidal (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); *French Colonial Louisiana and the Atlantic World*, ed. Bradley G. Bond (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

are to focus on the Lower Mississippi Valley rather than simply the colony of Louisiana. While Atlantic history is wonderful for examining colonial societies, it inevitably locates Native peoples on the margins of imperial networks and empires. In recent years scholarship on Native North America has increasingly highlighted the ways that Native political endeavors, economic connections, and kinship networks structured the lives of early North Americans.¹¹ In the last forty years, ethnohistorical scholarship on the Native southeast has completely shifted the way that we understand the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Historians including Theda Perdue, Patricia Galloway, Robbie Ethridge, Joshua Piker, and James Merrell have changed not only the way that we understand the societies of Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Catawba peoples, but also how powerful Native nations shaped both colonial and Native societies.¹² As Kathleen DuVal and Daniel Usner have definitively shown, in the Mississippi River Valley, Native peoples exercised tremendous influence over European settlers, and relationships among Native nations often were much more influential in shaping Native peoples' actions than the policy initiatives of European settlers.¹³

¹¹ Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: the Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone*, ed. Robbie Ethridge and Sheri M. Shuck-Hall (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

¹² Joshua A. Piker, *Okfuskee: A Creek Indian Town in Colonial America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Patricia K. Galloway, *Practicing Ethnohistory: Mining Archives, Hearing Testimony, Constructing Narrative* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); 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); James H. Merrell, *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

¹³ Working from a French imperial perspective, James Pritchard has also argued that Native peoples' initiatives and the local economic and demographic conditions more strongly influenced colonial

Native Power on the Great American River

My work builds on this scholarship and seeks to provide a fresh prospective on the Lower Mississippi Valley by centering on the experiences of the petites nations. Traditionally the story of the petites nations has been told as one of dependency and decline. With the notable exception of Daniel Usner, much of the contemporary scholarship on French Louisiana has labeled the petites nations as “settlement Indians,” “eurodependent polities,” and “client” tribes of the French, or completely ignored their influence.¹⁴ These narratives and terminology overwhelmingly suggest that these small and powerless nations quickly fell into dependency and decline, or as one 2012 publication succinctly put it, “As their usefulness to colonists diminished, so did their

development in the Americas than did broad colonial policy. James Pritchard, *In Search of Empire: The French in the Americas, 1670-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

¹⁴ The term “settlement Indians” has often been applied to small Native groups in South Carolina as well. This term has its origins in the locations of Native peoples at the edges of British colonial settlements in South Carolina and always carries the connotation that these nations were less powerful than the settlements they attached themselves to. Yet this terminology does not accurately describe the relationships between the petites nations and the French. Rather in this region French newcomers settled on the edges of Native towns or multi-ethnic settlements. During the 1700s, 1710s, and 1720s, French inhabitants set up small villages within or alongside the nations of the Biloxis, Mobilians, Tunicas, Natchez, Koroas, Yazoo, and many others. Therefore, if anything, we ought to call them “settlement French.” Fortunately the scholarship on American Indians has begun to move beyond dependency theory terminology. Theda Perdue’s 2007 article on the survival of the small Native polities of South Carolina into the present day revisits the cultural and economic adaptability of these native groups not as evidence of decline and dependency, but rather as strategies that allowed their people to maintain their Native identities and lands through the onslaught of colonial settlement. Theda Perdue, “American Indian Survival in South Carolina,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, vol. 108, no. 3 (2007), 215-234; Amy Turner Bushnell, “The First Southerners: Indians of the Early South,” *A Companion to the American South*, ed. John Boles (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 13; Charles L. Heath, “Catawba Militarism: An Ethnohistorical and Archaeological Overview,” *North Carolina Archaeology*, vol. 53 (2004), 82-83; Eric E. Bowne, “Southeastern Indian Polities of the Seventeenth Century: Suggestions toward an Analytical Vocabulary,” *Native American Adoption, Captivity and Slavery in Changing Contexts*, ed. Max Carocci and Stephanie Pratt (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 66; Carl A. Brasseaux, *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma: A Primer on Francophone Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 119-122; Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), xiv-xix.

overall numbers, and settlement Indians and *les petites nations* slowly faded out of the historic record and into extinction.”¹⁵

Yet a more careful inspection of French, Spanish, and British documents tells a very different story of gulf coast development. Far from being marginalized or disappearing, these small autonomous nations remained at the center of both colonial society and regional diplomacy through the 1780s. Perhaps more importantly, rather than vanishing, these small nations’ diplomatic finesse and economic adaptability help explain how so many of these nations and their descendants have been able to preserve their lands and communities in Louisiana through the present day.¹⁶

My dissertation examines the efforts of the Lower Mississippi Valley’s Native peoples to navigate the social and political changes of the eighteenth century. These “petites nations,” as the French called them, were a diverse set of autonomous Indigenous polities who controlled territories along the gulf coast waterways. Each of my chapters compares the experiences of a few of these small polities—including the Tunicas, Ofos, Biloxis, Koroas, Mugulashas, Bayagoulas, Mobilians, Chitimachas, and Tensas—and foregrounds their relationships with one another. My analysis highlights the diverse goals and relationships that the petites nations pursued throughout the century. Ultimately, I argue that many of these groups were able to sustain their autonomy as polities of fewer than 1,000 individuals because of their ability to build relationships with external groups,

¹⁵ Bowne, “Southeastern Indian Polities of the Seventeenth Century,” 77; George E. Lankford, *Cultural Resources Reconnaissance Study of the Black Warrior-Tombigbee System Corridor, Alabama* (Mobile: Department of Geology and Geography, University of South Alabama, 1983), 65-67; Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana*, trans. Joseph C. Lambert (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 1: 30-42, 73, 76, 77.

¹⁶ More than 26,000 residents in Louisiana identify as Indian. Louisiana is home to 10 state recognized and four federally recognized tribes. Jay Precht, “Native Americans in Twentieth Century Louisiana,” *KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, ed. David Johnson, Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities (2010).

both Native and European.

Chapter One introduces readers to the petites nations at the end of the eighteenth century. Beginning in the mid seventeenth century, conflict drove many refugee peoples into the Lower Mississippi Valley, and by the 1680s foreign raiders had begun to attack the small nations along the gulf coast. This chapter examines the integration of the refugee group of Ofogoulas into multi-ethnic joint settlements, the ways that Bayagoula and Houma people negotiated borders, and the efforts of the Tensas to replenish the people they had lost to slave raiders. By examining political and military tactics for protecting nations and incorporating outsiders, I argue that petites nations used a combination of joint settlement living and military reputation management to protect their nations. Chapter Two examines the integration of the French into these existing diplomatic and military systems and argues that the petites nations treated the first French settlers as a refugee nation. Similar to the process of incorporating other vulnerable outsiders, nations like the Mobilians, Acolapissas, and Tunicas allowed the French to settle alongside and within their villages and to hook into their trade and diplomatic networks. French dependency forced the early settlers to rely heavily on their petites nations allies and to negotiate on their terms. Yet not all of the petites nations were successful in creating and exploiting partnerships with the French. Chapter Three examines the experiences of the Tensas and Chitimachas, two nations who both initially formed alliances with the French but failed to secure protection from these relationships. Between 1700 and 1730 the French held enslaved Tensas and Chitimachas within their colonial settlements. This chapter examines the effects of this enslavement on the Tensas and Chitimachas as well as the ways Louisiana's slave policies and practices affected its

relationships with the Native nations of the region.

By the 1720s many of the petites nations were frustrated with the French, and Chapter Four explores the ways this frustration changed their relationships with the Louisiana settlers. By focusing on the Mobilians, one of France's first and closest allies, and the Chitimachas, a nation who had always had fraught relations with Louisiana, this section argues that French failures to maintain respectful and mutually-beneficial relationships with the petites nations led to outright hostility by the late 1720s. In 1729 Natchez frustrations with the French exploded into a bloody war. This conflict rocked the region and forced the petites nations to fight their kin. By examining the related petites nations of Ofogoulas, Yazoo, Koroas, and Tunicas in the Yazoo River region, Chapter Five illustrates why many of the petites nations were deeply conflicted about which side to back. The second half of the chapter explores the outcomes of the Natchez War and argues that this conflict made both the petites nations and the French recognize they needed each other's alliances to counter the power of the Choctaws. The final chapter follows the Tunicas' experiences after the Seven Years War as they negotiated the transition of French Louisiana to British West Florida and Spanish Louisiana and the outbreak of the Creek and Choctaw War. During the 1760s and 1770s the Tunicas were able to exercise seemingly outsized influence in the region through their many political connections. Together these chapters illustrate the diverse approaches of the petites nations to negotiating the rapidly shifting demographic and geopolitical composition of the Lower Mississippi Valley

By demonstrating the importance of Native networks on colonial Louisiana, this dissertation highlights the influence of politics within Indian country on the region as a

whole. This approach has led me to conclude that much of the violence that has traditionally been explained as culturally driven, and many of the relationships that have been framed as *petites nations*' economic dependency, were actually the result of a much wider array of relationships and forces within Indian country. This continental focus has also led me to draw new conclusions about the local significance of watershed events in the century, including French settlement at Mobile, the Natchez War, and the transition of French Louisiana to Spanish and British claimants. Ultimately, this approach has led me to four primary conclusions. Firstly, the small French, Spanish, and British settlements were integrated into *petite nations* networks and alliances in much the same way that they incorporated other Native nations. Secondly, the Natchez War dramatically altered the way that the *petites nations* both formed relationships with the French and conducted diplomacy with each other. This conflict led to a cessation in the practice of surprise mass-killings as a way to sever soured relationships, and it convinced both the French and the *petites nations* that they desperately needed each other's alliances. Third, the chronology of the *petites nations* is not one of continual decline. Rather for many of the nations who survived the Natchez War, they were able to build fruitful and even lucrative partnerships with Europeans between 1730 and 1770, and some populations actually began to increase again by the 1760s. Finally, I argue that Native influence in colonial Louisiana persisted well beyond the conclusion of the Seven Years War—a transition that historians often view as the turning point toward the decline of Native power in the East. Using this Indian-centered analysis, my work concludes that these Indigenous continental networks had at least as much influence on the lives of early Louisianans as did the colony's Atlantic connections.

Beyond the confines of the Red and Escambia Rivers, I see my work as contributing to the emerging discussion of “non-confederated” Indian nations and Indian laborers in Early America.¹⁷ For the past few decades, historical scholarship on colonial era and pre-colonial Native peoples has largely focused on nation building and tribal coalescence in response to colonialism and Mississippian collapse.¹⁸ However, in the Lower Mississippi Valley, I argue that coalescence of the petites nations into a larger confederacy was neither the obvious nor logical response to dealing with enemy Indian groups or the destabilizing forces of colonialism. In recent years historians have begun to go beyond the study of recognizable proto-nation states to appreciate that, for example, enslaved Indians and the loosely affiliated Shawnees also exerted powerful influences on early America.¹⁹ My dissertation contributes to these analyses of the alternative roles of Indian peoples both through my discussion of the ways that Indian labor, free and unfree, shaped colonial Louisiana and through my focus on the social, economic, and political networks of these small polities.

I hope that by better understanding the experiences of small Native polities during the eighteenth century, we can begin to better understand how the descendants of many

¹⁷ Jason Baird Jackson, *Yuchi Indian Histories Before the Removal Era* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); Sami Lakomaki, *Gathering Together: The Shawnee People through Diaspora and Nationhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

¹⁸ Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*; Eric E. Bowen, *The Westo Indians: Slave Traders of the Early Colonial South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005); Patricia K. Galloway, *Choctaw Genesis, 1500-1700* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Robin Beck, *Chiefdoms, Collapse, and Coalescence in the Early American South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Sheri M. Shuck-Hall, “Alabama and Coushatta Diaspora and Coalescence in the Mississippian Shatter Zone,” in *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone*, 250-267; Steven C. Hahn, *The Invention of the Creek Nation 1670-1763* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); James Taylor Carson, *Searching for the Bright Path: The Mississippi Choctaws from Prehistory to Removal* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

¹⁹ Stephen Warren, *The Worlds the Shawnees Made: Migration and Violence in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

of these nations have been able to maintain their communities and even homelands in Louisiana through this day. Surely the political strategies and economic adaptability that these small Indigenous nations demonstrated in negotiating with the French, Spanish, British, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Creeks informed their decisions as to how to navigate the expansion of the United States and the creation of the modern American south.

1

**In the Lands of the Man-Eaters:
The Slave Trade, Alliances, and Political Warfare, 1680-1700**

At the place where the Tunica Chief lived, some other Indians were eating too many of his people. Now he got tired of it. He sent the other chief a challenge to fight. The other chief was willing to fight. Then they made hickory sticks. After they had made them just right they met in the woods. When they met, they fought. As they beat each other with the hickory sticks, they were whooping. They beat each other until each had killed the other.¹

Tunica elder Sesostrie Youchigant recalled this tale in 1933. Youchigant was one of the last remaining fluent speakers of Tunica, and he had agreed to work with Mary Hass, a linguistics student at the University of California to record his nation's origin stories in the Tunica language for posterity. Hass visited Youchigant at his home in Marksville, Louisiana, not far from where many Tunicas still reside today. As Youchigant recounted the histories of his people, he told Hass of a time when the Tunica nation was suffering from the attacks of another Indian group, one who was "eating too many" of their people, and so their chief was forced to take violent measures to stop this horror. At first glance, this cannibalism may appear to be simply a mythic element of this tale. Yet the fear of man-eating Indians was a very real part of the lives of Youchigant's eighteenth-century ancestors. Far from being mythical, this fear of man-eating Indians

¹ This tale explains how these two chiefs became eagles, and the Tunica-Biloxis use this story to explain how their people came to identify with the emblem of the eagle. Mary R. Haas, "Fighting Eagles," *Tunica Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Publications in Linguistics, 1950), 6: 1, 75.

conveys the terror of a time when the Tunica nation was literally being consumed by their Native enemies.

In 1700 the prospects of the Tunicas and other small nations of the gulf coast were bleak. The Tunicas were one of at least forty small autonomous polities who called the lands along the Lower Mississippi and Mobile rivers home.² During the seventeenth century, this region was a trade hub that connected the southeastern, southwestern, and plains exchange networks. After the fall of the Mississippian Chiefdoms, most Native peoples migrated away from these fractured urban centers and gravitated towards new economic opportunities in the southeast.³ As in many trade regions, the people of the Lower Mississippi Valley were of a multiplicity of ethnic backgrounds and represented at least six distinct language groups.

The small nations of the gulf were fiercely autonomous. In this densely populated region, small polities settled close alongside their neighbors without the wide buffer zones that surrounded Indigenous polities elsewhere in the Southeast. Yet even in such close proximity, these groups maintained separate political, religious, and social orders.⁴ This diversity and political autonomy was so striking to the French that when they encountered these peoples in the eighteenth century they referred to them as the “petites nations” to differentiate them from the larger and more interior southeastern Nations such as the Choctaws or Chickasaws. Despite these political and cultural boundaries, from

² Guillaume de L’Isle, “Carte des Environs du Missisipi,” 1701, Louis C. Karpinski Map Collection, The Newberry Library, Chicago.

³ Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 139; David H. Dye, “Warfare in the Protohistoric Southeast: 1500-1700,” *Between Contacts and Colonies: Archaeological Perspectives on the Protohistoric Southeast*, ed. Cameron B. Wesson and Mark A. Rees (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 137.

⁴ Joseph Zitomersky, *French Americans-Native Americans in Eighteenth-Century French Colonial Louisiana* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1994), 359-380.

1600 to 1700 the petites nations managed to facilitate a vibrant cross-cultural commodity exchange.⁵ They relied on the Muskogean trade language of Mobilian to help them trade salt, bear oil, buffalo hides, orangewood bows, shell gorgets, and arrow points across ethnic boundaries and throughout the continent.⁶

Yet at the turn of the eighteenth century the petites nations' cosmopolitan world seemed on the verge of collapse. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, disease, warfare, and political destabilization set in motion by colonial forces and the collapse of the Mississippian world took their toll on these gulf coast polities and greatly reduced their populations. Then, between 1680 and 1710 the gulf coast suffered a new wave of epidemics and violence fueled by the expansion of the southeastern slave trade. This onslaught of slave raiders caused great suffering for all of Native groups in the region and further depleted their communities.⁷ As these nations shrunk in size they became more vulnerable to predations of larger and more powerful nations.

Youchigant's recollection of old tales of Indian nations who ate human beings conveys the fears of his ancestors from long ago. At the turn of the eighteenth century, petites nations peoples had witnessed their friends, families, and political leaders captured and carried off or killed by outsiders. As Youchigant's tale conveys, they lived

⁵ John R. Swanton, "Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley and the Adjacent Coast of the Gulf of Mexico," Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 43 (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian, 1911), 17-20; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 44-45.

⁶ Frank F. Schambach, "Spiro and the Tunica: A New Interpretation of the Role of the Tunica in the Culture History of the Southeast and the Southern Plains, A.D. 1100-1750," *Arkansas Archaeology: Essays in Honor of Dan and Phillis Morse*, ed. Robert C. Mainfort, Jr. and Marvin D. Jeter (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 189-197.

⁷ Robbie Ethridge, "Introduction: Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone," *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone*, ed. Robbie Ethridge and Sheri M. Shuck-Hall (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 11-2, 9-12.

in fear of foreign raiders and looked to their chiefs to regulate this violence and protect their people from “man-eaters,” the slave raiders who were consuming their people.

In the late seventeenth century, the growing demands of the British Atlantic world for cheap labor led to an increase in the trade of American Indian captives. Native captives were cheaper than imported Africans, and the merchants at Charlestown discovered that they could make a fortune selling enslaved Indians from enemy nations to colonists in New England, the Carolinas, and the Caribbean. Beginning in the 1670s these slave traders formed a series of lucrative partnerships with the Westos, Chickasaws, Creeks, and other southeastern nations who could provide them with a steady stream of Native captives. All told, between 1685 and 1715 slave raiders took between 24,000 and 51,000 Indians from across the Southeast to the slave markets in Carolina.⁸ Thus, for American Indians east of the Mississippi, fear of “man eaters” was a way to express the destruction wrought on their communities by slave raiders. Native peoples across eastern North America described intense fear of this violent process of national destruction. Sowe Indians called the Westo slave traders who attacked their villages “man eaters,” while the Shawnees claimed that their nation was almost swallowed by Iroquois raiders. Even the raiders themselves employed this metaphor. In 1708 the Chickasaws threatened to attack the tiny French settlement at Mobile and “eat up a village of white men.”⁹

⁸ These numbers exclude those slaves taken by Spanish or French and deaths from related factors, such as movement of disease and violence across the southeast. Furthermore, Robbie Ethridge posits that the slave trade could account for up to half of the total population losses of the Southeast during this same era, suggesting that the destruction wrought on the Southeast by the slave trade was roughly equal in magnitude to that of the waves of epidemics that are so often blamed for depopulating the southeast and paving the way for a new eighteenth-century political order. Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 237.

⁹ Warren, *The Worlds the Shawnees Made*, 83, 149; Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, to Jérôme de Pontchartrain, 2/25/1708, *Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion*, ed. Dunbar Rowland and A. G. Sanders (Jackson: Press of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1932), 3:113-114; Paul Kelton, *Epidemics and Enslavement: Biological Catastrophe in the Native Southeast, 1492-1715*

Yet, to be small was not necessarily to be powerless. In the late seventeenth century the petites nations developed a variety of strategies to cope with threats from these enemies. In the densely populated and heavily trafficked Lower Mississippi Valley, the petites nations' ability to defend and sustain their communities and territories depended upon their ability to shape interactions with outsiders. Since each nation independently was quite small, they relied on partnerships with other small nations to cope with the threats and disturbances of disease and slave traders. They developed methods to communicate across linguistic, geographic, and cultural boundaries and military practices to protect their nations. Two of the most important of the petites nations' strategies for coping with external threats were the development of flexible multi-ethnic community settlements and military tactics that discouraged raiding and enforced territorial boundaries.

The Slave Trade in the Lower Mississippi Valley

Like most of the Native polities in the seventeenth-century Southeast, the petites nations emerged out of the "shock waves" of disease, warfare, and slave raids that rocked the region. As the colonial trade system expanded across the southeast into the Mississippi River Valley, the accompanying pathogens, political reorganizations, and violence led to the fracturing of older and larger Native groups.¹⁰

(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 42, 113; Jean-Baptiste Bénard de la La Harpe, *The Historical Journal of the Establishment of the French in Louisiana*, ed. Glenn R. Conrad, trans. Joan Cain and Virginia Koenig (Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1971), 147.

¹⁰ Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 117; Ethridge, "Introduction: Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone," 1-43.

Most of these small tribes, including the Tunicas, were the descendants of Mississippian peoples who had migrated south after the disintegration of their chiefdoms to settle along the Mississippi River and its adjacent waterways in order to take advantage of trade opportunities. Although it is difficult to link the groups encountered by Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto to eighteenth-century nations, archaeologists posit that the Tunicas of the seventeenth century were the descendants of the Tanico salt traders of the Quiz Quiz chiefdom.¹¹ Quiz Quiz was a chiefdom located below present day Hot Springs, Arkansas, and the home of a complex and highly stratified Mississippian society. Like most Mississippian chiefdoms, Quiz Quiz shattered, perhaps due to resource depletion, disease, or internal conflict. During the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Quiz Quiz's descendants reorganized into new communities and the Tunicas and the Yazoo—two petites nations—emerged from this restructuring.¹² Like many other descendants of these southeastern chiefdoms, the Yazoo and Tunica migrated south to the Lower Mississippi Valley to seek new economic opportunities.¹³

When French explorers Louis Joliet and Jacques Marquette journeyed down the Mississippi River in 1673, they encountered the Tunica and noted that they were

¹¹ Schambach, "Spiro and the Tunica," 173-190.

¹² The origins of the late seventeenth century Tunica are not entirely understood, but Archaeologists agree that Tunican peoples, including the Tunica, Koroas, and Yazoo, had deep roots in the Mississippi, Yazoo, and Arkansas River valley region. Jeffrey P. Brain, *Tunica Archaeology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 21-25; H. Edwin Jackson, *The Ables Creek Site: A Protohistory in Southeast Arkansas* (Fayetteville: Arkansas Archaeological Survey, 1992), 113-114; Ian Brown, "Historic Indians of the Lower Mississippi Valley: An Archaeologists View," *Towns and Temples Along the Mississippi*, ed. David H. Dye and Cheryl Anne Cox (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990), 231.

¹³ Francoise Joliet de Montigny, "Letter of Mr. De Montigny," *Early Voyages Up and Down the Mississippi by Cavalier, St. Cosme, Le Sueur, Gravier*, ed. John Gilmary Shea (Albany: Joel Munsell, 1861), 75-76, 80; Nicholas de Fer, "Les Costes aux environs de la riviere de Mississipi. Decouverte par Mr. de La Salle en 1683 et reconnues par Mr. Le Chevallier d'Iberville en 1698 et 1699," 1701, Cartographic collections, Newberry Library; Guillaume de L'Isle, "Carte des Environs du Missisipi," 1701, Louis C. Karpinski Map Collection, Newberry Library.

producing salt and were heavily invested in the local trade.¹⁴ From their homes at the junction of the Yazoo and Mississippi, the Tunicas had access to trade networks along both rivers and had carved out a niche for themselves as vendors in the salt trade. In addition to growing corn, peaches, and persimmons and hunting to sustain their families, the Tunicas drew upon their experiences as salt merchants. They both boiled their own saline water into salt crystals and purchased pre-processed salt from the Natchitoches nation to sell to their neighbors. Although they specialized in salt, they also had a strong trade in horses with their Caddo allies to the Southwest.¹⁵

Yet in the last decades of the seventeenth century, the same networks that brought goods across the southeast began to bring disease and the dreaded man-eaters. The captive trade of the east coast had been steadily growing for roughly a half-century prior: however, a shift in the 1680s expanded the reach of this insidious exchange. Beginning in the 1620s Iroquoian peoples began heavily raiding the nations of the Ohio Valley and the mid Atlantic. This wave of violence sent many peoples fleeing south and west out of the reach of these raiders.¹⁶ Other groups, like the Eries, migrated south and became slavers themselves. In the 1660s and 1670s the Eries (then known as the Westos) formed economic ties first with Virginia and then with Carolina by trading in captives. The Eries' relationships with colonial governments in turn provided protection for their people. In

¹⁴ Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 12, 101; Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 21-30, 117; Earnest C. Downs, "Documentation of the Tunica-Biloxi-Ofo-Avoyel Community near Marksville, Louisiana," *Report on Terminated and Nonfederally Recognized Indians: Final Report to the American Indian Policy Review Commissions*, American Indian Policy Review Commission, Task Force 10 (Washington D.C., 1976), 193-195.

¹⁵ Brown, "Historic Indians of the Lower Mississippi Valley" *Towns and Temples*, 234.

¹⁶ Marvin T. Smith, "Aboriginal Movements in the Postcontact Southeast," in *The Transformation of the Southeastern Indians 1540-1760*, ed. Robbie Ethridge and Charles Hudson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 19.

1670, the British founded Charleston, and the city quickly became a hub of the southeastern deerskin trade.¹⁷ The nascent plantation economy of South Carolina developed concurrently with the expansion of the deerskin trade and created a growing demand for cheap labor. Carolina merchants turned to the Indian captive trade to fulfill their labor needs, and they formed a close partnership with the Westos in order to secure these captives. This alliance fueled an expansion in the trade in Indian slaves.

By the 1680s, British merchants had tired of the power that their Westo allies had gained from their roles as purveyors of captives in the Native slave trade.¹⁸ To unhinge the Westos' grip on the slave market, British traders began searching for other Native nations who could provide them with a steady supply of captive men, women, and children.¹⁹ Among these replacement groups were the Chickasaws, a powerful nation of 700 warriors, located in Black Prairie in the northern part of present day Mississippi, who were eager to gain entry into the British markets of the East Coast.²⁰

In 1685 the Chickasaws forged an alliance with the British. They received traveling emissary Henry Woodward in their villages and created a partnership with the

¹⁷ Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 91; Eric E. Bowne, *The Westo Indians: Slave Traders of the Early Colonial South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 37-38.

¹⁸ Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face Of Captivity in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2010), 48-50; Ethridge, *Mapping the Mississippi Shatter Zone*, 25, 30, 31, 33-34.

¹⁹ 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. Carl A. Brasseaux (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1979), 111, 116 ; Alan Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1607-1717* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 150.

²⁰ James R. Atkinson, *Splendid Land Splendid People: The Chickasaw Indians to Removal* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 11-29; Marvin D. Jeter, "Ripe for Colonial Exploitation: Ancient Traditions of Violence and Enmity as Preludes to the Indian Slave Trade," in *Native American Adoption, Captivity and Slavery in Changing Contexts*, ed. Max Carocci and Stephanie Pratt (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 39-42.

British that would both allow the Chickasaws to gain direct access to European guns and provide them with a measure of protection against other slave raiders in the southeast. The Chickasaws seized the opportunity to claim a position within the Indigenous slave trade. Supplied with British firearms, the Chickasaws led devastating raids against the Choctaws and their other Native neighbors, who had not yet gained direct access to the European arms. Within a decade, the Chickasaws had successfully exploited this advantage to become among the primary suppliers of Indian captives at Charlestown. The Chickasaws began by raiding their old enemies and neighbors the Choctaws, but they quickly began to search for new supplies of captives. Although the Choctaws did not have access to European guns in the 1690s, they still vastly outnumbered the Chickasaws, and their revenge raids took a heavy toll on the Chickasaw villages. Thus, the Chickasaws turned their eyes west for more appealing targets.²¹

Unlike the Choctaws, the petites nations of the Lower Mississippi Valley seemed to offer an ideal supply of captives. These nations were much smaller than the Chickasaws, lacked guns, and were located further south and west, meaning they would be less likely to carry out retaliatory raids against the Chickasaws. The Tunicas, in particular, were easy targets as their villages on the Yazoo river were located right at the western edge of the upper trade path that the Chickasaws relied on to move captives east.²² Although neither archaeological investigations nor written records have provided concrete numbers of captives taken from the southeast, historian Alan Gallay

²¹ Snyder, *Slavery In Indian Country*, 51-54, 61; Patricia Galloway, "Colonial Transformations in the Mississippi Valley," in *Transformation of the Southeastern Indians*, 242-243.

²² Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 101; Schambach "Spiro and Tunica," 202; Robbie Ethridge, "Indian Slave Traders and the Collapse of Southeastern Chiefdoms" in *Light on the Path: The Anthropology and History of the Southeastern Indians*, ed. Thomas J. Pluckhahn and Robbie Ethridge (University of Alabama Press: Tuscaloosa 2006), 215.

conservatively estimates that in the first two decades of the eighteenth century about 3,000 individuals became enslaved as the result of Chickasaw, Natchez, and Yazoo raids in the Lower Mississippi Valley.²³ Using John Swanton's conservative population estimates for 1698, the petites nations collectively totaled 16,485 people, which means that some 18% of the Lower Mississippi Valley's Indigenous population was taken as captives between 1700 and 1720 alone.²⁴

The expansion of the captive market along the gulf coast pulled the petites nations into a violent vortex that led to massive social and political upheaval and severe population loss. By the turn of the century, many of these nations had already lost nearly half of their population since the 1680s.²⁵ In 1699, when French explorer Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville arrived along the gulf coast, the region was fully in chaos. He recorded encountering a landscape strewn with abandoned and burned villages and palisaded towns. Iberville and his men were unsure whether disease or conflict or some combination of the two was responsible for the bulk of the devastation, but they were well aware that they had entered a region in turmoil.²⁶ Just before Iberville's arrival, smallpox, fever, and dysentery had spread from Carolina along the southeastern trade paths and seeped into the villages of the gulf coast. Iberville reported encountering

²³ Iberville suggests that by 1702 500 Choctaws had been enslaved by the Chickasaws and that 1,800 had been killed by the violence meaning that these number of those who were actually enslaved could be as low as 20% of total casualties for all who were the victims of this violence. Gallay, *Indian Slave Trade*, 150, 296-297.

²⁴ Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 40-43.

²⁵ The Mobile River petites nations of Mobiles and Tohomes were each reduced from populations of roughly 1,000 each in 1650 to populations of about 600 by 1702. Jay Higginbotham, *The Mobile Indians* (Mobile: Sir Rey's, 1966), 80.

²⁶ Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 59-60.

mounds of bones from men, women, and children as he sailed along the gulf coast.²⁷

Even though they were traveling along the Mississippi just decades after the La Salle and Joliet and Marquette voyages, Iberville and his men struggled to locate the towns and chiefdoms recorded by previous travelers, and they found that many of these polities had seemingly vanished from the earth.²⁸ Some nations were indeed eaten by disease and the violence of the slave trade. But many also regrouped and reorganized into new polities.

Multi-Ethnic Settlements and Refugees in the Yazoo River Region

The experience of the Mosopeleas, one of the nations who encountered La Salle in the 1680s, helps explain how some petites nations survived this violence while simultaneously vanishing from European records. In the mid seventeenth century, the Mosopeleas, a small Siouan-speaking nation, fled the Ohio River Valley seeking to escape the violence of the captive trade.²⁹ The Mosopeleas' efforts to escape raiders took them on a dangerous journey south and west all the way to the Mississippi River. As displaced and landless people without regional connections, they were prime targets for raiders. In the process of their migration down the Mississippi River, at least some of their peoples were captured by the Quapaw nation of the Arkansas River Valley. Fleeing

²⁷ Iberville, *A Comparative View*, 28-33.

²⁸ Iberville, *A Comparative View* 34, 48; Ethridge, "Indian Slave Traders and the Collapse of Southeastern Chiefdoms," 214; Louis de la Porte de Louvigny, "Carte du fleuve Missisipi: avec les noms des peuples qui l'habitent et des établissements des Espagnols et Anglois qui en sont proches," 1697, Cartographic Collections, Newberry Library.

²⁹ Marvin D. Jeter, "Shatter Zone Shock Waves Along the Lower Mississippi," in *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone*, 474-476; Richard L. Haithcock, "The Ohio River Valley Sioux and the Siouan, Monacna, Mannahoac and the Siouan Piedmont Catawba of the Virginia, Carolina Piedmont," *The Mosopelea Ofo Ganatchi and Occaneechi*, 1999, unnumbered, Newberry Library Special Collections, Newberry Library; Emily J. Blasingham, "The Depopulation of the Illinois Indians," *Ethnohistory* 3 (1956), 373-377.

further south, the Mosopeleas sought refuge with the petite nation of Tensas, a Natchezan speaking nation located on the western bank of the Mississippi.³⁰ By the 1680s the Mosopeleas had settled with the Tensas in their impressive town complex.³¹ Their grand cabins and temples covered in woven and painted mats and the Tensa elite's immaculate white gowns must have impressed the Mosopeleas, and perhaps they believed that an alliance with this powerful nation could offer them the protection they sought. This was a wise choice for the Mosopeleas. The Tensas and Quapaws were allied during the 1670s. Accordingly the Mosopeleas could use the Tensas to help them negotiate a peace with the Quapaws, and by residing at the Tensa village they would be safe from Quapaw assaults.³²

Over the next decade the Mosopeleas built regional networks. Living with the Tensas gave this nation time to recuperate from its losses, and by the 1690s the Mosopeleas who had not been integrated into Tensas society moved again and settled on the junction of the Yazoo River. At this trade hub they settled alongside the petites nations of Tunicas and Yazoos and here they became known as the Ofos. By 1690, this Yazoo junction had become a densely populated multi-ethnic community. In addition to the Yazoos, Tunicas and Ofos, the Koroas, Tioux, and possibly three or four other small nations settled in this region. Even after the waves of smallpox in 1699, the Yazoo

³⁰ Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 262-264.

³¹ Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 123-124, 137.

³² Nicolas de la Salle, *The La Salle Expedition on the Mississippi River: A Lost Manuscript of Nicolas de La Salle, 1682*, ed. William Foster, trans. Johanna Warren (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2003), 106; Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 260-265; Gabriel Gravier, *Découvertes et établissements de Cavelier de La Salle de Rouen dans l'Amérique du Nord* (Rouen: L. Deshayes, 1870), 187-189; Henri de Tonti, *Relation of Henri de Tonty concerning the explorations of La Salle from 1678 to 1683* trans. Melville B. Anderson (Chicago: The Caxton Club, 1898), 103-105.

settlements had a population of greater than 2,000.³³ Yet, despite this proximity, these nations maintained at least two separate languages, and each was a distinct political unit that pursued independent negotiations with external groups.³⁴

Thus the Mosopeleas did not vanish, they were not destroyed by the slave trade, and they did not have to sacrifice their autonomy. Rather, their community coped with this destabilization by migrating to safer territory, building new connections, and then capitalizing on new economic opportunities for their community. This multi-pronged strategy of migration, alliance building, shared settlement, and economic adaptability was a hallmark of the petites nations' experiences and a process that many petites nations repeated again and again throughout the eighteenth century.

Multi-national settlements were surely stressful for their inhabitants, but the petites nations recognized their advantages for both refugees and host communities. On his voyage down the Mississippi River in the 1682, French explorer La Salle recorded that the Tensas and their allies the Quapaws were at war with roughly twenty other nations in the region. This constant combat took heavy tolls on the Tensas, and, although some of their population could be replenished via captives, more than forty Mosopelea families made an appealing addition to their nation. The Mosopelea men could reinforce Tensas' raiding parties, and the women could help harvest the plentiful persimmons, walnuts, plums, and apples that grew on their lands. These refugees also came bearing valuable trade goods. In 1673 Joliet and Marquette recorded that the Mosopeleas possessed not only guns but also glass containers, metal hatchets and knives, and colored

³³ de Montigny, "Letter of Mr. de Montigny," *Early Voyages*, 75-76, 80.

³⁴ Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, plate 1.

glass beads.³⁵ The Tensas had trade connections into the Ohio River Valley, and so it is likely that the Mosopeleas and Tensas could communicate in Illinois if the Mosopeleas could not speak Mobilian. However, by 1670s the most crucial diplomatic introduction among unfamiliar nations was not language as much as the ritual of the peace calumet ceremony.

The destabilization of the Lower Mississippi Valley in the seventeenth century had forced the petites nations to become adept diplomats, and they were obligated to work with outsiders if they hoped to survive. Yet, as the petites nations peoples knew, outsiders could be dangerous, and from a distance it could be difficult to determine if an approaching group of diplomats were seeking diplomacy or war. By the 1670s the nations of the Lower Mississippi Valley had developed a highly structured series of meeting rituals centered on the peace calumet ceremony.³⁶ A calumet was a ritual pipe composed of a reed stem of two to three feet in length with a polished stone bowl for tobacco. Peace calumets usually had polished red stone bowls and long white feathers attached to their stems. Indian peoples, and later Europeans who wished to negotiate with Native nations, would approach a foreign village with the calumet held aloft signaling their peaceful intentions. Archaeologist Ian Brown has described the calumet as functioning as symbolic armor and as a mechanism by which “groups that normally were mortal enemies could safely complete their transactions” either for a period of trade or diplomacy.³⁷ Thus, during a time when raiders plagued the petites nations, the calumet

³⁵ Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 123-124; Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 243-267.

³⁶ Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 131.

³⁷ John Sibley to Henry Dearborn, “Historical sketches of the several Indian Tribes in Louisiana, south of the Arkansas river, and between the Mississippi and river Grand,” 1806, *Annals of the Congress of the*

ceremony allowed these nations to continue the essential trade and diplomatic interactions that sustained their peoples.

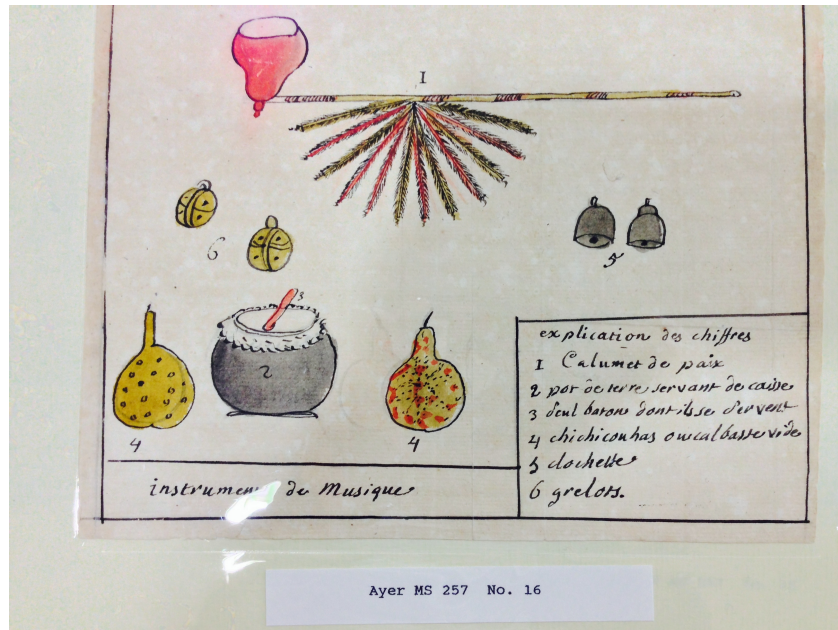


Figure 1- Musical Instruments. Object #1 is a calumet.³⁸

The calumet ceremony also helped the petites nations smooth the process of incorporating foreigners into their communities. Almost certainly, the Tensas and Mosopeleas engaged in a calumet ceremony upon meeting. After smoking with the chiefs and honored men of their host village, foreigners were expected to partake in an evening feast, listen to a series of speeches given by the local nation's leaders, and then either watch or participate in a night of dancing to celebrate the union of these two peoples.

United States, 1085-88; Ian Brown, "The Calumet Ceremony in the Southeast and Its Archaeological Manifestations," *American Antiquity* 54 (1989), 313-315; Bienville to Antoine de la Mothe, Siuer de Cadillac, 6/23/1716, *Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion*, 3: 214; Baron de Lahontan, *New Voyages to North America*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1905), 423-424.

³⁸ Dumont de Montigny, "Mémoire de Lxx Dxx officier ingénieur, contenant les evenemens qui se sont passés à la Louisiane depuis 1715 jusqu'à present [manuscript] : ainsi que ses remarques sur les moeurs, usages, et forces des diverses nations de l'Amerique Septentrionale et de ses productions," Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library, Chicago.

After an initial gift exchange, the warriors and headmen of each nation would recite their most significant military exploits. These warriors would often remove the home village's calumet from the central pole where it normally hung, and sing and dance with the calumet, acting out their victories and striking the pole as they recalled the battles their nation had won and the captives they had taken. This process could take hours, or even days.³⁹ The French, who the Indians joked spoke all at once during meetings "like a flock of geese," had no patience for these extended individual speeches.⁴⁰ Yet these performances of military might were of critical importance to petites nations' societies. By reinforcing the military prestige of the nation's headmen and elite warriors, these singers highlighted the power of their nation's leaders and reminded foreign nations of the value of their alliance. After proclaiming their nations' might, Native leaders were able to use these ceremonies to express their desires to trade, their love for the other nation, or in the case of the Mosopelea, their need for refuge.

Carrying calumets helped refugees gain acceptance within a village, as it demonstrated that they were not a threat and that they wished to create a relationship with the new group. Vast numbers of refugees arrived at petites nations villages in the last decades of the seventeenth and the first decades of the eighteenth centuries. Sometimes individual villages abandoned their homes to seek refuge with a neighboring people, or, as with the Mosopeleas, entire nations might migrate long distances seeking shelter.

³⁹ Jean-Francois- Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, *The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont 1715-1747*, trans. Gordon M. Sayre, ed. Gordon M. Sayre and Carla Zecher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 341-342.

⁴⁰ Le Page Du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana, or of the western parts of Virginia and Carolina: Containing a Description of the Countries that Lie on Both Sides of the River Mississippi with an Account of the Settlements* (London: T. Becket, 1774), 367.

Calumet etiquette seems to have dictated that nations must accept these outsiders, feed them, and treat them as allies, unless they intended to immediately enter into combat with the evacuees.⁴¹ The ability to negotiate refuge quickly and effectively was essential for survival in this unstable region.

Political Warfare and International Regulation

Although the Mosopeleas escaped the Iroquoian raids, they did not find a safe haven in the Lower Mississippi Valley. In addition to political reorganization, the influx of foreign refugees and the expansion of the southeastern Indian captive exchange in the late seventeenth century fueled a series of inter-tribal conflicts among the petites nations. Conflict was especially bad between neighboring nations. The close proximity of petites nations peoples meant that villagers were more likely to come into contact with outsiders in disputed lands and thus more likely to fight with outsiders who competed for resources. For example, while the Mosopeleas lived with the Tensas, the Tensas

⁴¹ On his 1682 voyage down the Mississippi La Salle relied on calumet ceremonies to facilitate peaceful entrances for him and his men into Native communities. All of the tribes along the Mississippi accepted the calumet and treated peacefully with LaSalle except for the petites nation of Quinipissas at the very bottom of the river. Upon rejecting LaSalle's calumet, the Quinipissas immediately began to shoot arrows at LaSalle's convoy. Likewise, during the first Natchez war in 1715 the Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana refused to engage in a calumet ceremony with the Natchez. The Natchez were "greatly horrified" by this refusal and correctly interpreted the gesture to mean that the French had suspended their alliance with the tribe and that they intended to kill some of Natchez. Perhaps most notably, the Chickasaw wars began because the French failed to understand the practice of calumet refuge. After the Natchez War, when Bienville insisted that the Chickasaws give up the Natchez refugees if they did not want to be assaulted themselves, the Chickasaws explained that they could not do this because "they have come to us for shelter and cannot be surrendered."

J. F. H. Claiborne, *Mississippi As Territory, Province and State* (Jackson: Power and Barksdale, 1880), 1: 59; André Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet: Being the Penicaut Narrative of French Adventure in Louisiana* trans. and ed. Richebourg McWilliams (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988), 171-180; James F. Barnett, *The Natchez Indians: A History to 1735* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 24-25; Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 130-131.

continuously raided the Koroa, Natchez, and Tunica nations along the edges of their territory.

Violence in the seventeenth-century Lower Mississippi Valley did not resemble European warfare. The petites nations did not declare their battles and march into open fields to slaughter one another, and they did not lay siege to forts and towns. Large war parties also almost always avoided outright attacks on enemy groups if they crossed each other's paths. Such small nations could ill afford to lose the numbers of warriors that pitched battles would produce, and simply killing the warriors of another nation would not have satisfied their goals.⁴² Rather, the petites nations strategically used violence to pursue political goals and prestige. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, these groups executed strategic raids on enemy nations to enforce territorial control, regulate inter-tribal murder, and gain captives.

While throughout most of the interior southeast sparsely populated buffer zones separated larger culture groups and created barriers between enemy nations, most of the petites nations lived within a few days travel of their neighbors.⁴³ This close settlement facilitated trade access, but it also limited the territory of each nation and increased the pressure on resources. The influx of refugee migrants in the second half of the seventeenth century populated the region even more densely, and exacerbated territorial conflicts. This problem was especially pressing for the nations at the bottom of the

⁴² Armstrong Starkey, *European and Native American Warfare 1675-1815* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998) 1, 26; Wayne E. Lee, "The Military Revolution of North America: Firearms, Forts, and Politics," in *Empires and Indigenes: Intercultural Alliance, Imperial Expansion, and Warfare in the Early Modern World*, ed. Wayne E. Lee (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 50-55.

⁴³ Kelton, *Epidemics and Enslavement*, 40.

Mississippi River, as the successive migrations of refugees south left them with nowhere to turn.⁴⁴

The peoples of the bayou, or Bayagoulas as they were called in Choctaw, struggled to cope with the increased pressure on local resources brought by migrating refugees. In the late seventeenth century the Bayagoulas, or alligator peoples as they called themselves, lived on the west bank of the Mississippi between present day White Castle and Donaldsville.⁴⁵ Their small cane and mud homes surrounded their village ceremonial center, where they had constructed an impressive central temple to house a sacred eternal fire.⁴⁶ To keep cool in one of the most humid regions in the North America, the Bayagoulas wore only woven bark clothing during the summer and the women secured their braids up off their neck around the crowns of their heads.⁴⁷ Both men and women painted their faces, and the elite of their village decorated their bodies with elaborate tattoos. These tattoos held gendered, social, and political significance for Native peoples of the gulf coast. While both men and women inked themselves with symbols that affirmed their individual and social identities, the kinds of tattoos that they wore were very different. For example, Chitimacha women were allowed to ink themselves only in white and red, while black ink was reserved for men.⁴⁸ Female

⁴⁴ Jeter, "Shatter Zone Shock Waves Along the Lower Mississippi," 367.

⁴⁵ See image 3.

Archaeology of Louisiana ed. Mark Rees, Rob Mann- French Colonial Archaeology 251; la Harpe, *Historical Journal*, 10.

⁴⁶ Paul du Ru, *Journal of Paul du Ru, February 1 to May 8, 1700, Missionary Priest of Louisiana*, ed. Ruth Lapham Butler (Chicago: Caxton Club, 1934), 20.

⁴⁷ Iberville, *A Comparative View*, 49-50.

⁴⁸ Tattoos were essential parts of American Indian identities within the Middle Mississippi River Valley as well. While markings tied both European and Indian peoples to Indian villages, moieties, and to their military records, the absence of tattoos among Native peoples living within French society spoke just as

Natchez leaders also used tattoos to illustrate their status and enforce their roles as divine rulers. During the 1720s the French recognized a particularly influential Natchez woman who they referred to as “Bras Piqué” or “Stung Arm.” Although the French use this term as her proper name, it is more likely that this was simply an honorary title that indicated her elite status as was marked by her tattooed arms.⁴⁹ These tattoos not only affirmed Native women’s political and kin connections but also illustrated their gender identities and emphasized their social roles within their nations.⁵⁰

In addition to spiritually significant designs, petites nations men covered their bodies with symbols of their past exploits in war and significant political ties. The most prestigious Bayagoula warriors tattooed themselves with alligators, the political and spiritual symbol of their village. Chitimacha warriors displayed their status through black lines tattooed across their knees. Because skin that covers kneecaps sheds quickly, these warriors had to have this process redone each year.⁵¹ These tattoos marked a young

powerfully about the identities of these individuals. Marie Rouensa, a Kaskaskia woman who famously converted to Christianity and shaped the alliance between her people and the French, chose not to have her body tattooed with her nation’s symbols. As Sophie White has argued, by rejecting these tattoos and dressing in a French manner, Marie emphasized her identity as a Christian woman at Kaskaskia and her relationship with the un-marked French missionaries. Likewise, masculine and feminine tattoos gave Native peoples the ability to elect their gender identities within their communities, at least in the Illinois region. Two-spirit and berdaches peoples – boys who were raised in traditionally feminine roles or men who chose to identify as women – were provided the ability to exhibit their gender identities not only through labor, dress, and sexual interactions, but by inking their bodies with women’s tattoos that more correctly corresponded to their gender. Thus tattooing not only helped clarify the social status of men and warriors, but also for women and Native peoples of all gender identities. Sophie White, *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians: Material Culture and Race in Colonial Louisiana* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 86, 102-103; Sleeper Smith, 34-36; Albert S. Gatschet, *The Shetimasha Indians of St. Mary’s Parish, Southern Louisiana* (Washington: 1883), 6.

⁴⁹ Louis Poncereau de Chavagne de Richebourg, “Mémoire de M. de Richebourg Sur la Première Guerre des Natchez,” *Historical Collections of Louisiana*, ed. B. F. French (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1851), 3: 245-246, 260; Charles E. Gayarre, *History of Louisiana: The French Domination* (New York: William J. Widdleton, 1867), 410, 449.

⁵⁰ White, *Wild Frenchmen*, 86, 103.

⁵¹ Gatschet, *Shetimasha Indians of St. Mary’s Parish*, 6.

man's entrance into manhood as one who had proved his skill in combat or by valiant deeds. Not only killing enemies, but also rattlesnakes, alligators, bears, and other threatening creatures, was a cause for celebration and commemoration. These tattoos distinguished accomplished warriors and sometimes involved a re-naming of individuals to reflect these deeds. For example, a Quapaw man who shot and killed a rattlesnake that was menacing his canoe received a hero's welcome upon his return home. For the impressive feat of shooting the swimming snake right in the forehead the Arkansas gave him the title "Chevalier of the Rattlesnake" and "designed and tattooed around his body the figure of a serpent with its head falling on a place where the ladies will permit me to let them guess." Because of this feat the Quapaws henceforth respected this man as a "captain" among their people.⁵² Snake tattoos in particular were used by Lower Mississippi Valley nations to express military leadership. The principal war leaders of the Natchez were known by the title of "tattooed serpent." The famous war leader who the French knew as "Serpent Piqué" during the 1720s reportedly had a serpent tattoo that coiled along his entire body encircling him from mouth to foot.⁵³

⁵² Jean-Bernard Bossu, *New Travels in North America*, trans. & ed. Samuel Dorris Dickinson (Natchitoches: North Western State University Press, 1982), 36.

⁵³ Snake tattoos and engravings were used as military titles across the eighteenth century southeast. During the late eighteenth century Catawba war leaders engraved black snakes on their backs and shoulders to illustrate military status. These markings were so essential to their leadership roles and identities that in the 1760s Pine Tree George, a Catawba War captain, went to the laborious task of engraving a silver gorget he had received from the British with two intertwining snakes. By hammering these snakes into the gorget Pine Tree George joined the emblems of his status within Catawba society to the British metal that allowed settlers to recognize his political and military pre-eminence. Gordon Sayre, *The Indian Chief as Tragic Hero: Native Resistance and the Literatures of America, from Moctezuma to Tecumseh* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 313; Thomas John Blumer, *Catawba Indian Pottery: The Survival of a Folk Tradition* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 161-162. See figure 4 for the illustration of Pine Tree George's engraved gorget.

Tattoos were such an essential part of the performance of a political identity that many Frenchmen in Louisiana ultimately embraced this practice. Traders in the backwoods of both the Lower Mississippi Valley and the Illinois country marked themselves with the symbols of their allied villages as a way to strengthen trade relationships.⁵⁴ In 1718 a French observer recorded that voyagers in Louisiana “enjoy having themselves tattooed, and there are many who, with the exception of their faces, have had their entire bodies tattooed.”⁵⁵ Having tattoos permitted Frenchmen safe passage among the territories of the friends of their Indian allies.⁵⁶ Reportedly, even Jean-Baptist Le Moyne de Bienville, one of the first governors of Louisiana and a careful diplomat, embraced these tattooing practices as a way to establish authority when the French first arrived in Louisiana. His contemporaries reported that when he went into battle he would remove his European clothes and dress like the Indians so that his Indian allies could see the tattoos that decorated his back and chest. These marks not only helped his Native troops identify his alliances, but also acted as a way to distinguish his rank as a leader in battle, much like a military uniform or medal.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ White, *Wild Frenchmen*, 188.

⁵⁵ This observer goes on to note that an unnamed “officer of high birth whose name you might know, whose tattoos include a picture of the Virgin Mary... a large number of drawings of Indian inspiration, among which is a snake winding itself around his person, and whose tongue, ready to dart out, is found on a certain part of the body that you might want to guess if you can.” As late as 1771 French inhabitants were still engraving their skin in ceremonies alongside their Indian allies in order to seal alliances and display their military accomplishments. “A Letter about Louisiana, Also Called Mississippi [written to a woman of quality], Nouveau Mercure February 1718,” *Le Plus Beau Païs du Monde*, ed. May Rush Gwin Waggoner (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2005), 61; John Thomas to Charles Stuart, “Testimony of William Richardson,” 11/21/1771, Class 21.672, vol. 1, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁵⁶ Arnaud Balvay, “Tattooing and Its Role in French–Native American Relations in the Eighteenth Century,” *French Colonial History* 9 (2008) 1, 8.

⁵⁷ Balvay, “Tattooing,” 3, 14, 7.

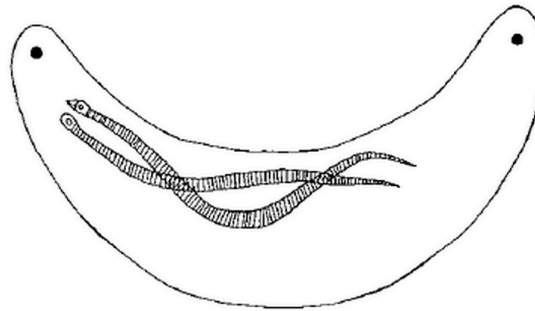


Figure 43. Drawing taken from the reverse side of the eighteenth century Pine Tree George gorget. Displays the serpent war captain insignia. The two snakes engraved on this silver gorget presumably by Pine Tree George.

reverse. He obviously felt the two snakes spoke better for his accomplishments in life (Figure 43). Pine Tree George knew how to interpret. Figure Two- Engraving of Snakes Identifying Military Rank on an Eighteenth-Century Gorget⁵⁸

In most of the Lower Mississippi Valley the Native peoples tattooed themselves by pricking or scratching open the top layers of their skin with fish teeth or other sharp objects and then rubbing ash or other colored powders into the cuts. After this ordeal the incisions often became infected and painful. Therefore, it is significant that Chitimachas and other Indian men believed these marks to be so essential as to merit yearly torture in order to ensure that the markings were crisp and readable.

These lines, figures, and images visually linked their bodies to their home communities and territories so that wherever they travelled, whoever they encountered would know what village they were from and what victories they had accomplished.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Thomas John Blumer *Catawba Indian Pottery: The Survival of a Folk Tradition* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 162.

⁵⁹ Dumont de Montigny, *Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont*, 345-348.

Natchez warriors reportedly not only tattooed themselves with symbols of their political identity and of their warrior status, but kept detailed records of their military feats on their bodies. Each Natchez warrior had a tattoo of a war club on his left shoulder blade. After each successful military excursion Natchez warriors would record their feats in battle by tattooing the emblem of the nation that they had conquered or captives they had taken below this club.⁶⁰ Beyond providing social status within the Natchez nation and helping them project an image of military strength, these markings also probably helped enemy nations determine what to do with Natchez and other captives.⁶¹

Throughout the 1690s the Bayagoulas fought with their closest northern neighbors. Their enemies the Houmas lived only twenty-four miles upriver, and the two engaged in continual conflict over territory.⁶² Their proximity meant not only that Houma warriors could reach Bayagoula villages in less than two full travel days, but that Bayagoula and Houma men sometimes chased deer and turkeys into enemy territory and fell prey to their enemies.⁶³ In conjunction with these border disputes, these nations periodically sent raiding parties into each other's villages to take captives. As both land pressure and population losses from disease and the slave trade increased in the 1680s

⁶⁰ Balvay, "Tattooing" 3-4; Pu Pratz, *The History of Louisiana*, 346.

⁶¹ In theory, the Natchez's tattoos would allow other nations to determine whether or not the Natchez had killed any of their own people, and therefore they could determine whether to execute captures Natchez with this information. In 1744 two Natchez men murdered 10 Catawbans. The Catawbans demanded the heads of these two murderers or threatened to go to war with the Natchez. When the Natchez chief delivered the pickled heads of the murders to the Catawbans, they were able to determine that the heads that Natchez chief had sent them were indeed the heads of the murderers by the distinctive tattoos that covered the two men's faces. Douglas Summers Brown, *The Catawba Indians: The People of the River* (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 1966), 223.

⁶² Marc-Antoine Caillot, *A Company Man: the Remarkable French-Atlantic Voyage of a Clerk for the Company of the Indies: a Memoir*, ed. Erin M. Greenwald (New Orleans: The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2013), 88; Iberville, *A Comparative View*, 43-44.

⁶³ La Harpe, *Historical Journal*, 12, 17.

and 1690s, this violence became more regular and more costly. By 1699, these raids had become so intense that the Houmas sometimes left with upwards of twenty-five Bayagoula captives, a painful loss for a nation of only 700.⁶⁴ This conflict made both these nations hesitant to enter into the contested middle woodlands and forced them to rely more heavily on corn production to nourish their families.

The Bayagoulas attempted to combat their population losses through a combination of diplomatic negotiations and strategic raiding. To help reduce this conflict and preserve territorial claims, these nations erected a tall red pole on their boundary line. The “*baton rouge*,” which gave the current state capital its name, was a clear marker not only to the Houmas and Bayagoulas, but also to other nations that they were crossing political boundaries. In the 1690s the Bayagoulas took in the petite nation of Mugulashas and granted them a piece of land adjoining their village center. This nation had suffered tremendous losses from disease and likely decided that they would be too weak to continue as an independent settlement. The Mugulashas were Muskogean-speakers, like the Bayagoulas, and their presence roughly doubled the Bayagoula population and helped mitigate the devastating losses among the Bayagoulas.⁶⁵

Captive raids drastically reduced the number of women in the Bayagoulas’ village, and thereby hindered the nation’s ability to sustain its people. Raiders especially targeted women and children because they believed them to be easier to integrate into new societies and because European merchants found them more desirable. This lack of

⁶⁴ M. de Sauvole de Villantray, *The Journal of Sauvole: Historical Journal of the Establishment of the French in Louisiana*, ed. Jay Higginbotham (Mobile: Griffin Printing Co. Alabama), 34.

⁶⁵ *Journal of the frigate "Le Marin" (September 5th, 1698-July 2nd, 1699): 275th anniversary, Biloxi Bay Colony* ed. Pierre Margry (Biloxi, 1974), 43.

women not only reduced the Bayagoulas' reproductive capacity, but also left them without the requisite female labor to prepare sagamite (corn cooked with bear oil). As feeding guests was a crucial component of calumet ceremonies, this paucity of women would have constrained both the domestic and political capabilities of the Bayagoulas.⁶⁶ Equally as significantly, the Mugulasha men assisted in Bayagoula raids against enemy nations and thereby increased the military might of the host nation.

Since petites nations like the Bayagoulas and Mugulashas were primarily interested in garnering captives from these conflicts, they relied on covert raiding tactics. In petites nations chiefs held very little coercive power, so even the war chiefs could not compel men to fight.⁶⁷ Rather, if a petites nations man or woman felt that a death or capture required personal vengeance, or if the chief believed they needed to send a political message through violence, they would need to recruit warriors from their village and from allies.⁶⁸

Among most petites nations, captives were crucial parts of village society. While many captives were killed to avenge the deaths of those lost or taken from within a village, others had the opportunity for complete integration within their new societies.

When the Mugulashas first greeted the French in 1699 the diplomatic envoy that carried

⁶⁶ In the southeast women played critical roles in both the social and political spheres of Native communities. Native women facilitated relationships between foreigners, participated in diplomatic rituals, engaged in the torture of enemy captives, and acted as leaders both within their kin networks and for their nations as a whole. Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 17-108; Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture 1700-1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 17-18, 38-40, 61-65; Michael D. Green, "Mary Musgrove: Creating a New World," in *Sifters: Native American Women's Lives*, ed. Theda Perdue (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 35-38, 41-45; Margry, *Journal of the frigate "Le Marin,"* 38-39; Dumont de Montigny, *Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont*, 343.

⁶⁷ David H. Dye, "Warfare in the Protohistoric Southeast: 1500-1700," in *Between Contacts and Colonies: Archaeological Perspectives on the Protohistoric Southeast*, ed. Cameron B. Wesson and Mark A. Rees (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 139.

⁶⁸ Du Ru, *Journal of Paul du Ru*, 5-7; Lahontan, *New Voyages to North America*, 500-501.

the calumet to the explorers included two Mugulasha headmen and a man who had had his “scalp lifted.” While this disfiguring indicated that the man had come to the Mugulashas as a captive and had suffered a brutal ordeal, by 1699 he had evidently become an integral part of foreign negotiations team.⁶⁹ Within petites nations societies, retrieving captives and war trophies, like scalps, helped young men prove their masculinity and gain respect within their community. Captive women and children could be integrated into their new societies and make up for the loss of vital laborers or they could be preserved to use as collateral for future negotiations.⁷⁰

Successful raids also reinforced the political prestige of war chiefs and headmen. When the French first met the Bayagoulas in 1699, the Bayagoulas shared the calumet of peace with them and then immediately asked their new allies for assistance in raiding their enemies the Houmas. Rather than support them militarily, the French offered to facilitate a peace between the two nations. Not surprisingly, the Houmas were quite hesitant to comply with this request and return the twenty captives they held at their village.⁷¹ In returning these captives, they would lose their ability to use them as collateral or gifts for future negotiations. When captives were not integrated, their bodies could also provide petites nations women opportunities to avenge their losses. In societies like the Tunicas, it was the women who threw pots of boiling oil on captives they had condemned to die or who begged to save their lives.⁷²

⁶⁹ Margry, *Journal of the Frigate*, 37; Iberville, *A Comparative view of French Louisiana*, 46.

⁷⁰ Dye, “Warfare in the Protohistoric Southeast,” 137.

⁷¹ Du Ru, *Journal of Paul du Ru*, 31.

⁷² Hass, *Tunica Texts*, 133.

Although much of the existing scholarship on the calumet has emphasized its role in making peace, the petites nations not only employed peace calumets, but war calumets as part of this process of garnering support for an assault. Unlike peace calumets, which were often decorated with white feathers, war calumets were covered with feathers painted black and red and wrapped in skin of turkey buzzards. If a headman wished to recruit warriors from another village, or even his own, he might rely on a similar type of calumet ceremony as the one used to make peace. Again, the warrior would make use of the calumet pole to act out his exploits and tell of the personal or national offenses that he sought to rectify through violence.⁷³

Once a warrior had recruited a group of raiders, he and his men would travel to their enemy's village and wait. Petites nations people usually relied on pre-dawn attacks so that they could capture villagers while everyone was sleeping and thus avoid as much armed resistance from their enemies as possible. Sometimes these warriors would wait for days or weeks for the perfect opportunity to strike.

Throughout the Lower Mississippi Valley native peoples used a complex system of symbols and markers to enforce territorial claims and manage their nation's reputations. Across the southeast, Indigenous peoples understood the colors red and black to represent violence and bloodshed. Like the Bayagoulas' *baton rouge*, black or red painted trees and poles along roads alerted travelers that they were crossing into enemy territory. In addition to marking territorial boundaries, the gulf coast nations used red and

⁷³ Dumont de Montigny "Poème en vers touchant l'établissement de la province de la Louisiane," ed. Marc de Villiers, *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, vol. 23 (1931), 320, 400; David H. Dye, *War Paths Peace Paths: An Archaeology of Cooperation and Conflict in Native Eastern North America* (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2009), 158, 164-165; Fred B. Kniffen, Hiram F. Gregory, and George Stokes, *Historic Indian Tribes of Louisiana: From 1542 to the Present* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 294.

black painted trees and engraved wooden sticks to publicize the military might of their people and to signal the status of their conflict with other nations. As international violence increased in the 1690s, some of the towns in the Lower Mississippi Valley, including the Acolapissas and Mugulashas also began relying on defensive palisades to keep out raiders. This was an effective method of protection as it meant that a raiding party might never find an ideal unguarded moment during which it could slip into a village unnoticed.⁷⁴

Thus, to signal that they desired war and to support their village or clan's reputation as fearsome warriors, raiders relied on a system of iconographic, engraved trees and clubs. If they were unable to attack, raiders would find a tree near the village, strip the bark and paint it half red and half black, again signaling conflict between nations. Then, so that the local nation would know by whom they had been threatened, the raiders dropped engraved sticks or clubs with their people's imagery.

⁷⁴ Margry, *Journal of the frigate "Le Marin,"* 41; De Montigny, *Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont*, 355; Du Ru, *Journal of Paul du Ru*, 66; Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville, "Journal of the Badine," *Iberville's Gulf Journals*, ed. Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1981), 61.



Figure 3- Instruments of War. Red and Black marked tree declaring war among two nations and engraved wooden national markers.⁷⁵

These symbols matched the tattooed images on the bodies of the warriors themselves, thus creating a clear system of political claiming and military posturing. The Bayagoulas, for example, used images of alligators, the Tunicas rattlesnakes, and the Houmas crawfish. These sticks were also essential communicators if warriors managed to destroy a village completely, as dropped sticks on a charred abandoned village would proclaim the victors' reputations as a fearsome warriors and would alert passers-by to the power of the Alligator people.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Dumont de Montigny, "Mémoire de Lxx Dxx officier ingénieur, contenant les evenemens qui se sont passés à la Louisiane depuis 1715 jusqu'à present [manuscript] : ainsi que ses remarques sur les moeurs, usages, et forces des diverses nations de l'Amerique Septentrionale et de ses productions," Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library, Chicago.

⁷⁶ Montigny, *Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont*, 342-357

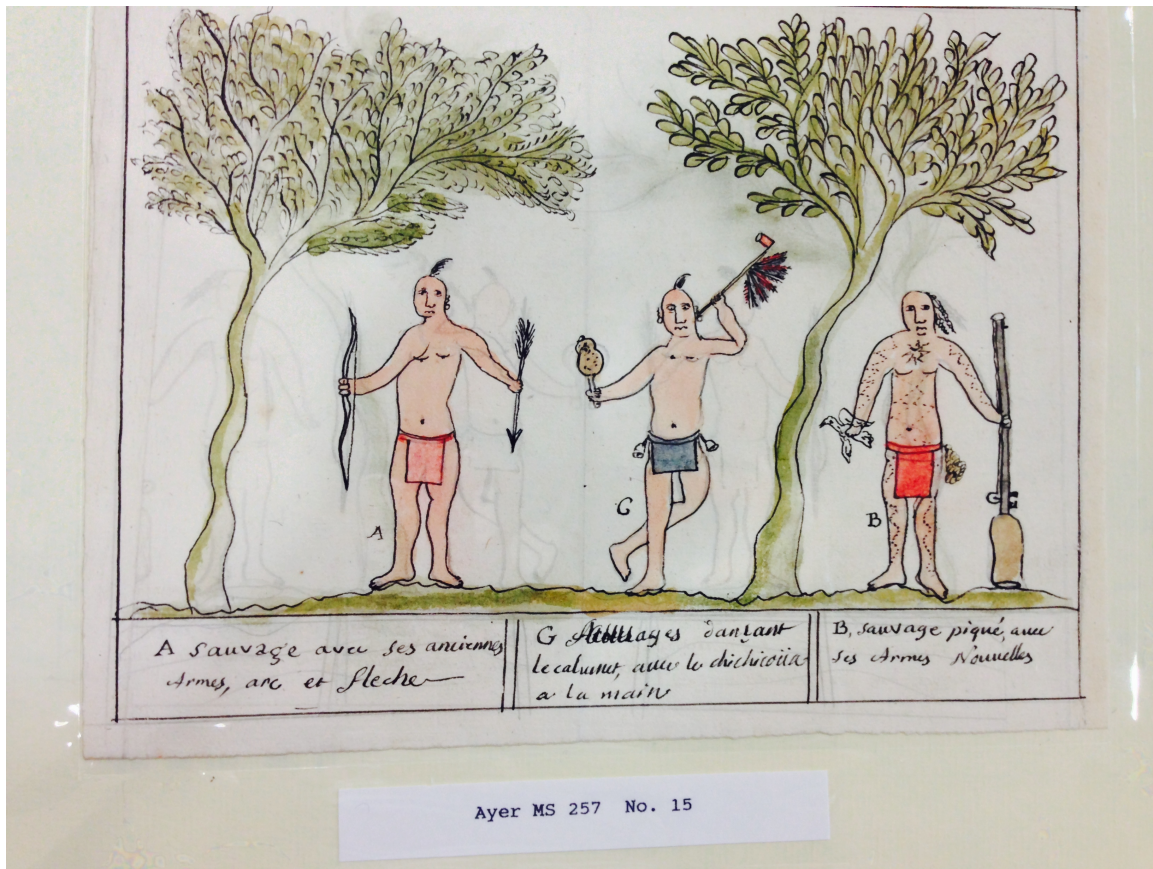


Figure 4- Tattooed Warrior⁷⁷

These engravings also sought to reinforce the image of masculinity and power of native warriors. When the Natchez wished to declare war they not only painted a tree with their symbols and colors, but they expressed exactly when this attack would occur and what would happen to their enemies. In the 1720s a French traveler reported seeing one of these signs and explained that “On the top towards the right hand is the hieroglyphic sign of the nation that declares war; next is a naked man with a tomahawk in his hand; and then an arrow pointed against a woman, who is flying away, her hair floating behind her in the air; immediately before this woman is the proper emblem of the

⁷⁷ Dumont de Montigny, “Mémoire de Lxx Dxx officier ingénieur, contenant les evenemens qui se sont passés à la Louisiane depuis 1715 jusqu’à present [manuscript] : ainsi que ses remarques sur les moeurs, usages, et forces des diverses nations de l’Amerique Septentrionale et de ses productions,” Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library.

nation against whom the war is declared. All this is on one line; and below is drawn the figure of the moon, which is followed by one I, or more; and a man is here represented, before whom is a number of arrows which seem to pierce a woman who is running away. By this is denoted, when such a moon is so many days old, they will come in great numbers and attack such a nation; but this lower part of the picture does not always carry true intelligence.”⁷⁸ The author goes on to clarify that the time at which this village can expect the attack is often incorrect. Certainly, if the Natchez were looking to orchestrate a surprise attack on their enemies it would be in their interest to mislead them about when to expect this assault. By portraying the enemy nation as weak and fleeing the Natchez asserted their military dominance and enhanced their military reputation. In framing their enemies as women, in stark contrast to the warrior figure proudly holding a tomahawk, they dually asserted the masculinity of their warriors and insulted their enemies, perhaps suggesting both that they were weak and fleeing women and that they were incapable of protecting their women. As this complex system of communications suggests, the ability to both publicize Native military records and assert an image of dominant masculinity were essential parts of international relations in the Lower Mississippi Valley.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana*, 355-356.

⁷⁹ This practice of recording military victories with written symbols on trees was common across North America in the late seventeenth century. During his travels in Canada between 1683-1694, Louis Armand de Lom d’Arce Baron de Lahontan recorded that the Algonquian nations of Canada used what he called “coats of arms” and “heiroglyphicks” to communicate their battle victories. He recorded that, like the Indian peoples of the Lower Mississippi Valley, after a successful attack the victors would peel the bark off of a nearby tree and paint their nation’s symbol on in bear fat and coal onto the tree. He reports that in Canada not only did Native peoples record their attacks on the site of the battle victory, but at each location that they stopped through on their way back home. Lahontan’s claims about the use of these coats of arms were later dismissed by the editor of the English translation of his work, who called his description of these written communications an “absurd and distorted description of Indian heraldry that probably arose from his misconception of the institution of totemism – a primitive superstition by which each gens or clan of a tribe adopted some animal as a totem or mythical protector.” Although scholars have long assumed that “primitive” peoples had no sophisticated forms of nonverbal communications, it seems that within both the Lower Mississippi Valley and Canada there was a complex, written dialogue taking place among Native

Thus, while some scholars have sought to trivialize or dismiss the rational motives for this violence by describing it as “endemic” within the region, “capricious,” or motivated by personal revenge, it was really part of a larger and complex system of regulation between nations to protect communities and territories.⁸⁰ In the 1680s, Native guides warned La Salle not to travel further downriver because in the Lower Mississippi Valley the nations eat people. While French explorers shuddered at the misinterpreted threat of finding themselves between Indigenous teeth, they were right to fear death. In many of the early maps of the Lower Mississippi Valley, the petite nation of Atakapas

nations. Far from being a “misconception,” Lahontan’s description of Native military communications as the use of coats of arms actually works as a strong analogy to describe the use of these images in Native warfare. According to Lahontan, in Canada Native peoples developed an elaborate tally system that allowed them to use peeled trees to communicate not only which nation or moiety had conquered the people of that region, but how many people they had killed, which direction the losers fled, and how many days from home and by what means the aggressors had traveled. The Natchez practice of tallying the numbers and identities of their victims on their shoulder blades is clearly a very similar practice and suggests that this elaborate system of native military communication may have been far more widespread than previously assumed. Baron de Lahontan, *New Voyages to North America*, 510-513, 686, 720. For more on American Indian uses of written imagery to communicate identity and military accomplishments see Garrick Mallery, *Picture-Writing of the American Indians* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Bureau of Ethnology, 1893), 358-360, 376-377, 390-407.

⁸⁰ Although his scholarship is now nearly a century old, the path breaking work of Albert Kroeber seems to still influence the ways and the attitudes with which scholars approach analyze Native violence. In his 1939 work Kroeber contrasted Euro-American warfare with that of the Native peoples of the Americas arguing that “They wage war not for any ulterior or permanent fruits, but for victory; and its conduct and shaping were motivated, when not by revenge, principally by individual desire for personal status within one’s society. It was warfare that was insane, unending, continuously attritional, from our point of view; and yet it was so integrated into the whole fabric of Eastern culture, so dominantly emphasized within it, that escape from it was well-nigh impossible.” Similarly, Marcel Giraud, who wrote *Histoire de la Louisiane française*, one of the most influential studies of colonial Louisiana of the twentieth century, dismissed conflict among the small nations of Lower Mississippi Valley as the result of “warlike habits” and “localized quarreling.” Even in more recent works on Louisiana Native violence is often dismissed as a cultural phenomenon or as petty warfare. For example, in 1987 Fred B. Kniffen, Hiram F. Gregory, and George Stokes, claimed that petites nations’ “reason for going to war might be capricious” and as late as 2007 Paul Kelton still discusses “endemic warfare” among Indigenous peoples. Albert L. Kroeber, *Cultural and Natural Areas of Native North America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939), 148; Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana*, trans. Joseph C. Lambert (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 77-83; Kelton, *Epidemics and Enslavement*, 46; Maurice R. Davie, *The Evolution of War: A Study of Its Role in Early Societies* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2003), 276; Wayne Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers: Anglo American Warfare 1500-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 133; Kniffen, Gregory, and Stokes, *Historic Indian Tribes of Louisiana*, 291.

appears labeled as cannibals, or more specifically “wandering and man eating savages.”⁸¹ While this label partially represents European tropes of Indigenous barbarity, it may also have been an intentional and strategic message created by Indigenous peoples themselves. In the 1730s, French soldier Dumont de Montigny claimed that he had heard that the nations of the region were called man eaters because sometimes when they tortured a war captive they cut a piece of his flesh off and “gnash it between their teeth.”⁸² The fear of the man-eating Atakapas so terrified French settlers that throughout the early decades of French colonization they did indeed avoid the Atakapas and stay out of their territory. Thus, although both the French and the petites nations peoples both feared nations with reputations for eating peoples, this term held very different meanings for them. In either case, the ability of the petites nations to construct political and military reputations as “nations that ate men or villages” served as a powerful mechanism for protecting their homelands and communities.⁸³

Escalation of the Slave Trade and the Search for New Alliances

At the turn of the eighteenth century the old systems of regulation and political interaction were in crisis. While long established methods of territorial control, regulation of international violence, population replenishment, and refugee asylum may have functioned well among the petites nations, they were not designed to deal with long

⁸¹ Herman Moll, “North America, According to ye Newest and most Exact Observations.” *Atlas Geographus*, 1712, Edward E. Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library.

⁸² de Montigny, *Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont*, 354.

⁸³ Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 360-361.

distance raids from massive parties of slave raiders. In the early 1700s raiding parties of over 200 Chickasaw and British warriors began assaulting petites nations.⁸⁴ The petites nations did not have the manpower to send warriors to travel several weeks in order to execute a retaliatory raid on the Chickasaws. Even worse, the expansion of this British captive network and the arrival of the French in the Lower Mississippi Valley ushered in an onslaught of diseases between 1698 and 1705. In addition to the small pox epidemic in 1698, French travelers brought fevers, dysentery, and a host of other illnesses. In 1700 alone, the Houma nation was reduced by half due to sickness. French travelers in 1699 reported that so many were dying of smallpox that the entirety of the Bayagoula and Mugulasha villages smelled of blood.⁸⁵

Thus, in the decade between 1698 and 1708, the petites nations' efforts to regulate their world and protect their peoples seemed to be spiraling out of control. In 1700 the Bayagoulas executed a predawn raid on the Mugulashas neighbors. They killed the men and adopted the captured women and children, effectively destroying the Mugulashas as an independent polity. Perhaps the Bayagoulas were desperate to replace their lost women and children and feared that if the Mugulashas maintained their independence they would all leave. Perhaps the two nations simply found the stress of sharing resources in this traumatic time to be too difficult. Whatever the case, the Bayagoulas clearly found the joint-living situation to be untenable and decided to sever the relationship in a way that would provide them with captive women.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Gallay, *Indian Slave Trade*, 289-297.

⁸⁵ Kelton, "The Great Southeastern Smallpox Epidemic 1696-1700," in *Transformation of the Southeastern Indians*, 32-34.

⁸⁶ Gravier, "Journal of Father Gravier's Voyage," *Early Voyages up and down the Mississippi*, 150.

Yet just four years later, the Bayagoulas again sought the safety of a dual settlement and they invited in the Tensas to replace the Mugulashas. Further north the Tensas were in prime Chickasaw raiding location, close to the upper trade path that ended just east of the Mississippi in Chickasaw territory. In 1704, the barrage of Chickasaw raids drove the Tensas to accept this refuge with the Bayagoulas. This must have been an especially uncomfortable partnership, both because the Tensas had been allied with the Mugulashas, and because the Tensas were Natchezean and therefore culturally and linguistically dissimilar from the Bayagoulas. Within just a couple of months of their resettlement, the Tensas killed nearly all of the Bayagoulas in a pre-dawn attack. Perhaps the Tensas had planned to avenge their allies, the Mugulashas, or perhaps again this uncomfortable joint living situation proved untenable. However, it seems most likely that the Tensas saw this as a prime opportunity to regroup and rebuild their population. By 1703, half of the Tensa men had lost their wives and children to slave raids and disease. Similar to the Bayagoulas, they must have seen the forced incorporation of women and children from another tribe as an opportunity to help replenish their people and repair this gender disparity.⁸⁷ Once they had killed the Bayagoulas, they invited in their neighbors to the west, the Chitimachas and Yanki-Chitos, to come share the calumet of peace and a feast of the corn of the Bayagoulas to celebrate this victory. The Chitimachas and Yanki-Chitos accepted this offer to make an alliance, and many of their people came to celebrate with the Tensas. However, the Tensas were not seeking peace. They took advantage of the assumption of safety offered by a calumet ceremony and attacked these visitors as well, again taking women and children. Although a brutal process, this bloody adoption

⁸⁷ Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 66.

did increase the Tensa population. From here the Tensas fled east to the newly established French fort at Mobile and sought calumet refuge with these newcomers.⁸⁸

Although the calumet of peace was designed to facilitate safe cross cultural interactions between nations, and the practice of multi-ethnic refugee settlements was intended to protect petites nations, by the 1700s these practices were no longer free from violence. In this same era dozens of petites nations peoples were forced to seek refuge in uncomfortable partnerships with neighboring nations. Often these partnerships collapsed in violence.

As the world was becoming increasingly dangerous for the petites nations, the emergence of a new political order in the Lower Mississippi Valley offered promise. In the early eighteenth century the French established a presence along the gulf coast, the Natchez Chiefdom consolidated its power, the Choctaws coalesced and gained access to firepower, and the Chickasaws connected the Lower Mississippi Valley to the economy of the British colonies on the eastern seaboard. The emergence of these great nations and new networks along the gulf coast facilitated a political realignment of the region. The petites nations began to look for new opportunities through connections with these emerging powers. In the first decades of the eighteenth century these petites nations employed a variety of strategies to attempt to pull these larger powers into their networks and use their partnerships to form new webs of protection for their communities.

⁸⁸ The Tensas' combination of rapid relocation and surprise assaults was very common and successful tactics used by many of the petites nations. Until 1732, many of the petites nations relied upon surprise attacks to sever joint settlements and chase out their former allies or to integrate women and children into their communities. Petites nations' incentives for these assaults are rarely clear from the documents. Beyond suggesting that the slave trade destabilized the region and led to increased conflict, for the most part scholars have not attempted to explain the causes of these attacks. Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 140, 144, 175, 177, 185, 190, 217; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 22-24; la Harpe, *Historical Journal*, 71-75.

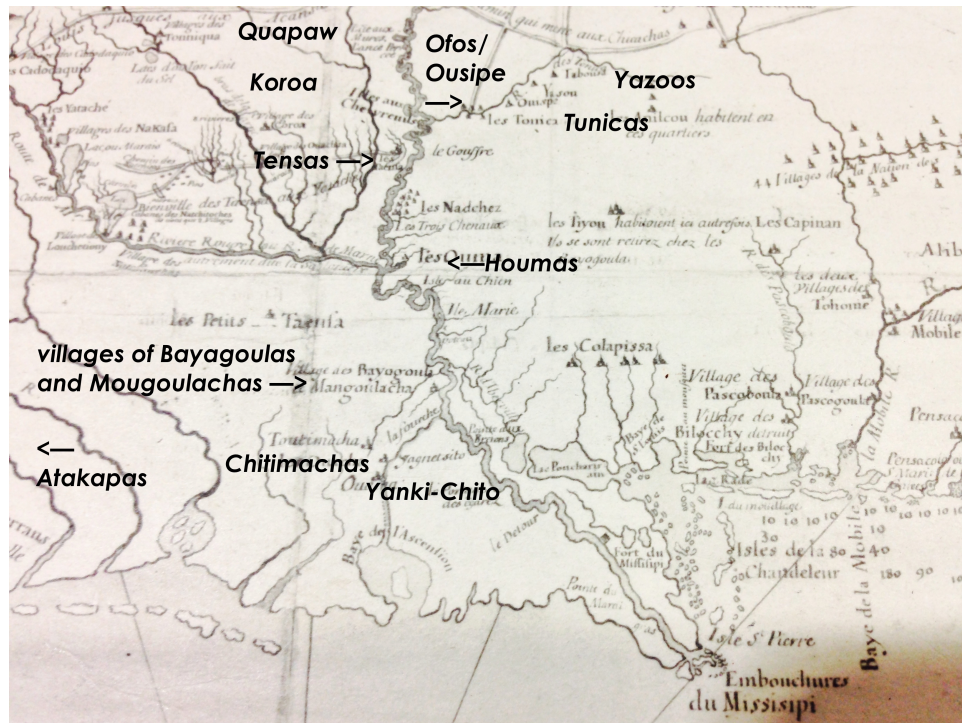


Figure 5- Petites Nations Locations Circa 1699⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Guillaume de L'Isle, "Carte des Environs du Missisipi," 1701, Louis C. Karpinski Map Collection, The Newberry Library, Chicago.

Establishing Relationships with the French, 1699-1710

The foreigners came smashing through the wood towards the Biloxi hunting camp. They had pale skin, thick beards and no visible tattoos delineating their social status or political affiliations. The Biloxis feared these pale men were more of the dreaded slave raiders. They dropped their work and those who could ran off into the woods. The bearded men pursued them, running and shouting in a strange language until they caught an elderly women. They dragged her back to the campsite and sat her down alongside an old man who had been unable to flee. Yet the men did not bind her or the old man at the campsite, rather they sat alongside the Biloxi captives and gave them gifts of tobacco and glass beads and made signs that their intentions were peaceful. Recovering from their initial fright, the old man and women told these foreigners that they were from the nearby joint settlement of the Biloxi and Mactoby peoples. The bearded men said they were French.¹

In February 1699 word of the arrival of a French expedition force spread quickly among the nations of the gulf coast. Unlike the pale and bearded men who came from the east, these newcomers did not seem to be primarily interested in obtaining captives, rather they seemed to want to trade with the nations and explore the region. The petites nations had heard rumors that these men had guns and beautiful goods and had offered to provide support against slave raiders, and so over the course of the spring of 1699 the petites nations welcomed these newcomers into their lands.

The French could not have chosen a more opportune moment to make their entrance into the Lower Mississippi Valley. Just a year before their arrival, a devastating smallpox epidemic struck the nations of the region, making it even more difficult for the petites nations to cope with the onslaught of captive raids. Everywhere that this French expedition passed they recorded signs of destruction and chaos. As they traveled through

¹ La Harpe, *The Historical Journal*, 9-10; Iberville, "Journal of the Badine," *Iberville's Gulf Journals*, 44.

the region in 1699 they encountered piles of bones, burned towns, palisaded villages full of sick peoples and towns that were almost entirely devoid of women. The Natchez and Choctaws, two of the most numerous and powerful polities in the Lower Mississippi Valley, were reeling from illness, and Chickasaw, Alabama, Tallapoosa, Coosa, and Abihka raiders terrorized the region.²

The French newcomers were also in a weak and vulnerable state. Beginning in 1699, France sent ships loaded with soldiers, laborers, officials, missionaries, colonists, and ultimately enslaved Africans to the Lower Mississippi Valley. Yet from the first, these immigrants struggled to scrape out a living in the new Louisiana settlement. During their first two decades along the gulf coast they continually suffered with bouts of flu and dysentery as they adjusted to the damp climate, and they struggled to secure enough corn and game to feed themselves. Yet, despite their shaggy beards and hungry eyes, the petites nations saw potential in the new arrivals. These settlers were poorly supplied with food, but they had access to high tech weaponry and seemed inclined to join the Native peoples' settlements.

Between 1699 and 1720 French settlers in Louisiana established a series of outposts adjoining Indian villages at strategic locations. Before the French established the better-known posts of Natchez and New Orleans in 1716 and 1718, respectively, Mobile was the primary nexus of the French empire in the Lower Mississippi Valley.³

²Kelton, *Epidemics and Enslavement*, 112, 137-156; "Letter of Mr. Thaumur de la Source," *Early Voyages up and down the Mississippi*, 81; Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 141-142; Paul Kelton, "Shattered and Infected," *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone*, 314.

³ Old Mobile, also known as first Mobile, was constructed at 27-mile bluff. Severe flooding led the French to move the location of their fort and settlement further inland, and, in 1711, this second Mobile was constructed close to the site of present day Mobile, Mississippi. John Brice Harris, *From Old Mobile to Fort Assumption* (Nashville: The Parthenon Press, 1959), 16; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 28.

Constructed in 1702 alongside Fort Louis de la Louisane with a meager 140 settlers, Mobile was the first of France's true joint settlements with the petites nations peoples of Louisiana. Although the French population of the Lower Mississippi Valley grew substantially from the few dozen soldiers and laborers who stumbled onto the sandy beaches at Mobile in 1699, by 1718 the colony had a mere 350-400 people scattered among Indian villages and outposts throughout the Lower Mississippi Valley.⁴ Thus, at their height during these first twenty years, the French settlers were roughly the size of a petite nation.

The petites nations welcomed this small population of travelers and traders and sought to integrate them into their political and economic systems. Both French and Native peoples hoped that building French settlements alongside Native towns would support a vibrant trade economy and protect them from the wrath of Indians allied with Carolina. Yet despite the best efforts of Louisiana officials and petites nations, French settlers at Mobile and in nearby settlements did not flourish. Chronic shortages of trade goods, few healthy settlers, and the inability of the French arrivals to develop sufficient agricultural production left the French almost completely dependent on the petites nations. Notwithstanding this power imbalance, petites nations peoples continued to court the newcomers and to pursue a variety of strategies to exploit these relationships.

During these first two decades of the eighteenth century, Indigenous and Francophone polities struggled to construct beneficial trade networks, protect their communities from foreign raiders, and develop political partnerships that would best serve their communities. As they settled on the gulf coast, the French settlers' small

⁴ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 31; Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana*, 1:101.

numbers and dependent state meant that they were forced to adapt to local cultural and diplomatic practices. French settlers at Mobile had to respect petites nations women, conduct political negotiations in accordance with regional customs, provide their Native allies with military support, and attempt to hide from their superiors that the local Indian nations shaped their diplomacy and settlement.

Building Alliances

Just days after their initial inauspicious encounter, the Biloxis hosted two calumet ceremonies for their new French allies. Upon seeing that the French meant no harm and seemed willing to part with beautiful trade goods, the Mochtoby and Biloxi secured an alliance with the leaders of the expedition. They shared food and the calumet pipe and welcomed the French to their territory near the present day location of Biloxi, Mississippi. On February 17 the Biloxi introduced the French to their close allies the Bayagoulas and Mugulashas. These Bayagoula and Mugulasha men had traveled east from their homes along the Lower Mississippi River to Biloxi territory to hunt. Due to the pressure exerted by their neighbors the Houmas on the northern border of their territories, it was safer for them to venture east along the coast than up the Mississippi. During their hunt they had heard cannon fire and followed the noise to the Biloxi village.⁵

The Bayagoulas and Mugulashas were intrigued by these newcomers and sought a formal alliance with them. After exchanging greetings and information with the Biloxis, the Bayagoulas and Mugulashas turned their attention to the leader of the French

⁵ Guillaume de L'Isle, *Carte des Environs du Missisipi*, 1701, Louis C. Karpinski Map Collection, Newberry Library; N. de Fer, *Les Costes aux Environs de la Riviere de Misisipi*, 1701, Louis C. Karpinski Map Collections, Newberry Library; Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville, *Iberville's Gulf Journals* Ed. Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1981), 5-7, 44-49.

expedition, Pierre Le Moyne D'Iberville. The Bayagoulas and Mugulashas rubbed Iberville's chest in friendship and turned their hands and faces towards the sacred light of the sun. Before his arrival at the head of the 1699 expedition to Louisiana, Iberville had served as a French soldier in Canada and had experience working closely alongside Native peoples. Iberville was therefore well equipped to negotiate with Indian nations.⁶ He came prepared with his own calumet, one made of iron and shaped like a ship, and offered it to his new allies. The Bayagoulas and Mugulashas asked where Iberville and his men were from and if they had come from upriver. Although they may not have personally encountered Frenchmen before, they were familiar with French travelers from stories of Tonti and La Salle's voyages through the region, and the Bayagoulas and Mugulashas correctly concluded that these were men of the same nation.⁷

Understanding that the French desired to form connections to other nations in the region, the Biloxis and Moctobys sought to take advantage of their diplomatic good fortune in meeting these newcomers first. After welcoming the French into their village they organized a large calumet ceremony with the Bayagoulas and Mugulashas. Around eight that evening, the Biloxis, Moctobys, Bayagoulas, and Mugulashas assembled around the calumet pole to eat, smoke, dance, and proclaim their reputations to the French visitors. Iberville was impressed by the fervor with which the warriors of these villages struck their wooden clubs against the calumet pole and boasted of their military exploits. The Biloxis, Moctobys, Mugulashas, and Bayagoulas, told the French that

⁶ Nellis M. Crouse, *Lemoyne d'Iberville: Soldier of New France* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 1-3. 55-62, 207-212.

⁷ Iberville, "Journal of the Badine," *Iberville's Gulf Journals*, 45-48; la Harpe, *Historical Journal*, 9-10; Iberville, *A Comparative View*, 31-46.

through this ceremony the French had also formed alliances with the Ouachas, Chitimachas, Yanki-Chitos, Houmas, Moctobys, Pascagoulas, Natchez, Bayacchytos, and Amylcou. Thus, in addition to illustrating their military prowess, these petites nations emphasized to the French travelers the extent of their alliance network through the region and aimed to demonstrate that their connections made them powerful allies.⁸

Perceiving the benefits of facilitating the expansion of French relationships in the region, the Biloxis sought to direct the course of negotiations at the calumet ceremony. Iberville and his men expressed their interest in traveling up the Mississippi River and asked many questions about the peoples who lived along its banks.⁹ With this ceremony the Biloxi highlighted their diplomatic skill, military power and extensive networks. They so successfully illustrated their prowess that the French chose to build their first fort alongside their town.¹⁰

During the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the petites nations regularly hosted diplomatic meetings at their villages. These meetings were important both for affirming and creating alliances and for mediating disputes between nations. For example, in 1699 the Houmas hosted a diplomatic summit among the Tunicas, Tensas, Natchez, and French missionaries. The Tunicas, Tensas, and Natchez had been fighting for years, and all three groups were interested in making peace. The Houmas provided a

⁸ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 13; Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 174-175; James F. Barnett, *Mississippi's American Indians* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 73 ; Pierre Margry *Découvertes et Établissements des Français dans l'ouest et dans le sud de l'Amérique Septentrionale* (Paris, D. Jouaust, 1880), 4:155.

⁹ Iberville, *A Comparative View*, 33-34, 47-48.

¹⁰ Gravier, Jacques, *Relation ou journal du voyage du r.p. Jacques Gravier, de la Compagnie de Jésus, en 1700 depuis le pays des Illinois jusqu'à l'embouchure du Mississipi*, Sabin Americana (Albany: J. Munsell, 1859), 55, 57.

neutral location for the groups to meet and resolve their differences, and the Houma leader and a French missionary helped mediate. With their help the Tunicas, Tensas, and Natchez were able to settle their differences and declare a halt to raiding among their nations.¹¹ Along with the use of the calumet ceremony, the practice of enlisting external nations to help mediate conflict and forge alliances was an essential part of the Lower Mississippi Valley diplomacy. Thus, by the arrival of this expedition in 1699, the Biloxis, Bayagoulas, and Mugulashas had developed sufficient diplomatic finesse to convince the French that Native alliances would be essential to their colonial project.

The French men who arrived in Biloxi territory in 1699 were part of an expedition sent by the French king to establish territorial claims in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Their mission was to set up a chain of defensive posts that could halt British expansion across North America from the east, explore the region for natural resources, determine if colonization would be a worthwhile venture for the French crown, and establish trade partnerships with the region's Native peoples. Through the fur and captive trades, the British had forged connections with Native peoples that expanded their economic and political networks from the east coast into the continental interior and throughout the southeast. French officials feared that this expansion of British influence poised the British to claim control of a large swath of the North American continent and might ultimately block France's territorial claims and trade networks in Canada. If the French extended their dominion along the length of the Mississippi River and the gulf coast they would be able to curb British expansion and possibly set up a lucrative trade economy of their own. Yet, during the first decades of French establishment in the Lower Mississippi

¹¹L'Abbé François de Montigny à Saint-Vallier, 8/25/1699, *Les Missions du Séminaire de Québec dans la Vallée du Mississippi*, ed. Noël Baillargeon (Québec: Musée de la Civilisation, 2002), 83-86.

Valley, the dream of territorial domination and the reality of French presence in the region were vastly divergent. Whatever the imperial designs Iberville and his men might have been ordered to carry out, these travelers urgently needed food, guides, protection, and labor to establish forts that would help them assert their claims to the region.¹²

The French spent their first three years setting up a post and settlement alongside Biloxi, traveling through the region, mapping the Mississippi, and building relationships with the local nations. The Biloxis helped construct their French fort, fed their soldiers, and introduced the French to the other coastal tribes. Through these connections with local groups the soldiers were able to survive the first five years in Louisiana and begin to integrate themselves into the regional political and trade networks. As expeditions of Frenchmen passed through the region they engaged local nations in calumet ceremonies, set up trade partnerships, and asked villages to lend portions of their land to build forts or outposts for French soldiers and merchants. During the first twelve years of colonial establishment the French were completely dependent on the petites nations. They relied on these peoples to guide them safely through the region, act as their emissaries with other nations, and provide enough for food their troops to survive the winters.¹³

The petite nations critically shaped Louisiana's early diplomatic networks. In 1699 Tensa guides helped the French priests forge relations with their Natchez allies and in 1700 the Tohomes provided Iberville with an introduction to their friends in the powerful Choctaw Nation. These two connections were essential to French establishment

¹² Marcel Giraud, *History of French Louisiana*, 1:58-59; Mathé Allain, *Not Worth a Straw*, 47-54.

¹³ Daniel Usner's *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves* provides the best analyses of these early exchanges between petites nations peoples and French newcomers. This path-breaking work re-integrated these small Indian nations into the central narrative of the development of colonial Louisiana and illustrates how truly dependent French settlers were on the petites nations during the early years of French colonization. Usner, *Indians Settlers and Slaves*.

as the Choctaws and Natchez became their most important allies during the 1710s and 1720s. Petite nations warriors also provided key support in French conflicts with local nations and their familiarity with the region made them indispensable military allies. Petites nations warriors helped avenge French deaths by both bringing scalps from French enemies to the Louisiana officials and by tracking down and capturing murders. For example, in 1704 Tunica warriors provided military assistance to avenge the death of a French missionary and in 1707 Tawasas gathered the scalps of Louisiana's Abhika enemies. These warriors also provided crucial assistance during French military campaigns. In 1708 Mobilians and Tohomes backed French military expeditions against the Alabamas, throughout the 1710s the Acolapissa and Nassitoches warriors supported French troops during the Chitimacha War, and the Pascagoulas supplemented French forces to defend the gulf coast from pirates and foreign raiders.¹⁴

Accommodating Foreign Cultures

These opportunities to serve as guides, help build forts, and supply the French with critical goods gave the petites nations considerable leverage to make demands of their new allies. Just three months after their initial meeting at the Biloxi calumet ceremony in 1699, the Bayagoula chief Antobiscania was already irritating French officials with his demands. The Bayagoulas were among the first and most trusted of French allies. As neighbors of the Biloxis, they had provided generous support to the

¹⁴ These examples constitute a very brief selection of the variety of ways that the petites nations provided indispensable diplomatic and military support to the fledgling French colony. Sauvole, *The Journal of Sauvole*, 30; la Harpe, *The Historical Journal*, 48-49, 54-56, 86; Iberville, *Iberville's Gulf Journals*, 141-143; Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 101-102, 125-126; Peter J. Hamilton, *Colonial Mobile: A Study of Southwestern History* (Mobile, First National Bank of Mobile, 1952), 101; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 18.

French since their arrival. Over the course of the first months of settlement French officials frequently turned to the Bayagoulas to use their military expertise and connections to guide French soldiers through the region and negotiate their safe passage through other nations' territories. The Bayagoulas were sure to exact sufficient payment in return for their labor, including beads, glass, coats, axes, and blankets. Because the French had built their fort with Biloxi assistance, on Biloxi land, and the Bayagoulas had provided so much support, the French concluded that it would be dangerous for them to antagonize either nation. Therefore, when Antobiscania came to the French fort asking for food, gifts, or to speak with the French Governor of Louisiana, Sieur de Sauvole, the French could not reject him.¹⁵ French officials recognized that they were completely dependent on these two nations, so had no choice but to deal with the Antobiscania and keep this influential leader content, or risk the consequences of offending both nations.

By spring of 1699 Governor Sauvole found himself especially irritated by being forced to negotiate with the Bayagoulas on Bayagoula terms. In addition to asking for supplies for the fort, Sauvole had been attempting to convince the Bayagoulas to guide his men to the nation of the Quinipissas (one of the tribes that the both La Salle and Tonti recorded encountering in the region), so he needed to remain in their good graces.¹⁶ On May 17, 1699 Antobiscania and three of his men approached Fort Maurepas, the French

¹⁵ Sauvole, *The Journal of Sauvole*, 25, 28, 40-41; Margry, *Découvertes*, 166-167, 172, 174-175.

¹⁶ In fact, the Quinipissas no longer existed by 1699. Although they appear on some early French maps, this is a mistake. The Quinipissas were destroyed by the violence that rocked the region before the arrival of the French. Some scholars have suggestions that the Quinipissas were attacked and that their refugees fled to the Mugulashas, and then when the Mugulashas sought refuge with the Bayagoulas both nations moved to join the Bayagoulas. Iberville's early journals misidentify the Mugulashas as the Quinipissas because by that time the Mugulashas had come into possession of a note that was given to the Quinipissas by Henri de Tonti, and because Antobiscania wore a blue, serge coat and an "ugly," red cravat that Bienville believed were also from Tonti. de Montigny à Saint-Vallier, 8/25/1699," *Les Missions du Séminaire*, 80; Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 140.

fort at Biloxi. The French recognized them from a distance by their tattoos and their hairstyles. Although, like most of the Indians of the lower Mississippi Valley, these men were beardless, Bayagoula men also depilated most of their scalps, leaving only a small lock of hair on their crowns that they decorated with feathers. They left their chests bare to display their tattoos and wore loincloths that were adorned with bells, feathers, bits of copper, and so many bangles that they jingled as they walked.¹⁷ Antobiscania and his men arrived, and in compliance with Native customs Sauvole was compelled to offer them food before they began their discussion. Sauvole was likely apprehensive during this meeting as he was wary of Antobiscania's adept negotiating skills. As he recorded in his journal, Sauvole considered Antobiscania the "craftiest savage that I have yet seen, and the one that goes to the farthest ends" to achieve his goals.¹⁸

Sauvole was correct in assessing that Antobiscania was intent on exploiting his relationship with the French, and after he finished his meal he began to convey his demands. First, Antobiscania requested another thick red blanket, as he claimed that his had burned in a fire during an attack on his town. Sauvole did not believe this tale but felt compelled to provide him with a replacement blanket nonetheless. Second, and perhaps most gratefully, Antobiscania wished to bring his wife on another visit to the French fort to meet with Sauvole and the other French officials. He stressed to Sauvole that it was extremely important that his wife be received with "the same homage as they give him." While lavishing diplomatic ceremony and gifts on this Indian chief already frustrated Sauvole, he now found himself pressed to provide the same pomp for a woman. This was

¹⁷*Journal of the Frigate "le Marin"* 40-41.

¹⁸ Iberville too described Antobiscania as being remarkably intelligent and cunning. *The Journal of Sauvole*, 23-24; Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville, "Journal of the Badine" *Iberville's Gulf Journals*, 79.

utterly out of accordance with French understanding of gender and politics, and, as Sauvole admitted in his journal, he had not “considered that the savages were sensitive in that manner.”¹⁹

Antobiscania was “sensitive” in this manner. Antobiscania’s wife and other Bayagoula women held crucial diplomatic roles in cementing relationships with foreigners as well as important political and social roles within Bayagoula society. Given her stature within Bayagoula society, Antobiscania expected foreign diplomats to treat his wife respectfully. During their first encounter and ceremonial meeting in March 1699, the Bayagoulas offered the French several Native women as a token of good alliance, which the French gladly accepted. While some Bayagoula women helped cement personal relationships with the French newcomers, others participated directly in the calumet ceremony, enforcing their nation’s political reputation.²⁰ After everyone had eaten the corn porridge provided by the Bayagoula women, the three nations smoked and danced. The French sat on deerskins surrounding the great calumet pole and watched the warriors and village leaders proclaim their great victories and political deeds. Penicaut, a carpenter who traveled with the Iberville expedition, was taken aback when he discovered that women also partook in this ceremony. He watched as Bayagoula women joined their husbands, brothers, and sons in striking the calumet pole and boasting of their military

¹⁹ *The Journal of Sauvole*, 23; Margry *Découvertes*, 4: 448.

²⁰ Iberville recorded that Biloxi women sung to him during his initial calumet ceremony and that he had seen both Houma men and women strike the calumet pole and brag of their victories in war. It is unclear from the account if these women were boasting of their own military exploits or those of their kin or nation at large. In either case, women clearly had roles in both shaping and publicizing their nation’s military engagements. Margry, *Découvertes*, 4: 176; Iberville, “Journal of the Badine” *Iberville’s Gulf Journals*, 44; *Journal of the frigate “Le Marin,”* 49-50.

and political accomplishments.²¹ Bayagoula women's participation not only in the process of torturing captives, but directly in the calumet ceremony, suggests that they were deeply involved in both the military and political affairs of their nations, and that their nations recognized the value of their opinions and exploits.

Among the nations of the Lower Mississippi Valley, women held revered social and political statuses within their societies. Women partook in calumet ceremonies, welcomed foreign visitors into villages, determined the fate of captives, and sustained their communities through agriculture and child rearing. In 1700 French missionary Paul du Ru noted that the Bayagoula women seemed to “do all of the work,” meaning that they raised the chickens, grew the corn, prepared the meals and likely chopped the firewood that supplied the French explorers.²²

Yet beyond these essential community roles, at least some petites nations women also became primary political leaders.²³ When French priest Jacques Gravier traveled

²¹ Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 6-7.

²² du Ru, *Journal of du Ru*, 29.

²³ Historians of the Lower Mississippi Valley have long recognized the role of women leaders or “female suns” among the Natchez, yet there has been almost no exploration of the role of women's political leadership within petites nations' societies. Although the Natchez are often treated as an anomaly and as one of the few remaining chiefdoms within the Native Southeast, recent scholarship suggests that they shared many social, religious, and political customs with the other nations of the Lower Mississippi Valley. Like the women of the Houma, Bayagoula, and Atakapa nations, Natchez women were essential diplomats and leaders within their communities. Scholars of American Indian history, including Theda Perdue, Juliana Barr, and Kathleen DuVal, have powerfully illustrated the essential roles that Native women played within southeastern native societies and their profound involvement within the political, social, and economic endeavors of their nations. The practice of women assuming roles of paramount political leadership within southeastern polities stretches at least far back as the 1540s when a powerful female leader ruled the Mississippian polity of Cofitachequi. By the early eighteenth century, the majority of the most high-ranking political leaders of southeastern nations were men, although again, women also played crucial roles in international and internal politics. Within most petites nations communities women participated in similar ways, and the few examples of women's roles as primary political leaders of their nations suggest there was also room for political engagement and military advancement beyond the more common gendered divisions of labor within their societies. “Nouvelle Relation de la Louisiane, Nouveau Mercure Septembre 1717,” *Le Plus Beau Païs du Monde* ed. May Rush Gwin Waggoner (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2005), 40; George E. Milne, *Risings Suns, Fallen Forts, and Impudent Immigrants*:

through the Houma village in 1699, he recorded that the nation was mourning the recent death of their female chief. The Houmas wept over her death and stored her bones in their sacred temple. From the stories they told of her life, Gravier gathered that she was a formidable leader. This chief had proven herself in war and thereby earned the right to be the Grand Chief of the village. She led calumet ceremonies, cut her hair like the male warriors and held the primary seat in the Houma's councils.²⁴ French travelers also recorded the Atakapas had a primary female chief. During the 1770s Jean Bernard Bossu recorded with awe that "the entire district of Atakapas is under the rule of a women called Quitachoulabenaky, meaning regent. She rules with as much courage, wisdom and discretion as a man could. Consequently the savages have nicknamed her woman of valor, that is heroine." Electing a young female chief was an unusual practice for the Atakapas, as they generally preferred to be governed by older men. Yet Quitachoulabenaky had earned the love and respect of her people and so was promoted to chief at a young age. Bossu was impressed not only with her political abilities but her moral character as well. He compared Quitachoulabenaky to the English Queen Elizabeth because both women kept lovers but refused to marry because a husband might

Race Power and War in the Lower Mississippi Valley PhD diss. (Norman, University of Oklahoma, 2006), 6,11,17,114-115, 125-126; Barnett, *The Natchez Indians*, xv-xvi; Paul A. Kunkel, "The Indians of Louisiana, About 1700- Their Customs and Manner of Living" *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History: The French Experience in Louisiana* (Lafayette, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1995), 252-253; DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 20,63, 73; George Edward Milne, "Picking Up the Pieces: Natchez Coalescence in the Mississippian Shatter Zone" *Mapping the Mississippi Shatter Zone*, 387-412; Theda Perdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society, 1540-1806* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1979), 9; Charles Hudson, *Knights of Spain, Warriors of the Sun: Hernando de Soto and the South's Ancient Chiefdoms* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1997),174-175; Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman*, 10, 61, 71; Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women*, 38; James Taylor Carson, "Molly Brant: From Clan Mother to Loyalist Chief," *Sifters*, 48-58.

²⁴ Gravier, *Relation du Voyage*, 42-43.

compromise their political roles. In Quitachoulabenaky's case she kept a lover who Bossu referred to as her "slave."²⁵

Thus, even if most women were not able to achieve supreme leadership roles within their communities, it seems evident that women were deeply involved in political and diplomatic endeavors at all levels. It is therefore not surprising that Antobiscania felt that it was essential that his wife receive the same measure of respect as he was accorded by the Bayagoulas' new allies. For eighteenth-century Frenchmen like Sauvole, Gravier and Bossu, the political power, military engagement, and sexual freedom of these women was shocking and radically different from the idealized subservient roles of women in French society. Yet despite their discomfort with Native political and social practices, the French understood that their relationships with Native peoples were essential to their survival in the region. Therefore, when a leader like Antobiscania demanded that the governor show his wife the same respect that he received, French officials were forced to accommodate these demands and behave in accordance with Native diplomatic protocols.²⁶

The Bayagoulas sought not only material goods and respect from their new French friends, but also French military support against their allies. Initially, like many of the petites nations, the Bayagoulas attempted to recruit the French as military allies in their ongoing war against the Houmas. When Paul du Ru first arrived among the

²⁵ Bossu describes this "slave" only as a man that Quitachoulabenaky could discard when she tired of him and so it is unclear from the text whether this man was actually a slave or if Bossu just believed that she treated him as such. Bossu, *New Travels*, 92-94.

²⁶ Kathleen DuVal's *The Native Ground* provides a clear and compelling example of the many ways that Indian peoples forced French settlers to negotiate on their terms and adapt to Native diplomatic protocols. For an analysis of the ways Indian peoples in the Middle Mississippi River Valley integrated French officials into their existing diplomatic systems, see DuVal, *The Native Ground*.

Bayagoulas in 1700, he said that immediately after they had fed him a meal of bear meat they began to press him for his support. Du Ru remarked “an old Bayagoula more dried up than even the bear meat and venison” tried desperately to enlist him to go on a raid against the Houmas. Du Ru declined, and the elderly Bayagoula did not seem to bear any grudges. Within petites nations, political leaders held minimal coercive power, and raiders relied on voluntary recruitment to garner manpower for attacks.²⁷

French records of early encounters almost always include explanations that the French extended the petites nations offers of “protection.” While the French believed that they were bringing the petites nations under the protection of the king and into the realm of France, on the ground these promises amounted to very little.²⁸ In 1702 there were a mere 140 French settlers in Lower Louisiana, roughly the size of one fifth of the Bayagoula nation. Despite their trade connections, the French were far too few to control the territory they claimed for their King, and their presence did little to halt attacks by Chickasaw and Alabama raiders. Access to guns and powder meant far more to the petites nations than did nebulous promises of the extension of French power over their nations.²⁹

Once the Bayagoulas realized they would have no luck in employing the French as warriors against the Houmas, they opted to use them instead to make peace. In March

²⁷ du Ru, *Journal of Paul du Ru*, 5-7.

²⁸ During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the French colonial officials used their relationships with Native peoples to claim possession of the territories that Native peoples controlled. By claiming political and social connections to Native peoples in the American continent, French settlers rhetorically transformed Native peoples into subjects and extensions of the French empire. For the clearest explanation of this effort to claim possession of Native nations and lands see Michael Witgen’s “The Rituals of Possession: Native Identity and the Invention of Empire in Seventeenth-Century Western North America.” Michael Witgen, “The Rituals of Possession: Native Identity and the Invention of Empire in Seventeenth-Century Western North America” *Ethnohistory*, vol. 54, no. 4 (2007), 639-661.

²⁹ Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana*, 1:101.

of 1700, the Bayagoulas led the French up the river into Houma territory. Because the French were there, the Houmas received the Bayagoulas peacefully, and the three nations were able to discuss their relationships. If the Houmas wanted access to French goods, they would have to behave kindly toward France's allies—the Bayagoulas. Moreover, the Bayagoulas pressed the French to demand that in exchange for creating a French alliance with the Houmas, the Houmas would return their Bayagoula prisoners, and agree to cease fighting the Bayagoulas.

This was a high price for the Houmas. By giving up the Bayagoula captives they would be sacrificing their leverage if they needed to bargain with enemies again in the future. In 1699 Iberville recorded that the chief of the Mugulashas came to the calumet ceremony with a slave who had been scalped. Amazingly this man had survived the torture and went on to play an important part in Mugulasha diplomatic ceremony. Petites nations like the Bayagoulas and Mugulashas relied on captives to restore the population losses they suffered from disease and conflict. Beyond simply filling labor voids, captives also played crucial roles in facilitating cross-cultural negotiations, as did the scalped captive in facilitating the Mugulasha and French relationship. Additionally, the Bayagoulas almost certainly still had Houma captives, possibly some of whom they had already tortured.³⁰ Ultimately, the Houmas agreed to this arrangement. Although they were very upset by the demand to return the captives, they evidently decided that the possibility of developing a relationship with the French and gaining access to European trade goods was worth the risk of giving up their hard won captives.³¹

³⁰ *Journal of the frigate "Le Marin"*, 37.

³¹ Margry, *Découvertes*, 4: 408; la Harpe, *The Historical Journal*, 24.

While the French adapted to uncomfortable local customs, many Native nations also made sacrifices and adopted unorthodox methods to gain the alliance of the French. In 1699, the Tunicas, one of the nations that was part of the successful trade hub on the Yazoo River, found themselves in crisis. Although the Tunicas had numbered roughly 1,200 in the 1690s, they had been hard hit by both the smallpox epidemic and the expansion of Chickasaw slave raiders. Disease and slave-trade-related conflicts killed about half of their people by 1710.³² Like so many of the petites nations, in 1699 the Tunicas reached out to the French newcomers in the hope that an alliance might halt this destruction. Yet, like the Houmas, the Tunicas faced the challenge of building an alliance with the French in spite of France's alliance with their enemies. During the second half of the seventeenth century the Tunicas had fought bitterly against their northern neighbors the Quapaws. Quapaw oral tradition suggests that when they migrated into the northern Lower Mississippi Valley they pushed out Tunican speakers and the two nations had been on bad terms since then. Then, in 1673, the Quapaws connected with the Joliet and Marquette expedition and secured an alliance with the French. Thus, not only was it in the Quapaws' interest to block the formation of a Tunica-French alliance, but the Tunicas likely feared that a permanent French presence in the region would result in well-armed Quapaws and more drastic losses for the Tunicas.³³

The Tunicas knew they would have to provide a compelling reason for the French to ally with them in order to counter the Quapaws' assertions that the Tunicas were their

³² According to Jeffrey Brain's estimates, the Tunicas numbered only 500 in 1719. Combined with the Ofo and Yazoo communities, their settlement on the Yazoo in 1699 was home to 2,000 individuals. Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 316; Paul Kelton, "The Great Southeastern Smallpox Epidemic," 35.

³³ DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 69; Marvin D. Jeter, "From Prehistory through Protohistory to Ethnohistory in and near the Northern Lower Mississippi Valley," *The Transformation of the Southeastern Indians*, 189-190; Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 132-133.

enemies. The Tunicas relied heavily on their strategic location and willingness to embrace French culture to sell the value of their alliance. In 1699 the Tunicas were situated at the base of the Yazoo River. From this location they continued to trade salt, pottery, and horses to nations both east and west of the Mississippi. This trade involvement had helped them secure alliances with both the Yazoo River nations and the Caddoan peoples to the west, and so the French recognized that the Tunicas could help them forge connections with these other nations.

In addition to their political and economic power, the Tunicas used their willingness to embrace the presence of French priests to entice the French to maintain relationships with their nation. Unlike almost all of the petites nations, the Tunicas not only requested the presence of French missionaries in their villages, but their chiefs also went out of their way to project the image of Catholic devotion within their nation.³⁴ In 1699 Tunica chief Dominique received Father Davion in his village and eagerly submitted to a baptismal ritual. Dominique's enthusiasm and professions of faith helped counter the rest of the nation's tepid reception of the priest who, by August of that year, has managed to baptize only three dying infants.³⁵

The Tunicas continued to rely on their image as eager recipients of French culture to solidify their relationships with the French through the 1720s. During the 1710s and

³⁴ The Natchez, for example, tolerated the presence of missionaries within their villages, but certainly never embraced their presence. St. Cosme, who was stationed among the Natchez and the same missionary who would later be murdered by the Chitimachas (see chapter 3), complained that he did not have enough muscle to enforce his conversion of the Natchez, and that he was maltreated and occasionally attacked by Natchez villagers. Barnett, *The Natchez Indians*, 49; Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 316-317; George Edward Milne, "Rising Suns, Falling Forts, and Impudent Immigrants: Race, Power, and War in the Lower Mississippi Valley (diss. University of Oklahoma, 2006), 44; Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 180; la Harpe, *Historical Journal*, 60.

³⁵ "Letter of de Montigny 1/2/1699" *Early Voyages*, 75, 78; de Montigny à Saint-Vallier, datée 8/25/1699, *Missions du Séminaire*, 77.

1720s the next Tunica chief, Cahura-Joligo, continued to emphasize the Catholicism of his nation, and he delighted the French by permitting a missionary to baptize not only himself but also his wife and son.³⁶ In addition to welcoming missionaries in this village, Cahura-Joligo embraced the sartorial trappings of a friendly diplomat. French travelers reported that Cahura-Joligo regularly wore a European waistcoat and carried a gold-headed cane. On a ribbon around his neck he wore a French medal that was engraved with an image of the French king's wedding on one side and the city of Paris on the other.³⁷ Thus, much like the tattoos that marked him as an accomplished warrior and a leader of his people, Cahuro-Joligo's dress demonstrated his powerful economic and political connections to the French. By the 1720s, their appropriation of French culture, coupled with the Tunicas regular military assistance, convinced the French that the Tunicas were among France's most reliable Indian allies.³⁸

Yet despite French conviction that the Tunicas were completely loyal, the Tunicas saw the French as only one part of their alliance network, and during the 1700s and 1710s they also reached out to several of Louisiana's enemy nations. Much as the French allied with both the Quapaws and the Tunicas because it was to their advantage, the Tunicas also reached out to the British, Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Natchez. In 1700 the Tunicas received a deputation of Chickasaw diplomats into their villages and attempted to

³⁶ As with his predecessor, Cahura-Joligo's enthusiasm for Catholic priests did not extend to the rest of the village. This suggests that both men understood acceptance of Catholic ritual to be an integral part of the diplomatic process and a crucial component of relationship building between leaders rather than as a critical alteration of faith.

³⁷ DuPratz, *History of Louisiana*, 312; Charlevoix, *Historical Journal*, 174.

³⁸ Milne, *Rising Suns*, 225; Patricia K. Galloway "'This nation.. is very brave and has always served the French well.' --Tunicas under the French Regime. 1676-1763," *The Tunica-Biloxi Tribe: Its Culture and People*, ed. Faye Truex and Patricia Q. Foster (Marksville, Tunica-Biloxi Indians of Louisiana, 1987), 20-32.

negotiate an alliance with them in order to stop their continuous raiding. Yet Chickasaw raiders continued to attack their villages, and so in 1704 they attempted to bypass the Chickasaws and make a direct alliance with the Chickasaw's British allies. Rather than endeavoring to sell the British on their devotion, the Tunicas attempted to market themselves based on the value of their economic alliance. During their 1704 meeting, the Tunicas provided the British with a gift of Tensa captives. Perhaps they intended to convey that they too could provide the British with slaves. Although the British were geographically distant, the Tunicas made efforts to sustain this relationship and in 1708 and 1714 the Tunicas received British traders in their villages. They held calumet ceremonies for these travelers and likely tried to negotiate trade and alliance agreements.

In addition to courting these European powers, throughout the 1710s the Tunicas also pursued relationships with the Natchez and Choctaws, who were rapidly becoming the dominant powers in the region.³⁹ Essentially, even as the petites nations sought to build close alliances with the French, they continued to pursue a range of political and economic options. Furthermore, like nearly all of the nations in the Lower Mississippi Valley, both great and small, the Tunicas often pursued alliances with nations that were hostile to their other allies. Much as the French assumed that they could manage alliances with a variety of adversarial peoples, the petites nations too believed they could manage these often conflicting alliances.

³⁹ la Harpe, *Historical Journal*, 68, 70-76, 90-91; Barnett, *Mississippi's American Indians*, 104-105.

Refugees at Mobile

Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley found French political and military weakness baffling given the grandiose nature of their claims about the French empire. Native peoples during the early 1700s mocked these Louisianans, saying that they “made a big noise but [their] words did not go beyond the door of [the] room.”⁴⁰ Perpetually starving, in need of guides, porters, hunters, bear grease, corn, and warriors to guard their forts, the French settlers offered promises of trade and military support, but they struggled to honor their commitments. They pledged to protect their allies, but chronic shortages of guns and ammunition and lack of manpower inhibited their ability to defend even themselves.⁴¹ Thus, in the early 1700s the French formed a joint settlement with the petites nations at Mobile. Like many of the other small polities in the region these petites nations of Mobilians, Naniabas, Tohomes, Capinans, and Frenchmen sought protection in cluster settlements, where they all hoped to defend themselves from British expansion and develop beneficial trade networks.

In 1702 severe repeated flooding led the French to accept an offer from the Mobilians to relocate to their colonial post from Biloxi further inland to Mobile. The Mobilians and their close neighbors, the Naniabas and Tohomes, were small fishing

⁴⁰ This Indigenous idiom was recorded in 1717 by the Commissary General of Louisiana, Marc Antoine Hubert in a description of the dislike of the Louisiana native nations for Jean Michele de L’Epinay, who briefly served as governor of Louisiana. The expression is roughly equivalent to the common American expression “more bark than bite.” Marc Antoine Hubert to the Council, 10/26/1717, Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion ed. Dunbar Rowland and A. G. Sanders (Jackson: Press of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1929), 2; 249.

⁴¹ Regis du Roullet to Maurepas, 1729, Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion ed. Dunbar Rowland and A. G. Sanders (Jackson: Press of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1927): 22-24; Lusser to Maurepas, 1/25/1730, MPA FD, I: 102-110, Bienville and Salmon to Maurepas, 5/11/1737, MPA: FD, I: 349; Sauvole to Pontchartrain, 8/1/1701, MPA: FD 2:9-13; de Montigny, *The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont*, 144.

nations of the Pensacola culture.⁴² Their peoples had migrated west to the Mobile Bay region likely sometime during the seventeenth century. The Mobilian, Tohome, and Naniaba, lands along Mobile Bay were further east than those of Bayagoulas, Houmas, Tunicas, or other petites nations, and were with a week's travel of not only Chickasaw and Choctaw territories, but also the lands of the Alabamas, Abihkas, Coosas, and Tallapoosas (four groups that would later become part of the Creek confederacy).⁴³ Therefore, during the 1690s and 1710s, these small groups had suffered not only Chickasaw raids, but also massive attacks from Creek raiders. On May 12, 1700 several Mobilian and Tohome chiefs arrived at Fort Maurepas to meet with Sauvole. They told him that their people had just suffered a joint raid by the Conchas and Piniscas and they desperately needed French help.⁴⁴ Over the previous year, the Mobilians, Naniabas, and Tohomes had brought supplies to the French fort and strengthened their relationship with the governor. Now, in their moment of need, they expected to receive military support in return for their service. Sauvole recognized that "It is not a small obligation that we owe

⁴² Some archaeologists have suggested that the Mobilians were the descendants of the Mauvila chiefdom encountered by de Soto in 1540. Whatever their Mississippian era origins, the Mobilians of the eighteenth century had suffered greatly in the interim era, and their nation was tremendously reduced from its former size. Some suggest that the piles of bones on Massacre Island were Mobilian bones, although the cause and context of this slaughter is unclear. Hudson, *Knights of Spain*, 146, 232-240.

⁴³ The Creek nation did not yet exist as a coherent polity at the turn of the eighteenth century. Rather, I am using "Creek" here to broadly discuss the peoples of many linguistic and ethnic backgrounds who lived in the region between the Mobile River and the confluence of the Coosa and Talapoosa Rivers, who would later become the Creek nations.

⁴⁴ Patricia Galloway suggests that Concha is likely referring to the Creek town of Coosa and that "Pinisca" may be a misreading of Apsicas for Abihkas. Both Abhika and Coosa were towns that ultimately became part of the Creek confederacy. Here I use "Creek" for the sake of clarity, but this is not how eighteenth century peoples would have identified them. For this era, Muscogean, petites nations, and European peoples identified these peoples by their towns, and throughout the eighteenth century Creek towns remained fiercely autonomous even as they developed a more unified political superstructure. Ives Goddard, Patricia Galloway, Marvin D. Jeter, Gregory A. Waselkov, John E. Worth, "Small Tribes of the Western Southeast," *The Handbook of North American Indians vol. 14 The Southeast* ed. Raymond D. Fogelson (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian, 2004), 14: 178-179; Willard B. Walker, "Creek Confederacy before Removal," 14: 373-375; *The Journal of Sauvole*, Ed. Jay Higginbotham, 45.

to those people there; they are the only ones for a hundred leagues around who could have aided us” in the event of an attack on the French fort, and so he dutifully sent French soldiers to protect the Mobilian and Tohome villages. Given the isolation and military weakness that plagued both these small Pensacola peoples and the undersupplied French, it seemed logical to the Mobilians that the French should come seek refuge at their villages and the groups should form a joint settlement. In addition to requesting men, the chiefs offered to host the French on their lands, and as Sauvole explained “They fervently wish that we should go establish ourselves on their river.”⁴⁵

Sauvole weighed his options. He kept French soldiers stationed at the Mobilian and Biloxi villages until he finally made the decision to relocate the fort in 1702. Settling alongside the Mobilians facilitated easy access to the food supplies that the French desperately lacked, and their lands were superior to the swampy cite that Iberville has selected for the first French fort.⁴⁶ Over the past year the French expedition continuously battled starvation as the shortage of supplies and the soldiers’ inability to farm meant they were completely unable to provision themselves. Although Sauvole had attempted to trade with the Spanish in Florida, he was unable to negotiate regular deliveries of flour from Pensacola. Therefore, he depended upon trade with local nations to support his men, sometimes sending men directly into the villages of the Acolapissas, Mobilians, Tohomes and others when the French entered periods of starvation.⁴⁷ Fortunately for the French,

⁴⁵ Sauvole, *Journal of Sauvole*, 45-46, 48; “Carte Pour Donner une Idee de las Positions des Villages Sauvage,” 1700, Louis C. Karpinski Map Collection, The Newberry Library, Chicago; Higginbotham, *The Mobile Indians*, 43.

⁴⁶ Gravier, *Relation du Voyage*, 66-67.

⁴⁷ A combination of poor planning, lack of regulation, wars in Europe and the distance between France and Louisiana meant that shipments of crucial food, supplies, and trade goods arrived sporadically and often loaded with unusable provisions. Colonial officials complained repeatedly that shoddy packaging and

the Mobilians nevertheless thought that a relationship with these hungry settlers would be to their advantage.

During the first decade the French developed service based alliances with the nations that surrounded Mobile. Settlers bought poultry, corn, bear fat, and wood and counted on these allies to guide them to interior nations, provide regional intelligence, and supplement the French labor force at Mobile. While nations like the Tunicas, Atakapas, Koroas, and Choctaws, with whom the French traded and occasionally asked for support and guides, maintained extensive economic networks within the interior, petites nations peoples at Mobile developed economies that became completely interwoven with those of the French settlers. Like other Native trade settlements, the multiple nations that clustered around Mobile learned to adapt and negotiate across their cultures.⁴⁸

While some scholars have described Indian peoples who had developed interwoven economic relationships as dependent nations, early French officials more often described themselves as the dependent party.⁴⁹ The Indian nations' relocations to

handling meant that wine arrived soured, olive oil leaked, meat turned rancid, and flour rotted before they reached Louisiana. Between 1708 and 1711 not one supply ship arrived in Louisiana to aid the settlers and led to one of the periods of most abject hunger and dependency for the stranded Louisiana colonists. Food shortages were a constant struggle for the Louisiana settlers throughout France's tenure in the Lower Mississippi Valley, yet the first two decades were undoubtedly the worst. During the winter of 1718-1719 at least 500 settlers starved to death at Biloxi and during the three following winters observers reported seeing settlers mad with hunger, eating rats, and dying in great quantities. Gregory A. Waselkov, "French Colonial Archaeology at Old Mobile: An Introduction" *Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 36, No. 1, French Colonial Archaeology at Old Mobile: Selected Studies (2002), 10; Kerelec, Memoir on Indians 12/12/1758, MPA: FD, 5:224; Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 106; Hubert to the Council 10/26/1717, MPA:FD (1929) 2: 240; Perier and De La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 7/31/1728 MPA:FD 2: 576; Bienville to Pontchartrain 6/6/1704, MPA: FD, 3:25; Savole to Pontchartrain 8/1/1701, MPA:FD 2:12; Hamilton, *Colonial Mobile*, 65; Usner, *Frontier Exchange Economy*, 35-40.

⁴⁸ Sauvole, *The Journal of Sauvole*, 159.

⁴⁹ In recent years anthropologist Eric E. Bowne has proposed a new series of analytic terms to describe American Indian groups. He suggests that the petites nations should be described as "Eurodependent polities" because of the lack of resistance with which they adopted European goods and their immediate

Mobile have been often presented as the result of French efforts to resettle Native Groups near colonial outposts to use them as broader defenses. However, as Sauvole made clear, it was actually the Biloxis and Mobilians who convinced the French to settle near them rather than vice versa. Like the Tunica-Yazoo- Koroa, Tensa-Mosopelea, or Bayagoula-Mugulasha settlements, it was extremely common for petites nations peoples to either jointly settle together or take in groups of refugees like these French settlers.

Native peoples also perceived the French to be helpless and dependent. In the era before the Natchez War both the petites nations and the Choctaws understood the French to be a nation of refugees. British travelers in the region repeatedly told the Indian nations that the French were refugees from France, which seemed to fit with their desperate state.⁵⁰ In 1707 Bienville complained that the Choctaw and Chickasaw headmen did not sufficiently fear the French. They asked him “in great seriousness if there were really as many people in France as here” and if so why had they not come to assist the settlers or to avenge the deaths of the Frenchmen in Louisiana.⁵¹ In 1708, nearly a decade after their

dependency on French settlements for protection. This model also leads him to conclude that the petites nations died out as they became less useful to the French. Similarly, Paul Kelton concludes that following an epidemic in 1711, Lower Mississippi River Valley nations “dwindled into small dependent communities, or what the French called les petite nations. Some of course survived the fate of becoming small appendages to the fledgling colony of Louisiana.” Usner’s explanation of the petites nations peoples near Mobile as groups that balances “political autonomy with economic interdependency” remains the most accurate iteration of the economic and political reality of petite nations peoples. Bowne, “Southeastern Indian Politics of the Seventeenth Century,” 66, 73, 75, 77; Robbie Ethridge, “Introduction: Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone” *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter*, 34, 37; Paul Kelton, *Epidemics and Enslavement*, 189, 200, Usner *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 45; Lankford, *Cultural Resources*, 17.

⁵⁰ Higginbotham, *Old Mobile*, 358

⁵¹ Bienville to Pontchartrain 2/20/1707, *MPA: FD*, 3:38.

initial arrival in the region, the French numbered fewer than 200 settlers. The Choctaw population was more than one hundred times that size.⁵²

Given the options of orienting their political and economic activities around one of these two powers, most of the petites nations prioritized their relationships with the Choctaws. Even as the Mobilians and Tohomes worked with the French, they maintained close ties to the Chickasawhay division of the Choctaws.⁵³ During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries they specialized in the salt trade and carried salt crystals inland to sell to the Choctaws. While their primary economic focus seems to have shifted away from the salt trade towards labor services for the French at Mobile, the Mobilians and Tohomes maintained their political connections to the Choctaws and continued to receive them in their villages throughout the 1700s and 1710s. Thus, given these two options, it is highly likely that the Mobilians and Tohomes continued to consider the Choctaws to be their most important political allies and their relationship to this massive nation to be of primary significance.⁵⁴

A tendency to fixate on European claims had led historians to conclude that the French successfully created a program of resettlement that corresponded to their imperial designs rather than that they were integrated into political and economic systems that

⁵² Usner, *Frontier Exchange Economy*, 25; Usner, *American Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley: Social and Economic Histories* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 35.

⁵³ Patricia K. Galloway "'So Many Little Republics': British Negotiations with the Choctaw Confederacy, 1765" *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (1994), 516-517.

⁵⁴ Unlike the Tunicas and many of the petites nations further north, the Mobilians and Tohomes did not desire to form an alliance with the British. Perhaps because these nations had been so hard hit by Creek slave raiders, they do not appear to have courted either Creek, Chickasaw or British traders. Lankford, *Cultural Resources*, 11, 35; Monsieur de Beauchamps, "Journal of Visit to the Choctaws," 1746, *Travels in the American Colonies*, 262-268; Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 163.

encouraged geographic movement and adaptive economies.⁵⁵ For example, in 1706 the Apalachees and Pensacolas fled to Mobile seeking refuge from a devastating barrage of Alabama and Coushatta raids and asked for resettlement.⁵⁶ While the Spanish accused the French of luring away their Indian allies in order to weaken the Spanish settlements in Florida and strengthen French power at Mobile, it is abundantly clear that European machinations had very little to do with this resettlement. When the Spanish Governor wrote to Bienville insisting that he “send back the four nations, Apalachees, Pensacolas, Choctaws, and Tawasas” Bienville explained that he was unable to do this, claiming that “I had never been the first to propose to these nations to come and take lands in our region; that it was the Indians who had come to represent to me that the lands about Pensacola were not good for anything.”⁵⁷ Rather, small Florida nations took advantage of the calumet refuge system and joint settlement practices at Mobile to escape Creek attacks. Like any other trade settlement, Mobile became a diplomatic and economic hub during the first decades of the eighteenth century.

Yet this new settlement and French alliance failed to immunize the Mobile River nations against raiders.⁵⁸ The Mobilians, Naniabas, and Tohomes hoped that a French settlement in their lands would deter these raiders and would give them access to a fort

⁵⁵ Joseph Zitomersky suggests that “Integration of native settlements into French structure of territorial occupation and settlement was a pragmatic response to the inadequacy of external connectivity that actually existed in the matter of food supply.” He emphasizes that French imperial designs pulled the petites nations into the Mobile region and into French trade networks rather than acknowledging French integration into Indigenous settlements and economies. Zitomersky, *French Americans- Native Americans*, 385.

⁵⁶ Shuck-Hall, “Alabama and Coushatta Diaspora and Coalescence in the Mississippian Shatter Zone,” in *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone*, 264-266.

⁵⁷ Bienville to Pontchartrain, 2/25/1708 *MPA:FD* 3:115. Here “Choctaws” is definitely a mis-spelling of “Chatots” a smaller nation of Indians who migrated to Mobile between 1704-1706 from Pensacola.

⁵⁸ Jay Higginbotham, *Old Mobile Fort St. Louis de la Louisiane* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991), 189-193, 216; Lankford, *Cultural Resources Reconnaissance*, 17, 45, 65-67.

and guns to defend themselves. Relocating the French base made the nations the primary supplier of provisions and thereby one of their closest allies, but it also carried significant risks. By allying themselves with the French the Mobilians Naniabas and Tohomes became antagonists of the British crown and thereby even more prime targets of the British allied Alabama raiders.⁵⁹

The French and Mobilians responded to attacks from Alabama and Chickasaw raiders with very different tactics. Similar to the Bayagoulas and Houmas, the French understood that their military reputation in the Lower Mississippi Valley was of the utmost importance. In 1704, two years after Koroas killed a French missionary, the Alabamas killed a French trader. The Governor of Louisiana, Jean-Baptiste LeMoyne, Sieur de Bienville (the brother of Iberville), understood that the expectation among the Indian nations would be that the French should raid an Alabama village and kill an Alabama as revenge for this attack.⁶⁰ If they did not, the French would risk looking weak and the nations might assume that they could kill Frenchmen with impunity or attempt to destroy them entirely.⁶¹

Bienville turned to the Mobilians for assistance in executing retribution on the Alabamas. His plan was to recruit Mobilans, Tohomes, and Choctaws to guide his sixty soldiers into Alabama territory and to attack their villages. After allowing the Native

⁵⁹ Bienville to Pontchartrain 6/6/1704, MPA: FD 3: 19.

⁶⁰ Jean Baptiste Lemoyne Sieur de Bienville served as the Governor of Louisiana four different times and for a total of thirty years during French tenure in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Although he was repeatedly accused of corruption and malfeasance in office, Bienville is largely considered to be Louisiana's most adept colonial governor. He held the office first from 1701-1713, then for a short stint from 1716-1717, again after a brief interlude from 1718-1725 and finally from 1733-1743. Duclos to Pontchartrain 6/17/1716, MPA: FD, 3: 205-211; *The Louisiana Governors: From Iberville to Edwards*, ed. Joseph G. Dawson III (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 7-17.

⁶¹ Bienville to Pontchartrain 2/25/1708, MPA: FD, 3: 113-114.

warriors several days to purify themselves for battle, Bienville and his troops and the one hundred and twenty Mobilians, Tohomes, and Choctaws set out in early June.⁶² Yet rather than assaulting the Alabama villages the Mobilians and Tohomes led the French soldiers east and then in circles until the Choctaws grew tired and began to abandon the mission. Bienville became concerned that the Mobilians and Tohomes were leading them into a trap and he ordered the remainder of the party to return to Mobile. In reporting back to his superior, however, Bienville suggested that the Alabamas were so frightened by the approach of the French forces that pursuing the matter further would hardly be worthwhile.⁶³

Rather than sabotaging the French, the Mobilians were attempting to protect both their own people and their French allies from a potentially disastrous political blunder. While the French records contain no explicit explanation of the Mobilians and Tohomes decisions to thwart the French efforts to seek revenge against the Alabamas several factors would have made it extremely unlikely that the Mobilians would want to attack the Alabamas. First, the Mobilians likely understood better than the French the repercussions of beginning a full-scale war against the Alabamas. In 1700 the three nations that would later join to form the Upper Creeks—the Alabamas, Tallapoosas and Abhikas—had upwards of 10,000 people in their towns while the Mobilians, Naniabas, and Tohomes together numbered only about 1,225. With this population the Alabamas were able to send raiding parties of 600-700 men to attack the Mobilians. French estimates suggest that the Mobilians, Naniabas, and Tohomes together could muster only

⁶² la Harpe, *Historical Journal*, 46.

⁶³ Bienville to Pontchartrain 6/6/1704, MPA: FD 3: 20-22; Peter J. Hamilton, *Colonial Mobile*, 65.

about 600 warriors in 1699 and only about 350 warriors by 1702.⁶⁴ Furthermore, as they journeyed to the Alabamas alongside the French soldiers, many of the Mobilians and Tohomes became direly ill. During this mission the French transmitted a deadly “plague” to their Indian allies that forced many of them to abandon the mission and return home.⁶⁵ In addition, the Alabamas also had far more firearms than the French forces as their trade with the British gave them ready access to guns. Finally, the Mobilians had kin among the Alabamas. Likely these relations were Mobilians who had been taken in Alabama raids and incorporated into Alabama society.⁶⁶ Perhaps they feared that an assault on the Alabamas might have dire consequences for the captive Mobilians that the Alabamas maintained among their villages.

Even though the Mobilians did not want to attack the Alabamas, they also realized that outright refusal of the French request for military support could jeopardize their relationship with the French. So while they superficially agreed to the French plans, they also devised strategies that allowed them to pursue their own interests. In fact, this failed

⁶⁴ Higginbotham, *Mobile Indians*, 80; Wood, “The Changing Population,” 74; Margry *Découvertes et Établissements des Français dans l’ouest et dans le sud de l’Amérique Septentrionale* (Paris, D. Jouaust, 1880), 4: 602; Usner *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 19-20.

⁶⁵ Although other scholars have suggested that this plague may have been yellow fever, Paul Kelton suggests that this is unlikely given the longer incubation period before the Mobilians and Tohomes began to exhibit symptoms. In any event, this “plague” was absolutely devastating for the Mobilian and Tohome communities. When their sick warriors returned home they spread the illness among their villages and “almost annihilated” their entire nation. Kelton, *Epidemics and Enslavement*, 191. Years later, when Bienville recorded this expedition in his memoir he recalled that the 1704 plague had reduced this nation by roughly ninety percent. He estimates that in that year the smaller Tohome settlement, called the “Little Tohomes” lost 270 out of their 300 warriors. “Bienville’s memoir of Louisiana 1725-1726,” MPA:FD 3:537; Higginbotham, *Old Mobile*, 201.

⁶⁶ It is difficult to determine whether these kin arrived among the Alabamas voluntarily or as the spoils of captive raiding. However, considering the almost continuous conflict between the Alabamas and Tohomes, and the Mobilian, Tohome and Naniaba’s connections to the Choctaws, it is unlikely that these family members were in the villages voluntarily.

raid not only preserved the two nations' friendship but it also allowed the French to save face by having mounted a revenge attack and the Mobilians to avoid attacking their kin.

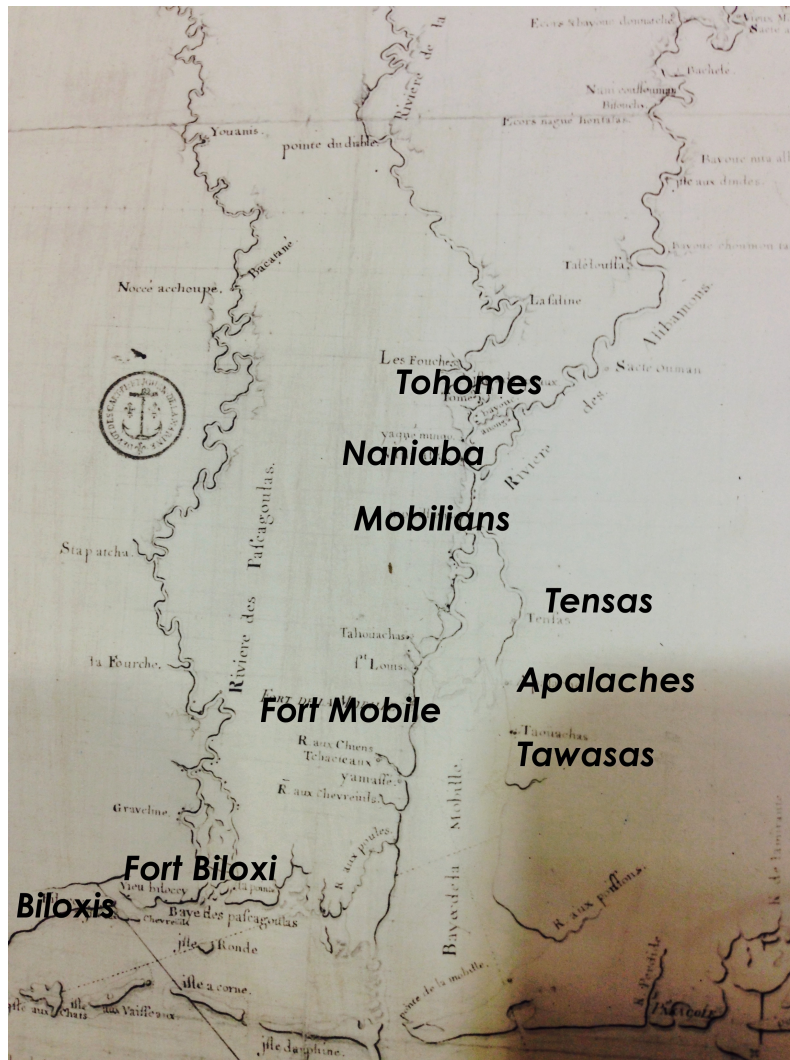


Figure 6- Map of Mobile Bay Settlements⁶⁷

Kinship, Captives, and Violence in Joint Settlements near Mobile

The same violent and unstable environment that forced many groups to seek refuge in and near Mobile in the early eighteenth century also fostered challenging cross-cultural kinship relations. The dual phenomenon of heavy captive raiding within the

⁶⁷ Map Detail from 1740 of the Mobile and Mississippi Rivers. Broutin, "Carte particulière d'une partie de la Louisianne," 1740, Louis C. Karpinski Map Collection, Newberry Library.

Lower Mississippi Valley and the popularity of temporary multi-national refugee settlements meant that petites nations peoples developed not only extensive alliance networks but also expansive kinship connections. When kinship and alliance obligations were at odds the friction between trying to mediate these two sets of priorities sometimes resulted in violence.

Unfortunately for the Mobilians, their French alliance did very little make them less appealing targets for captive raiders. While the French attempted to build a relationship with the Alabamas, they were largely unsuccessful. The French were unable to offer the Alabamas more attractive trade terms than their British neighbors to the east, and so the Alabamas saw no benefit to allying with the Louisiana settlers. In 1708 two Mobilians fled from Alabama villages to warn their families and the French of an imminent Alabama attack. Likely these two Mobilians were captives who had been integrated into Alabama society. Despite the warning, the Alabamas captured 30 Mobilian women and children. If alliance with the French did not deter raiders, it at least provided the Mobilians with additional manpower to exact retribution for these raids. While the Mobilians may not have been willing to risk open war with the Alabamas over the deaths of French traders, their own people were a completely different matter. Following this dreadful assault on their villages, the Mobilians turned to the French to help them carry out a retaliatory raid on the retreating Alabamas. Although this French and Mobilian coalition was unable to retrieve the lost women and children they managed to kill 30 and capture 5 Alabama prisoners, whom they turned over to the Mobilians. The

families of the lost Mobilian women and children then tortured and burned the Alabama captives in their villages, exacting revenge for their lost relations.⁶⁸

The importance of kinship in shaping these early interactions cannot be overlooked. While boundaries and military prestige fueled violence in the Lower Mississippi Valley, the high incidences of captivity and joint settlements complicated political relationships between peoples. Much as kin connections between the Mobilians and the Alabamas may have reduced the willingness of Mobilians to attack Alabama villages, kinship could also be a powerful motivator toward violence.

In addition to creating conflicts with foreign nations, the threat of losing one's kin sometimes also led to the fracturing of political alliances between allies. In early 1706 the French soldiers at Fort Mobile were starving. Yet again chronic food shortages forced them to depend on the generosity of their allies and Bienville instructed his men to go out to Indian villages near Mobile and take refuge there until the French were again able to support them. André Penicaut, a carpenter stationed at the fort, took three men and went to live with the Nassitoches and Acolapissas further west on the banks of Lake Pontchartrain. The year before, the Nassitoches had come to Mobile seeking temporary resettlement in the region. Heavy rains in 1705 had flooded their homelands on the Red River and destroyed their harvest and so they sought refuge with the Acolapissas. In 1706 the Acolapissas again accepted refugees when they took in Penicaut and his three companions at Mobile. Penicaut came bearing gifts to help smooth this process of incorporation to both show respect to the village leaders and reinforce the value of French

⁶⁸ Bienville to Pontchartrain, 8/20/1709 MPA: FD, 3:136; Bienville to Pontchartrain 2/25/1708, MPA:FD, 3: 113-114, Higginbotham, *Old Mobile*, 358; Hamilton, *Colonial Mobile*, 63.

partnership. On his first night in the village Penicaut presented the Acolapissa chief and the Nassitoches chief and his daughter with gifts of beautiful cloth brocaded with pink and green flowers. The Acolapissas made it clear that the Nassitoches and French refugees were welcome as their guests, and the Nassitoches chief who hosted Penicaut in his home stressed that the Acolapissas chief occupied the most prestigious position in his village.⁶⁹

Penicaut loved his time with the Nassitoches and Acolapissas. In comparison to the time he spent starving with his fellow soldiers, he relished the attention of the Nassitoches and Acolapissas women and the consistent diet of boiled corn porridge and game. He passed his year among the nations hunting, teaching French to the Nassitoches chief's daughters Oulchogonime and Ouilchil , and instructing the two nations on the proper form for dancing minuets. Penicaut described the Nassitoches women as lovely. In contrast to the Acolapissa women, whom he considered disfigured from their extensive tattooing, he found the unmarked skin of Nassitoches women very attractive. Likewise, he enjoyed the company of the Nassitoches and Acolapissa men. Penicaut recorded that the men of both tribes were great comedians and he exclaimed that on numerous occasions their antics around the campfire had him and his French compatriots nearly dying of laughter. When he had to leave in 1707 he lamented that he would miss the affections of these peoples but that he would be comforted by the French wine.⁷⁰

In 1712 Penicaut was reassigned to travel to the Nassitoches and Acolapissa village in order to help the Nassitoches travel back to their homelands on the Red River.

⁶⁹ Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 106-108.

⁷⁰ Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 106-115.

He had been instructed to establish a French post alongside their village so that the French could expand their trade networks west into the Caddoan territory. By 1712 their homelands had dried and the French hoped that the Nassitoches would be able to facilitate their integration into the western economic exchange. The Nassitoches agreed to return and reunite with the portions of their nation that had opted to remain in small groups in their homelands rather than seek refuge near Mobile. The Nassitoches gathered their things and bid their hosts farewell.

Yet the Acolapissas were unwilling to let the French rip their families apart. Penicaut indicated that everything went as planned until the moment that the Nassitoches were ready to leave. Then, suddenly, the Acolapissas fell with furor on their departing guests. They quickly killed seventeen Nassitoches men and captured more than fifty women and children. The Nassitoches who managed to escape fled to the surrounding woods and hid. Penicaut watched in horror and then fled the village himself. Ultimately he was able to reconnect with some of the Nassitoches who had escaped this attack and he and the much-reduced group traveled north.⁷¹

Although the French were shocked by this sudden attack, Penicaut's account makes clear that the Acolapissas assaulted the Nassitoches primarily in an effort to maintain their relationships with their female kin. By 1712 the Nassitoches had lived alongside the Acolapissas for six years and it is evident that the Acolapissas men shared intimate relations with the Nassitoches women and likely fathered children. Thus, when the Nassitoches threatened to leave and sever these kin ties, "the Colapissas were seized with jealousy or, rather, with rage. Seeing that the Nassitoches women, too, were leaving

⁷¹ Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Cahumet*, 145-146.

and were going away with their husbands, they fell upon the Nassitoches with blows of guns, arrows, and hatchets.”⁷² Although many of these Nassitoches women had Nassitoches partners, the Acolapissas clearly felt that it was their right to keep these women and their children and that the French plan for relocation threatened to destroy their families.

Although it is evident that mass killings and surprise attacks were effective tactics to break decaying partnerships at multi-ethnic villages, these attacks could also be an effective way of forcing amalgamation between nations and preventing another nation from leaving. Like many of the tribes east of the river, the Acolapissas had been hard hit by Chickasaw raiders and likely had already lost a disproportionate number of women and children to the captive trade.⁷³ It is unclear whether Penicaut understood that he was asking the Acolapissas to give up their lovers, wives, and children, but he certainly did not believe their response was acceptable.

Penicaut recorded that the French were furious at the Acolapissas for this attack and swore that the French “intended to take revenge” for this slaughter at some later date.⁷⁴ Yet this day of reckoning never came and it seems that the French were unable to force the Acolapissas to return these women and children. Perhaps the French calculated that they could also fall prey to the Acolapissa if they wronged them, perhaps they too

⁷² Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 146.

⁷³ Shortly before the Acolapissas first met the French in 1699, they had suffered a terrible raid by British and Chickasaw slavers. These raiders burned two of the Acolapissas’ towns and took fifty women and children. The Acolapissas consolidated their six towns and moved off the Pearl River to the east bank of the Mississippi, about 45 miles north of present day New Orleans. Some of the Acolapissas also sought refuge independently with the Bayagoulas. By 1702 the Acolapissas had only 250 families in their settlement. Kelton, *Epidemics and Enslavement* 192-193; la Harpe, *Historical Journal*, 14; Margry, *Découvertes*, 4: 429, 602.

⁷⁴ Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 146.

desperately needed to support of the Acolapissa to support their settlement at Mobile, or perhaps they simply could not find an opportunity. Whatever their rationale, the French were unable to avenge this wrong and found that they needed to adjust their plans for the Nassitoches settlement as the result of this conflict.

The Great Nations of the Lower Mississippi Valley Circa 1700

While the little nations at Mobile and along the gulf coast were adapting to joint settlements with the French newcomers, the larger nations of the Lower Mississippi Valley underwent a series of substantial political and demographic shifts that radically altered the geopolitical landscape of the region. Beyond forcing uncomfortable alliances and chasing tens of thousands of peoples from their homelands, the rise of the southeastern Indian slave trade had massive repercussions for the political structures of the southeast.

Through their partnerships with British traders, the Upper Creeks and the Chickasaws became two of the best-armed and most formidable forces in the region. Both peoples first contacted the British during the 1680s as Charlestown began to develop as a regional trade center, but this partnership affected their national political and social development differently. While the Chickasaws rapidly evolved into a cohesive militaristic slaving society, the peoples who later became known as the Creeks did not develop a strong national identity until later in the eighteenth century. Rather, throughout the late seventeenth and first decades of the eighteenth century, Creek, British, and French observers identified Muskhogean peoples by their towns. Town political and social affiliations formed the basis of Creek identity. While local organization remained

the most important, Creek involvement in the slave trade encouraged Muskogean peoples of different villages to settle in close proximity and jointly participate in diplomacy and military encounters with outsiders. During the 1680s and 1690s people of Alabama, Coweta, Tallapoosa, Apalachee and other towns negotiated together and these external relationships provided the foundations for Creek national identity.⁷⁵ Yet in practice, Creek peoples remained loosely organized throughout the 1700s and 1710s.

Therefore, the French and petites nations peoples near Mobile negotiated with individual towns, not with the Creek nation as a whole. During the first decades of the eighteenth century the French, Mobilians, Naniabas, Tohomes, Capinans, Biloxis, and Moctoby were primarily concerned with developing alliances or strong military reputations that would discourage Alabama attacks—the Creek town located most closely to Mobile. Despite their best efforts, the Alabamas heavily raided the petites nations at Mobile during the 1700s. This threatened not just the livelihoods of the petites nations, but also the stability of the French settlement. Farther west, the lower Creek towns hammered the petites nations along the gulf coast in Florida. To block Spanish expansion from their settlements at Pensacola, British officials encouraged their native allies to raid the small settlements of Native peoples who lived along the Spanish missions in Northern Florida, and indeed in the 1690s and 1700s Creek raiders brutally assaulted the settlements of Pensacolas, Apalachees, Talawas, and other small coastal polities. This

⁷⁵ Shuck-Hall, “Alabama and Coushatta Diaspora and Coalescence in the Mississippian Shatter Zone,” *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone*, 258-267; Michael D. Green, *The Politics of Indian Removal: Creek Government and Society in Crisis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 14; Kathryn E. Holland Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America: 1685-1815* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 5-8.

constant threat of harassment by Creek raiders drove the petites nations to cluster near Mobile for protection, prevented French expansion out east from Mobile until the late 1710s and depopulated the northern border of Spanish settlements in Florida.⁷⁶

Further north and west, Chickasaw raiding also forced geographic and political changes within the Choctaw nation. By 1702 Chickasaw raiding had forced the Choctaws to consolidate their people into closely placed towns and surround their villages with fortified outposts. Unlike the Chickasaws, who had secured access to European firearms via their British trade partners, in 1700 firearms were sparse among the Choctaws. Thus, although they numbered at least 17,500 in 1700, or roughly two and a half times the size of the Chickasaws, they struggled to defend their people. However, although they had difficulty warding off Chickasaw raiding parties, and they were very loosely politically linked in 1700, the Choctaws were unequivocally the most powerful nation in the region. Their sheer number and the breadth of political and economic connections they held to the other nations of the region made them fearsome enemies even without access to guns.⁷⁷

The Natchez were smaller and much more socially stratified than the Choctaws, but they too exerted regional influence. Located south and west of the Choctaws near the present day location of Natchez Mississippi, the Natchez nation was organized along a strict social and political hierarchy with strong centralized leadership. The Natchez were governed by a class of ruling elite who they called the great “Suns,” in reference to their

⁷⁶ Steven C. Hahn, *The Invention of the Creek Nation 1670-1763* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 42-43, 52, 73.

⁷⁷ Patricia K. Galloway, “Choctaws at the Border of the Shatter Zone: Spheres of Exchange and Spheres of Social Value,” *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone*, 333-356; Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 197-201, 219, 236.

celestial heritage and power. These elites exercised political authority in a way that was extremely rare in the Lower Mississippi Valley and which greatly impressed the French, who saw echoes of their own Sun King in the Natchez rulers.

In 1700 the Natchez were already recalling their former glory days and seemed poised on the brink of destruction. In the 1690s the Natchez were hit by waves of disease and their people died in enormous numbers. In the 1710s Natchez elders recalled a time before the arrival of the French when their nation had 1,900 Suns and more than 200,000 people. Sometime shortly before the arrival of the French, the Natchez abandoned the primary ceremonial and political center of their nation, the Emerald site. Perhaps they were forced to leave this mound complex to retreat further south and west to escape slave raiders, or perhaps internal conflict led to a political and geographic reorganization. Either way, this move indicates that the Natchez were in the middle of political turmoil and restructuring during the late seventeenth century.⁷⁸ By 1698 the Natchez had plummeted to just 3,500 spread among five villages along the Mississippi River. They watched the onslaught of slave raiders and waves of migrations of refugee nations into the region, and sought to develop a plan to protect their people from a similar fate. In 1699 the Natchez made peace with some of their oldest enemies in an effort to gain the alliance of the French. Throughout the 1700s and 1710s the Natchez attempted to balance alliances with the Tunicas, Koroas, Yazooos, Tensas, Chitimachas, Chickasaws, British,

⁷⁸ Ian W. Brown, "An Archaeological Study of Culture Contact and Change in the Natchez Bluffs Region," *La Salle and His Legacy* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi), 179-184; George Edward Milne, *Natchez Country: Indians, Colonists, and the Landscapes of Race in French Louisiana* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 33-35.

and French and capitalize on political and economic opportunities by slave raiding, captive trading, and offering refuge to nations displaced by the slave wars.⁷⁹

Conclusion

The escalation of the southeastern Indian slave trade and the onslaught of epidemics at the turn of the eighteenth century substantially altered the geopolitical landscape of the Lower Mississippi Valley. Chickasaw and proto-Creek raids on petites nations settlements along the gulf led these nations to seek new alliances and to increasingly rely on the greater security of joint settlements. These pressures also led them to enthusiastically incorporate French newcomers into their networks.

Although they were vulnerable to foreign raiders, on a local level, petites nations exercised significant power and their relationships shaped the lives of all the peoples along the Mobile and Mississippi Rivers. During the first two decades of French settlement along the gulf coast, they forced the Louisiana colonists to adapt to their customs and politics. Despite their stately rhetoric and claims to their superiors, Louisiana officials largely failed to counteract the prevailing image of French weakness among the Indigenous nations of the Lower Mississippi Valley. Their endeavors were thwarted by Mobilian and Acolapissa priorities, and the murders of French travelers went un-avenged in the province. The French struggled with the terms of their relationships with even their steadfast allies, as the Tunicas forged connections to France's enemies, and the Bayagoulas forced them to accept uncomfortable cultural expectations. Thus, within the first decade of their settlement, Louisiana's officials began to look for ways to

⁷⁹ Milne, *Natchez Country*, 15-44.

improve their political and military reputation within the region, and demonstrate to their Native neighbors that they too could exploit the power of their many new relationships.

3

Enslaving their Allies: Petites Nations Slaves in French Settlements 1700-1720

“The sun was red, the roads filled with brambles and thorns, the clouds were black, the water was troubled and stained with blood, our women wept unceasingly, our children cried with fright, the game fled from us, our houses were abandoned, and our fields uncultivated, we all have empty bellies and our bones are visible.”¹

In 1718 an elderly Chitimacha diplomat recalled the previous decade with horror. Since 1706 his people had been at war with the French and their Native allies and they were desperate for peace. He explained that his community was devastated, hungry, grieving, and eager to put an end to the conflict. As he spoke, he recalled the hundreds of Chitimachas that had died in the conflict, the hundreds more that fled to seek refuge with other nations, and his many kin whom the French held enslaved at New Orleans, Mobile, and Natchez. Like so many of the petites nations, the Chitimachas had initially hoped that the arrival of the French might stop the rampant violence of the Indian slave trade. In 1699 the Chitimachas were among the first to share a calumet pipe with the French newcomers and to discuss a trade and diplomatic relationship. Yet within just a few years their hopes for a peaceful partnership had been shattered.

Much of the scholarship on the petites nations has emphasized their close relationships to the French newcomers and support for early Louisiana colonists. In

¹ Excerpt from a speech from a Chitimacha “word-bearer” to Governor Bienville in 1718. In this speech the roads “filled with thorns and brambles” likely refers to the method that petites nations peoples used of defending their forts. When they feared attacks from outsiders they would strew brambles and thorns across the openings of the palisades that surrounded their villages in order to slow the entrance of attackers. Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 133, 341.

recent years historians of the Lower Mississippi Valley have emphasized the importance of the economic exchange between settlers at Mobile and New Orleans and the surrounding Native nations.² Through diplomacy, joint settlement, military support, and trade partnerships, nations like the Tunicas and Bayagoulas used the French to protect their people. Although some petites nations developed advantageous political and economic relationships with the French, not all had such positive interactions with the newcomers. Many nations, including the Houmas, Tohomes, and Nassitoches, had more mixed experiences incorporating the French into their alliance networks. While French alliance brought them trade opportunities, it did little to protect their nations from other raiders, and French colonists spread devastating European diseases throughout the Lower Mississippi region. Overall these nations perceived the French as a necessary if unpleasant ally and continued to court other powerful nations.

Few nations had as fraught relationships with the French newcomers as the Chitimachas and Tensas. During the 1700s and 1710s both struggled tremendously to protect their people against slave raiders, and assaults by enemy Indian nations drove both to seek relationships with the French settlers. Yet despite their alliances with the French, significant numbers of Tensas and Chitimachas ended up in bondage by the very allies they had hoped would protect them.

² Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 20-50, 60-65; Khalil Saadani, "Gift Exchange Between the French and Native Americans in Louisiana," *French Colonial Louisiana and the Atlantic World*, ed. Bradley G. Bond (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005) 43-61; Shannon Lee Dawdy, "A Wild Taste: Food and Colonialism in Eighteenth Century Louisiana" *Ethnohistory* (2010) 57:3, 397; Gregory A. Waselkov, *Old Mobile Archaeology* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1999), 39-45; Rob Mann, "Persistent Pots, Durable Kettles, and the Colonial Discourse: Aboriginal Pottery Production in the French Colonial Basse Louisiane and pays d'en haut" *Rethinking Colonial Pasts Through Archaeology*, ed. Neil Harris (Oxford: Oxford, 2014), 276-278; Charles N. Elliot, "A Geography of Power: French and Indian Alliances on the Southeast Louisiana Frontier," *Fierce and Fractious Frontier*, ed. Samuel C. Hyde Jr. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 27-37.

In addition to demonstrating the varying success of petites nations' alliances with French Louisiana, the experiences of the Tensas and Chitimachas also challenge French claims that they did not promote Indian slavery among their people. During the early years of the Louisiana settlement the French officials repeatedly insisted to their Indian allies that they did not deal in allied slaves and that the French king was their true friend. However in practice, the demand for labor from French colonists at Mobile, Biloxi, and New Orleans led Louisiana officials to turn to Indian captives to fulfill these demands and even to go so far as to enslave their allies, the Chitimachas and Tensas.

Labor Shortages and French Policy —Enslaving Native Americans

In 1702 Governor Bienville wrote to his superior in France with an urgent request for women. He reasoned that 100 young women of good quality and strong moral character would be an adequate amount to support the colony at Mobile. The first ships of explorers had not included any women, and colonial officials were concerned about the deleterious effects of the lack of female presence, specifically the lack of a labor force to do the feminine labor of washing and cooking.³ Yet the first group of French women did not arrive in Louisiana until 1704, and then only twenty-one women came, rather than the requested 100.⁴ Similarly, by 1706 Louisiana settlers were vociferously demanding that the French government send African slaves to the colony to help with the labor shortage and to establish plantations. Much as these French officials reasoned that they needed women to do the work of domestic labor, French settlers believed that African bodies

³ Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order*, 20.

⁴ Allain, *Not Worth a Straw*, 84-87; Higginbotham, *Old Mobile*, 143, 163.

were more suited to the grueling labor of clearing fields and establishing farms, another set of tasks these men did not want to do themselves. Again, the French crown processed their requests slowly and incompletely. The first Africans did not arrive in Louisiana until 1709 and they remained extremely scarce until the 1720s.⁵

During the early years of the colony the French made efforts to find sources of labor, yet they were unable to procure enough for their most basic needs. Although they relied heavily on their petites nations allies to help them with this labor shortage, the services rendered by their Mobile, Tohome, Biloxi and other allies did not fulfill their domestic needs, and the settlers quickly tired of having to negotiate on Native terms. French men were accustomed to work outside of their homes and to have female family members take care of their basic domestic needs. During the eighteenth century, cooking, laundry, and housekeeping required a tremendous investment of labor and time. Yet most of the first settlers in Louisiana were single French men. The 1708 census of the Louisiana colony recorded that the colony had only 180 men bearing arms, 27 French families, and 60 French backwoodsmen who lived within Indian villages. If we assume that each family had one man, that would leave 153 men who were of age to bear arms who did not have female relatives. Even if we assume that the men who lived at Native

⁵ Three years after they issued this request, in 1712, there were a mere twenty enslaved Africans in colonial Louisiana. The numbers of African slaves remained extremely low until 1719, when the transition of the title of Louisiana to Scottish financier John Law increased French investment and attention to Louisiana. Yet the continual inability of the French settlers to provide for themselves took devastating tolls on Louisiana's enslaved black population. During the first three decades of French settlement, more than half of the enslaved Africans in the colony died within several years of their arrival from sickness, starvation, and abuse. Although between 1719 and 1721 more than 2,000 Africans arrived in Louisiana, by November of 1721 there were only 680 Africans still alive in the colony. This pattern continued throughout the next decade as well. In total, between 1719 and 1735 more than 7,000 enslaved Africans arrived in Louisiana. By 1735 there were only 3,400 of these bondsmen and their children left alive and an untold number more died on slave ships traveling to the colony. Daniel H. Usner Jr., "From African Captivity to American Slavery: The Introduction of Black Laborers to Colonial Louisiana," in *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History: The French Experience in Louisiana* (Lafayette, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1995), 183-197; Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order*, 54-57.

villages had some form of access to female laborers that would still leave 93 French men without any female kin or servants. Besides highlighting the geographic limitations of the French empire this census highlights a tremendous gender disparity and provides insight into the labor crunch that shaped early relationships with local nations.⁶

This shortage of women during the 1700s and 1710s led the French to embrace the southeastern Indian captive trade and occasionally to conduct slave and captive raids against their allies. Ultimately, French needs for labor and their willingness to employ violence to secure servitude led to the development of a spectrum of coercive, slave, and wage-based Indigenous labor within Louisiana. In 1708 there were a total of 279 French settlers in Louisiana, not including the men living at Indian villages, and 80 Indian slaves. Nearly a third —roughly 29%— of the colonial populations at Mobile and Biloxi were enslaved Native peoples.⁷

Despite this tremendous gender imbalance, during the first decade of French settlement the enslaved Native population of French Louisiana was predominantly male. Early Louisiana censuses indicate that between 1702 and 1711 French settlers held 103

⁶ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 25-27; “Census of Louisiana by Nicolas de la Salle,” 1708, MPA: FD, 2:19.

⁷ As imported Africans gradually became more available in the French colony during the 1720s, the numbers of enslaved Indian men and women began to equalize, with enslaved Native women slightly outnumbering men. By the second half of the 1720s, the increased importation of African slaves into colonial Louisiana resulted in far less demand for Indian captives. The 1721 census of Louisiana lists 161 Indian slaves and 680 African slaves. Five years later, the census from 1726 lists the colony as having 159 Indian slaves, suggesting no increase in the number of Native laborers, while the number of African slaves had nearly tripled to 1,385. However the number of unfree native laborers was likely higher than this figure as census takers often did not include *couriers du bois* (French traders who lived in the backwoods) and therefore did not count captive Native women who had “married” their captors. Kathleen DuVal, “Indian Intermarriage and *Métissage* in Colonial Louisiana” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (2008), 273; Gallay, *The Indian Slave Trade*, 310-311; “Census of Louisiana by Nicolas de la Salle,” 1708, MPA FD, 2: 19-20; Juliana Barr, “Captives to Slaves: Commodifying Indian Women in the Borderlands” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 92, No. 1 (2005), 29; Carl J. Ekberg, *Stealing Indian Women: Native Slavery in the Illinois Country* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 14-21.

American Indian men and 80 American Indian women as slaves. This means that just over 56% of Indians slaves at Mobile were male. Enslaved Africans did not arrive in Louisiana until 1709, and between then and 1711 there were only 11 African slaves of both sexes at Mobile, so almost all of the slave labor during this era was performed by Native peoples. This gender imbalance may be surprising, as most studies of enslaved Native peoples in European settlements in North America have focused on the role of women in these early settlements. Yet this high number of enslaved men suggests that the immediate needs of French settlers were less for domestic labor than for traditionally male jobs. Enslaved Indian men served as guides, hunters, and interpreters. Native men performed the backbreaking work needed to build the infrastructure of colonial Mobile and New Orleans and labored on French habitants plantations as they attempted to scrape a living out of the muddy delta.⁸

⁸ The exact numbers of male and female slaves in Louisiana are unclear in part because census takers did not always include the same areas of Louisiana in their records, and so it is difficult to determine if this gender ratio remained consistent throughout French tenure in Louisiana. The census of 1727, for example, includes only the settlements of Louisiana between New Orleans and Pointe Coupee (it does not count either Biloxi or Mobile or the small settlements in that region) and it lists only 75 Indian slaves. Likewise the census of 1731 only includes settlements along the Lower Mississippi River below Pointe Coupee. In 1731, these settlements are recorded as containing only 47 Indian slaves, and they are not differentiated by sex. The few records that do differentiate Indian slaves based on sex may indicate that in many regions the ration of male to female enslaved Indians remained roughly equal throughout the century. However, the numbers are too sparse to draw any definitive conclusions. For example, in 1745 the census of Pointe Coupee indicates that there were nine enslaved Indian men and eleven enslaved Indian women. In 1763, in the very last census to include Indian slaves as a separate category, French officials counted 29 enslaved Indian men and 31 enslaved Indian women. Yet because of the incentive not to identify Native slaves as Indians, these totals do not accurately represent the gender spread of enslaved Indians in colonial Louisiana. In 1763 Spain gained possession of Louisiana. Under Spanish rule, the enslavement of Native peoples was prohibited, and in 1769 the Spanish Governor of Louisiana outlawed Indian slavery. This decree prohibited the enslavement of additional Indian people, and opened the avenue to legal manumission to enslaved Indians who could prove their Native descent in Spanish court. However, in 1790 the Spanish government suspended the ability of slaves of Native decent to bring legal petitions for emancipation to court because their emancipation and their manumissions would be financially disastrous for many of the plantation owners in Louisiana. For more on the significance of these emancipations in the Pointe Coupee region see Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *African in Colonial Louisiana*. Historian Stephen Webre estimates that there were roughly 230 enslaved Indians at the times of the cession although these Native people quickly disappeared from the Spanish censuses after transition. For example, in the census of the French Pointe Coupee settlement listed 20 Indian Slaves in 1745 and 12 Indian slaves in 1763. Six years later, the Spanish census takers recorded that there was not a single Native slave at Pointe Coupee. In 1764, at the time of the

While enslaved Native men facilitated French relationships with other nations in the backcountry, enslaved Native women played crucial roles in sustaining the nascent French settlements around Mobile. Enslaved women washed, cleaned, mended clothes, and prepared food for French men. In addition to expecting enslaved Native women to perform this multitude of household chores, many French men also expected them to perform all of the duties of French wives including sex. Indian women enslaved at French settlements were coerced to have sex with their French masters so often that early observers labeled them as the wives or concubines of their French masters because of the assumption of sexual relationships.⁹

These intimate relationships scandalized French priests who passed through the region. In 1708 a traveling priest wrote back to his superior in France urging him to

transition, the Governor of New Orleans remarked that “we have in the colony many Indian slaves who like the negroes are subject to sale.” Thus although the exact numbers of enslaved Indians within Louisiana are uncertain, the legal and anecdotal evidence overwhelmingly suggests that there were a considerable number of enslaved Native people in the colony throughout the entire eighteenth century. Bill Baron, *Census of Pointe Coupee Louisiana, 1745* (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1978), 18-21; Jaqueline K. Voorhies, *Some Late Eighteenth-Century Louisianans, Census Records, 1758-1796* (Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1973); Charles, Maduell, *The Census Tables for the French Colony of Louisiana from 1699-1732* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co. Inc., 1972), 81; Stephen Webre, “The Problem of Indian Slavery in Spanish Louisiana, 1769-1803,” *Louisiana History*, vol. 25, no. 2 (1984), 117-135; “Segun los padrones del año 1769 en los papeles remitidos por el Estimado Señor O’Reilly...”- Combined Censuses of 1769 and 1777, legajo 2359, Special Collections, Newberry Library, Chicago; Jean-Jacques Blaise D’Abbadie to Minister, 1/10/1764, *The Critical Period*, ed. Clarence W. Alvord & Clarence E. Carter (Springfield: Trustees of the Illinois State Historical Library, 1915); “Proceedings Instituted by Pedro Morsu and Baptista Borguinon (Morsu) to prove that they are mestee Indians in order to Obtain their Emancipation,” 1/26/1790, no. 2369, file 216, Spanish Judicial Records, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum Collections, New Orleans; India Mariana v. Francisca Pomet, 1/13/1791, no. 2677, file 35, box 62, Spanish Judicial Records, Louisiana Historical Center; “Diligencia practicada por Pedro Morsu, Yndio Mestizo, sobre que los herederos del difuna Don Francisco Cruzat le otorizen su libertad,” 5/4/1790, no. 2491, file 156, box 58, Spanish Judicial Records, Louisiana Historical Center; Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 336-340; Thomas de Acosta to Unzaga y Amezaga, 8/25/1775, legajo 2357, 1-2, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Library of Congress; Assistant Attorney General vs. Baptiste Sauvage, 11/9/1765, no. 1901, Superior Council Records, Louisiana Historical Center, Louisiana State Museum Collections, New Orleans.

⁹ Waselkov, *Old Mobile Archaeology*, 38, 46; La Mothe Cadillac to Pontchartrain 10/26/1713, MPA:FD 2: 169; Bienville to Pontchartrain 2/25/1708, MPA:FD, 3:124; Abstracts of letter from Cadillac, Diron, and Bienville to Crozat 10/1713, MPA:FD, 3:176-178; Ekberg, *Stealing Indian Women*, 29.

outlaw these types of relationships. He lamented that Governor Bienville's familiarity with an Indian women had scandalized the entire colony. Overwhelmingly, priests like La Vente found these relationships unhealthy and unholy.¹⁰ They believed that only a married man and woman should live under one roof and that these Indian women were having deleterious effects on the French soldiers by living in unlawful intimacy and replacing French wives. Some French officials too were deeply disturbed by these relationships and their implications for the colony. They worried that the children of Indian women and French settlers would not be ideal settlers for Louisiana, as they would have questionable loyalty to the French king. One official even prophesied with horror that if relationships between settlers and Indian women were permitted to continue "the colony would become a colony of half-breeds who are naturally idlers, libertine, and even greater rascals, as those of Peru, Mexico, and the other Spanish colonies."¹¹ These moralizing officials urged the Company of the West to send French women as quickly as possible to offset these dangerous relations. As one French official remarked in 1712, without European women they would be hopeless to prevent this illicit sex, and the settlers would continue to engage in relationships with Native women because "the Indian women are easy. The climate is stimulating, and they are young men for the most part Canadians, that is to say very vigorous."¹²

Yet these officials and priests represented the minority of opinions of the subject. Both Governor Bienville and the French settlers realized that they could not survive

¹⁰ Jean Delanglez, *The French Jesuits in lower Louisiana* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 1935), 393-398.

¹¹ Delanglez, *French Jesuits*, 398.

¹² Memoire of D'Artaguet to Pontchartrain, 9/8/1712, MPA: FD, 2: 72.

without female labor, and so they turned to purchasing enslaved native women to satisfy their needs. Evidently, many of the French soldiers had sexual as well as labor relationships with their female slaves and these relationships produced a wealth of children.¹³ In 1716 Governor of Louisiana Antoine de la Mothe Sieur de Cadillac complained to the superior council about the extent of these immoral relationships. As he reported, “all except for Sieur Blondel and the newcomers have Indian women as slaves who are always with child or nursing” suggesting that this sexual exploitation was ubiquitous. By September of 1716 anxiety about unhealthy relationships forced the French council to permit marriages between Catholic Indian women and French men.¹⁴

The creation of new legislation to regulate Indian slavery in Louisiana was designed not only to satisfy the moral qualms of French priests and officials, but to address French concerns about the very legality of enslaving Indigenous peoples within the colony. In 1709 Indian slavery was formerly legalized in New France and Louisiana. As is evident, this ordinance did not create the trade in Indian slaves through the French colonies, but rather sought to regulate an already widespread practice. As within Lower Louisiana, in the Illinois country, and in the interior of New France, in many cases Native peoples sought to solidify trade relationships with the French via gifts of Indian captives. French officials worried that if the legal status of these captives remained ambiguous the *couriers du bois* would be inclined to sell these captives to the English, thereby destabilizing French claims into the continental interior.¹⁵

¹³ Bienville to Pontchartrain, 2/25/1708 MPA: FD, 3:124; DuVal, “Indian Inter-marriage and Mètissage,” 275.

¹⁴ Council Minutes, 9/1/1716, MPA: FD, 2: 218.

¹⁵ Brett Rushforth, “‘*A Little Flesh We Offer You*:’ The Origins of Indian Slavery in New France,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 4 (2003), 800.

Yet it was not just French colonial legislation for North America, but the global efforts of the French crown to regulate slavery within its possessions that shaped the status of enslaved Native peoples along the gulf coast. Article IX of the 1685 Slave Code for the French Islands specified that “The free men who will have one or several children from their concubinage with their slaves, together with the masters who permitted this, will each be condemned to a fine of two thousand pounds of sugar; and if they are the masters of the slave by whom they have had the said children, we wish that beyond the fine, they be deprived of the slave and the children, and that she and they be confiscated for the profit of the [royal] hospital, without ever being manumitted. *Nevertheless we do not intend for the present article to be enforced if the man who was not married to an other person during his concubinage with his slave would marry in the church the said slave who by this means will be manumitted and the children rendered free and legitimate.*”¹⁶ Thus, according to contemporary French legal codes, single French men who fathered children with enslaved women should be wed to these slaves. This marriage would legitimize the relationships in the eyes of the law and free their children from future bondage.¹⁷ La Vente had lived in the Mascarene Islands where this law was in effect immediately preceding his arrival in Lower Louisiana. Thus, although this legislation was designed to regulate primarily African slaves on France’s sugar

¹⁶ “Le Code Noir ou recueil des reglements rendus jusqu'a present,” 1767, trans. John Garrigus, *Société, d'Histoire de la Guadeloupe* (1980).

¹⁷ Whether this was the law in practice or not in the Mascarene Islands, it certainly was not common in Louisiana. I have only found one record of a Frenchman in the lower Mississippi Valley Louisiana who liberated his Indian slave once she had his child. In 1721 an enslaved Indian woman recorded only as Marianne gave birth to a son Jean Francois. Three years later, Jean Francois’ father, Francois Alvin, had this child baptized. When the child was baptized in 1724 there is a note that says that both Marianne and Jean Francois were declared free. Winston de Ville, *Gulf Coast Colonials: A Compendium of French Families in Early Eighteenth Century Louisiana* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1968), 17.

plantations in the Caribbean and Indian oceans, it is evident that La Vente's decisions to press for more lawful weddings were informed by these practices.¹⁸

Officially, French settlers were only supposed to possess slaves captured in just wars and preferably from distant regions. Allowing the enslavement of Indian nations near Mobile seemed to French officials to be bad policy, as it could lead neighboring nations to attack the French settlement in retribution for holding their people captive. Equally as importantly, however, French officials feared that enslaving Native peoples would tarnish their image of compassionate diplomacy. French settlers in the Lower Mississippi Valley repeatedly declared that they did not enslave their Indian allies, unlike the English. Bienville believed this was a key tenet of official policy. Again, as the French were poorer and militarily weaker than the British settlers, they traded on their image of "justness." In 1711 Bienville claimed that was the one thing keeping the Chickasaws from attacking the French settlement at Mobile was that Chickasaws had seen Bienville return captives from French-allied nations in Canada who had been brought to Louisiana for sale. He believed this gesture had made quite an impression on them. "I have disposed in such a way that they prefer a small present from us to a much more considerable one from the English whom they like only because they give them a great deal and whom they despise because of the little scruple that they have against buying slaves of the nation which they are not at war. This we do not do at all, and

¹⁸ In her recent work Sophie White has traced the connections between French Louisiana and the Mascarene Islands and illustrated the connections between the 1685 Code Noir (slave code), the 1723 slave code for the Mascarene Islands, and the 1724 slave code for Louisiana. She has argued that La Vente and other colonial officials were already developing racialized ideas about identity at the turn of the eighteenth century and connecting these ideas about race and enslavement to their experiences in Louisiana. White, *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians*, 230.

because barbarians as they are, they do not fail to make the distinction between our sentiments and those of the English.”¹⁹

As noble as this policy appears, like so many policies, it did not reflect the reality of enslavement in colonial Louisiana. As French settlers had extremely limited access to enslaved Africans during the first two decades of colonial settlement, they turned to Indian laborers to provide the essential labor that allowed French men to continue their official tasks for the government. Although the French continued to insist that they did not exploit and enslave allied nations as the British did, French correspondence is filled with references to Indian slaves who were not only from very local peoples, but even from allied nations.²⁰ Between 1700 and 1730 people from many of France’s allied nations including substantial numbers of Chitimachas and Tensas as well as Nassitoches, Chickasaws, Comaches, Paniouachas, Tawasas, Alabamas, Koroas, Apalachees, and Ouachitas, ended up enslaved and laboring for French masters.²¹ The 1726 census of colonial Louisiana includes 159 Indian slaves, 1,385 African slaves, and 1,663 French inhabitants.²² Although this record suggests that enslaved Indigenous peoples made up

¹⁹ Bienville to Pontchartrain, 10/27/1711, MPA: FD, 3:159; Margry, *Decouvertes*, 4:516-517, 561; Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slavery in New France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 240-243.

²⁰ Although early scholarship claimed that only a negligible amount of Indian peoples were enslaved by the French in Louisiana, it is now generally accepted that the French did enslave Native peoples in considerable numbers during the eighteenth century. Patricia Dillon Woods, “The French and Natchez Indians: 1700-1731” *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History: The French Experience in Louisiana* (Lafayette, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1995), 289; Gregory A. Waselkov, “French Colonial Archaeology at Old Mobile,” 5; Kathleen DuVal, “Indian Intermarriage and Métissage in Colonial Louisiana” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (2008), 273; Juliana Barr, “Captives to Slaves: Commodifying Indian Women in the Borderlands” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 92, No. 1 (2005), 24.

²¹ Hamilton, *Colonial Mobile*, 111, 78-79.

²² Usner, *Indians Settlers and Slaves*, 48-49.

less than five percent of the total population, this number is artificially low and does not reflect the spectrum of unfree Native labor that existed in early Louisiana.²³

Although both Chitimachas and Tensas were enslaved by the French settlers, the stories of how their peoples ended up in bondage are strikingly different. During the 1700s and 1710s Tensa captives were bought and sold individually or in small groups, while the French aimed to enslave the Chitimacha nation en masse. Even once they became enslaved within French settlements, the captives of these two nations often had strikingly different experiences depending on their ability to maintain kin connections and to move beyond the confines of French towns. As Juliana Barr, Kathleen DuVal, Theda Perdue, and many others have emphasized, it is essential that we recognize the diverse experiences of captivity, trafficking, and bondage that Native Americans endured, and how these experiences varied by gender.²⁴ Additionally, as Brett Rushforth has argued, the trade in Native captives was a vital part of the cross-cultural exchange between Native peoples and French settlers in North America and helped solidify diplomatic and trade relationships.²⁵

Comparing the experiences of these two nations illustrates not only the mechanisms by which allied Indian peoples could become enslaved, but also two vastly divergent approaches to attempting to cope with the violence of the many captive trades that existed in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Taken together these two narratives

²³ As I illustrate later in this chapter, this number does not seem to reflect the many captive women and children who appear in later census records no longer as slaves but as the wives and children of the Frenchmen who held them in bondage.

²⁴ Juliana Barr, "Captives to Slaves," 20; Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women*, 66-68.

²⁵ Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance*, 11-13.

illuminate the range of social, political, and labor-based relationships that existed among the petites nations and the French in early Louisiana.

The Tensas' World in Chaos

The Tensa were among the earliest of Lower Mississippi Valley tribes to make alliances with French newcomers. In the 1670s and 1680s the Tensas were living along Lake St. Joseph on the western side of the Mississippi River, north of the Natchez and south of the Tunicas. The Tensas had forged a close alliance with the Quapaws, and together they fought to protect their communities and territories. During the two decades before French arrival, regional political upheavals pitched the Tensas and Quapaws into war with nearly all of the surrounding nations, including the Tunicas, Yazoo, Koroas and Natchez. The Tensas struggled to find ways to protect their kin from this violence.²⁶

The Tensas were a Natchezan people with a strict social hierarchy and a theocratic government. In addition to political and military initiatives, they relied on higher powers to guide them through this traumatic era. Like their Natchez neighbors to the south, the Tensas built earthen mounds to elevate hallowed grounds, recognized the sun as a sacred power, and believed that their leaders held divine power. They built homes of thick clay walls and cane mats that were woven expertly by Tensa women to keep out the rain. The Tensa villages were organized around a sacred ceremonial center that held their most precious relics. This sacred center housed a grand temple topped with three eagles facing the direction of the rising sun. Inside of this temple, Tensa spiritual leaders tended an ever-burning fire. This was the precious fire of the sun, given to them

²⁶ de Montigny à Saint-Vallier, 8/25/1699," *Les Missions du Séminaire*, 78-79.

directly from the spirits via flaming lightning bolts. Should the fire go out, it was said that the Tensas's world would fall out of balance.

Although they were at war with the Natchez and Chitimachas during the 1680s, the Tensas recognized both groups as distant kin. Even during times of conflict, historical and social connections and common spiritual practices, including the worship of a solar deity, linked these antagonistic nations. According to the Natchez, the two nations shared sacred fire, and if the Natchez ever let their village's fire extinguish, they would need to go make war on the Tensas to obtain the sacred flame to restart their own.²⁷

The powerful leaders of the Tensa village attracted the Mosopeleas to seek refuge there, and the majesty of the village drew the interest of traveling French diplomatic expeditions. In 1682 the Chief of the Tensa received French explorer Henri de Tonti at his village. The Tensa leader greeted La Salle in his magnificent home surrounded by 60 headmen from the eight Tensa villages that made up the polity and by his three wives. Tonti was very impressed by this lavish reception and by the respect that the Tensas paid to their leader. He recorded that the Tensas so esteemed this chief that when he died 100 young men were slain alongside him so that they could accompany him to the afterlife. The bones of the chief and the young men were then stored in cane mats within the sacred temple where they would be eternally cherished by the living.²⁸ Tonti's estimate of 100 sacrificial victims is perhaps high, considering that the Tensas only numbered about 1,600 during this era. Regardless, Tonti's observations indicate that the Tensa leader

²⁷ Letter of de Montigny, 1/2/1699, *Early Voyages*, 77; de Montigny à Saint-Vallier, 8/25/1699," *Les Missions du Séminaire*, 85-86; "Polluting the Fire" *Native American Legends, Southeastern Legends: Tales from the Natchez, Caddo, Biloxi, Chickasaw, and Other Nations* Ed. George E. Lankford (Little Rock: August House, 1987) 56-57.

²⁸ Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 154.

wielded great power and that this polity had been stable enough to afford large sacrifices of its population for spiritual purposes.²⁹

Yet despite their efforts to project a public image of power, during the last two decades of the seventeenth century the Tensas struggled to protect their people, and their eight-village polity began to fracture under pressure. European diseases took a heavy toll on the Tensas and by 1699 the nation was reduced to only 700 people, less than half of its population just twenty years earlier. To compound this pain, the constant conflict with their neighbors caused their nation to lose disproportionate numbers of women and children to captive raiders.³⁰ Although the Tensas took captives of their own to replace the lost women and children, they had to trade away many of these captives to cement alliances. During Tonti's visit, for example, the Tensas gave the French travelers a captive Koroa woman as a gift of good will to help seal their alliance.³¹

As with the other peoples of the Lower Mississippi Valley, the expansion of the southeastern Indian slave trade threw the Tensa world into chaos at the end of the seventeenth century. The Tensas tried to mitigate this destruction by the incorporation of the Mosopeleas during the 1680s, but these foreigners soon left. Sometime between 1700 and 1706 the Tensas again took in outsiders, when they welcomed Ouachitas refugees. The Tensas also tried to incorporate the French and exploit the political advantages of their new connections. In 1699 Tensa diplomats welcomed the French missionary

²⁹ Thaumur de la source records that the Tensas only killed 13 when their chief died in 1699. Letter of de Montigny, 1/2/1699, *Early Voyages*, 78; Letter of Mr. Thaumur de la Source, 1699, *Early Voyages*, 82; de Montigny à Saint-Vallier, 8/25/1699," *Les Missions du Séminaire*, 87; Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 135-138.

³⁰ Letter of de Montigny, 1/2/1699, *Early Voyages*, 76; Montigny à Saint-Vallier, 8/25/1699," *Les Missions du Séminaire*, 83; Barnett, *The Natchez Indians*, 38, 50.

³¹ Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 139; Margry, *Découvertes*, 1: 556-569.

Francois de Montigny into their village. They received him generously and provided him with guides for the region. The priest was surveying the region and evaluating plans to send missionaries there. De Montigny claimed that the Tensas asked him for help making peace with their neighbors. De Montigny agreed and acted as mediator in establishing peace between the Tensas and Natchez.³² It would be advantageous for the French to have all of their allies on good terms. This way they would not lose men to enemy nations or be drawn into regional conflicts. Yet despite French efforts to create peace in the region and a unified Indian force to confront British expansion, the nations of the Yazoo River region continued to suffer from raids and disease, and their partnership did very little to help the Tensas.³³

By 1700 it seemed clear to the Tensas that they had somehow gravely erred and were experiencing divine punishment. In the spring of 1700, a bolt of lightning struck the Tensas' main temple. The cane mats and walls of the temple caught fire and burned in a blaze as the Tensa people cried in horror at this expression of divine wrath. Both the Tensas and Natchez believed that lightning was the sacred fire of the sun, the same fire that burned eternally in their temples, and was the tangible embodiment of spiritual power. At the behest of the elderly guardian of the temple, the Tensas sang, blackened their faces with mud, and begged for the spirit to put out the flames. It was abundantly evident to them that the powerful Sun was furious with them and that they needed to purify and rectify their people. As the flames continued to crackle, charring the sacred

³² He also aimed to create peace between the Tensas and Tunicas and the Tunicas and Natchez, but these peacemaking efforts were less effective. de Montigny à Saint-Vallier, 8/25/1699," *Les Missions du Séminaire*, 73-90.

³³ Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 62.

bones of their former chiefs, Tensa women came forward with their infants and made the ultimate sacrifice, throwing these children into the blaze. Iberville and Penicaut watched in horror as Tensa mothers cast their children into the flames until Iberville instructed the Frenchmen with him to stop the Tensas by force. Not surprisingly, the Tensas' relationship with their French allies soured. They may have blamed them and their priests for disturbing the spiritual balance of their world, and they were furious with Iberville for inhibiting their ability to use blood sacrifice to restore spiritual order.³⁴

In any event, the blood sacrifice was not enough to restore order to their world. Between 1700 and 1706, Chickasaw raids into Tensa territory continued to increase in frequency and severity. By 1703 these raids had left half of the Tensa men without their wives and children.³⁵ In response to the onslaught of slave raiders and English presence around the Yazoo River region, some of the nations of the Lower Mississippi Valley turned to slaving themselves in hopes that trading in slaves could help them form an alliance with the British and protect their people. In 1704, for example, the Tunicas captured twenty Tensas and send them as a gift to Carolinian traders in an attempt to build a partnership.³⁶ The British in turn then gifted twelve of these Tensas to the Chickasaws as a gesture of friendship and alliance.³⁷ Given the tremendous volume of captive Indians that the Chickasaws traded to the British as part of a purely economic

³⁴ Gravier, *Relation du Voyage*, 34; Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 29; Ross Phares, *Cavalier in the Wilderness: The Story of the Explorer and Trader Louis Juchereau de St. Denis* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 17-19; la Harpe, *Historical Journal*, 22-23; Margry, *Découvertes*, 4: 414.

³⁵ In 1704 the Chickasaws sold at least 12 Tensas to the British at Carolina. Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 214; Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 66.

³⁶ La Harpe, *Historic Journal*, 68.

³⁷ Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 62.

exchange, it is worth noting that even as these captives were commoditized in Charleston slave markets, British traders continued to recognize their important symbolic role in Southeastern diplomacy.

The Tensas took steps to mitigate this damage through a series of violent forced adoptions and relocations. Perhaps because they could not risk the Ouchitas women and children leaving them as the Mosopeleas had. Sometime between 1700 and 1706 the Tensas violently adopted the Ouachitas living with them. Although the records are vague, it seems most likely that the Tensas killed the Ouchita men and integrated the women and children into their villages. They then began a process of relocation, joint settlement, deadly, surprise assaults, and captive adoption against the Bayagoulas, Chitimachas, and Yanki-Chitos at the bottom of the Mississippi River.³⁸ From 1706 to 1712 the Tensas moved along the lower Mississippi River where they were plagued by constant conflict with the Houmas. Given that the Houmas had fought for decades with the Bayagoulas for control of the region, it is not surprising that they were unwilling to cede large portions of their land to these invaders from the north.³⁹

As their partnership with the French had failed to provide security for their people, the Tensas continued to seek other protective alliances. Some Tensa families decided that their safest option was to take refuge with the Natchez and incorporate into their polity.⁴⁰ Those who remained independent during the 1700s and 1710s attempted to confront the slaving problem directly by constructing alliances with their former slavers,

³⁸ Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 186, 217; Perier to Maurepas, 11/28/1729, MPA: FD, 1:61; Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 68; Margry, *Découvertes*, 4: 432.

³⁹ Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 161; la Harpe, *Historical Journal*, 53.

⁴⁰ Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 239.

and Tensa diplomats strove to establish alliances with the British. Many nations, like the Chickasaws and Westos had successfully converted themselves from the victims of slave raiders into slaving societies themselves. By forming alliances with their former enemies the British during the seventeenth century, both the Chickasaws and Westos managed to protect their people from other slave raiders, at least temporarily.

During the first decade of the eighteenth century, many of the Lower Mississippi Valley polities sought to pursue relationships with the British and Chickasaws in hopes of converting their most powerful enemies into allies. In 1704 the Tunicas tried to form an alliance with the Chickasaws, who had been assaulting their villages, and they offered the Chickasaws and British Tensa captives to secure these alliances.⁴¹ Rather than attacking the Tunicas for capturing and stealing their people, the Tensas tried to approach the buyers directly. Three years later, when British traders next passed through the region, the Tensas received them in their villages. During these diplomatic summits in 1708, Tensa leaders met with South Carolina trader Thomas Nairne and indicated that they wanted a partnership with the British. Much like their alliance with the Natchez, the Tensas hoped that a relationship with the British would stop Chickasaw attacks and prevent the British from accepting more Tensa captives. Nairne was traveling down the Mississippi on a British diplomatic mission to secure the alliance of the nations in the region so that the French would be left isolated and unable to hold onto their territorial

⁴¹ la Harpe, *Historical Journal*, 48-50, 54, 68-71.

claims along the gulf coast and in the Southeast. Nairne met with the Tensas as well as the Tunicas, Koroas, Natchez, and Quapaws.⁴²

Like the Tensas, most of these nations had not seen reductions in regional violence since the arrival of the French and viewed the Louisianans as only one part of their protective diplomatic networks. Therefore in 1708 they were still seeking powerful allies. Yet, this long distance trade and diplomatic relationship with the British was difficult to sustain. The eight hundred miles between South Carolina and the Lower Mississippi Valley and the preoccupation of British officials fighting Queen Anne's War on the eastern seaboard sapped their available resources. No more British traders returned to the region until 1713. Price Hughes, another Charleston trader, led this expedition with the same orders as Nairne. He traveled down the river and again affirmed the British crown's commitment to forming trade partnerships with the petite nations. Yet Price Hughes never made it back to South Carolina to tell of his diplomatic successes along the Mississippi. As he crossed through Tohome territory near Mobile, a Tohome warrior attacked and killed him. Unfortunately for the Tunicas, Tensas, and other nations who had held diplomatic conferences with Hughes, this meant that the agreements they had reached did not come to fruition.⁴³

This murder was a strong reminder that while many Lower Mississippi Valley nations sought to convert enemies into allies, not all of the region's nations were so forgiving of slave traders. The Tohomes had been hard hit by British-allied Chickasaw

⁴² Bienville to Pontchartrain, 10/12/1708 MPA: FD, 1:39; Thomas Nairne, *Nairne's Muskhogean Journals: the 1708 Expedition to the Mississippi River*, ed. Alexander Moore (Jackson: Mississippi Press 1988), 75-76.

⁴³ Bienville to Pontchartrain, 8/20/1709, MPA: FD, 2: 136; Bienville to Pontchartrain, 2/25/1708, MPA: FD, 2:113-115; Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 160-163; Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 235.

and Alabama slave raids. Moreover in 1708, Thomas Nairne tried to convince the Choctaws to begin raiding the Tohomes and small nations around mobile and selling these prisoners to the British. The Tohomes plainly saw British presence in the region as a serious threat to their people, and so they killed Hughes to send a powerful message that these captive traders were not welcome and could not expect to pass safely through their lands. Perhaps realizing in the wake of this killing that British alliance was not a viable option, the Tensas migrated once again and decided to try their luck with the French. They relocated to the outskirts of Mobile and sought a partnership similar to those of the Biloxis, Tohomes, and Mobilians.⁴⁴

Tensa Captives and Wives at Mobile

Of the many Tensas captured between 1680 and 1713, at least some of them found their ways into the hands of French settlers at Mobile, so that when the Tensas moved to Mobile in 1713, some of their kin were already living in bondage with their allies. In these thirty years the Tensas had never declared war on the French, and they had never severed their alliance, so they were certainly not “just” captives of war.⁴⁵ Furthermore, almost all of the Tensas whose age and sex appear on the baptismal records of Mobile before 1712 were women and children. In fact, on the colonial registers there are several Indian slaves who are less than a year old, including a Tensa slave belonging

⁴⁴ “Bienville’s Memoir of Louisiana 1725-1726,” MPA: FD, 3: 563; Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 223, 233, 235; Gallay, *The Indian Slave Trade*, 129-131.

⁴⁵ Even as they met with British and other traders the Tensas maintained relations with the French at mobile. As recently as 1711 the Tensas had traveled down to meet with the governor and re-affirm their alliance. Hamilton, *Colonial Mobile*, 249.

to Sieur Guillaume Boutin, who was baptized in 1708 at just two months of age.⁴⁶ This child and the many other infants were likely carried to Mobile with their captive mothers. As is evident from the Tunicas' exchanges with the Chickasaws and British, other Lower Mississippi Valley nations were using Tensa captives to forge alliances. So it is likely that the French received these Tensas in the same type of diplomatic exchanges. Four other Tensa women also received baptism at the same time that the Tensa infant was baptized in 1708. It is unclear whether one of these women might have been his mother. Perhaps this child was stolen from his village, but the infant may also have been the product of rape of one of these Tensa women by her French master.

The parish priests who recorded these baptisms sought to simultaneously whitewash and legitimize the coercive violence of French settlers' exploitation of their Indian slaves, not only for domestic but also for sexual labor.⁴⁷ In 1712, the baptismal records indicate that both Sieur Charli and Sieur Rochon "have tensas slaves who find themselves pregnant this year," most likely with Mr. Charli and Sieur Rochon's children respectively. This was at least the second child of Mr. Charli's Tensa slave, as she had already given birth to a child named Jean and had him baptized in 1709.⁴⁸ Sieur Charli, who appeared on the baptismal register as having a pregnant Tensa woman in his possession, is also listed on a 1709 baptismal document as the father of a metis child. The mother in this account is listed only as an Indian slave and it is not clear if she is the same Tensa woman that "found herself pregnant" in 1712 or if this is another woman. In any

⁴⁶ Higginbotham, *Old Mobile*, 365.

⁴⁷ In addition to recording most of the Indian captives without their tribal affiliations, or without their first names, some of the records of early Mobile families simply have no indication of who the mothers of French men's children might be. de Ville, *Gulf Coast Colonials*, 20-25, 48, 51, 57.

⁴⁸ Hamilton, *Colonial Mobile*, 99.

case, the frequency of these baptisms of infants with Indian mothers and repeated references to Tensa slaves suggests that the French men of Mobile did not share either Bienville's scruples about enslaving only enemies of French Louisiana or La Vente's concern about unlawful intimacy.⁴⁹

The clearest illustration of the legal and semantic conversion of an Indian woman from slave to wife is illustrated by the marriage of Marguerite and Pierre-Rene LeBouef in 1712.⁵⁰ In 1706 Pierre-Rene LeBouef left Mobile to build a new home on a small concession south of Mobile. He knew he would need help with domestic labor to maintain this new home, and so he brought his Tensa slave Marguerite with him. After living with Marguerite for five years, he decided he would like to make Marguerite his official wife, and so he had her baptized by a local priest. The following year, in 1712, they were wed and by 1713 she gave birth to a son "Claude" whom le Boeuf also had baptized.⁵¹

Yet colonial officials did not all support the practice of French settlers marrying Indian women. Although the priests who baptized, married, and buried Indian wives and slaves hoped that their relations with French settlers would convert them into good Christians and faithful vassals of the French crown, in the opinions of several Louisiana administrators, these relationships did more harm than good. Rather than civilizing and Christianizing Native women, officials found that these marriages turned Frenchmen into

⁴⁹ de Ville, *Gulf Coast Colonials*, 17, 18, 21, 22, 26, 36-37, 44, 45, 52.

⁵⁰ As Kathleen DuVal has shown, marriages between Native women and French men in the Lower Mississippi Valley were quite rare, unless the woman was enslaved, and therefore not in a position to truly consent to the marriage. DuVal, "Indian Inter-marriage and Mètissage in Colonial Louisiana," 271-273.

⁵¹ Higginbotham, *Old Mobile*, 456; Hamilton, *Colonial Mobile*, 99.

savages.⁵² In addition to wearing Indian clothing, eating Indian foods, and living in an un-Christian manner, these ties threatened the very loyalty of these Frenchmen to the colony. Some of the traders who lived among the nations of the Lower Mississippi Valley became so deeply integrated into Native societies and their new political and social identities as to as to tattoo themselves with the symbols of their adopted nations. It was rumored that Bienville not only had intimate relationships with Indian women but that he had received tattoos from various villages. One observer claimed that when Bienville led Native peoples “to march to war with them he makes himself nude like them” so that the Nations could see his tattoos denoting his tribal alliances and military rank.⁵³ French authorities were perhaps right to fear these close relationships, as marriages, and tattooing indelibly linked the identities and alliances of their settlers to the military and political actions to those of their adopted Native kin.⁵⁴

The independent economic endeavors of free Tensa women troubled colonial authorities, and they feared that close contact with these women might result in the spread their “*libertine*” ideology to the French.⁵⁵ When comparing what he perceived to be the more moral behavior of Tunica women to those of their neighbors the Tensas and Natchez, French missionary Jaques Gravier remarked with contempt that the Tunica women “*ne sont pas libertines ni effrontées comme elles le sont aux natchez et tensas*”—

⁵² Jennifer M. Spear, “Colonial Intimacies: Legislating Sex in French Louisiana,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 1 (2003), 84-88.

⁵³ Balvay, “Tattooing and Its Role in French–Native American Relations,” 14.

⁵⁴ Dana Bowker Lee, “Captives to Kin: Indian Slavery and the Changing Social Identities on the Louisiana Colonial Frontier” *Native American Adoption, Captivity and Slavery in Changing Contexts*, 83.

⁵⁵ Gravier, *Relation du Voyage*, 29.

the Tunica women “are not as shameless or such libertines as the Tensas and Natchez women.”⁵⁶

Within Tensa society women had considerable power over their own bodies and sexuality. Within both Natchez and Tensa societies women were expected to be faithful to their husbands once they were married. Yet until they were wed, Tensa women were at liberty to pursue whatever relationships they saw fit, including relations with men both for personal pleasure and economic gain. Young Tensa, Natchez, and Atakapa women often hired themselves out to work in the homes of both French and Indian men with whom they had no kin ties. These women worked as domestics, translators, and in a multitude of capacities for their employers.

Some Tensa women also exchanged sexual labor for payment in addition to their other work for Frenchmen. As French traveler Dumont de Montigny recorded during his time at Natchez in the 1720s “There were even some Indian women who came to offer themselves to the soldiers or habitants, to the officers and the sergeants, and this at a very cheap rate. But if you paid them a little more generously... then the Indian woman served as your wife and your slave all at once. She looked after the cooking, made the flour and the bread, both fluffed up the bed and helped to flatten it. Others hire themselves out for one or two days like field slaves to pound the corn and make flour.”⁵⁷ De Montigny saw the labor of Indian women outside of their own homes as deeply degrading and failed to distinguish between the forced labor of enslaved Native people and the wage labor of free Natchez and Tensa women. His use of the terms “wife” and “slave” to describe the sexual

⁵⁶ Gravier, *Relation du Voyage*, 29.

⁵⁷ de Montigny, *The Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont*, 349-350.

and domestic work of these women illustrates how murky French colonists found the boundaries between free and unfree Indian women's labor and why both the terms "slave" and "wife" are fraught when they appear in descriptions of Native peoples within colonial society.



Figure 7- Dumont de Montigny's Illustration of Indian women in Louisiana⁵⁸

Within their own societies, Native women who became economically successful through their labor were respected and highly esteemed. Rather than diminishing their appeal in the eyes of prospective partners, Native men desired wives who were self sufficient and brought wealth to their marriages. By working for non-kin members and

⁵⁸ Dumont de Montigny, No. 17, Mémoire de Lxx Dxx officier ingénieur, contenant les evenemens qui se sont passés à la Louisiane depuis 1715 jusqu'à present [manuscript] : ainsi que ses remarques sur les moeurs, usages, et forces des diverses nations de l'Amerique Septentrionale et de ses productions" Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library, Chicago.

receiving payment for their labor, these women amassed more wealth to bring to their marriages and became more attractive as potential wives. The one catch, at least within Atakapa society, was that these young women must not bear children from these relationships with men who were not their husbands. If a woman had a child from one of these relationships, the Atakapas then considered the woman's conduct to be shameful, and she would likely be unable to marry.⁵⁹

Some enslaved women at Mobile may have also exchanged sex for payment. In a couple of different instances enslaved women at Mobile formed sexual relationships with French men who were not their masters. Both Germain de La Farge and Rene le Boeuf had children with enslaved Indian women who belonged to other settlers. While it is very likely that these French men raped or coerced the unnamed Indian slave belonging to Mr. Marchand and Therese, the Christian slave of Mr. Diron, into having sex with them, it is also possible that these women sought these relationships with LaFarge and le Bouef in order to improve their situations in Mobile or to pursue economic gain.⁶⁰

Enslaved Tensas reconstructed their shattered lives and built new kin networks within Mobile. In 1714 a Tensa woman who belonged to Sieur de Boisbriant and a Chitimacha man who belonged to Sieur de Chateague baptized their baby daughter Marie.⁶¹ This relationship is remarkable given that only eight years prior the Tensas had slaughtered many Chitimachas on a raid to capture and forcibly adopt Chitimachas women and children into their dwindling nation. Considering this history it is surprising

⁵⁹ Bossu, *New Travels*, 94-95.

⁶⁰ de Ville, *Gulf Coast Colonials*, 44,45; Ekberg, *Stealing Indian Women*, 16.

⁶¹ Hamilton, *Colonial Mobile*, 100, 115, 116.

that these two captives formed a relationship less than a decade later at Mobile. It is significant that both parents are named and claimed in the baptism, and thus presumably in a sustained relationship, unlike the Tensa women who are recorded as “finding themselves pregnant” with no recorded male involvement. This unlikely union illustrates the close ties between enslaved people of various nations at Mobile, and the way that the common experience of captivity and servitude brought together Native people of enemy nations.⁶² What is also striking about this record is the baffling question of how and why this woman and her child remained enslaved in Mobile when her kin were located just outside of the city. It seems most likely that this woman had been enslaved before the arrival of the Tensas. She may have opted to continue to serve Sieur de Boisbriant in Mobile even after her people arrived to be near her Chitimacha partner, or it is possible that she was unable to escape this bondage despite her people’s proximity.

Enslaved Native peoples, including the aforementioned Tensa and Chitimacha parents, formed close relationships that stretched across household, ethnic, and national boundaries, and Native families at Mobile straddled different statuses of freedom.⁶³ Because of the small population and close proximity of settlements at the fort town, enslaved peoples likely came into contact with other captured kin members, their free brethren, and enslaved people from other nations on a regular basis. In addition to French slave holders Apalachee and Mobilian people held enslaved Chitimachas, Paniouachas

⁶² Often either the fathers of the children of enslaved Native women were not recorded in baptismal registers, or census takers did not record the names of the enslaved Indian mothers of the children of French fathers. For example, Thomas Asselin is recorded as having his child Elizabeth baptized in September of 1736 yet her mother is only listed as “Thomas Asselin’s Indian Slave.” de Ville, *Gulf Coast Colonials*, 18.

⁶³ Ekberg, *Stealing Indian Women*, 42-43, 71-72.

and other Native people of unspecified nations.⁶⁴ This close contact also meant that sometimes enslaved native people formed relationships with, married, and produced children with free Indians who lived in an around Mobile. In 1716 for instance, an Indian slave (nation unknown) of Sieur Duclos and a free Taoucha woman baptized their infant daughter Marguerite, and in 1720 an enslaved Indian woman and a free Chatot man named Capinan baptized their infant daughter Marie.⁶⁵

Although the Tensas resented that the French held some Tensa women captive, given the immense volume of captives and violent, forced adoptions within the Lower Mississippi Valley, the Tensas were accustomed to negotiating with other nations that held their kin as captives. The chaos that the slave trade created in this region meant that polities were often forced to negotiate with nations who held captives of their nation or captives of their allies. For example, in 1699 the Houmas agreed to negotiate with the Bayagoulas while the Houmas held Bayagoula prisoners. During 1710s the French continued to negotiate with the Natchez, Tunicas, and Acolapissas even as they held captives from other allied nations. As late as the 1740s the French negotiated with

⁶⁴ Hamilton, *Colonial Mobile*, 110.

⁶⁵ The records of the baptism of the Chatot man and his enslaved lover are especially fascinating. The Capinan Indians lived alongside Mobile in the late seventeenth century and are thought to have been absorbed by the Mobilians, Tohomes, and other native groups by the 1710s after waves of disease decimated their populations. This Chatot's name was likely his articulation of his identity and suggests that this man may have been a Capinan man who integrated himself into Chatot society. The Chatots migrated to the Mobile River region around 1704 in order to escape a barrage of Creek slave raids into North Florida. Both the Taouacha (Tawasa) and Chatot were recent migrants into the Mobile river region. When they lived in Florida and Alabama, before they moved to Mobile, they had formed relationships with Spanish settlers and priests. The petites nations who migrated into the Mobile River region were overwhelmingly Catholic unlike the Mobilians, Naniabas, and Tohomes, so it is more likely that in these instances the parents requested baptisms for their children versus the baptisms of the children of enslaved non-Catholic parents at Mobile. The relationships that crossed the boundaries of freedom and slavery and involved Christian Indians also deeply troubled French priests at Mobile, and they refused to recognize these unions. Alexander Huvé, the priest who baptized Marie, later added a comment onto the record of this baptism to happily note that Capinan had left this enslaved woman and found another woman to replace her. Hamilton, *Colonial Mobile*, 112-114; Margry, *Découvertes*, 1:196-197, 602; Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 98.

Chickasaw leaders who took French prisoners as captives to use as leverage in diplomatic negotiations.⁶⁶

Not only did free and enslaved members of the same nation sometimes live in close proximity within Mobile, but petites nations peoples also held Indian slaves from other petites nations. For example, in 1715 Jean, a free Mobilian man, and his free Chitimacha wife, Marie Magdalene, jointly went to receive their baptisms from Alexander Huvé, one of the priests at Mobile. Within the same year, Huve also performed two baptisms for enslaved Chitimachas within Mobile, one for a four-year-old girl named Marie who belonged to the chief of the Chatot nation and one for Alexander, a fifteen-year-old Chitimacha slave of the missionaries of Fort Louis. Along with Alexander's baptism, the priest also recorded that Salome, the wife of the chief of the Apalachees, attended and agreed to serve as his godmother.⁶⁷ Joint settlements naturally brought together people of different nations and ethnicities into close contact, but they were also spaces in which free, captive, and enslaved Native peoples regularly interacted. While they might offer the opportunity to form relationships with others who shared their status— like Jean and Mary Magdalene or the Tensa and Chitmacha slaves of Sieur de Boisbriant and Sieur de Chateague— they were also placed where people might interact with kin who had been captured or forcefully integrated into other societies. In sum, although surely it was difficult for Chitimacha, Tensa and other peoples to see their kin enslaved, it was not unusual for nations in this region to have to negotiate with those who held their people as captives.

⁶⁶ “Minutes of the Superior Council of Louisiana,” 7/23/1723, *MPA: FD*, 3: 356-357; Vaudreil to King Louis XV, 2/10/1744, *MPA:FD*, 4:213; Margry, *Découvertes*, 4: 408; la Harpe, *Historical Journal*, 24.

⁶⁷ Hamilton, *Colonial Mobile*, 114.

By 1713 it seems that the Tensas were eager not to lose any more women to raiders and believed a relationship with the French would help them achieve this goal. The Tohome murder of Price Hughes had proven that their hopes for a British alliance were untenable, and their frequent migrations were taking a heavy toll on their community. Within the last decade they had been forced to commit a tremendous amount of violence in order to replenish the population of women they lost to raiders. Having failed to establish an alliance that could properly protect them, they sought the safety of a joint settlement and closer alliance with the Louisiana settlers.⁶⁸

Making “Just” Slaves of the Chitimachas

While many slaves came as either gifts to the French to secure alliances or through independent purchases by French men, the Chitimachas are a striking exception to this pattern. Unlike the other captive Indians at Mobile, most of the Chitimachas were acquired through a war designed to create legal Indian slaves. This mass enslavement of the Chitimachas is perhaps the clearest challenge to Bienville’s argument of French moral superiority with regard to enslaving Indians.

The Chitimachas began their relationship with the French in 1699 when they had shared the calumet pipe with Iberville and his men at the village of the Biloxis. At the turn of the eighteenth century the Chitimachas lived along the gulf coast to the west of the Mississippi River, between Bayou La Fourche and Bayou Teche.⁶⁹ While they were

⁶⁸ In 1724 the Apaches attempted to enter into a similar arrangement with the French in Louisiana. By establishing a trade relationship and alliance with the French they hoped to secure not only access to French goods, but freedom from French slave raiders and a return of their women and children. Juliana Barr, “Captives to Slaves,” 24-25.

⁶⁹ Robert A. Brightman, “Chitimacha” *Handbook of North American Indians*, 14: 642.

on good terms with the French during the first five years of French colonization, they did not develop a close service-based relationship with the French in the way that many of the other petites nations did.⁷⁰ The Chitimachas' position further to the west was substantially removed from the Mississippi River, so French officials journeying up and down the river did not need to interact with the Chitimachas.

More significantly, the Chitimachas' neighbors, the Atakapas, had developed a well-known reputation for being fearsome man-eaters and therefore the French were hesitant to venture into their territory. French maps from the early of the eighteenth century warned travelers that in bayous west of the Mississippi they would encounter "*Indiens errans et antropophages*" – "wandering and man eating Indians."⁷¹ "Atakapa" is the Choctaw term for "man-eater," which suggests that the Atakapas had succeeded in

⁷⁰ I am hesitant to use the word alliance to describe the Chitimachas relationship with the French during these early years for several reasons. First, the infrequent and distant connections between the Chitimachas and the French does not at all resemble the mutually-beneficial connections of the French and Tensas, Mobilians, Choctaws or other petites nations. In fact, there appears to be very little besides the calumet ceremony that led the French to claim that the Chitimachas were their allies. As occurred in many cases, it seems that the French overestimated and misunderstood the significance of this initial calumet ceremony. While calumet ceremonies were integral parts of the procedure of securing relationships with Native groups, they were not the sum total of this process. French settlers tended to understand calumets as sacred treaties; inviolable and binding agreements securing alliance or dominion over or with Native peoples. Yet, it seems that for most groups in the Lower Mississippi Valley, the calumet was a temporary measure to help facilitate the development of a relationship. Calumet ceremonies provided safe passage for travelers and allowed for political and military negotiations between kin groups and nations. Yet, as is abundantly evident in the French records, Native peoples believed that these ceremonies must be regularly repeated to sustain the relationship. French travelers had to stop to participate in calumet ceremonies each time they crossed Native peoples' lands if they wanted safe passage, and Indian leaders frequently visited the French at the their forts at Mobile, Natchez, and New Orleans to re-affirm their ties and negotiate the terms of these relationships. Thus, if the French had only engaged with the Chitimachas once in 1699, it seems more than likely that the Chitimachas would have perceived this relationship to have grown cold and to be in need of a re-affirmation by 1702 when the next French traveler passed into their territory. Tracy Neal Leavelle, *The Catholic Calumet: Colonial Conversions in French and Indian North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 7; Robert A. Williams Jr., *Linking Arms Together: American Indian Treaty Visions of Law and Peace 1600-1800* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 46-47.

⁷¹ Guillaume de L'Isle, "Carte de la Louisiane et du cours de Mississipi," 1730, Everett D. Graff Collection of Western Americana, The Newberry Library, Chicago; Guillaume de L'Isle, "Carte de la Louisiane et du cours de Mississipi," 1718, Roger S. Baskes Collection, The Newberry Library, Chicago.

publicizing their military might to nations on both banks of the Mississippi River.⁷²

Through the 1730s French settlers were consequently hesitant to travel west and cautious in their dealings with the Atakapas.⁷³ Both the Atakapas and Chitimachas were also very large nations in comparison to both the French and to the petites nations near Mobile. Swanton estimates that in 1698 the Chitimachas numbered 2,625 and the Atakapas were roughly 3,500.⁷⁴ The French were hesitant to wander into Chitimacha and Atakapa territory and, after their initial ceremony in 1699, Chitimachas were not in close contact with the newcomers. Although they were formally allied in the eyes of the French, they had no close economic relationship to solidify the bond.

Not long after their introduction, the Chitimachas began to suspect that the French were not interested in maintaining an alliance, and that they had far more devious plans for the nation. After two years of minimal contact, in 1702 French Commandant Juchereau de St. Denis led a contingent of French and Acolapissa soldiers into Chitimacha territory. This force attacked a group of Chitimachas who were out hunting and captured twenty. St. Denis carried these captives back to Mobile where he sold them to French settlers as slaves.⁷⁵ When Governor Bienville heard of this expedition, he sternly reprimanded St. Denis and insisted that he return the Chitimacha captives.

⁷² Lyle Campbell, *American Indian Languages: The Historical Linguistics of North America* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1997), 145-146; Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 360.

⁷³ As late as the 1730s the French were still hesitant to establish relationships with the Atakapas because they believed the rumors that this nation would capture and eat trespassers into their territory. In his terse commentary on the Opeloussas and Atkapas nations to the west of the Mississippi River Bienville is sure to include along with a population tally and that they were successful fishermen, that the Atkapas “eat their prisoners.” “Bienville’s Memoir of Louisiana 1725-1726” MPA: FD, 3: 529

⁷⁴ These estimates include allied neighboring allies of the Chitimachas and Atakapas and it seems that Swanton included the Yanki-Chitos in his estimate of the Chitimacha population. Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 45.

⁷⁵ Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 338.

Bienville correctly assessed that this act would sever any alliance between the Chitimachas and French and lead them to retaliate against the French at the next opportunity. In his defense, St. Denis claimed that his men were suddenly attacked and so he was forced to retaliate. While this claim seems dubious, and Bienville clearly believed St. Denis had entered Chitimacha territory looking for an excuse to garner captives to sell for profit, it is plausible that there is some truth to St. Denis' story. If it had been years since the Chitimachas last negotiated with the French, they would likely have been looking for French envoys to arrive bearing a calumet or other signs of goodwill. The uninvited invasion of their lands by an armed contingent of Canadians and Acolapissas would have appeared to be a war party and thus would have necessitated an attack by the Chitimachas. In any event, Bienville's orders to St. Denis to return the captives were "poorly carried out," and the records suggest that the captives were never returned.⁷⁶

Four years later, the relationship between the Chitimachas and French became even more strained as the petites nations reeled from the escalation of Chickasaw raiding. In November of 1706 the Chitimachas attacked French priest Jean-François Buisson de St. Cosme as he travelled down the Mississippi River. The Chitimachas surprised and killed St. Cosme and his three French companions in their sleep, but they let a young Natchez boy traveling with the party escape to carry the news of the Chitimacha assault. The Chitimachas needed this Natchez survivor to publicize this violence and to convey the message that unwelcome Frenchmen who crossed in their territories and captured their people would face the same fate.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ la Harpe, *The Historical Journal*, 60; Higginbotham, *Old Mobile*, 93.

⁷⁷ In the narratives this boy is listed as a slave, yet this term does not appropriately convey the relationship of the Natchez boy to the French travelers. Given that Saint Cosme was traveling from the Natchez village

Although the Chitimacha murder of St. Cosme has most commonly been told as an act of random and senseless Indian violence, it is evident that the Chitimachas had good reason to feel threatened by French presence in their lands and that they wanted to send a clear message to potential slave raiders. Many contemporary and historical accounts of this story suggest that St. Cosme's end was purely bad luck. In these versions, a war party of Chitimachas was out in search of their enemies the Bayagoulas. When the enraged Chitimachas were unable to find an opportunity to attack the Bayagoulas, they instead turned their wrath on the guileless St. Cosme and his party, who happened to cross their path as they returned home.⁷⁸

While this story conveniently leaves the French blameless in the Chitimacha attack, St. Cosme's murder was not misplaced rage, but rather an intentional political message from the Chitimachas to their French and Indian enemies. In addition to the 1702 slave raid led by St. Denis, during the summer of 1706 the Chitimachas had suffered a terrible assault by France's Indian allies the Tensas. After fleeing Chickasaw raiding on the Yazoo River and launching a surprise attack on the Bayagoulas, the Tensas

where he had been working to spread Christianity, it is likely that the boy was given to the French missionary to act as an emissary and laborer. Much like the cabin boys that French officials left among their Indian allies to learn their languages and facilitate relationships, or like the "squirrel kings" that acted as foreign diplomats within Native nations, the Natchez had probably loaned this boy to the missionary to help facilitate their relationship. Crucially in these cases, both those of the French boys, the Natchez boy, and the Squirrel kings, these foreigners might be expected to labor, but they maintained their connections to their communities. Both the Mobilians and Tohomes for example gave children to the French settlers at Mobile as a way to foster connections between the two nations. Bienville had two Mobilian "slaves" who taught him to speak Mobilian so that he could communicate with the nations of the region. Although the French expected these children to serve them and occasionally listed them as "slaves" it seems evident that these children were not captives and while they certainly experienced a degree of coerced labor, their experience was markedly different than those of captives taken in war. Thus, if we consider Christina Snyder's explanation of Native conceptions of slaves as people without connections or kin, the term slave does not seem to effectively convey the status of this young Natchez boy. la Harpe, *The Historical Journal*, 77; Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 5-8; Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana* 1: 84-85; Higginbotham, *Old Mobile*, 205.

⁷⁸ Hamilton, *Colonial Mobile*, 50-51; la Harpe, *Historical Journal*, 54; Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 337.

had also killed and captured many of the Chitimachas and their Yanki-Chito allies. By November of 1706 the Chitimachas had come to perceive the Tensas and Tensa-allied outsiders in their territory as direct threats to their nation. St. Cosme's incursion merely offered them the opportunity to make clear that French raiders would not be allowed to assault their nation with impunity. Although many accounts of St. Cosme's murder suggest that the young Natchez boy escaped the Chitimacha attack, it seems much more likely that the Chitimacha warriors permitted him to escape for political reasons.⁷⁹

The murder of this French priest frightened the colonial officials at Mobile and necessitated a forceful reply so that the French would not look militarily weak in the eyes of their other Native allies. Much as the Chitimachas were attempting to illustrate to the surrounding nations that they would protect their peoples and territories, the French too feared what might happen if they looked weak in the eyes of their neighbors. Bienville felt compelled to retaliate against the Chitimachas and to orchestrate violence that would help repair France's dismal reputation among the Indian nations of the region. In February of 1707, Bienville expressed concern that the Chickasaws and Choctaws, the two nations he saw as Louisiana's most essential allies, did not really believe that the French were as great a nation as they pretended to be. He wrote that after they heard about the murder of St. Cosme they wanted to know "if there were really as many people in France as here" (Louisiana) and added that "if there were really as many people as I

⁷⁹ It is also likely that the Chitimachas alliance with the Natchez would have made them hesitant to kill a Natchez boy and risk inciting a cycle of violence between these two nations.

[Bienville] said, some of them would come here to avenge the deaths of the Frenchmen.”
If not, they told Bienville, the French “have no courage at all.”⁸⁰

The killing of St. Cosme was not the first killing of a French priest by a nation with which the French claimed alliance. In 1702, several Koroas had slain a French missionary and his three compatriots along the Yazoo River. According to the French, the Koroas only wanted the wealth of merchandise with which the priest was traveling. Although the French were enraged by this murder, four years later they still had been unable to exact revenge or punish the Koroas for this incident.⁸¹ The Koroas’ ties to the Chickasaws, English, and Natchez rendered them untouchable, unless the French were prepared to start a war with these powerful nations.

Bienville understood that the only response that might repair France’s military reputation among their Native allies would be to avenge the three French deaths by killing or capturing at least three Chitimachas. Yet the French saw an opportunity in this tragedy that led them to retaliate far beyond the expected scope of regional justice. Rather than orchestrating a single raid, like the one he had sent against the Alabamas in 1704, Bienville launched a full-scale war against the Chitimachas. In February of 1707 Bienville sent couriers to the villages of Louisiana’s Native allies asking for support against the Chitimachas, and by March he had recruited a Native and French coalition of

⁸⁰ Bienville to Pontchartrain, 2/20/1707, MPA: FD, 3: 38-40; Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana* 1: 207; Delanglez, *The French Jesuits*, 34.

⁸¹ Although various French traders had been killed in the backwoods, including one by the Alabamas just two years prior to the St. Cosme murder, and allegedly twelve by the Chitimachas between 1700 and 1707, the deaths of the two priests troubled French officials in a way that the deaths of the couriers du bois did not. As Louisiana missionaries operated in effect as state-sanctioned emissaries, there could be no suggestion that the murder of a priest was an isolated or meaningless incident; rather the French, and certainly at the least the Chitimachas understood these incidents as conveying much larger political messages. Bienville to Pontchartrain, 6/6/1704, MPA: FD, 3: 22; Bienville to Pontchartrain, 2/20/1707, MPA: FD, 3: 38-40; Barnett, *The Natchez Indians*, 50-51.

20 Bayagoula, 15 Biloxi, 40 Chaouacha, 4 Natchitoches, and 7 French soldiers. During their first assault on the Chitimachas, this coalition killed not three but fifteen Chitimachas, wounded forty more, and captured an untold number of prisoners. However, rather than ending this cycle of violence, this raid was merely the beginning of what would become a decade-long war.⁸²

The murder of St. Cosme had provided the French with the perfect excuse to declare war on the Chitimachas and thereby both convert their former allies into a ready supply of slaves and impress their other allies. Recall that beginning in 1706 French colonists at Mobile pled for African slaves and that their requests went unanswered. Thus French officials recognized that Chitimacha captives had potential to ameliorate this labor shortage and satisfy the colonists far more effectively than requesting African captives.⁸³ Merely weeks after this initial attack, Bienville sent none other than Juchereau St. Denis to lead the next assault. Backed by Canadian troops and Native allies, St. Denis and his forces stormed into the Chitimacha village closest to French settlements in Bayou Lafourche, burned the village to the ground, and took as many captives as his men could drag back to Mobile. There, the 80 Chitimacha captives fetched 200 livres apiece.⁸⁴ Thus the Chitimacha War, which was undoubtedly at least in part St. Denis' fault, ultimately

⁸² Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 337.

⁸³ The dates of the assaults and the Chitimacha are rather murky, as Penicaut, one of the key sources on this incident, seems to have misdated his account of the Chitimacha war. He confuses the killing of Missionary Foucault in 1702 with that of St. Cosme in 1706 and so in his chronology the Chitimacha war begins four years earlier than the official correspondence reflects. Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 100-102.

⁸⁴ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 24; la Harpe, *Historical Journal*, 5; Sophie Burton and F. Todd Smith, "Slavery in the Colonial Louisiana Backcountry: Natchitoches, 1714-1803" *Louisiana History*, Vol. 52 No. 2 (2011), 140.

provided St. Denis and many other Frenchmen with the opportunity to get into the lucrative business of captive vending with officially sanctioned approval.

They Shall Not Be Returned—Chitimacha Slaves in French Louisiana

In addition to slaving, the French used the Chitimacha War to improve their military reputation and demonstrate their ability to punish Native nations who assaulted Frenchmen. Bienville had the Chitimacha man who killed St. Cosme publically executed in Mobile. On Bienville's orders the man was tied to a wooden horse and the French executioner broke his head, scalped him, and then threw his body into the river. Even after this execution, French officials continued the war for nine more years. Until 1718 they offered bounties for the scalps of any Chitimacha person regardless of guilt, age, or sex.⁸⁵ The Chitimachas repeatedly asked for peace, yet the French found the trade in Chitimacha captives far too lucrative to cease this war. Therefore the Chitimachas did not have enough political muscle to convince their allies the Natchez to declare war on the French or to woo the other small nations away from the French.

The French finally agreed to end the horrible war in 1719. Most accounts suggest that it was ultimately the frustration of French planters who lived along the Lower Mississippi with the continual Chitimacha raids that forced the French to grant peace to the Chitimachas. Penicaut recorded that the concessionaires near Bayou La Fourche complained bitterly that their workers were continually in danger of being killed and captured by Chitimacha warriors. By 1718 the Chitimachas were indeed holding several

⁸⁵ Hamilton, *Colonial Mobile*, 64.

French captives in their villages, so these hostages provided an additional incentive to end the war.⁸⁶

It is also likely that the French sense of risk involved in a war for Indian slaves had increased. From 1715-1718 shockwaves from the Yamasee War reverberated across the gulf coast. After decades of frustration with the exploitive practices of British Indian traders, in 1715 a coalition of Native peoples including Yamasees, Catawbans, Choctaws, and others rose up and attacked British merchants in their villages and across South Carolina. These Indians were furious with the traders who they accused of beating their wives, imprisoning their families, and stealing their property- allegedly to fulfill outstanding debts. For three years this native coalition fought with British officials before finally losing the war. The Yamasee War convinced British officials that it was too dangerous to deal in Native American slaves. While the French had never orchestrated anywhere near the volume of Indian enslavement as their British counterparts, they would have recognized the potential for a comparable pan-tribal attack on French settlements in response to slave policies.⁸⁷

Thus, in 1718, Governor Bienville invited a Chitimacha delegation to New Orleans to negotiate peace accords. The warriors, diplomats, and leading men and women

⁸⁶ Bienville to Cadillac, 6/23/1716, *MPA:FD* 3: 18, 23; Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 216-217; Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 339.

⁸⁷ The French were aware of the developments of the Yamasee War as the conflict sent Indian refugees fleeing across the southeast, at least some of whom ended up seeking refuge with the nations around Mobile. Gregory Waselkov has argued that the Tohome man who murdered British trader Price Hughes was acting in concert with the other southeastern Indian nations who killed British traders in their territories and therefore should be understood as part of the Yamasee War. Hamilton, *Colonial Mobile*, 111; William L. Ramsey, "Something Cloudy in Their Looks: The Origins of the Yamasee War Reconsidered" *The Journal of American History* (2003) Vol. 90 no. 1, 44-57; Bienville to Pontchartrain, 9/1/1715, *MPA:FD*, 188-189; la Harpe, *Historic Journal*, 65; Gregory A. Waselkov and Bonnie L. Gums, *Plantation Archaeology at Rivière aux Chiens ca. 1725-1848* (Mobile, University of South Alabama Center for Archaeological Studies, 2000), 19.

of the Chitimachas processed into New Orleans singing the calumet and then sat silently for a long while, contemplating the gravity of the event and their relationship with the French. Governor Bienville offered the Chitimachas peace and suggested that they relocate their village closer toward French settlements. The Chitimachas replied to this offer with a response that was equal parts joy and anguish. A diplomat who spoke on behalf of the nation emphasized their grief and frustration that the atrocity committed by a single Chitimacha man caused so much bloodshed and loss for his entire nation. Yet he followed up this lament by expressing that in comparison to the “red sun” and weeping women and children who had colored the last decade for the Chitimachas, that “now the sun is warm and brilliant...the roads are clear... the game comes back, our women dance until they forget to eat, our children leap like young fawns, the heart of the entire nation laughs with joy to see that we will walk along the same road as you all, Frenchmen.”⁸⁸

This peace came at a high cost for the Chitimachas. Bienville’s terms stipulated that the French would not return Chitimacha captives to their villages but rather would keep them as slaves. Indeed, the captives acquired in this war made up the core of the population of colonial Louisiana through 1718. Chitimacha men, women, and children were forced to labor at Mobile and Natchez and for travelers moving throughout the country for decades after.

Perhaps the most familiar account of the fate of an enslaved Chitimacha is that of the Chitimacha woman who guided French habitant Antoine Simon Le Page Du Pratz through Louisiana in the 1720s. Du Pratz arrived in Louisiana in 1718, after the conclusion of the Chitimacha War. Because the peace agreements between the

⁸⁸ Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 342.

Chitimachas and French stipulated that enslaved Chitimachas would not be returned to their families. In 1718, Du Pratz was still able to purchase a Chitimacha woman in New Orleans, despite the renewal of the Chitimacha-French alliance. Although Du Pratz does not include this woman's name in the narrative, we know from his account that even as a slave she maintained connections with her free kin and continued to use her national identity to negotiate with other nations during her travels with Du Pratz. Du Pratz was very impressed by her ability to translate and conduct diplomacy on his behalf, her upstanding character, and not least her ability to fight off alligators armed only with a stick. It is in part through his terse references to her that we know that many of the Chitimachas sought refuge with the Natchez during the Chitimacha War and took up residence there permanently. Like many of the enslaved Native women who were sold to French settlers, this Chitimacha woman also had a sexual relationship with her captor, and she and Du Pratz had several children.⁸⁹

For many of the Chitimachas who ended up enslaved at Mobile, their lives closely mirrored the experiences of the Tensa women who were enslaved by French settlers and had sexual relationships with their masters. For example, within the first year of the Chitimacha War, Francoise Guyon des Pres Derbanne (d'Arbanne) the keeper of the king's storehouse at Mobile, purchased a Chitimacha woman named Jeanne de la Grande Terre. Earlier that year Derbanne had moved to Massacre Island to start a plantation of his own, and he evidently decided that he needed a woman's labor in order to properly run his concession. In addition to relying on her to help run his household Derbanne began a sexual relationship with Grande Terre and Grand Terre became

⁸⁹ Du Pratz, *History of Louisiana*, 21-22, 77, 316; Sayre, *Indian Chief as Tragic Hero*, 207.

pregnant. In 1710 the first of Grande Terre and Derbanne's children was baptized by French priest Alexander Huvé and given the name Jean Baptiste.⁹⁰ Perhaps under pressure from Huvé, who was a strong proponent of marriages between Indian women and French men, Derbanne eventually married Grande Terre and "they subsequently lived a long life together producing numerous children."⁹¹ Women like Grande Terre thus became intimately linked to this new society and raised children who grew up politically if not geographically distant from their kin. Unlike Du Pratz's Chitimacha slave, it is much less likely that Grand Terre was able to travel throughout Louisiana to see her extended family and maintain relationships with her village. Yet the critical mass of enslaved Chitimachas at Mobile and New Orleans suggests that these Chitimacha men and women were able to maintain connections with at least some other enslaved Chitimachas, and perhaps thereby had some indirect communication with their families at home.

For the majority of the Chitimacha nation back in La Fourche, this war led to massive population loss, fractured their existing villages, and turned many of their people into refugees. Like the relatives of Du Pratz's slave, some Chitimachas chose to leave their homes and seek refuge with stronger nations to avoid the wrath of French soldiers, and the Natchez offered haven to many Chitimacha families. Those who remained suffered hunger, fear, grief and "roads filled with brambles and thorns." In 1699 French travelers estimated that the Chitimachas and their neighbors the Yanki-Chito had roughly

⁹⁰ Baptiste was an exceptionally common surname for enslaved Native peoples in Louisiana. It signified that the Indian had been baptized by the church.

⁹¹ Higginbotham, *Old Mobile*, 444-445.

700-800 warriors in their villages, or 2,450 to 2,800 people total.⁹² By 1720 French reports estimate that the Chitimachas had only 100 warriors remaining, meaning that their total population was only about 350. Their nation had decreased by 85-87% over the last twenty years.⁹³

The Chitimacha War not only caused a plummet in the Chitimacha population but also forced the consolidation of the Yanki-Chitos and the Chitimachas into a joint polity. Early maps of the Lower Mississippi Valley differ on the exact location of these people, but they all place the Chitimachas, Yanki-Chitos, Ouachas, and Chaouachas living in close proximity to the west of the Mississippi River in present day Terrebonne and La Fourche parishes.⁹⁴ All four of these nations were in close contact, but the relationship between the Chitimachas and Yanki-Chitos was especially strong, and the two nations frequently negotiated together during diplomatic summits.⁹⁵

The Chitimachas and Yanki-Chitos were distinct polities, yet their close political and geographic ties led the French to attack Chitimacha and Yanki-Chito peoples indiscriminately during the war. Although many of the Indian slaves at Mobile do not appear in French records either by name or by tribal affiliation, some of the records of the forced marriages and baptisms of enslaved Chitimachas at Mobile help shed light on the identities of these captives. Several of the captives who became slaves at Mobile

⁹² la Harpe, *Historical Journal*, 10-11.

⁹³ D'Artaguiette, "Journal of Diron D'Artaguiette" *Travels in the American Colonies*, 42.

⁹⁴ Herman Moll, "North America, According to ye Newest and most Exact Observations." *Atlas Geographus*, 1712, Edward E. Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library; DeLisle, "Carte de la Louisiane et du cours de Mississipi," 1718, Roger S. Baskes Collection, The Newberry Library; Delisle, "Carte des Environs du Missisipi," 1701, Louis C. Karpinski Map Collection, The Newberry Library; Sieur de Beauvilliers, "Carte Nouvelle de la Partie de l'oest de la Province de la Louisiane sur les observations & decouvertes du Sieur Bernard de la Harpe," 1720, Louis C. Karpinski Map Collection, The Newberry Library.

⁹⁵ Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 175.

identified themselves as having the last name “Grande Terre” such as Jeanne de la Grande Terre and Marie Therese de la Grande Terre, the wife of merchant Jaques Guyon.⁹⁶ While these women are labeled as Chitimacha slaves in the records, this epithet strongly suggests that they were Yanki-Chito.⁹⁷ In both Choctaw and Mobilian *Yakna-tcito* means “big country” and so these women were effectively identifying themselves as Marie Therese and Jeanne of the Yanki-Chitos.⁹⁸

By the close of the Chitimacha War, the Yanki-Chitos no longer to appear on French maps of the region and drop from the historic record. In the wake of the war against the Chitimachas the survivors of the two nations became even more closely intermeshed. While the descendants of the “big country” people maintained separate social identities, the war destroyed the ability of the Chitimachas and Yanki-Chitos to maintain separate diplomatic relationships with the French, and by midcentury the two peoples effectively coalesced into a single polity.⁹⁹

Conclusion

While the Tensa and Chitimacha nations had very different relationships with the French settlers during the first two decades of colonization, people from both of these

⁹⁶ Higginbotham, *Old Mobile*, 445; Dana Bowker Lee, “Captives to Kin,” 83-85.

⁹⁷ It was not uncommon for enslaved Indian people at Mobile to appear in parish records with their tribal identity listed as their last name. For example in 1746 Marguerite Panyoussa was buried in Mobile and in 1713 Marguerite Tanca gave birth to a son Claude. Panyoussa and Tanca are almost certainly French spellings for Panioucha and Tensa. de Ville, *Gulf Coast Colonials*, 21, 45.

⁹⁸ Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 337; Campbell, *American Indian Languages*, 145-146.

⁹⁹ Baron de Crenay, “Carte de partie de la Louisiane,” 1733, Louis C. Karpinski Map Collection, The Newberry Library; Nicolas de Fer, “Partie Meridionale de la Riviere Misisipi, et sus environs, dans l’Amerique Septentrionale,” 1718, Edward E. Ayer Collection, The Newberry Library.

nations ended up enslaved in colonial Mobile, New Orleans, Natchitoches, Natchez, and along the Mississippi River.¹⁰⁰ In the case of the Tensas, most of their enslaved were women and children and were taken by other Native allies of the French who traded them to settlers as part of political and economic exchanges. In contrast, the Chitimachas were taken as war captives in a conflict that was specifically designed by the French to generate a labor supply for the struggling colony, and more of these captives were men. Yet crucially, in both cases, French officials claimed these nations as allies. Thus, for all of Bienville's insistence that the French did not trade in Indian slaves and that the French did not enslave their allies, French relationship building and captive exchange in Lower Louisiana bears striking similarities to those of British in the years before the Yamasee War. It is therefore not surprising that as the French colony expanded in the 1710s and 1720s all of their petites nations allies began to grow frustrated with the French settlers and wary of their intentions.

¹⁰⁰ Burton and Smith, "Slavery in the Colonial Louisiana Backcountry," 136,140.

**The Gathering Storm:
Frustrations with the French in the Decade Before the Natchez War**

In 1725 Governor Bienville proclaimed the destruction of the petites nations in Louisiana. The French had been in the Lower Mississippi Valley for a quarter of a century and yet were still struggling to gain a firm foothold in the region. Yet, Bienville needed to project an image of victory and dominance to his superiors in France. In his opinion, Louisiana needed more resources if it was to thrive. So in 1725 when he wrote his official memoir of his time thus far in the region, along with his recommendations as to how to make the colony flourish, he included repeated pleas for more funding. In this appeal for support from the French crown and investors, he emphasized the virtues of the colony, the potential for development of Louisiana's natural resources, and the subjugation and disappearance of the local Indian population. The vanishing of the Indian threat and his ability to govern and control France's Native allies were essential selling points for the venture. Thus, in assessing the Lower Mississippi Valley, he recalled that it was "formerly the most densely populated with Indians but at present of these prodigious quantities of different nations one sees only pitiful remnants that have escaped the fury of the continual wars that they had among themselves and which were still lasting in the year 1699...Several have been entirely destroyed."¹

Certainly over the previous three decades the petites nations had experienced unimaginable loss. Nations including the Tohomes and Mobilians had lost ninety percent

¹ "Bienville's memoir of Louisiana 1725-1726," MPA: FD, 3:519-527.

of their populations to epidemics, while large numbers of the Tensas and Chitimachas had been taken by slave raiders. Without exception, the petites nations of the Lower Mississippi Valley were less than half of their pre-1700 sizes. Yet “feeble remnants” they were not. While Bienville and many later historians have attempted to dismiss the petites nations after 1720 as “settlement Indians,” or as “destroyed” and “dependent,” this trauma only strengthened the resolve of those who survived this era to find new ways to protect their communities.² Rather Bienville’s tale of the ruin of the petites nations was more wishful thinking than reality, and reflects his desire to proclaim control over the Lower Mississippi Valley.³

Although petites nations peoples had suffered immense losses, they were in no way cowed by the anemic French colony. Rather than becoming desperate and dependent, during the 1720s many of the petites nations began to resent the French. Louisiana had done very little to ensure the safety of the petites nations, and in some cases it arguably made the lives of the Lower Mississippi Valley peoples more difficult. For nations like the Chitimachas, rather than the promise of new allies that would protect them from slave raiders, the French brought only more violence and captivity.

Moreover, as the French grew more confident in their political position within the southeastern networks, they began to lose sight of their status as recent immigrants and

² Kelton, *Epidemics and Enslavement*, 150, 189- 197; Brasseux, *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma*, 120; Lankford, *Cultural Resources Reconnaissance Study*, 65-67; Bowne “Southeastern Indian Polities of the Seventeenth Century,” 73-77.

³ Colonial propaganda from the 1710s and 1720s frequently emphasized both the friendliness and destruction of local Indian nations in Louisiana. In 1717 and 1718 the Company of the West published several letters in French newspapers extolling the virtues and potential of Louisiana in an attempt to recruit colonists and investors. Similarly to Bienville’s memoir, both letters included assessments of the disappearance of the local Indian nations and the complete “destruction” of the Chitimachas who they claimed were reduced to a “wandering” people. “A Letter About Louisiana, Also Called Mississippi written to a woman of Quality” in the *Nouveau Mercure* February 1718, *Le Plus Beau Païs du Monde*, 67; “A New Account about Louisiana,” in the *Nouveau Mercure* September 1717, *Le Plus Beau Païs du Monde*, 39-43.

refugees within the region. Between 1699 and 1720 the political and demographic makeup of the Lower Mississippi Valley had shifted dramatically. As the Choctaws and Natchez grew in power and the Chickasaws began to lose their position of dominance, petites nations sought to shift their alliances to keep up with these changes. These demographic shifts were especially difficult for the small nations around Mobile who were among the hardest hit by disease in the 1710s. These changes compromised their ability to force the French to comply with their demands and maintain relationships on their terms. This in turn made the settlers far less attractive allies for some of the Mobile River nations.

By the end of the 1720s poor political and economic policies and social blunders had tried the patience of even the Louisianans' most steadfast petites nations allies. After all of the assistance they had provided against the Alabama and Chickasaw raiders during the Chitimacha War, and for the desperately starving settlers, petites nations leaders were stung by the Louisiana officials' attempts to dismiss many of the smaller polities and to emphasize only their alliances with the larger nations during the 1720s. Moreover, not only the Chitimachas, but many of the other Lower Mississippi Valley nations were troubled by the enslavement of local Indian peoples within the colony and the efforts of the French to expand their settlements onto Indian land.

Thus by the 1720s many of the petites nations were re-evaluating the wisdom of their alliances with the French and beginning to consider the powerful Natchez nation as a viable alternative to alliance with the Choctaws and French settlers. Those who chose to maintain relationships with the French made overt efforts to demonstrate that there was nothing dependent about their relationships. During the 1720s both the Chitimachas and

Mobilians powerfully articulated that despite the changes of the last two decades, the French would have to continue to negotiate on their terms if they desired to maintain relations, or they would sever ties with the settlers.

Demographic and Geopolitical Shifts

By the conclusion of the Chitimacha War, the Lower Mississippi Valley had once again undergone a serious geopolitical reorganization. The year 1718 marked not only the conclusion of the French conflict with the Chitimachas, but also the end of the far-reaching Yamasee War in South Carolina. The massive pipeline of Southeastern Indian captives flowing to Charleston was shut off, and nations like the Chickasaws and Creeks could no longer rely on the lucrative business of captive trading. To be sure, both Creeks and Chickasaws continued to trade in deerskins with South Carolina merchants, and the Yamasee War by no means halted all slave trading within the southeast, but the massive and constant export of captive Lower Mississippi Valley peoples for labor in the British Atlantic effectively ceased after 1715.⁴

This shift had significant impact on both the Creeks and the Chickasaws. Historian Stephen Hahn has argued that Creek national identity and the beginning of political unity were forged in the wake of this conflict.⁵ Following the Yamasee War, the Creeks also adopted a policy of neutrality, or rather a willingness to negotiate with Spanish, French, and British settlers simultaneously, rather than an exclusive alliance with only the British. The Chickasaws did not have access to the Spanish at Florida, and

⁴ Ramsey, "Something Cloudy in their Looks," 44-57; Barnett, *The Natchez Indians*, 30-31; Ekberg, *Stealing Indian Women*, 43.

⁵ Hahn, *The Invention of the Creek Nation*, 373.

there was both too much hostility between their nation and the French and too few French trade goods to supply the Chickasaws for a French and Chickasaw partnership to be viable. This left only the British as viable access point to European merchandise after the war.⁶ Both the Chickasaws and the Creeks had also suffered serious population losses due to high rates of exposure to European diseases and warfare. By 1725 both nations had been reduced to about 50% of their 1700 populations, with the Chickasaws numbering only 3,500 and the Upper Creeks 7,000 people.⁷ Thus while the Chickasaws remained a formidable regional force through the 1730s, by 1720 the collapse of the southeastern Indian captive trade and the heavy toll of diseases had greatly reduced their power.

In comparison, the Choctaws had lost far fewer people during the same period, and their new connections to French trade networks increased their regional power.⁸ Even before the arrival of Europeans in the regions, Choctaws were beginning to coalesce and confederate.⁹ Chickasaw raiding had forced them to cooperate militarily to protect their people, and their relationship with the French during the 1700s and 1710s had given them access to guns, metal hatchets, and other advanced weaponry. Although through the 1720s the Choctaws still suffered from shortages of trade goods, even the limited access

⁶ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 26-28.

⁷ Usner, *Social and Economic Histories*, 35.

⁸ The ability of nations to control resources, protect their people, exploit economic opportunities and networks, and determine the course and terms of their nations' relationships with outsiders as indicators of power within the southeast. Thus, as the Choctaws went from being unable to protect their people, unable to access advantageous weapons technology, forced to contract their villages, and losing control of their outlying territories around 1700, to being better able to defend themselves against raids, gaining access to valuable European good and technology, and forcing all of their allies to negotiate on their terms by the 1720s, it seems that this would illustrate a concrete increase in regional power during this twenty year period. DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 5-8.

⁹ Galloway, "Choctaws at the Border of the Shatter Zone" *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone*, 340-341.

to European goods tremendously improved the Choctaw ability to defend their 14,000 people.¹⁰ This increase in access to weapons and trade goods, coupled with the end of the slave trade and the weakening of the Chickasaw nation, meant that the Choctaws became even more powerful in comparison to the other polities of the Lower Mississippi Valley.¹¹

Along the central Lower Mississippi Valley, the Natchez also expanded their regional influence. At the turn of the eighteenth century the Natchez seemed to be teetering on the brink of becoming a petite nation themselves, as epidemics wracked their villages and they fought continuous wars with their neighbors. Yet during the 1700s and 1710s, the Natchez pulled off a masterful balancing act as they attempted to outfit themselves with a web of alliances that could weather all possible political turnovers. To combat their plummeting population, the Natchez took in refugee populations including the Koroas, Tioux, Grigras, and parts of the Chitimachas, Tensas, and Ofogoulas during the first decade of the century. For nations who did not wish to ally with the Chickasaws, Choctaws, or French settlers, the Natchez provided an appealing alternative and the promise of safety. These polities incorporated into the Natchez nation as lower class settlements and retained limited political autonomy. The best estimates suggest that by the 1710s and through the 1720s the Natchez had between 2,000-3,000 people in their six villages.¹²

¹⁰ Carson, *Searching for the Bright Path*, 27.

¹¹ Patricia K. Galloway and Clara Sue Kidwell, "Choctaws in the East," in *Handbook of North American Indians of the Southeast*, 14: 511-512.

¹² Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 44; Barnett, *The Natchez Indians*, 25-27, 41-44, 78-80, 99.

In addition to incorporating Native outsiders, the Natchez also welcomed French newcomers into their villages. Between 1700 and 1715 the Natchez cultivated relationships with French travelers, hosted French priests, and worked to establish relationships with the newcomers. Yet, much to the vexation of the French, they also hosted British and Chickasaw traders in their villages. In order to help solidify relationships with the distant British, the Natchez marketed their towns as ideal locations for basing the expansion of British trade into the region, and they began trading in Lower Mississippi Valley slaves themselves. For example, in 1713, the Natchez and their Yazoo allies orchestrated a surprise slave raid against the Chaouachas under the guise of a diplomatic visit and then sold these Chaouacha captives to British traders back at their villages.¹³ Thus while the Natchez cultivated relationships with the French and offered refuge to some of the petites nations, they also facilitated British and Chickasaw incursions into the region.

These webs of alliances served the Natchez well and made the French treat them with respect. In 1714 several Natchez men ambushed, robbed, and killed four French traders who were traveling up the Mississippi River to trade in the Illinois country. Although the circumstances were remarkably similar to those of the death of St. Cosme eight years earlier, the French recognized that they could not possibly react in the same way as they had with the Chitimachas; the Natchez were far too powerful and too well connected. Instead, with the help of the Tunicas, the French worked with several Natchez elites to capture and execute only the Natchez murderers. Furthermore, this incident

¹³ Usner, *Social and Economic Histories*, 20; Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 186-193; Brown, "Culture Contact and Change in the Natchez Bluffs region," 178-179; Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 159.

convinced the French that the Natchez could be either valuable allies or dangerous enemies, and so they constructed Fort Rosalie right within their town, which effectively guaranteed the Natchez steady access to traders and European goods.¹⁴

However, British suppliers were far from the Natchez homelands and European conflicts caused unreliable access to British goods, so after the outbreak of the Yamasee War the Natchez turned their attention more thoroughly to the French. As stated above, in 1716 the Natchez permitted the French to build Fort Rosalie alongside their homes near present day Natchez Mississippi.¹⁵ The Natchez allowed the French to establish concessions alongside the fort on their territories and to sow tobacco on their fertile fields. Rather than removing themselves from this loaned land, many Natchez opted to remain living on these French concessions and fully integrate themselves into these settlements. Natchez men and women exchanged their labor for French trade goods and set up close economic ties that allowed them to profit from these tobacco farmers.¹⁶

These initial cohabitations were hardly a threat to the Natchez nation. In 1718 the entire colonial population of Louisiana was not more than 350-400 people scattered between Indian villages, and by 1722 the two concessions at Natchez had a mere 95 French men, women, and children. The French and Natchez occasionally came into conflict during these early years of alliance and joint settlement, mostly when the French

¹⁴ Samuel Wilson Jr., "French Fortification at Fort Rosalie," *Natchez La Salle and His Legacy: Frenchmen and Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley*, Ed. Patricia K. Galloway (Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, 1982), 196-197; Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 167-176.

¹⁵ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 28.

¹⁶ Patricia K. Galloway, "Formation of Historic Tribes and French Colonial Period" in *Native, European, and African Cultures in Mississippi, 1500-1800* (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1991), 69.

abused Native people, misused the land, or let their cattle run wild.¹⁷ As St. Cosme complained during his time among the Natchez from 1700-1706, before he was killed by the Chitimachas, the Natchez did not fear or even respect the French. He had trouble asserting authority in the village and failed to convince the Natchez to follow his teachings. He wrote with frustration to his superior, the bishop of Quebec, asking for servants and some military muscle to protect him in his endeavors with the Natchez since he found that “it is awkward for a missionary to have to punch an Indian” to enforce his will.¹⁸

Although it is abundantly evident that the great nations did not fear the French and neither did most of the petites nations, by the 1720s the growing population of Louisiana settlers and their track record of exploiting Native peoples was beginning to change their political image in the region. After two decades of near constant famine, sickness, and poor provisioning, in the second half of the 1720s the colony stabilized and began to grow. Not only did the population of Europeans increase, but Louisiana began to receive regular shipments of enslaved Africans. The 1726 census suggests that there were 2,228 European servants and settlers, 1,540 African slaves, and 229 Indian slaves in the settlements just along the Lower Mississippi River and in New Orleans. Including Mobile, Biloxi, Natchez, the smaller gulf coast settlements, and interior Louisiana there were roughly 4,000 people in the Louisiana outposts and concessions and another 3,500

¹⁷ Many of these early conflicts were also caused by friction between different towns within the Natchez nation. Within this conglomerate nation the leaders of each town exercised substantial political authority. During the 1710s and 1720s the various towns vied for supreme control of the nation leading to internal conflict. Different portions of the Natchez nation held different alliances, and sometimes-conflicting political agendas led various towns to attack French. John Brice Harris, *From Old Mobile to Fort Assumption* (Nashville: The Parthenon Press, 1959), 25-29.

¹⁸ Barnett, Natchez Indians, 49.

dispersed among Indian villages.¹⁹ The mass importation of Africans into Louisiana was also beginning to fuel the development of a marginally successful tobacco plantation economy and the French officials were hopeful that this enterprise could finally render the colony profitable. This population surge dramatically increased the number of French in the Lower Mississippi Valley.²⁰ While this increase had a relatively minor effect on the relationships between the French and the larger interior nations of the Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws, this demographic change was much more significant for the nations with whom the French cohabited.

Perhaps nowhere did the population shift of the 1710s and 1720s more dramatically change relationships than among the French and Native nations at Mobile. By 1726 there were 528 settlers and enslaved persons living Mobile.²¹ The same ships that carried in enslaved Africans, French settlers, and company provisions also brought unrelenting waves of diseases to the Mobile Bay. The Mobilians, Naniabas, Tohomes, Biloxis and other nations immediately surrounding Mobile were the hardest hit by these epidemics. Biloxi men and women continued to come to Mobile from their villages on the Pearl River throughout the 1720s to trade fish and game, yet by 1720 this constant exposure to European disease had reduced the nation to only 175 people.²² Likewise, the Mobilians had lost upwards of 90% of their population to sickness. In 1699 there were between 2,100 and 2,450 Mobilians and Tohomes living in the vicinity of Mobile. By 1725 there were only 210 surviving Mobilians and Tohomes living alongside the old

¹⁹ Maduell, *The Census Tables*, 50.

²⁰ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 30-57; Usner, *Social and Economic Histories*, 31-46.

²¹ Maduell, *Census Tables*, 62-64.

²² Caillot, *A Company Man*, 82-84.

capital. The population explosion in Mobile and the onslaught of sickness pressed the Native population to live in close proximity to their allies and effectively forced coalescence as Mochtoby, Capinan, Naniaba, Tohome, and Mobilian men, women, and children died in droves. After the 1710s the Capinans and Mochtobys ceased to appear in French records as independent nations. Those who were able to fight off the waves of plagues integrated into Mobilian, Tohome, Biloxi, Chatot, and Choctaw villages.²³

For the Mobilians and Tohomes who survived this devastating era of disease, the political and demographic situation they encountered in the 1720s barely resembled the geopolitical world of 1700. Rather than negotiating with a few desperate foreigners seeking refuge among their people, in the 1720s the Mobilians found themselves outnumbered by Frenchmen in their homelands. It seemed to them that their Louisiana allies had forgotten the small nations to whom they owed their survival, as French officials fixed their attention on the Choctaws and Chickasaws and failed to treat the Mobilians with the same level of respect they had garnered in the 1700s.

Continued Dependency

In 1728 French Governor Etienne Perier wrote to the Directors of the Company of the Indies begging for more supplies.²⁴ Perier had taken over the governorship of Louisiana in 1727 and was having a terrible time sustaining the colony. Louisiana was short on essential provisions, like rope and nails, and the government had no copper coin

²³ “Bienville’s memoir of Louisiana 1725-1726,” MPA:FD, 3: 536-537; Margry, *Découvertes*, 4: 602; Higginbotham, *The Mobilian Indians*, 80; Kelton, *Epidemics and Enslavement*, 189-192; Usner, *Social and Economic Histories*, 35; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 40-44, 50-51.

²⁴ In 1723 the Company of the Indies took over control of Louisiana from John Law.

with which to pay the soldiers.²⁵ Despite the influx of immigrants and enslaved Africans to farm the lands, Louisiana was still largely unable to support itself and the colony had to depend on trade with their Native allies. Perier was frustrated and desperate. He told the company that “everybody is falling sick,” and the colony “is without wine, brandy, flour, meat, and other dry merchandise” and lacking in medicine.²⁶ Much of the wine and wheat that was shipped to Louisiana was sealed improperly and unsuited to the long hot voyage and damp weather. Barrel after barrel was soured and spoiled. Perier also complained of the quality of the dry provisions, as the company shipped him millstones so soft that they “fall to pieces like sand” and stockings and jackets for the troops that “are all so rotten there is no way to get anything out of them.”²⁷ In this list of essentials he also pleaded for the limbourg cloth and light trade guns that Indians demanded.²⁸ This brightly colored red and blue woolen cloth was used by many native peoples as blankets, wraps, and as a colorful substitute for fur or feather capes.²⁹

Perier understood that trade items for Native peoples were as essential as wheat and wine for the French colony. If the French could not supply themselves they would need to trade for food. These coveted commodities were essential parts of the annual gifts

²⁵ Perier and de la Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 11/2/1727, *MPA: FD*, 2: 554-555.

²⁶ Perier and de la Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 7/31/1728, *MPA: FD*, 2: 576.

²⁷ Perier and de la Chaise to the Director of the Company of the Indies, 11/3/1728, *MPA:FD* 2:601; Perier and De La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 7/31/1728, *MPA:FD*, 2: 584.

²⁸ Perier and De La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 7/31/1728, *MPA: FD*, 2: 580; *The Louisiana Governors*, 25-27; Perier and de la Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 1/30/1729, *MPA:FD*, 2: 612-613.

²⁹ Diana DiPaolo Lauren, “Threads, Collecting Cloth in the North American French Colonies” *Archaeologies* (2008) vol.4 no.1, 57; Ralph A. Smith and Benard De La Harpe, “Exploration of the Arkansas River by Benard De La Harpe, 1721-1722: Extracts from His Journal and Instructions” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1951), 343.

given by the French to their native allies in order to maintain trade and diplomatic relations. Each year, French diplomats would travel to the villages of the Choctaws, Natchez, and other polities, or the nations would come to Mobile and New Orleans. At these annual meetings colonial officials offered Native leaders gifts to show their good intentions, and the groups would share the calumet, reaffirm their alliances, and discuss any political or economic issues. Without these gifts, Louisiana diplomats could not hold councils and could not ask for support from their Indian allies. Given the state of the colony, Perier estimated that Louisiana would require about 19,000 livres worth of gifts for the Indians in 1728 alone.³⁰

Access to the merchandise and provisions that would be used to hold these councils, give as presents, and supply a steady trade were thus an integral part of not only the economic, but also the political exchanges in the Lower Mississippi Valley.³¹ Perier was mindful of the repercussions of providing insufficient gifts and trade goods to Indian leaders. By the 1710s these continual shortages of trade goods and gifts began to cause friction with their Native allies.³² Ten years prior, in 1717, the then governor of Louisiana, Jean-Michiele L'Epinay, had undersupplied the petites nations and Choctaws

³⁰ Annual gifts were essential components of Southeastern Indian diplomacy. These presents not only conveyed the continued desire for a relationship and peaceful intentions, but also functioned as a kind of tribute to France's Native allies. Perier's estimated increase reflects an increase of more than 300% from the gift giving amount 20 years prior. During the winter of 1706-1707 France only distributed 6,000 livres worth of goods. Although French officials resented these payments, they ultimately decided that the support of their native allies was so essential that they could not afford to ignore their demands. Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 98-100; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 26-27; Bienville to Pontchartrain, 10/27/1711, MPA: FD, 3:160; Vaudreuil to Maurepas, 2/12/1744, MPA: FD, 4: 216.

³¹ Perier and De La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 7/31/1728, MPA: FD, 2: 580.

³² Minutes of the Superior Council of Louisiana 12/22/1724, MPA: FD, 3: 463; Vaudreuil to Rouille, 5/10/1751, MPA: FD, 5: 93; Bienville to Pontchartrain, 9/1/1715, MPA: FD, 3:188-189; Hubert to the Council, 10/26/1717, MPA: FD, 2:240; De La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 9/6/1723, MPA: FD, 2: 312-315.

with gifts. The petites nations perceived his shortcomings as a great insult and they threatened to sever their relationships with the French government. In 1717 Louisiana's commissary general nervously wrote back to the Council of the Navy to report on the damage done by these shortages. The failure of the French to pay these gifts had led the Indians to become "very dissatisfied and they say among themselves that Mr. De L'Epinay was a mangy old dog whom the Great Chief on the other side of the great lake [the French King] had sent to this country, because he was dying of hunger in his village and he was an old woman."³³ From these Indians' perspective, his inability to fulfill his diplomatic requirements rendered him unfit to lead and unworthy of their respect. In no uncertain terms, Native leaders emphasized the French official's weakness, his un-manly conduct, and his dependent refugee status on the gulf coast.

By the 1720s the petites and great nations had become even less patient with the shortcomings of their French allies. All of the polities of the gulf coast recognized that the French were militarily weak and short on trade goods, and also that Louisianans would enslave native peoples given the opportunity. Perhaps these nations could have better tolerated trade shortages if the French seemed to be their true friends, or behaved as weaker polities were supposed to and defer to their stronger allies. Either way, the combination of indiscriminant slave trading and perpetual goods shortages infuriated their Native allies. If Bienville had formerly banked on the superior reputation of the French as being true friends of the Indians and refusing to enslave native peoples, after the Chitimacha War Native peoples no longer had any illusions of French benevolence. The continued visibility of Indian slaves in French settlements and the colonists' brutal

³³ Hubert to the Council, 10/26/1717, MPA: FD, 2: 240.

treatment of their captive Indian enemies troubled their Native allies.³⁴ For example, in 1746 when traveling French diplomat Major Jadart de Beauchamp asked Choctaw Chief Mongoulacha Mingo why he did not trust the Louisiana officials, he pointed toward their history of enslaving allied petites nations peoples. He told Beauchamp “that he had long known that we [the French] sought the ruin of the red men ”and Mongoulacha Mingo cited the case of the Chief of the Tohomes, “whom M. De Bienville, in the early days of the old fort of Mobile, had sent to the islands to die; and that he [Bienville] had had this man taken by force.”³⁵ Mongoulacha Mingo referred to the French practice of sending Native captives to St. Domingue and other French possessions, where, as slaves, they mostly died of illness and exploitation on sugar plantations.³⁶

Through the first half of the eighteenth century, the Choctaws relied on the Mobilians and Tohomes to convey messages for them to the French, the Mobilians and Tohomes traded salt to the Choctaws, and all three regularly held diplomatic meetings.³⁷ Thus the version of the story that this Choctaw chief received was likely an account directly from the Tohomes or Mobilians. Although Beauchamp insisted that in the case that the Choctaw chief referenced, the Tohomes themselves had given up this chief to Bienville as a captive because they did not like him as a leader, the Choctaws doubted this version of the story.³⁸ Whatever the case, as Mongoulacha Mingo’s speech indicates,

³⁴ Lusser to Maurepas, 1/25/1730, MPA:FD, 1:102-105.

³⁵ Beauchamps, “1746 Journal of Visit to the Choctaws,” *Travels in the American*, 266-267.

³⁶ Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 57, 97.

³⁷ Iberville, *Iberville’s Gulf Journals*, 141-143.

³⁸ In general, petites nations chiefs exercised minimal coercive authority. Thus petites nations peoples generally did not feel compelled to heed the guidance of their leaders, follow them to war, or perform any kind of labor at their request. Therefore, it would be extremely surprising if the Tohomes recognized as a

France's practice of enslaving their petites nations allies threatened to destroy their relations with both the petites and great nations.

We might expect that as petites nations suffered massive population losses and enslavement by their French allies and the French settlements and alliance networks expanded, that the petites nations would become more willing to accommodate French settlers' desires and terms of negotiation. Yet the actions of petites nations during the 1720s suggest that for at least some of them, this experience of suffering and loss made them less convinced of the value of French alliance and more determined to remind the French that Indians still held power in the region. They did not accept French excuses for failing to provide sufficient trade goods, and they sometimes refused aid to French diplomats when the French failed to meet their obligations. As Patricia K. Galloway has argued, Native peoples perceived gifts to and from European settlers as investments in a relationship.³⁹ By failing to return the investment and maintain respectful relationships with petites nations near Mobile, the French appeared to be indicating their desire to end or degrade the quality of the relationships, and petites nations peoples reacted in kind. In essence, rather than encouraging dependence and desperation for any terms of trade by treating petites nations poorly, this failure to respect the terms of Native relationships led petites nations people to back further away from the French.

leader a man who they all detested. There is no other record of this incident, so it is ultimately impossible to determine the degree of veracity of Beauchamps and Mongoulacha Mingo's speeches.

³⁹ Galloway has argued that the Choctaws and other southeastern Indian peoples were not fully integrated into a market economy during the eighteenth century. Therefore rather than being able to understand exchanges in purely economic terms, we need to assess economic relations with attention to the ways that Indians understood and valued people, relationships, and subsistence goods. Galloway, "Choctaws at the Border of the Shatter Zone" in *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone*, 345- 359.

The relationships between the Chitimachas and the French, and the Mobilians and the Tohomes and the French during the 1720s illustrate just these types of unexpected responses. Given the dramatic population losses of the Chitimachas and Tohomes, and the brutal war and mass enslavement of the Chitimachas by the French during the 1710s, we might expect that these three nations would behave in especially acquiescent ways towards the French. Yet the sparse records from the 1720s suggest that instead these nations went to great lengths to demonstrate to the French that they were not subservient peoples, and would not be governed by the wishes of the Louisianans.

Violating the Terms of Exchange: Mobilians and Tohomes

In addition to being close friends of the Choctaws, the Mobilians and Tohomes had been dear allies of the French at Mobile. During the first decade of French settlement the Mobilians and Tohomes provided essential supplies and labor to the struggling French establishment at Mobile. They served as guides, soldiers, and porters and they traded essential foodstuffs to the settlers at Mobile. In return the French gave them coveted European goods and provided them with military support against their enemies. When Le Page Du Pratz arrived in Louisiana in 1718, he remarked that the Tohomes “are our friends to a degree as even to tease us with their officiousness.”⁴⁰

French supply shortages remained critical throughout the 1720s, and so they continued to depend on the petites nations near Mobile for assistance. During an especially severe period of famine from 1719-1721. French officials were once again forced to send the soldiers stationed at Mobile to the villages of the Biloxis and

⁴⁰ Du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana*, 308.

Pascagoulas to be fed through the winter.⁴¹ Even as Bienville claimed the destruction of the petites nations in 1725, he recognized that the Acolapissas “furnish us almost all the meat that is consumed at New Orleans,” the Pascagoulas and Capinans were “very good hunters and fishermen,” the Biloxis “furnish an abundance of meat to all the French” and even the Chaouachas, whom he considered “by nature slothful and indolent,” produced and sold corn to the French.⁴² Thus, the inhabitants of Mobile and New Orleans were able to eat in large part because the petites nations were willing to trade with the French settlers.

Yet, by the late 1720s, the French lost sight of the importance of these relationships and began to break the terms of their mutually beneficial exchanges. As Mongoulacha Mingo indicated, they enslaved some petites nations peoples, and they began to channel their limited supply of trade goods towards larger interior nations, leaving little ammunition, powder, or limbourg cloth for the Native peoples whose settlements they shared. From intimate friends who were “very much attached to the French,” the Tohomes and Mobilians had grown frustrated and skeptical by the end of the 1720s.⁴³

During the first decade of their relationships with the French, the Mobilians and Tohomes had vastly outnumbered the few French refugees whom they welcomed into their villages. Yet French expansion and epidemics had flipped this demographic balance by the 1720s. Additionally, the French had decreased their dependence on the Mobilians

⁴¹ Usner *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 36.

⁴² “Bienville’s memoir of Louisiana 1725-1726,” MPA: FD, 3: 527, 535, 536.

⁴³ “Bienville’s memoir of Louisiana 1725-1726,” MPA: FD, 3: 537.

and Tohomes, by building a network of alliances with other Indian nations. From primarily relying on the petites nations immediately around Mobile, the French, as early as the 1710s, had increasingly turned their attention toward forging alliances with the Choctaws, Natchez, Tunicas and other interior nations. The French were especially intent on cultivating an alliance with the region's strongest polity, the Choctaws. In 1711 Bienville explained that the Choctaws "are the key to this country."⁴⁴ Louisiana's petites nations allies noticed this shift in focus.

In 1729 French lieutenant Regis de Roulet found his diplomatic mission to the Choctaws hamstrung by the Tohomes' and Mobilians' frustrations with French behavior. Roulet was on an assignment to travel from Mobile north to meet with the leaders of several Choctaw villages. The shortage of French trade goods and the failure of the French during the previous year to distribute annual presents to the Choctaw chiefs had encouraged many Choctaw leaders to turn to British traders to fulfill their trade needs, thereby forming political alliances with the British. The Choctaws refused to trade with anyone with whom they did not have a diplomatic relationship and so no transaction could be purely economic. Trading with the British required the construction of political ties with these traders, albeit very loose ones. French officials were terrified that the Choctaw—British alliance would threaten Louisiana. If they could not depend on their Choctaw allies to keep out the British, they feared that the British and their Indian allies could easily overrun French settlements.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Bienville to Pontchartrain, 10/27/1711, MPA: FD, 3:159.

⁴⁵ Regis Du Roulet to Maurepas, Abstract of the Journal made by Roulet in 1729-1733, MPA: FD, 1:171.

Roullet's crucial assignment was to meet with these Choctaw leaders, listen to their complaints, assure them that they had the firm support of the French king, and talk them out of pursuing relationships with the British. In order to convince them that the French could supply their people, he was bringing hundreds of pounds of coats, leggings, limbourg cloth, shirts, blankets, knives, beads, scissors, gunflints, powder, vermillion, brass bells, and other gifts to give to the Choctaw village leaders. To bring these goods to the Choctaws, Roullet required porters, and so when he arrived at Mobile he requested that the commandant of Mobile supply him with seventeen Indians to carry this load to the Choctaws. The commandant replied that he would order the Tohomes and Mobilians to supply nine men from their villages and that he would also acquire eight men from the Choctaw town of Chickasawhays. Yet the commandant was promptly forced to write back to Roullet to say that although he was "greatly mortified by this mistake" he could not get the Tohomes and Mobilians to carry the bales of goods.⁴⁶

As soon as the Tohomes and Mobilians had realized that these goods were not destined for them, they refused to carry the burdens. They too were short on trade goods and needed the cloth, gunflints, bullets, and other goods that Roullet was carrying. Roullet decided to try his luck negotiating with the nations directly. He first visited the Tohomes and asked for porters. The Tohomes had long supplied the French with labor, so Roullet expected an affirmative reply. Yet all except two Tohomes refused this request, saying that they did not have orders from their chief to do so. For his part, the chief of the Tohomes said he lacked the authority to make his men carry burdens for the French.

⁴⁶Chickasawhay was the name of a Choctaw town. The use of town names to identify Choctaw people throughout the eighteenth century illustrates how Native people continued to prioritize town level political and social identities over national identity. Regis du Roullet to Maurepas, MPA: FD, 1:21-54; Regis du Roullet to Perier, 3/16/1731, MPA: FD, 4: 65.

Thus, without having to directly reject Roullet, the Tohomes refused to bear his burdens. Roullet was shocked and infuriated by this rejection. He lamented that if it had not been for the help of the Chickasawhays he would have been forced to leave many of these goods behind. He next stopped at the village of the Mobilians where he spoke with their Chief, Tonty, and made the same request. Tonty bluntly and emphatically refused. As he explained, “whenever the French needed porters or any other commission it was to those of the river [the Mobilians and Tohomes] that they applied” as he recalled the long service of the Tohomes and Mobilians to the French. Yet Tonty was stung by the French failure to bring his people trade goods, so he refused, suggesting “the Choctaws who were flush with provisions could carry the bullets powder and other goods that [Roullet] had, since they were for them.”⁴⁷

Tonty and the chief of the Tohomes believed that the French were not maintaining their end of their political alliances and trade partnerships, and so the Mobilians and Tohomes should not have to maintain theirs. Tonty complained that the French lacked sufficient ammunition to keep his people from “being defeated like women.” For the Mobilians, the purpose of living with the French was to help them better defend their people from raiders. If they did not have access to guns and powder, their relationship was not achieving its primarily diplomatic goal. Asking his people to carry desperately needed trade goods to the Choctaws was beyond obtuse; it was deeply insulting. Thus, by 1729 it seemed to Tonty that French alliance had become more trouble than it was worth. Frustrated by the French officers’ inability to understand how these partnerships should work, and because even during times of shortage the French

⁴⁷ Regis du Roullet to Maurepas, 1729, MPA: FD, 1:22-24; Abstract of the Journal made by Roullet in 1729-1733, MPA:FD, 1: 171.

seemed to find ways to supply the Choctaws, Tonty refused to provide the French any more guides to help them traverse the region.

Roullet did manage to get most of his goods to the Choctaw villages with the help of the Chickasawhays, but the refusal of the Mobilians and Tohomes, delayed him and imperiled France's diplomatic goals. Without the vitals services provided by Louisiana's many petites nations allies, the colony would be in dire condition. Apalachees and Chatot people labored alongside colonists at Mobile: Houma and Chaouacha hunters supplied New Orleans with fish, corn, and chicken: and the Tunicas provided military support and intelligence to the settlers near Natchez. By shifting towards treating their relationships with the Tohomes and Mobilians as purely economic, rather than as diplomatic and social partnerships that facilitated economic exchanges, and by attempting to commoditize captives, French settlers irritated petites nations peoples and made them question the value of French alliance.⁴⁸

Thorns and Briers in the Sides and Feet of the French: the Chitimachas

Even more surprising than the Mobile River nations' refusal to aid French diplomacy is the disrespect with which the Chitimacha nation treated French diplomats. Considering the desperation of the Chitimacha leaders to end their war with France in the 1718, French officials fully expected the Chitimachas to comply with all of their peace terms. In the treaty, Bienville specified that he expected the Chitimachas to move closer

⁴⁸ Father Raphael to Abbe Raguett, 5/15/1725, MPA: FD, 2: 483-484; Memoir on Indians by Kerelec, 12/12/1758, MPA: FD, 5:224; Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 125-126; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 45.

to New Orleans and to serve the colonial population.⁴⁹ Much like the Mobilians and Tohomes, the Chitimachas were to act as porters and guides and to supply the city with meat, corn, and cane baskets. Yet, Chitimachas refused to acquiesce to French demands.⁵⁰ Rather than bending over backwards to keep the French pleased during the 1720s, the Chitimachas went out of their way to continue to harass the French and exact small vengeance where they could.

In the spring of 1727 Jesuit Missionary Father du Poisson began the arduous journey up the Mississippi River. Du Poisson had been assigned to establish a mission at the Quapaws, to Christianize the nation and maintain their alliance with the French. The spring flooding had swelled the muddy river and made the current nearly impassible, so du Poisson and his men were advancing upstream very slowly. The travelers had to stop frequently and stay overnight at Indian villages where they expected to be kindly received and fed by Louisiana's riverine allies. When Poisson and his men stopped at the Bayagoulas he spotted a familiar face, Framboise, a chief of the Chitimacha nation. Seeing that the travelers were weary, hungry, and unable to cook dinner on account of the soggy ground, Framboise invited them to dine with the Chitimachas at his village and he left a young Chitimacha to guide them. The hungry travelers eagerly accepted and packed their things back into the pirogues to travel to the Chitimachas.

Poisson's party set off behind the Chitimacha youth through the thick mud in pursuit of the promised meal. The Chitimachas had withdrawn further from the river to escape the flooding and so were lodged in a particularly inaccessible portion of the

⁴⁹ Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 219-220.

⁵⁰ D'Araguette, "Journal D'Artaguiette" *Travels in the American Colonies*, 42.

swamp. These travelers shortly had to get out of their canoes and slog through the mud in their robes. Father Poisson found fighting the mud and the tangled bayou vegetation exhausting, and he explained that they continued only because the guide “assured us that it was only a step farther, [so they] pushed the pirogue by main strength, for the hope of feasting with Framboise encouraged them; but, at length, we found only overthrown trees, mud, and some low ground where the water was stagnant.” Then, when the explorers had pressed themselves thoroughly into the wilderness, “The little Savage left us there, and disappeared in a moment. What were we to do in these woods without a guide? Father Souel jumped into the water, and we did the same; it was somewhat amusing to see us splashing among the thorns and briers knee-deep in water; our greatest trouble was to draw our shoes out of the mud.”⁵¹ The guide had abandoned them deep in the woods and far from the river. This was a serious predicament as French soldiers and travelers frequently starved to death or ran into trouble and died when they became lost in the Louisiana country. Yet du Poisson and his men failed to take the hint, and they pressed on in the direction of the village.

Miraculously du Poisson’s men did manage to toil their way through the mud and locate the Chitimacha village, but Framboise’s reception was far from hospitable. Addressing the weary travelers in their mud-caked clothes, Framboise coolly told the missionaries that he “had nothing” for them. Poisson correctly assessed that the best course of action would be to immediately flee from the village and return to the canoes, in spite of his party’s exhaustion. Southeastern diplomatic etiquette required that

⁵¹ Letter from Father du Poisson, Missionary to the Arkansas, to Father [?],” 10/3/1727, in, *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers, 1900), 67: 279-303.

diplomats were always received and fed at the villages of their allies no matter the inconvenience to their hosts. To turn away the French travelers and refuse to receive them was therefore an overtly hostile act. Perhaps Framboise expected that these travelers would meet their ends in the bayou mire before they even reached the village, or perhaps things would have turned violent if the French had attempted to stay the evening. In either case, Framboise clearly conveyed that the Chitimachas not only did not wish to help the missionaries on their diplomatic endeavors, but that the French were not welcome in their territory.⁵²

Like that of the Tohomes and Mobilians chiefs, Framboise's behavior was designed to remind French travelers in Native territory of their dependence on the benevolence of the petites nations and to assert that the French had no power over native peoples beyond the borders of their settlements. Framboise had every reason to hate the French, and when he was forced to deal with travelers who passed through his people's territory, he refused to do anything to aid them.

Throughout the 1730s the French continued to couple descriptions of the Chitimachas as "destroyed" and "wandering" with complaints about their attacks on colonists and property. For a nation that was allegedly conquered and subdued, the Chitimachas remained a considerable preoccupation for French officials. In Bienville's 1732 memoir to the king he again insisted that the Chitimachas were greatly reduced from their former glory, having at present only forty warriors, or roughly 140 people. However, even as he emphasized their weakness, he lamented their continual harassment of French settlers, saying that they had recently killed two Frenchmen in their territory

⁵² Father du Poisson to Father [?], 10/3/1727, *Jesuit Relations*, 67: 279-303.

and burned a plantation.⁵³ Beyond isolated attacks on property, the French also feared a Chitimacha conspiracy to seek revenge. They knew that the Chitimachas maintained relationships with the Opelousas, Ouachas, Chaouachas, Houmas, Natchez, Tunicas, and Avoyelles and had allies who also resented French behavior.⁵⁴ In 1738 when Totica, a chief of the Chitimachas, met with the Tattooed Serpent, a military leader of the Avoyelles, French officials worried that this meeting might be designed to form a pan-tribal assault on French settlements near Pointe Coupee.⁵⁵ Nervous about the potential for an attack, the French decided to withhold all trade ammunitions from the Avoyelles, Tunicas, and Chitimachas.⁵⁶

For all of their efforts to assert that the Chitimachas were no longer a threat, the correspondence from the 1720s and 1730s suggests a very different narrative of Chitimacha and French relations. While the Chitimachas had certainly suffered tremendous losses and were forced to deal with a colonial power that kept some of their people enslaved, the Chitimacha nation was hardly a subjugated and dependent polity. Rather, through minor aggressions and the maintenance of their many other alliances, the

⁵³ There is some question as to whether the Chitimachas or the Natchez were responsible for these attacks. The Tunicas, one of Louisiana's closest petite nation allies, informed Bienville that they believed it was the Chitimachas who were responsible, although Bienville later considered that it was likely that the Natchez had committed these murders. *Memoir of the King to Serve as Instruction for Sieur de Bienville, the governor of the province of Louisiana*, 2/2/1732, MPA: FD, 3: 555; *Bienville to Maurepas*, 8/10/1733, MPA: FD, 3: 625.

⁵⁴ *Bienville to Cadillac*, 6/23/1716 MPA: FD, 3:214; *Bienville to Maurepas*, 12/20/1737 MPA: FD, 3: 706; *Bienville's memoir of Louisiana 1725-1726*, MPA: FD, 3: 528.

⁵⁵ Most of these rumors of Chitimacha assaults and conspiracies are unsubstantiated. Thus these incidences indicate as much about French cognizance of Chitimacha frustration and fear of the potential for retribution for the mass enslavement of the Chitimachas as they do the actual political and military engagements of the Chitimachas.

⁵⁶ *Louboey to Marepas*, 11/18/1738, MPA: FD, 1: 156-157.

Chitimachas asserted their independence and reminded the French that they were still at the mercy of their Indian neighbors.

By the close the 1720s many of France's native allies seethed with resentment. Although the Choctaws, Natchez, Tohomes, Mobilians, Chitimachas, and other petites nations maintained relations with the French, they all had litanies of grievances against their French allies. The expansion of the French settlements during the 1710s and 1720s strained French relations with their native neighbors at the joint settlements of Mobile and Natchez. The conclusion of the slave trade meant that petites nations no longer had to live in dire fear of British and Chickasaw raiders, so even though they had lost hundreds of kin, their fortunes seemed to be improving. Likewise, the decline of the Chickasaws and the political and economic developments of the Choctaws and Natchez shifted the regional balance of power, and the French frantically worked to secure and maintain the alliance of these two great nations. Yet the combination of trading in slaves, violating the terms of Native diplomacy, and being chronically short on trade goods threatened the viability of Louisiana's relations. It was only a matter of time until these simmering hostiles boiled over into violence.

5

The Storm Breaks: The Natchez War and Its Consequences

“Before the French came amongst us, we were men, content with what we had and that was sufficient: we walked with boldness every road, because we were our own masters; but now we go groping, afraid of meeting thorns, we walk like slaves, which we shall soon be, since the French already treat us as such. When they are sufficiently strong they will no longer dissemble...Shall we suffer the French to multiply, till we are no longer in a condition to oppose their efforts?”¹

On November 28, 1729, a group of Natchez elders carried the calumet of their nation to the French commandant at Fort Rosalie. They entered the fort surrounded by men laden with fowl and corn and their warriors who were prepared as if for a great hunt. The Natchez declared they had come to celebrate their relationship with the French and to thank the commandant, Sieur de Chepart, for his generosity and flexibility. Earlier that year Chepart had ordered that the Natchez village of White Apple would need to relocate in order to make space for a French plantation.² White Apple had some of the finest farmland in Natchez country, and Chepart saw economic potential in the fertile earth. Not surprisingly, the village leaders of White Apple were furious at this presumptuous request. During the summer of 1729 they had held councils with the rest of the nation to determine their course of action, and they struggled to decide how to deal with the French. After failing to convince Chepart to rescind his request, the headmen of White

¹ Speech from a Natchez village chief calling for war with the French at a council meeting in 1729. Du Pratz, *A History of Louisiana*, 83.

² The village of White Apple was also known as the village of White Earth. Brown, “Culture Contact and Change in the Natchez Bluff Region,” 193.

Apple finally told the commandant that they would move, but they begged to stay through the harvest so they would not lose the year's crops. Chepart agreed, and thus at the end of the season in November he opened the fort gates to receive the thankful villagers.³

Yet rather than showering them with gifts of produce, these Natchez leaders and warriors rained clubs, axes, and musket fire on the unsuspecting French. Within hours the Natchez killed at least 229 colonists and captured 50 French women and children and 300 African slaves.⁴ Like many of the Lower Mississippi Valley nations, the Natchez were furious with the French settlers, and they feared exploitation if they continued to allow these social and diplomatic affronts to go unpunished. Chepart's obtuse demands were the last in a long line of French transgressions against Natchez people and property. His treatment of the Apple villagers led many Natchez leaders to conclude that French and Natchez joint settlement cohabitation had become untenable and that this alliance needed to be severed. Thus, after months of secret diplomatic gatherings and military preparation, in November of 1729 the Natchez villages violently severed this joint settlement in typical Lower Mississippi Valley fashion.

The shockwaves of the Natchez attack rippled across the entire gulf coast. Over the next year, both the French and Natchez frantically attempted to recruit neighboring nations to back their causes. Although the Natchez were larger and more powerful than the French, both nations recognized that the conflict would ultimately be determined by their diplomatic networks and the amount of military support that they could garner from

³ Milne, *Natchez Country*, 159-177; Swanton *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 221-225; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 26-27.

⁴ Barnett Jr. *The Natchez Indians*, 105; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 27.

their allies. If the local nations chose to support the French in their fight against the Natchez, as they had against the Chitimachas in 1706, the Natchez could expect to suffer tremendous losses. French officials realized that independently they did not have enough forces to combat the powerful Natchez.⁵ In the mid-1720s the Natchez numbered roughly 1,750 people and could field about 500 warriors.⁶ The French absolutely could not let an attack of this magnitude go un-avenged—to do so would be political suicide—and so they entreated the Choctaws and petites nations to help them fight the Natchez and avenge their losses.

Many petites nations were torn as to whether to support the French or the Natchez. By 1729 most of the petites nations had constructed tangled webs of alliances that linked them diplomatically and economically to French, Natchez, French-allied, and Natchez-allied nations. This was especially true for the petites nations who lived in the lands nearest to Natchez along the Yazoo River and on the Mississippi River. These Tunica, Ofogoula, Koroa, and Yazoo nations all had close political and economic ties to the French as well as strong political and kin connections to the Natchez. Therefore, when the two nations declared war, they found themselves caught in the middle of a conflict among allies.

⁵ It is difficult to determine the exact number of soldiers who were in Louisiana in December of 1729. Marcel Giraud's calculations suggest that the number was no more than 325. Over the course of the next year France sent an additional 242 soldiers to defend the colony. However, Giraud suggests that these reinforcements were effectively useless as they overwhelmingly arrived sick, malnourished, and unadjusted to the Louisiana climate. For comparison, this force is, on par with the military might of many of petites nations. In 1723, six years before this conflict, French officials estimated that the Houmas had roughly 300 warriors, the Acolapissas had 150, and the Tunicas had 200. The Tohomes and Mobilians, who had been among those hardest hit by disease, could still field an army of 140 warriors in 1730. D'Artaguette, "Journal of D'Artaguette," *Travels in the American Colonies*, 42-44; Giraud *A History of French Louisiana* 5:403-404, 409; Wood, "The Changing Population," 74; Higginbotham, *Old Mobile*, 180-194.

⁶ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 66.

The outcomes of the Natchez War would have massive effects on the geopolitical alignments of the region. By the conclusion of the conflict, not only the French and Natchez, but several of their allies had suffered catastrophic losses. In the wake of this bloody regional war, the petites nations reconsidered their diplomatic and political strategies. Thus, over the course of the three decades following the war, the petites nations who survived worked to rebuild their alliance networks in ways that would protect them from being dragged into future regional conflicts.

The Politics of Violence

Perhaps if Chepart had been more familiar with Lower Mississippi Valley diplomacy and joint settlement practices, he might have guessed that the Natchez would respond to his efforts to evict their people with violence. Although historians and novelists have long presented the Natchez attack on the neighboring colonists as an anomalous and uniquely brutal incident, it was neither.⁷ The Natchez response to the transgressions by the French settlers followed a very similar pattern to those of the Bayagoula killing of the Mugulashas and the Tunica killing of the Houmas. In all of these cases, the process of joint settlement severance relied on surprise attacks. The process of ending the French and Natchez cohabitation was not exceptional.

During the course of their nearly two decades of cohabitation, the French and Natchez neighbors had repeatedly come into conflict. Between 1716 and 1729 the French and Natchez inhabitants had three major diplomatic crises, which have typically been called wars by historians. In each case French settlers violated Natchez political and

⁷ For an overview of literature on “the Natchez Massacre” see Sayre, *Indian Chief as Tragic Hero*, 203-248.

social expectations and the lack of a cohesive system for resolving these disputes led to violence. Each of these crises led to both French and Natchez bloodshed. The execution of several high level Natchez officials by the French at the end of the 1716 and 1724 conflicts also caused political shifts within the nation and stoked the smoldering anger of these leaders' kin and allies.⁸ These deaths would require vengeance.⁹

By the conclusion of the first conflict in 1716, the commissary general of Louisiana, Sieur Duclos, was already predicting a future war with the Natchez. He correctly feared that the executions of prominent Natchez leaders would cause the Natchez to fear and resent the French settlers within their midst. As he explained, after the execution of Natchez leaders “judging us by their principles” the chief of White Apple “would always fear that sooner or later we should have them tomahawked and in order to prevent it they would not fail immediately or later as soon as they found a fine opportunity to play some bad trick on the French” and even more bluntly that French

⁸ In both cases, as part of the peace agreements, French officials executed high-ranking authority figures that had killed French men and led resistance against the French settlers. Like the other polities of the Lower Mississippi Valley, Natchez social and political identity was town-based, and within the Natchez nation there were strong internal divisions. These conflicts provided ambitious Natchez leaders with the opportunity to eliminate their political rivals. During both the Natchez crises of 1716 and 1723 Natchez leaders aided the French in capturing and executing men from other villages who had murdered French settlers. In 1724 Natchez leaders blamed the chief of the Tioux village (a refugee nation from the Yazoo River that had sought refuge among the Natchez) for the mutilation of a French mare. The Tioux leader denied that his people had anything to do with the mutilation. By deflecting blame for this incident to the less powerful Tioux, the Natchez avoided the outbreak of conflict. In essence, although these earlier conflicts emerged from tensions between the Natchez and the French settlers, they were fundamentally shaped by internal power struggles within the Natchez nation. Ian W. Brown, “Culture Contact and Change,” 181; Milne, *Natchez Country*, 75-77, 111, 120-123.

⁹ For spiritual as well as political reasons American Indians across the southeast felt compelled to avenge the deaths of their kin. Unless these deaths were “covered,” that is the families of the dead were compensated by the killer with gifts and material support for the loss of their loved ones, the death of kin required blood vengeance. The “crying blood” or the dead demanded that the killer or one of his kin be killed in order to restore spiritual balance. In sum, killing Natchez leaders assured that Natchez kin of the dead would need to seek vengeance for their murdered brethren. For a fuller explanation of blood debts, covering Native deaths, and crying blood see Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers*, 136-138, 164-166, and Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 80-100.

settlers at Natchez “would not be safe at all and would even run the risk of being massacred there some day.”¹⁰ In essence because the French had not followed Native protocol for dealing with murders between nations, the Natchez would eternally live in fear that the French would launch a surprise attack on them in order to exact their revenge. In order to prevent the French from having a “fine opportunity” to do this, Duclos predicted that the Natchez would strike first to neutralize this danger.

The threat that Duclos perceived grew as Natchez leaders watched the French mistreat both their own people and Louisiana’s other Indigenous allies. In the weeks before the assault in 1729, Natchez leaders complained that the French treated their people like slaves, let their cattle run wild over their lands, and debauched their women.¹¹ As they had accepted a number of Chitimacha refugees during the 1710s, the Natchez were well aware that enslavement by the French was a very real threat and that the French had no hesitations about holding former allies in bondage. Additionally, the growth of the population of enslaved Africans within the French settlement troubled the Natchez.¹² They saw the French abuse these bondsmen and they feared that they were next.¹³ When they complained that the French “treated them as slaves” this was not just a

¹⁰ Duclos to Pontchartrain, 6/7/1716, MPA: FD, 3:211.

¹¹ Milne, *Natchez Country*, 176.

¹² Between 1726 and 1732 there was a tremendous increase in the number of African slaves in Louisiana. Mass importation during this five-year period led to an increase in enslaved Africans from 1,540 in 1726 to 3,800 African bondsmen in 1732. Over the course of these five years twelve slave ships carrying 3,682 Africans landed in Louisiana. In 1726 there were reportedly 105 French settlers and 74 African slaves, however merely three years later the Natchez region numbered 400 whites and 280 African slaves. These numbers suggest that the population of Natchez nearly quadrupled in these three years alone. Usner 113; Paul LaChance, “The Growth of Free and Slave Populations in the French Colonial Louisiana,” *French Colonial Louisiana and the Atlantic World*, 212, 215-216; Giraud, *History of French Louisiana* 5: 390; Maduell, “*Census Tables*,” 26.

¹³ George Milne and other scholars of the region have convincingly argued that this influx of enslaved Africans at least in part led to the final Natchez War. Bond has suggested that without the importation of

figure of speech. One Natchez leader pointed directly to an incident in which the French used corporal punishment on a Natchez man. “For the least fault they will tie them to a post, and whip them as they do their black slaves. Have they not already done so to one of our young men; and is death not preferable to slavery?”¹⁴ In addition to using force to punish Natchez men, the French also showed no compunction about mistreating Natchez women. Their perception of Natchez and Tensa women’s sexual liberty as sexual availability led to conflicts with the Natchez kin who sought to defend their mothers, sisters, and wives from predatory colonists.¹⁵ Finally, if the French did not respect Native women, they also failed to respect Indian property. Natchez men repeatedly took out their frustrations on the cows, pigs, and horses that stomped through their fields crushing and eating their corn crops. They cut the tails off of these animals, slashed them, and sometimes killed the trespassing beasts in an effort to communicate that French destruction of Natchez land and food supplies would not be tolerated.¹⁶ Yet again, French settlers failed to read mutilations of their animals as a way to enforce territorial boundaries and continued to permit their livestock to graze freely.¹⁷

Ultimately, Natchez fear for their liberty, the safety of Natchez women, and their control of their homelands caused them to seek violent recourse. The French clearly had

this massive new labor force Chepart would not have desired to expand his plantation holdings because he would have no labor to work the fields. Milne has argued that Natchez peoples watched the local African population increase and observed their exploitation by French masters leading them to construct their own racial identity and to use this ideology to justify the expulsion of the French. Milne, *Natchez Country*, 150-159.

¹⁴ DuPratz, *History of Louisiana*, 83.

¹⁵ de Montigny, *Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont*, 183.

¹⁶ Milne, *Natchez Country*, 100, 106; Usner, *Social and Economic Histories*, 25; Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 215-216.

¹⁷ Bienville, “Minutes of the Superior Council of Louisiana,” 7/23/1723, MPA: FD, 3:359-360.

no intention of leaving of their own accord and seemed to be determined to force the Natchez out of their own territory. Therefore, it seemed to Natchez that a violent severance of this joint settlement was the only viable option.¹⁸

The Natchez were not the only nation that decided to pursue violent severance strategies in 1729. Just weeks after the Natchez assault on Fort Rosalie in 1729, the Koroas and Yazoo also used surprise assaults to attack the French. In a move that almost directly mirrored the tactics of the Natchez, Yazoo and Koroa warriors entered Fort St. Pierre carrying a calumet and slaughtered the small garrison, keeping several of the women and children alive as captives.¹⁹ This assault caught the French off guard, as the Koroas and Yazoo were also allies and trade partners of the French.

Since the construction of Fort St. Pierre alongside their villages in 1719, the Koroas and Yazoo had maintained close economic and diplomatic relationships with Louisiana. During the first decade of the eighteenth century Chickasaw slave raids had fractured the joint settlement of the Tunicas, Ofogoulas, Ibitoupas, Tioux, Koroas, and Yazoo on the Yazoo River. Subsequently, the Tunicas had relocated south and worked

¹⁸ For more in depth explanations of the many and complex causes of the Natchez War in 1729 see George E. Milne's *Natchez Country: Indians, Colonists, and the Landscapes of Race in French Louisiana*, Patricia Dillon Woods' *French and Indian Relations on the Southern Frontier*, James F. Barnett's *The Natchez Indians: A History to 1735*, Marcel Giraud's *A History of French Louisiana*, and Daniel H. Usner's *American Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley: Social and Economic Histories*.

¹⁹ The Yazoo and Koroas are estimated to have killed 17 of the soldiers stationed at St. Pierre in this 1729 assault. Although the outpost at St. Pierre was technically called a fort, this term implies a greater level of French establishment and military control than actually existed near the Yazoo and Koroa villages. In 1727 a French priest who visited the outpost remarked that the fort was actually a "hut...surrounded by palisades, its sole defense consisting in the position it occupied at the top of the bluff." This tiny hut had a total of only twelve soldiers at the time and a mere four other inhabitants. Although the post had increased to about 80 people, including the garrison, by 1729, this settlement remained small and heavily dependent on the generosity of the Yazoo and Koroas. Giraud, *History of Louisiana*, 5:382-384, 400; Lisa Marie Malischke, "Old Methods Made New—French Fort St. Pierre (1719-1729), Daily Life, Stanley South, and Multivariate Statistics," (paper presented at the Southeastern Archaeological Conference, Greenville, November 2014); Sophie White, *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians*, 105.

to form a close alliance with the French, while the Koroas and Yazoo initially prioritized relationships with the Natchez and British traders. To avoid becoming enslaved themselves, the Koroas and Yazoo conducted raids against their neighbors, including the Tensas, and sold these slaves to British traders.²⁰ The Koroas and Yazoo maintained connections with British traders during the 1700s and 1710s and resented French presence in their territories.²¹ In 1702 several Koroas killed a French priest and his three travel companions and in order to repair relations with the French, the Koroa chief agreed to execute these murderers. Yet this execution frustrated many Koroas as it violated Native customs of revenge raiding to avenge murders.²² Although it seems that the Koroas' primary alliance was with the Natchez, the Koroas did maintain relationships with the French through trade. When the Yamasee War made access to British goods difficult, the Yazoo and Koroas permitted the French to establish Fort St. Pierre at their villages in 1719 along the Yazoo River to facilitate French trade. To the French, having a fort in the region would both help their claims to the region and persuade the Yazoo and Koroas to bring their deerskins to them.²³

Despite their close alliances with the Natchez, the Koroas and Yazoo were initially conflicted about whom to support in this war. Although the Yazoo had allied with the French during their conflict with the Natchez in 1723, they were not sure that

²⁰ La Harpe, *Historic Journal*, 48-53.

²¹ Bienville to Pontchartrain, 10/12/1708, MPA: FD, 2, 39; Bienville to Raudot, 1/20/1716, MPA:FD 3: 198.

²² Bienville to Pontchartrain, 6/6/1704, MPA:FD, 2: 22; Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 100; DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 91.

²³ "Bienville's memoir of Louisiana 1725-1726," MFA: FD, 3: 531; Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 204.

they would back them again.²⁴ After the attack on Fort Rosalie, several Yazoo diplomats protected a French colonist who had escaped the slaughter. These Yazoo men took the wounded, exhausted colonist into their cabin, dressed his wounds, and fed him before sending him safely to New Orleans. They asked him to convey to Governor Perier that they wished to remain at peace with the French.²⁵ The presence of Fort St. Pierre and relationships with the French provided economic opportunity to the Koroas and Yazoos through both the deerskin trade and selling provisions to the fort.

This web of connections created a challenging diplomatic situation for the Yazoos and Koroas when the Natchez asked for their support in 1729.²⁶ The Natchez had protected their people and connected them to British traders to the east. Yet their other allies, the Tunicas, had supported the French in the three previous conflicts against the Natchez and were likely to do the same in this one. Opposing the French would mean that they would lose access to the trade post in their village. However, the chronic shortages of trade goods limited the usefulness of this post to the Yazoos, and by the 1720s they reportedly believed that “the French were only beggars.”²⁷ Much like the Mobilians and Tohomes near Mobile, the French attempted to convince the Yazoos and Koroas to continue to supply their fort and provide services, even when they were unable to uphold their end of the exchange and therefore were forced to “beg” for assistance. Natchez alliances and French shortages led the Yazoos to consider severing their ties, yet it was

²⁴ Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 211.

²⁵ Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix *Historical journal of Father Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix* (New York: 1851), 153; Milne, *Natchez Country*, 177.

²⁶ DuVal, *Native Ground*, 96.

²⁷ Delanglez, *French Jesuits*, 447.

the French response to the Natchez attack that finally convinced them to act on these frustrations.²⁸

Just one week before the Yazoos and Koroas struck Fort St. Pierre, on December 12, French Governor Etienne Perier committed an atrocity against another allied petite nation. The Natchez attack had terrified French settlers and Perier became convinced that a pan-Indian conspiracy was afoot.²⁹ Perier was acutely aware of how weak the colony's defenses were, and he feared imminent attacks on other French settlements. In his panicked state, he suspected that the Choctaws were coming to destroy New Orleans and he feared surprise assaults from the petites nations around New Orleans. In 1729 the Houmas, Bayagoulas, Chaouachas, and Acolapissas lived on the fringes of the colonial capital. Indian men and women from these nations regularly traveled through the city to trade with the French settlers. They took advantage of the growing colonial economy by trading in corn, meat, fish, baskets, hides, and other essential provisions. Although these nations had been good allies and crucial economic partners to the French, Perier doubted their loyalty.³⁰

In his frantic search for some action to prevent the potential attack on New Orleans, Perier decided to execute a military assault that would help counter the prevailing image of French military weakness. On December 5, 1729, Perier ordered a

²⁸ Marcel Giraud argued that the Natchez convinced the Yazoos to join their cause and attack the French by giving them presents, and many accounts of the attack include no explanation of the Yazoo's rationale. Giraud, *History of French Louisiana*, 5: 400; Milne, *Natchez Country*, 185.

²⁹ Perier was convinced that British merchants and officials on the eastern seaboard had fomented this rebellion. He also believed both the Choctaws and Chickasaws were part of this plan and that a Choctaw assault on New Orleans was imminent. Barnett, *Natchez Indians*, 106-107; de Montigny, *Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont*, 238-239.

³⁰ Goddard et. al., "Small Tribes of the Western Southeast," *Handbook of North American Indians of the Southeast*, 14: 189; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 63; Zitomersky, *French Americans- Native Americans*, 367-368.

company of free black militiamen to march south into the swampy homelands of the Chaouachas nation and kill every Chaouacha.³¹ The small nation of the Chaouachas numbered only about 105 people before this attack, and the assault nearly destroyed them. Perier eagerly proclaimed this slaughter a success, and he boasted to his superior that “this example carried out by our negroes has kept the other little nations up the river in a respectful attitude. If I had been willing to use our negro volunteers I should have destroyed all these little nations which are of no use to us, and which might on the contrary cause out negroes to revolt.”³² In essence, Perier thought he had executed a brilliant political move. By relying on black soldiers to attack the Chaouachas, he hoped to create Native animosity towards Africans within the Louisiana colony and prevent the dreaded African and Indian uprising.³³ Equally as important, he expected that by killing so many Chaouacha men, women, and children he would terrorize the other petites nations into submission.³⁴

³¹ Before the Natchez War the Chaouachas were located only three leagues downriver from New Orleans on the eastern bank. Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 219-220.

³² Perier to Maurepas, 11/28/1729, MPA:FD, 1: 64.

³³ By 1727 the French establishments along the Mississippi River from New Orleans up to Pointe Coupee contained roughly an equal number of enslaved Africans and European inhabitants. According to the 1727 census there were 1,460 Europeans and 1,561 African slaves. Perier was convinced that given the opportunity African and Native Americans would ally and rise up against the European population. Some enslaved Africans did participate in the Natchez attack on the French settlements near Fort Rosalie, yet the degree of their involvement and role they played in these assaults is unknown. Milne, *Natchez Country*, 180-185; Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 102; Maduell, *Census Tables*, 81.

³⁴ It is difficult to tell exactly how many Chaouachas died in this assault. Perier claimed that he destroyed the nation, however this is primarily because he wanted to proclaim his expedition a success. Like many nations that the French claimed to have destroyed, the survivors sought refuge with an ally and established a new joint settlement. Following this assault the Chaouachas fled to the Ouachas and took up residence at their village. In 1739 the Chaouachas and Ouachas together numbered about 105 people and in 1758 the Ouachas alone numbered roughly 35-40 people. Swanton, 42; Goddard et. al., “Small Tribes of the Western Southeast,” *Handbook of North American Indians of the Southeast*, 14: 189.

Rather than keeping the other Indian nations in a “respectful attitude,” Perier’s move further antagonized them. Following the French slaughter of the Chaouachas, the Choctaws intervened and encouraged the Bayagoulas, Houmas, and Acolapissas to temporarily relocate further upriver into the safety of Choctaw territory. Perier saw this as a grand success and evidence that his policy was working. In April 1730 he reflected on the efficacy of this move as he icily reported that if the small nations had not relocated to a safer distance from the city “we should be obligated to destroy them, especially the Houmas, the Bayagoulas, and the Acolapissas, who were in the general conspiracy although they are under obligations to us and they are very near us.” Yet it does not seem to be a coincidence that barely one week after this slaughter the Yazoo and Koroas who had hitherto been peaceful toward the French turned to violence. Perhaps the unprovoked assault upon the Chaouachas was all the evidence they needed to be convinced that the Natchez leaders who argued that “the neighborhood of the French is a greater prejudice than benefit to us” were correct.³⁵

The Chaouachas had been allies of the French for decades before this attack; they had aided the French in their fight against the Chitimachas, and they bore no love for the Natchez.³⁶ In fact, in 1713 the Natchez, along with their Yazoo and Chickasaw allies, had used a subterfuge assault, much like the one they used against the French in 1729, to enter and attack the Chaouacha village. Under the guise of a calumet ceremony, they killed a number of Chaouachas, including the head chief and several of his family members, and took eleven Chaouacha prisoners, including the head chief’s wife, back to

³⁵ DuPratz, *History of Louisiana*, 83.

³⁶ Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 337.

Natchez. Here they sold these captives as slaves to the British.³⁷ This brutal exchange suggests that the Chaouachas were among the least likely candidates to join the Natchez's "general conspiracy," and their selection for extermination clearly indicates that Perier was simply looking for a weak target for this terror attack.³⁸ This was a dangerous move on Perier's part because the French desperately needed the support of the Choctaws to fight the Natchez, and attacking their petites nations allies would hardly win them any popularity.

Traditionally all of these horrific killings have been called "massacres," especially the better-known attacks by the Natchez, Koroas, and Yazoos on French settlers.³⁹ However, this term connotes barbarism and senselessness, and distracts readers from the goals of the assaults. Recently historians have emphasized the need to re-assess the terminology that we use to discuss violence committed by and against Native peoples.⁴⁰ As Richard Slotkin explains, colonial settlers in North America justified their own extreme violence by highlighting the barbarism of their enemies. Much as Perier decided

³⁷ Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 159-160.

³⁸ The Houmas, Bayagoulas, and Acolapissas were also very unlikely to have sympathized with the Natchez. In 1723 a Natchez diplomat came to village of the Acolapissas to try and convince them to join the Natchez in their war against the French. The Acolapissas not only declined this offer, but they held the Natchez diplomat hostage at their village and informed the French of this plan. Additionally during this 1723 conflict, more than 200 warriors from the petites nations, including the Houmas, traveled to Natchez to provide their services to the French. All three nations had longstanding trade relationships with the French and had assisted them greatly during the early years of settlement. D'Artaguiette "Journal of D'Artaguiette," *Travels in the American Colonies*, 30-36; Milne, *Rising Suns*, 134.

³⁹ Contemporary authors largely used the term "massacre" to describe the slaughter of their compatriots. Some more recent authors have also used the terms "uprising" or revolt to characterize the attack. Giraud *History of French Louisiana*, 5, 400; Chevalier de Champigny, *Memoir on the Present State of Louisiana* (New York, 1853), 113; Sayre, Indian Chief As Tragic Hero, 202-205; Spear, *Race Sex and Social Order*, 33; de Montigny, *Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont*, 235; Barnett, *The Natchez Indians*, 105, 110.

⁴⁰ Both Deloria, Gleach and DuVal have also critiqued the use of the terms "uprising," "massacre," and "rebellion" to discuss Native violence and diplomacy. Philip Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 21,54; Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empire in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 5-7; DuVal, *Native Ground*, 95; Frederic W. Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 149-158.

that the Native killing of French settlers at Fort Rosalie justified the mass killing of Chaouachas south of New Orleans, Puritans in New England justified the slaughter of the Narragansetts and Pequots by suggesting that barbaric violence was needed to fight savage peoples.⁴¹ More recently, Wayne Lee has written extensively about the ways that perceptions of enemy populations as “other” and as barbarians coupled with fear for one’s own safety, increased the willingness of armies to use extreme violence against foreign populations.⁴²

Thus rather than calling any of these attacks “massacres,” discussions of the Natchez War should instead focus on the political and practical goals of the violence. By emphasizing the purpose and methods of the violence, we can clearly see that the Yazoo, Koroa, and Natchez attacks were efforts to use traditional military methods to sever relationships within joint settlement communities. Drawing on the well-worn strategy of using calumet subterfuge to catch their enemies off guard, the Natchez, Koroas, and Yazoos killed the French settlers to send powerful messages that they were no longer welcome in their territories.⁴³ In both cases the nations’ goals were to remove the outsiders who had violated the terms of their relationships and to return the communities to Native control. Perier clearly designed the attack on the Chaouachas to terrify the allied petites nations and dissuade them from staging their own attacks on French settlements.

⁴¹ Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 73-78, 137, 188.

⁴² Wayne Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers*, 3-5, 8-9.

⁴³ Tactics similar to calumet subterfuge were used by native peoples across North America. While the prevalence of calumet subterfuge and surprise massacres in the Lower Mississippi Valley during the first third of the eighteenth century may be unusual, the tactics were not. Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers*, 134.

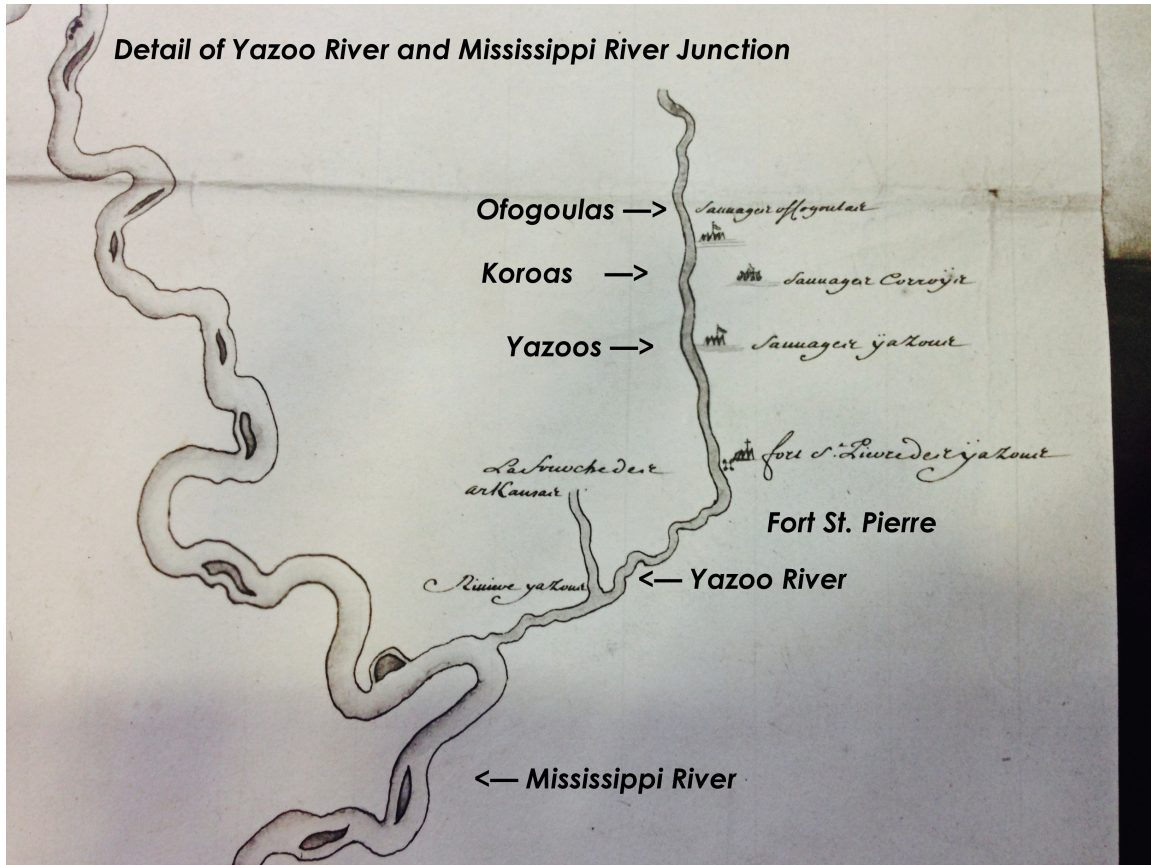


Figure 8- Koroa, Yazoo, and Ofogoula locations near Fort St. Pierre circa 1729⁴⁴

Choosing Sides

The Ofogoula women were making clay pots when the Yazoo diplomats arrived in their village on a brisk mid-December day in 1729.⁴⁵ They welcomed the Yazoo men into their village as the community assembled to listen to their news. The Yazoos, Koroas, and Ofogoulas were close allies. Their three nations had lived along the Yazoo River together in a joint settlement for at least forty years. This roughly 700 person multi-

⁴⁴ Bernard Diron, "Fleuve St Louis cy devant Mississipy relevé à la boussole," 1719, Louis C. Karpinski Collection, Newberry Library.

⁴⁵ It is unclear from the sources if the Yazoos arrived at the Ofos village on December 12, the same day as the assault on St. Pierre, or on the following day. The Ofogoulas lived only 10-14 miles away from the Koroas and Yazoos so it is possible they arrived with the news of the attack the very same day.

ethnic settlement had a remarkably egalitarian social and diplomatic structure. In sharp juxtaposition to the hierarchical society of their Natchez allies, the Yazoo, Koroas, and Ofogoulas had no supreme monarchs and shared power among local leaders.⁴⁶ The Ofogoulas received the Yazoo warmly and listened to their tale of successfully attacking the French fort at St. Pierre.⁴⁷ The Ofogoulas congratulated their friends on this military success and told them they were very sorry to have missed this battle. On hearing that they had missed out on this opportunity, both to attack the French and to acquire valuable prisoners, several of the Ofogoula warriors took off towards the Mississippi River. They had heard that several French pirogues were coming down from Illinois, and this seemed to be a perfect opportunity to acquire a few more prisoners and take part in the action.⁴⁸

Despite this initial enthusiasm, the Ofogoulas were hesitant to formally join the fight against the French. Like many of the petites nations, they were frustrated with French diplomats and traders, yet they were not certain that Natchez alliance would be to their advantage. The Ofogoulas were still fairly recent immigrants into the region. Their great grandparents had fled the Ohio River Valley seeking safety from war and slave raiders, and so they were not likely to have been eager to become entangled in a major

⁴⁶ D'Artaguiette, Journal of D'Artaguiette, *Travels in the New American Colonies*, 51.

⁴⁷ The Chakchiumas lived in the borderland between the Chickasaw and Choctaw nations and they maintained ties with both polities as well as British and French traders and officials. In 1725 they were living in a joint settlement with the Taposas and Ibitoupas and together these three petites nations numbered roughly 700 people. At least the Ibitoupas and possibly also the Taposas had been part of the pre-eighteenth century Yazoo River settlement that included the Koroas, Ofogoulas, and Tunicas. Goddard et. al., "Small Tribes of the Western Southeast," *Handbook of North American Indians of the Southeast* 14: 186; Swanton, *Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley*, 42; Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 135, 179, 197, 216, 233-235; Penicaut, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet*, 239; Memoir of François Le Maire, 1/15/1714, *Le Plus Beau Pais du Monde*, 131.

⁴⁸ The Ofogoulas assault on the French pirogues resulted in the killing of only three Frenchmen. Lusser to Maurepas, 1/25/1730, MPA: FD, 1: 99-100.

violent conflict and risk losing more of their community. They also may have simply decided that removing the French from the region would not be in their best interest. The women who greeted the Yazoo diplomats were midway through the task of creating pots. Once they had shaped and fired the earthen vessels, they filled them with rendered bear fat to sell to the French at Fort St. Pierre. The French relied on the Ofos, Yazoos, and Koroas to supply them with essential food items like meat and bear grease, and this exchange provided the three nations with ready access to tailors, gunsmiths, and European trade goods.⁴⁹ Now that the fort was gone, the women must have wondered what would happen to their community's economy, and where they would take this batch of bear grease.

It took the French several months to muster a force to attack Natchez, so the Ofogoulas had time to weigh their options carefully. Like the Houmas and the Tunicas, the Ofogoulas likely received Natchez envoys in early 1730 who entreated them to join them in their fight.⁵⁰ In the first month of the war the Ofogoulas did not pledge their alliance to the Natchez and Yazoos or to the French. Yet neutrality was a precarious situation for the Ofogoulas. Their location along the Yazoo River put them far beyond the pale of French control and firmly within reaches of Natchez, Yazoo, and Koroa influence. The Ofogoulas could not expect to remain at their present location in close connection with these nations and not support Natchez war efforts, and they certainly would not have wished to anger their neighbors by pledging allegiance to the French. Thus, it rapidly became clear to the Ofogoulas that they would have to choose sides.

⁴⁹ De Montigny, *Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont*, 189.

⁵⁰ Barnett, *The Natchez Indians*, 107.

Like most of the petites nations, the Ofogoulas were waiting to see what the Choctaws would do. In 1725 the Choctaws numbered roughly 14,000 people and exercised significant political influence over all of the small polities, including the French, in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Immediately following the news of the Natchez attack, French officials sent envoys to this powerful nation bearing gifts and pleading for military support and assistance. It was a reasonable place to turn. The Eastern Division of the Choctaws had been allied with the French for nearly three decades.⁵¹

Internal social and political divisions had long complicated the Choctaws' relationships with outsiders as well as within their own nation. Like most southeastern groups, most power was controlled by village leaders rather than at the national level. However, in broad terms, the Choctaw nation was split into four primary divisions, each of which had its own political priorities and relationships with foreign nations. The Eastern Division of the nation had close ties to the Alabamas and the French, the Western Division was closely connected to the Chickasaws and the British, the Sixtowns Division historically had relationships with the Natchez, and the Chickasawhays had close ties to the petites nations, especially the nations nearest Mobile.⁵² Ultimately many Choctaws concluded that aiding the French and removing the Natchez would be in their interest, but only if the French made the endeavor worth their while and amply compensated them for their service.⁵³

⁵¹ Galloway, *Practicing Ethnohistory*, 264.

⁵² Galloway, "So Many Little Republics," 516-517.

⁵³ Lusser to Maurepas, 1/25/1730, MPA:FD, 1: 94; Milne, *Natchez Country*, 188.

By January at least some of the Choctaws agreed to back the French, but the petites nations were slower to respond. During the first major retaliatory push by the French in late January of 1730, 800 Choctaw warriors volunteered their support to the Louisiana militia. Meanwhile, the French gathered petites nations warriors at the village of the Tunicas and prepared for a second assault in early February. Yet only 300 petites nations men arrived to support this first wave of attacks.⁵⁴ Given that the petites nations who held close relationships with the French could field nearly 1,800 warriors, this means that fewer than 17% of these men answered Louisiana's pleas for military assistance.⁵⁵

The Tunicas had played crucial roles in all of France's previous conflicts with the Natchez and continued to be a key force in the Natchez War of 1729. Through their incorporation of Catholic priests into their communities, trade relationships, and continual military assistance, the Tunicas had convinced Louisiana officials that they were among their most valuable and dependable allies. By 1722 Tunica Chief Cahura-Joligo had convinced the Perier that the Tunicas were "the only Savage Nation truly friends of the French."⁵⁶ The Tunicas had provided substantial military support during the

⁵⁴ Giraud, *History of French Louisiana*, 5: 409; Broutin to the Company, 8/7/1730, MPA:FD, 1: 131-132.

⁵⁵ By my calculations, the Atakapas, Chitimachas, Bayagoulas, Biloxis, Chaouachas, Houmas, Tohomes, Mobilians, Opelousas, Ouchas, Chakchiumas, Ibitoupas, Taposas, Tensas, and Tunicas could field a combined force of 1,775 warriors in the mid 1720s. Together these nations' populations included roughly 6,213 people. According to Daniel Usner's estimates, in 1725 the total Indian population of the Lower Mississippi Valley (as far north as the Quapaws, as far west as the Red River, and as far east as the Mobile River) was 35,000. Not including the Choctaws, Chickasaws, or Creeks, this puts the total population of smaller nations, including the Natchez and Quapaws, at 10,600, of which the aforementioned petites nations comprised roughly 59%. Based on my population estimates for the fifteen aforementioned petites nations, this means that these nations comprised roughly 18% of the total Indigenous population of the region and thus their support in the war would have been essential. For comparison, if the total number of petites nations warriors had arrived to support the initial French endeavors, they would have more than doubled the number of Choctaws involved in the fighting. Usner, *Social and Economic Histories*, 35.

⁵⁶ Milne, *Rising Suns*, 237.

French conflicts with the Natchez both in 1716 and 1723-24 and Cahura-Joligo had been seriously wounded fighting the Natchez in 1723.⁵⁷ The French highly valued this military support and in 1722 Dumont Du Montigny praised the “Christian Chief” Cahura-Joligo for his valor in battle and proclaimed that “the Tunica nation, which, although not the most numerous, holds the advantage of courage and stout hearts.”⁵⁸

Even the Tunicas struggled with the decision of whether to support the French in 1729.⁵⁹ Like the other Yazoo River nations, the Tunicas maintained connections with the Chickasaws and British traders. So while they had relied on the French to trade their deerskins and labor for European goods, they also had other avenues to acquire guns, knives, limbourg cloth, and other coveted trade goods. More than economic concerns, kin ties worried Tunica leaders as they weighed their options in early 1730. The Tunicas had long had close relationships with not only the Yazoos, Koroas, and Ofogoulas, but also the Natchez. During their time in the multi-ethnic settlement on the Yazoo River and then in their village south of the Natchez they had built both diplomatic and personal relationships with their neighbors. Even after their opposition in the 1716 and 1723-24 conflicts, the Natchez still sent them an envoy in 1729 asking for their support. The Natchez chose a Tioux diplomat to carry this request recognizing that the Tunicas’ former Yazoo River neighbors would likely have the best chance of convincing them to

⁵⁷ De La Chaise to the Directors of the company of the indies, 9/6/1723 MPA:FD, 2: 374; Bienville to Cadillac, 6/23/1716, MPA: FD, 3:213; Galloway, “This nation... is very brave,” 26.

⁵⁸ Montigny reported that even after Cahura-Joligo took a bullet through his mouth and cheek while fighting the Natchez, he remained unfailingly loyal to the French. Dumont de Montigny, *Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont*, 185-186.

⁵⁹ Galloway, “This nation...,” 26-27.

support their Natchez allied kin rather than the French.⁶⁰ The Tunicas declined this request and instead waited to see what the Choctaws would do.

The importance of the Choctaws in shaping the final Natchez War cannot be overstated. Although histories of the war have focused on the actions of the Natchez and the French, the Choctaws were unquestionably the decisive factor in this conflict. Their decision to ally with the French in late December of 1729 not only provided the French with military superiority, but also pulled in the alliances of the petites nations.⁶¹

The Choctaws' support turned the tide of the conflict. On January 27, 1730, 500 Choctaw warriors assaulted the Natchez villages. They caught the nation off guard, and managed to kill 60 Natchez, liberate 54 French women and children, and capture at least 15 Natchez and 100 enslaved Africans who had been held captive by the Natchez. The Natchez fled these Choctaw attackers and sought refuge in two palisaded forts within their villages. The French and Choctaws laid siege to these forts and after several weeks hunger and disease drove many of the Natchez to flee into the woods to seek refuge. Thus, by late February of 1730 the French and Choctaws seemed to be winning the war.

The Choctaws entry into the conflict stripped the petites nations of their ability to remain neutral. Shortly after the Choctaws learned of the Koroa and Yazoo attacks, they launched a surprise attack against the Yazoos. Under the pretext of trading bear oil, a group of Choctaws entered the Yazoo village, killed several Yazoos, and retrieved some of the French captives.⁶² In early January, the Choctaws attacked another group of

⁶⁰ Diron D. Artaguet to Maurepas, 12/9/1729, MPA: FD, 1:77-78.

⁶¹ Broutin to the Company, 8/7/1730, MPA: FD, 1: 131.

⁶² The date of this attack is unclear. Lusser to Maurepas, 3/8/1730, MPA:FD, 1: 96-97.

Yazoos as they traveled with the remaining French captives to sell these prisoners to the Chakchiumas and Chickasaws.⁶³ These two assaults frightened the Ofogoulas and sent them fleeing from their settlement with the Koroas and Yazoos, and they sought refuge with their old allies the Tunicas. The Ofogoulas likely feared that if the Choctaws attacked the Yazoos and Koroas again they might also target the Ofogoulas. These attacks persuaded the Ofogoulas not only to geographically relocate their people, but also forced them into alliance with the Tunicas and French. Although they did not directly attack the other petites nations, in late 1730 French officials recorded that the Choctaws “have been intimidating the small nations along the Mississippi River and on the Mobile River.”⁶⁴ By “intimidating” the petites nations with threats of the consequences if they did not support the French, the Choctaws pressured the petites nations to join them in the war. Thus, were it not for the Choctaws, many of the petites nations would likely have abstained from the conflict, or possibly even backed the Natchez. As French officer Ignace-Françoise Broutin remarked in 1730 even “the Tunica would take the stronger side as all the Indians would infallibly have done if the Choctaws had taken arms against us.”⁶⁵

French officials resented having to beg for assistance from the Choctaws and the petites nations. Since the conclusion of the slave trade the Choctaws had become more assured of their regional dominance, and they no longer lived in terror of Chickasaw and

⁶³ Much as French and Native forces also targeted Yanki-Chito peoples who lived near or among Chitimacha settlements during the Natchez war, the Ofogoulas feared that raiders would not differentiate between the Yazoos and Koroas and their nation.

⁶⁴ Perier to Ory, 11/15/1730, MPA: FD, 4: 53.

⁶⁵ Broutin actually went on to say that it was not the power or military might of the Natchez that should frighten the French, but rather “only the Choctaws were to be feared.” Broutin to the Company, 8/7/1730, MPA: FD, 1: 131.

British raiding parties.⁶⁶ The increased confidence of the Choctaws and the desperation of the French was a miserable pairing for Louisiana officials who wished to imagine that they controlled the region. In 1730 Governor Perier lamented that both the Choctaws and the petites nations recognized the dependency of the Louisiana colony. He begged the comptroller of finances to send him more money and remarked that the lack of funds and men made the Choctaws “think we use them only because we are not capable of making war. The idea we have given them of us by using them in our defense. *The least little nation thinks itself our protector in the situation in which we are.*”⁶⁷

In return for securing the support of the petites nations, Choctaw leaders pressed the French to provide them with generous compensation. In March of 1730 officer Joseph-Christophe de Lusser was sent to the Choctaws to hear their grievances and negotiate the return of several French prisoners. By late February many Choctaws had tired of the war and felt they were not being adequately rewarded for their efforts. During their assault on the Yazoo and Koroas the Choctaws had obtained several of the French captives that these nation were holding. Yet rather than returning these captives, they instead brought them back to their own towns and waited for the French to come “repurchase” them. The Choctaws claimed that they were holding these French men, women, and children because the French had not justly rewarded them for their assistance in the war, and it would violate Native customs to strip the warriors of their hard-won captives without proper recompense. As the Choctaw chief of Yellow Canes explained in

⁶⁶ Although Chickasaw and Choctaw conflict continued for decades after 1718 and rose again in frequency during the Chickasaw wars in the 1730s, after the Yamasee War the rates of captive raids in the Lower Mississippi Valley dropped dramatically.

⁶⁷ Perier to Ory, 8/1/1730, MPA: FD, 4: 39-41.

1731, without the Choctaws and other Indian nations the French were useless. Their soldiers did very little damage in battle, and although “the cannon of the French made much noise [it] had had little effect; that it was as if one was spitting on the ground.” Furthermore, he stressed that “the Tunicas and other little nations had not wished to fight for the French because the French had put some of them in chains and treated the red men like slaves” and “that they stole the skins of the Indians by not giving them fair compensation for their goods.”⁶⁸ Therefore, he argued that the French should be extremely grateful to the Choctaws.

The Chief of Yellow Canes’ speech casts into doubt long standing assumptions that the Tunicas and other petites nations were almost unfailingly pro-French, an assumption that stems from the mistaken belief that the petites nations were dependent on the French and served them completely faithfully.⁶⁹ In fact, their initial minimal participation in the early stages of this war, and their frank opposition to helping the French, suggest not love for and dependence on the French but rather a growing frustration that echoed the sentiments of the Natchez. From this perspective, the regional significance of the Natchez War is less about the unique grievances of the Natchez villages than that about its importance as a turning point for all French and Native relations in the Lower Mississippi Valley.

⁶⁸ Lusser to Maurepas, 3/14/1730, MPA:FD, 1:102-105; Milne, *Natchez Country*, 195.

⁶⁹ DuVal, *Native Ground*, 95; Milne, *Natchez Country*, 185-186; de Montigny, *Memoir of Lieutenant Dumont*, 185-186; Galloway, ““This nation... is very brave,” 25-27; Giraud, *History of French Louisiana*, 5: 409; Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 302-303.

Captives and Revenge: the Bloody Conclusion of the Natchez War

If we understand the Natchez War not as an isolated conflict between the Natchez and French, but rather as a massive regional war that pitted kin and allies against one another, it is perhaps easier to understand why this event was so traumatic and influential for the petites nations. In particular, the nations of the former multi-ethnic Yazoo River settlement, who were on the front lines of this conflict, suffered tremendously and by the end of the war the geopolitical map of their homelands barely resembled the land in 1729. Historians have long been fascinated by the bloodshed and horror of the Natchez War and have sought to explain it as everything from the effects of the “rapacious, haughty, and tyrannical” commandant Chepart to the first race war of the gulf south.⁷⁰ Yet by stepping back and looking at the involvement of the smaller nations in the Yazoo River region we can better understand how this war changed diplomacy, violence, and relationships for both the French and Native peoples of the Lower Mississippi Valley.

Much as the close-knit joint settlement at Natchez necessitated a mass killing to sever Natchez relations with the French, the conflict among the Yazoo River nations erupted in tremendous violence. Throughout 1730 and 1731 both the Tunicas and the Ofogoulas provided assistance to the French troops and went on raids against the Natchez villages. While some Tunicas were likely seeking revenge for the death of their loved ones in previous conflicts, many Tunicas were conflicted about having to fight their kin. Even as the war raged on, at least some Tunicas maintained connections with their Natchez friends and families. Throughout the 1730s Lattanash, one of the Tunica

⁷⁰ Sayre, *Indian Chief As Tragic Hero*, 217-219; Giraud, *History of French Louisiana*, 5: 397; Gayarre, *History of Louisiana: The French Domination* (New York: William J. Widdleton, 1867), 1: 396; Milne, *Natchez Country*, 149-174.

headmen, protected his Natchez lover who lived with him at the Tunica village. This woman, with whom Lattanash may or may not have had children, remained with him at the village until 1731 when the fighting had become so intense that her presence angered others within his nation. In December of 1731 French officials reported with some satisfaction that Lattanash had finally gotten rid of this Natchez slave and returned to his wife.⁷¹ Although Lattanash's Natchez lover was eventually cast out of the village, several Natchez men and women willingly fled to the Tunicas during the war. The same report that explained the status of Lattanash's illicit love also indicated that a number of Natchez were looking to "sell themselves" to the Tunicas.⁷² These passages are confusing because the French failed to distinguish different levels of social incorporation and captivity from abject servitude. These Natchez were most likely seeking refuge with the Tunicas and willing to exchange their services in exchange for being permitted to stay safely in their village.

Yet despite these social and political connections, as Tunica and Natchez men and women fought and died in this conflict, the relations between the two nations became increasingly bitter. On April 10, 1730 several Tunica diplomats arrived in New Orleans carrying six Natchez prisoners. The Tunica warriors had captured three Natchez women including the wife of the chief of the Flour village, and three Natchez children. Yet rather than integrating these captives, executing them, or selling them to other nations, the Tunicas brought them to New Orleans to give to the French as gifts. Governor Perier

⁷¹ It is unclear if this woman was actually enslaved or if she had joined the Tunicas by choice and obviously it is nearly impossible to assess whether this relationship was consensual. The fact that the town wanted the woman removed and that she was not executed and seems to have been let go leads me to believe that this Natchez woman was not actually a captive but rather had come to the village as several other Natchez did, to seek refuge during the war.

⁷² Juzan to Perier, 12/29/1731, MPA:FD, 4: 112.

received the Tunicas but returned the captives to them. Historian Sophie White has suggested that Perier declined these prisoners so that he would not have to try them in a French court and execute them according to French laws. By leaving the captives with the Tunicas he expected that the revenge would be immediate and their deaths would be cathartic to the terrified French citizens.⁷³



Figure 9- Illustration of the Public Torture and Burning of the Wife of the Chief of the Flour Village of the Natchez⁷⁴

⁷³ Milne, *Natchez Country*, 198; Sophie White, "Massacre, Mardi Gras, and Torture in Early New Orleans" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 3 (2013), 497, 519- 530.

⁷⁴ Caillot, *A Company Man*, plate 6.

The Tunicas took the wife of the Flour chief to a public square on the outskirts of the city to be executed. French crowds gathered around the square and hurled abuse at the Natchez as the Tunicas stripped and bound the woman. Unlike the village of White Apple, which had always resented French presence in Natchez territory, the people of Flour village had previously been on reasonably good terms with French settlers, and along with the Tunicas their leaders had helped mediate some of the earlier conflicts between the French and other Natchez. As a prominent Natchez woman, the Chief's wife was likely involved in the peace negotiations, and she recognized at least one of her captors. As the Tunicas bound her to the wooden frame and began to burn different parts of her body, she shouted insults at them. She accused her executioners of lacking skill and vowed that her nation would have vengeance against the Tunicas for this cruelty. She reserved special vitriol for one of her tormentors, a Natchez man who had escaped the Natchez villages and found refuge with the Tunicas. This man had offered his services in exchange for sanctuary and in 1730 was serving as the personal servant of Tunica Chief Cahura-Joligo. While she screamed, French men and women came forward and participated in this torture. They stabbed the woman with sharp canes and seared bits of her flesh. Perhaps these French men and women believed they were exacting revenge for the deaths of the French, or perhaps hearing the woman's cries simply reminded them that the Natchez were not invincible. When the Flour Chief's wife finally died, the Tunicas quickly killed several of the other Natchez and threw them into the flames.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Caillot was struck by the participation of French women in this ritual torture. He claimed that the French women had punctured her flesh and "larded her." As Sophie White explains, Caillot perceived the French women cutting holes in the Natchez woman's body as they would a piece of meat before they filled these holes with lard. Caillot, *A Company Man*, 146-148; Sophie White, "Massacre, Mardi Gras, and Torture in Early New Orleans," 497, 519-530.

By late spring of 1730 the French, Choctaws, Tunicas, and other allied nations had won several decisive victories against the Natchez, Koroas, and Yazoo, and the Natchez seemed to be on the defensive. In June the Chief of the Flour village came with his people to the village of the Tunicas to plead for peace. His community was suffering from French and Choctaw attacks and he wanted temporary refuge for his people. He asked the Tunicas to negotiate on his behalf to secure a peace with the French. Governor Perier was pleased to hear this news, and he eagerly encouraged the Tunicas to conclude this peace. Although the Choctaws had sharply criticized the French for negotiating with a nation who had killed so many of their people, Perier recognized that he was short on supplies and troops and could not count on his Indian allies to continue supporting this war.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Milne, *Natchez Country*, 189-202; de Montigny, *Memoire of Lieutenant Dumont*, 250.



Figure 10- Tunica Chief Bride-les-Boeuf with Natchez Scalps⁷⁷

Thus the wife of the Flour Chief ultimately had her revenge. On June 13, at Perier's urging, the Tunicas hosted the Flour Chief and his people in their village for the obligatory calumet ceremony to begin negotiations. They dined, danced, expressed their mutual desire for peace, and went to bed side by side. In the pre-dawn hours the Natchez men fell on the sleeping Tunicas. They slaughtered Cahura-Joligo first (and most likely

⁷⁷ Alexander de Batz, "Sauvage Matachez en Guerrier," 1759, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography.

his Natchez servant as well). By the end of this initial assault, half of the Tunica nation was dead. Over the next five days the Tunicas regrouped and the surviving warriors retook the village. These bereaved people then fled south along the Mississippi and stopped just north and across the river from the French settlement at Pointe Coupee.⁷⁸

The Natchez War took an exceptionally heavy toll on the descendants of the Yazoo River joint settlement. The war dragged on through 1730 as the exhausted petites nations and the Choctaws continued to chase down fleeing groups of Natchez. On February 2, 1731, Governor Perier officially proclaimed victory. He claimed that the Natchez were defeated and that the French now had 450 Natchez prisoners in custody.⁷⁹

While some Natchez remained in their old homelands, the bulk of the survivors fled east to seek refuge with their allies. Although the Natchez were received by the Cherokees, Creeks, Catawbias, and several other southeastern nations, the majority of the refugees found sanctuary with the Chickasaws.⁸⁰ In accordance with Native refuge

⁷⁸ Milne estimates that the Natchez killed twenty, wounded twenty, and captured eight Tunicas in the assault. d'Artaguet to Maurepas, 6/24/1730, MPA:FD, 4:77; Beauchamp to Maurepas, 11/5/1731, MPA: FD, 4:81; Perier to Maurepas, 12/10/1731 MPA:FD, 4:103-106; Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 300; Milne, *Natchez Country*, 203.

⁷⁹ Despite French claims of victory and the total destruction of the nation, Natchez people remained in the southeast and even in the Lower Mississippi Valley in the decades after the war. Their continued presence in the region plagued the French, as they burned plantations, attacked livestock, and continued to harass the settlers. Throughout the 1730s the French continued to send petites nations patrols into the woods around Natchez to capture the remaining Natchez. The French did not know how many Natchez remained in the lands around Natchez after the war, but they were convinced that the nation was still fairly large. During the 1730s groups of 40-50 Natchez attacked plantations in broad daylight and in 1733 the Ofogoulas reported that they estimated the Natchez had about 50 warriors. Using this number and a normal calculation of 3.5x to determine population, one might estimate the total number of Natchez in the band north of Pointe Coupee was at least 140-175 people. However, this estimate is problematic both because the Natchez lost a disproportionate number of women and children, so the 1 warrior to 3.5 civilians ratio is likely incorrect, and because it is unlikely that these 40-50 warriors represented the entire military capacity of this outlaw band. Bienville, "On the Indians" 5/15/1733, MPA: FD 1: 196-197; Caillot, *A Company Man*, 154; La Chance, *French Colonial Louisiana and the Atlantic World*, 242; Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 245-247.

⁸⁰ Historian George Milne estimates that about 500 Natchez found refuge with the Chickasaws after the Natchez war. Milne, *Rising Suns*, 233; Bienville to Maurepas, 12/20/1737, MPA: FD, 3: 707; Vaudreuil to

customs, the Chickasaws and other nations received these refugees and offered them shelter. This should have ended the French offensive, as the petites nations rarely pursued their enemies once they had sought shelter with another Nation. Yet the French did not subscribe to these regional refuge customs and instead considered the harboring of Natchez by the Chickasaws to be a hostile action. Thus, during the 1730s the French declared war on the Chickasaws and proceeded to fight a series of disastrous wars.⁸¹

The combination of Natchez near and far plagued the Ofogoulas. As one of the few survivors of the Yazoo River settlement, the Ofogoulas had extremely tangled alliance networks at the conclusion of this conflict. When they sought refuge with the Tunicas they fought alongside the Tunicas, French, and Choctaws and supported French troops at the village. After the Natchez War the surviving bands that stayed in Louisiana repeatedly attacked the Ofogoulas. In June of 1732 several Natchez traveled down to Pointe Coupee to leave tomahawks declaring war against the Tunicas. On their travels down to the Tunica territory, these warriors killed two Ofogoulas and wounded two more. Yet in August of the following year, the French discovered that the Ofogoulas had been in communication with these Natchez and accused the Ofogoulas of betrayal.

The French were correct in suspecting that the Ofogoulas were in communication with the Natchez, but these two nations' meetings had very little to do with the French.

Rouille, 5/10/1751, MPA:FD 5: 76; James Adair, *The History of the American Indians* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1775), 225.

⁸¹ The harboring of the Natchez was one of several factors that caused the French to declare war on the Chickasaws during the 1730s. In addition to tracking down the Natchez, the French were also looking to keep the Choctaw nation weak and preoccupied so that this much more powerful nation would not turn against the French. Therefore they encouraged Choctaw leaders to fight their old enemies the Chickasaws in these conflicts. Despite the Chickasaws repeated claims that they wanted to make peace with the French, the Louisiana officials continued to push for conflict. As it was, Louisiana was short on goods to trade and gifts for their Native allies and they did not have the resources to supply the Chickasaw nation. Therefore rather than admitting this and declining the Chickasaw's alliance, the French worked to destroy the Chickasaw nation. Du Pratz, *History of Louisiana*, 96.

To confirm these suspicions of collusion, the French commander of the fort at Natchez assigned two Choctaws to follow the Ofogoulas and spy on their whereabouts. As expected, the Choctaw spies followed several Ofogoulas to a secret village of the Natchez where the Ofogoulas came and met with a Natchez man who was working in his vegetable garden.⁸² Considering the ongoing violence, it seems that rather than being disloyal, the tiny Ofogoula nation was attempting to negotiate a cession of hostilities with the Natchez who remained. Given their close proximity, it would have been vital for the Ofogoulas to make peace with their hostile Natchez neighbors. Earlier that month the Ofogoulas had captured a Natchez woman and a Natchez girl and may have been trying to use these captives as leverage to gain peace.⁸³ By 1739 the Ofogoulas numbered only about 50 people and so were not eager to lose any more of their nation to violence.⁸⁴

The Ofogoulas' connections to the Natchez also created a host of problems for them with the Natchez who had fled east and their Chickasaw allies. After the Natchez War, when the Tunicas fled south to settle across from Pointe Coupee, the Ofogoulas settled directly alongside the fort at Natchez. As the French rebuilt the garrison there they provided them with labor, protection, and foodstuffs. In exchange the French troops did their best to protect the Ofogoulas from attackers. Through the 1750s the Ofogoulas continued to suffer from attacks by Chickasaw raiders. The French-Chickasaw War exacerbated tensions between the French-allied petites nations and their old enemies the Chickasaws. The Chickasaws seem to have targeted Ofogoula women in particular during

⁸² Bienville, "On the Indians" 5/15/1733, MPA: FD, 1:196-197.

⁸³ Bienville to Maurepas, 8/10/1733, MPA: FD, 3: 624-625.

⁸⁴ James O. Dorsey and John R. Swanton, *A Dictionary of the Biloxi and Ofo languages: accompanied with thirty-one Biloxi texts and numerous Biloxi phrases* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1912), 11.

their raids into the Lower Mississippi Valley.⁸⁵ Perhaps these Chickasaw raiders were influenced by the Natchez who felt betrayed by the Ofogoulas after they deserted them during the war, or perhaps the Natchez were trying to retrieve their kin. Either way, the Ofogoulas continued to live in fear of Chickasaw raids throughout the 1730s, 40s, and 50s.⁸⁶

The Natchez War created a tremendous number of prisoners, captives and displaced persons within the Lower Mississippi Valley. The Natchez who surrendered or were captured by the French troops were enslaved, and most of these were exported to St. Domingue to work on sugar plantations. Of the 450 Natchez captives that Perier claimed to have acquired during the war, 300 were crammed on board slave ships and sent to the Caribbean. Yet only 160 of these captives made it to St. Domingue. The others died in an uprising on board one of the ships and from sickness and abuse at sea.⁸⁷ In January of 1733 Bienville met with some of the enslaved Natchez who were laboring on St. Domingue. He spoke at length to St. Cosme, one of the chiefs of the Flour village who was enslaved there.⁸⁸ The chief assured him that it was only the Natchez who had revolted, and that the other Indian nations had had no part in planning the conspiracy. He also asked Bienville when he would be able to return to his home as he had been led to

⁸⁵ In September of 1754 a Chickasaw raiding party carried off four Ofogoula women as well as one of the Ofogoula women's Tunica husband. Kerelec to De Machault d' Arnouville, 9/15/1754, MPA: FD, 5: 143-145.

⁸⁶ Kerelec's Memoir, 12/12/1758, MPA: FD 5: 212.

⁸⁷ Giraud, *History of French Louisiana*, 5:428.

⁸⁸ This Natchez chief was named after his father, the missionary St. Cosme who had lived among the Natchez and been killed by the Chitimachas in 1706. Milne, *Rising Suns*, 228.

believe that his people would soon be able to return to their lands on the Mississippi.⁸⁹

Bienville did not record how he responded to this heartbreaking question, but it is almost certain that none of these Natchez ever made it back to their fields and kin.

For the Tunicas, the process of retrieving friends and family involved tracking down and incorporating Natchez women who had become enslaved by the French, as well as Tunica women who had been captured by the Natchez. In late December of 1731 Tunica Chief Dominique rescued four Tunica women from the Natchez. On his way home he stopped by Juchereau de St. Denis' habitation to speak with St. Denis's Natchez slave. This Natchez captive was the daughter of one of the Flour Chiefs, and she provided Dominique with valuable intelligence. She was still in communication with her free relatives, and even as an enslaved woman she continued to exercise her role as a diplomat and a go-between for her people. She explained that the Natchez band who was led by the chief of Little Corn "were seeking a favorable opportunity to sell themselves to the Tunicas."⁹⁰ Given that she trusted Dominique with this sensitive effort to find her people refuge, we might surmise that she had negotiated with or at least known Dominique before the war. Likewise Dominique seemed to trust her interpretation of the Natchez band's genuine good faith, as, even given the brutal assault when they last incorporated Natchez refugees, the Tunica chief planned to receive this Natchez contingent. However, they were only willing to take them in "on the condition that they hand over their arms."⁹¹ Two years later, in 1733, the Tunicas received two Natchez women who had

⁸⁹ Bienville to Maurepas 1/28/1733 MPA: FD, 3:580-581.

⁹⁰ Juzan to Perier, 12/29/1731, MPA: FD, 4:112.

⁹¹ Ibid.

formerly been owned by St. Denis, one of whom may have been the daughter of the Flour Chief.⁹² The bill of sale specifies that these women were given to the Tunicas in return for their services, but it is unclear whether the Tunicas paid for these women or if they were simply diplomatic gifts of good will. Perhaps Dominique requested this woman from St. Denis.⁹³ Either way, evidently in the 1730s, even as they fought Natchez in the backwoods, the Tunicas were looking to incorporate individual Natchez men and women into their villages.⁹⁴

The Natchez surprise calumet attack at the Tunica village in 1731 was the last of its kind in the Lower Mississippi Valley.⁹⁵ After the Natchez War this practice effectively ceased. Petites nations people who had lived through this conflict saw how disastrously the Natchez, Koroa, and Yazoo violent severances had backfired, and it seemed evident that this tactic would not work for dealing with soured alliances with the French newcomers. Perhaps more remarkably, after the Natchez War there is no more evidence of mass slaughters in joint multi-national settlements, no more records of petites nations

⁹² The document does not specify whether this woman was the Flour Chief's daughter or just another Natchez woman. Given her relationship with Dominique it seems likely that the Flour Chief's daughter was one of these women. However, it is not possible to determine definitively who these women were.

⁹³ "Procuration by Juchereau de St Denis, to collect payment for 2 Natchez women," 3/8/1738, *Superior Council Records*, Reel 22, Special Collections, Newberry Library.

⁹⁴ Archaeologist Bradley Lieb has suggested that the presence of Natchez pottery at the Tunica village across from Pointe Coupee suggests that in addition to trade, there may have been Natchez women living with the Tunicas. Jeffrey P. Brain however has suggested that the presence of Natchez pottery at the Tunica site most likely indicates trade rather than the presence of Natchez women. Jeffrey P. Brain, *Tunica Treasure* (Cambridge: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, 1979), 241; Bradley R. Lieb, *The Natchez Indian Diaspora: Ethnohistoric Archaeology of the Eighteenth-Century Natchez Refugee among the Chickasaws* (diss.: University of Alabama, 2008), 165, 336.

⁹⁵ Bienville to Maurepas 11/5/1731 Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion ed. Dunbar Rowland, A. G. Sanders, and Patricia Galloway (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 4: 79-80.

using calumet ceremonies to attack villages, and no more joint mass killings to obtain women.

The petites nations realized that if the rate of destruction continued to escalate as it had in the first third of the century, they would surely be gone by the mid century. Thus, it seems that once violent-severance and mass-killing integration tactics began to fail the petites nations as effective military tools, they replaced this practice with new diplomatic strategies. After the Natchez War, the petites nations shifted away from providing broad military support to primarily supplying labor to the French and they worked to create new and extensive alliance networks that would keep them from being forced into war by the French, Choctaws, or others.

Labor, Relationships, and Diplomacy After the Natchez War

The conclusion of the Natchez War marked the end of a diplomatic era. The Natchez were no longer the pre-eminent nation on the Lower Mississippi River, the Koroas, Yazoo, and Natchez peoples had become refugees in their homelands, and the French settlement alongside Fort Rosalie and the Natchez Grand village had been reduced to rubble.⁹⁶ This bitter conflict had reminded the French settlers along the gulf

⁹⁶ Although the French declared the Yazoo destroyed, it seems they may have found refuge with the Choctaws following the Natchez War. Both the “yasoux” and the “Ybitabugula” appear as part of a list of Choctaw villages on a Spanish receipt for provisions consumed by the Choctaws at a Congress in Mobile in 1784. The “yasoux” are almost certainly a group of the Yazoo, and the “Ybitabugula” may be the Ibitoupa who may have also found refuge with the Choctaws during the Natchez War. “Estado que manifiesta los viveres consumidos en las raciones de Indios de la Nacion Chatas que han concurrido en el Congresso celebrado en la Plaza de la Movilia” legajo 271 Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Library of Congress Washington D.C.; Ian W. Brown and Vincas P. Steponaitis, “The Grand Village of the Natchez Indians Was Indeed Grand: A Reconsideration of the Fatherland Site Landscape,” forthcoming in *Forging Southeastern Identities: Social Archaeology and Ethnohistory of the Mississippian to Early Historic South*, ed. Gregory A. Waselkov and Marvin T. Smith (Draft of July 2, 2014), 11.

coast how much they depended on Native peoples for their safety and prosperity.⁹⁷ For both the petites nations and the French, this conflict also illustrated with disturbing clarity how weak their settlements were in the face of the Choctaw nation and forced them to consider what might happen to a nation that opposed the Choctaws. Thus, in the wake of the Natchez War, the small polities—both Native and French—of the gulf coast banded together and worked to tighten their alliances. The petites nations sought to exploit their track records of loyal service during the Natchez War to gain diplomatic advantages and capitalize on economic opportunities. Thus, in the years after the Natchez War the petites nations used service-based economic relationships with the French to leverage political power in the region.

The level of interdependency and continued trade partnerships in the years after the Natchez War may at first seem baffling. Why, when the petites nations were so frustrated with the French in the years before the war, did they continue to negotiate with them? Why did nations like the Mobilians and Tohomes return to service-based relationships with the settlers after all of their frustration with Louisiana's diplomatic blunders, paltry gifts, and goods shortages and after their flat refusal to serve the French in the years before the Natchez War? The answer to these questions lies in the petites nations' shifting relationships with the Choctaws.

During the Natchez War both the petites nations and the French had been obligated to act against their will by the Choctaws. The petites nations were forced to fight for the French despite their protestations that they did not wish to defend the settlers who enslaved and exploited their people. Small polities like the Tunicas and Ofogoulas

⁹⁷ DuVal, *Native Ground*, 96-101.

had suffered terrible losses on account of their engagement in this conflict. Likewise the Choctaws forced the French to pay a high price for their military and diplomatic assistance. The French had to pay ransoms to retrieve their own citizens and pay for the return of their African slaves. French diplomats had been roundly insulted by the Choctaw chiefs and forced to increase their annual gifts and payment in exchange for the Choctaw services. French diplomats complained that the Choctaws continued to “exact rewards for the slightest actions that might relate to [French] interests” and to be most “haughty” through the 1750s as they sought to exploit French military dependency.⁹⁸ Thus, by the 1730s, both the French and the petites nations had decided that they would be essential allies for one another. Through their alliances with the other small nations in the region, the French and petites nations would be better able to counter Choctaw dominance and to acquire essential military support, trade goods, and food stuffs without depending on the Choctaws.⁹⁹

During the 1730s and 1740s a combination of French shortages of trade goods, increasing British presence within the Western Division, and a series of French judicial and diplomatic blunders increased tension among the Choctaws. Anthropologist Patricia Galloway has convincingly argued that French efforts and failures to extend Louisiana’s judicial powers into the Choctaw nation ultimately led to the murders that sparked a full-scale civil war. Between 1746-1750 this brutal, internecine conflict ravaged the Choctaw

⁹⁸ Vaudreil to Maurepas, 10/28/1745, MPA:FD, 4:242.

⁹⁹ Allegedly during the 1760s an Acolapissa man murdered a Choctaw for insulting him by saying that the Acolapissas were “the dogs of the French.” In Native American lexicons, “dog” was often used as a synonym of slave. If this account is true, it suggests that the close relationships between the Acolpissas and the French, and perhaps the petites nations’ relationships with the French at large, irritated the Choctaws. It also suggests that this Acolapissa man so vehemently objected to the insinuation that he were bound to the French that he were willing to kill rather than accept this assertion. Sayre, *Indian Chief As Tragic Hero*, 228; Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance*, 35-37.

nation. The Eastern Division fought the Western and Sixtowns Divisions, while the Chickasaws tacked back and forth between the two sides.¹⁰⁰ By the conclusion of the war over 800 chiefs, warriors, and honored men in the Western Division alone had lost their lives.¹⁰¹ Conflict within the Choctaw nations threatened to enmesh the petites nations into another ruthless conflict. This was especially true for the Mobile River nations who had long held close relationships with the Chickasawhays.

The Mobilians, Naniabas, and Tohomes relied on their relationships with the French to keep them from falling into complete dependence on the Choctaws. Although the Mobilians, Naniabas, and Tohomes had all held close relationships with the Choctaws during the half century before the Natchez War, after the conflict they sought to create separation between themselves and their much more powerful allies. In September 1735 an honored man of the Choctaws paid an ominous visit to Tonty, chief of the Mobilians. This Choctaw diplomat menacingly told Tonty that the Mobilians must “take the side of the English, who were promising them big presents if they joined them to drive out the French, whereas on the other hand if they refused to agree to it they would attack them [the Mobilians] as they would the French.”¹⁰² This message sounds exactly like what Tonty would have wanted to hear in 1729 when he refused to supply the French with porters. The Choctaw diplomat was offering generous gifts, plentiful trade options, and the ability to exact revenge on the French who had failed to adequately compensate his people in former years. Yet rather than accepting this honored man’s demands, Tonty

¹⁰⁰ Galloway, “So Many Little Republics,” 518.

¹⁰¹ Galloway, *Practicing Ethnohistory*, 245-291.

¹⁰² Bienville and Salmon to Maurepas, 9/16/1735, MPA: FD, 3: 693-684.

reported the threat to his French allies and both the settlers and the Mobilians prepared for the possibility of an attack.

Thus, in the years after the Natchez War the Mobilians, Naniabas, and Tohomes returned to using service to secure relationships with the French. They provided the city with foodstuffs, acted as porters and rowers, and provided crucial military intelligence.¹⁰³ Together these nations and the French troops fought off external threats. In 1732, in the aftershocks of the Natchez War, the Mobilians and Tohomes roundly defeated a party of attacking Chickasaws and succeeded in killing or capturing at least 24 of the 26 warriors.¹⁰⁴ In 1748 these nations again proved themselves as valuable defensive allies. In November the inhabitants at Mobile received word that a Choctaw force had attacked the French garrison at Natchez (and presumably the Ofogoula forces stationed at the fort) and a second group of Choctaw warriors was marching to destroy Mobile. While the French inhabitants fled for the safety of the coastal islands, the Naniabas, Mobilians, and Tohomes stood guard and defended Mobile from the Choctaw invasion.¹⁰⁵

French military dependency also provided petites nations people with political bargaining power, and nations like the Ofogoulas thrived on these relationships in the interwar years. In the decades after the Natchez war the Ofogoulas continued to live alongside the French fort at Natchez. There they supplied the French troops with food and provided military assistance tracking down fugitive slaves and fighting off

¹⁰³ Memoir on Indians by Kerelec, 12/12/1758, MPA: FD, 5: 224.

¹⁰⁴ King to Bienville, 2/2/1732, MPA: FD, 3: 552-553.

¹⁰⁵ This practice was not unique to the Mobile River settlements. In 1750 the Governor of Louisiana convinced groups of Ouachas and Bayagoulas to relocate their villages to the edges of the settlements along the German Coast. He did not have the manpower to send French troops to protect these settlements from Choctaw raids and so he hoped that the Bayagoulas and Chaouachas could stand in and guard the settlements. Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 85.

Chickasaw and Natchez raiders. This service, their diplomatic ties, and their familiarity with the backwoods near Natchez rendered them indispensable allies for the French post.¹⁰⁶ In 1745 the Ofogoulas decided that the French were charging them too much for their goods. The Louisiana government had just increased the profit margin on trade goods for Indians from 50 to 100%. The Ofogoulas frankly told the officials at the Natchez post that this exchange rate was unacceptable, and they threatened to leave the post and resettle further downriver if the merchants did not alter these terms. Their threats prompted the governor of Louisiana to write to the controller of finances requesting a change to this “deplorable” policy. As he explained, if the Ofogoulas were dissatisfied and they moved from the post at Natchez, “that would do us great harm because this little nation provides a living for the garrison of this post and gives it *all of its security*.”¹⁰⁷

Again in 1756 the Ofogoulas used their leverage to influence French policy in the fulfillment of their duty as a backcountry patrol. In June of that year Toubamingo, Chief of the Ofogoulas, came down to New Orleans with his ally Guedelonguay, one of the Chiefs of the Quapaw nation. These leaders traveled jointly to ask the French officials in the capital for pardons for a French murderer and several deserters whom they had captured in their territories. They knew that the French policy was to execute deserters,

¹⁰⁶ The shortage of French laborer at Natchez and Pointe Coupee also meant that Native peoples and enslaved Africans often worked side by side. In 1732 an Ofogoula and African slave were attacked by a party of Natchez while they were out hunting together to supply the fort. Both the Tunicas and Ofogoulas continued to work alongside enslaved African peoples throughout the century. During the 1790s, several Tunicas were living and working on one of the plantations at Pointe Coupee. Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 246, 358, 366-368. Daniel H. Usner’s *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves* remains the best work on the multi ethnic social and economic relationships that developed out of Louisiana’s “frontier exchange economy.”

¹⁰⁷ Italics mine. Vaudreil to Maurepas, 10/30/1745, *MPA: FD*, 4: 249-250; Swanton and Dorsey, 11-12.

but both chiefs objected to this punishment.¹⁰⁸ Both men called on their military records to showcase their loyalty to the French and reminded the officials of the battles they had fought in and the other captives they had dutifully brought before the French.¹⁰⁹

Toubamingo's reputation preceded him. He was better known to French officials as Perruquier or "wigmaker," a reference to the quantity of scalps he had taken from his enemies. Despite the small size of his nation, only about fifty people, he clearly expected the officials to acquiesce to his request. The official who transcribed his speech commented that "he did not neglect to point out that if his nation was small in number today it was only for having fought for the French and together with the French, which is public knowledge, and it is no less constant to them than it is very useful today at the Natchez post."¹¹⁰ Not surprisingly, the French promised the deserters would not be executed.

During the second half of the French tenure in the Lower Mississippi Valley, the petites nations and French again formed essential and interdependent relationships. In addition to supplying defense, the petites nations continued to provide the cities and military outposts with essential food and services. While the French experienced nothing like the starvation and mass death tolls of the 1710s, Louisiana continued to be chronically short on provisions through the 1740s and 1750s.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ For his part, Guedeloungay explained that the one of them had sought refuge in the sacred temple in his village. He explained that in entering this temple a guilty man is washed clean and that Arkansas customs forbid the any man from punishing one who had sought refuge in this temple.

¹⁰⁹ DuVal, *Native Ground*, 81.

¹¹⁰ Indian Harrangues at the Council of War, 6/20/1745, MPA:FD, 5: 175-176.

¹¹¹ This chronic shortage of food in Louisiana encouraged a high number of desertions among French troops. The high rates of desertion weakened Louisiana officials' abilities to depend on their own troops in times of conflict and to rely even more heavily on Native assistance. Vaudreil to Maurepas, 10/28/1745,

For nations like the Tunicas, who could supply both food and military support, these partnerships could be lucrative. In the years between the Natchez War and the Seven Years War the Tunicas rebuilt their communities and flourished economically as the result of these type of service-based relationships. Archaeological evidence from the Tunica village site suggests that during this era the nation accumulated substantial material wealth. From their location at the French settlement at Pointe Coupee they made themselves an integral part of the functioning of this colonial outpost. Tunica men supported the French with guides and intelligence, and Tunica women produced the peaches, corn, squash, and grease to trade with the settlers.¹¹² Caches of Native and European utilitarian and prestige items, including shell and copper jewelry, glass and earthen vessels, kettles, muskets, buckles, fish hooks, nails, and pipe stems indicate that the tribe enjoyed access to an active European trade. Skeletons and trash piles from the site suggest that the Tunicas both ate and drank well while they lived in this location.¹¹³ It may seem surprising that the Tunicas continued to tie themselves ever more closely to the French even after the disastrous outcomes of the Natchez War. Yet, the Tunicas understood that they could not survive the tumultuous Lower Mississippi Valley alone, and in the 1730s partnerships with the settlers offered the best economic opportunities for the small nation.

MPA:FD, 4: 245; Vaudreuil to Maurepas, 11/5/1748 MPA:FD, 4: 338; Louboey to Maurepas, 11/6/1745, MPA:FD, 4: 257; Vaudreuil to Rouille, 5/10/1751, MPA:FD, 5: 93; Memoir on Indians by Kerelec, 12/12/1758, MPA:FD, 5: 212-224.

¹¹² 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; *Historical Sketches of the Several Indian Tribes in Louisiana, South of the Arkansas River, and Between the Mississippi and River Grande*, 725; Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 30-43, 300-301; Usner, *Indians Settlers and Slaves*, 62-63, 85.

¹¹³ Brain, *Tunica Treasure*, 280-282; Jeffrey P. Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 300-302.

After 1732 French settlers moved to develop the lands near the Tunicas and Pointe Coupee and set up plantations. They grew indigo, corn, and rice and relied on a combination of enslaved African labor and free and un-free Native labor to support the plantations and keep the settlements safe.¹¹⁴ The Tunicas were an integral part of the prosperity of these settlements as they protected the settlers, supplied them with food, and chased down run-away slaves.

Conclusion

For the Tunicas who survived the onslaught of disease, slave raiding, and the Natchez wars, they were able to see their community once again flourish and their nation rise to prominence as one of the most powerful regional polities. Although they had suffered dramatic losses in the Natchez War, the steep death toll that had devastated their nations during the first third of the century began to decline. After the conclusion of the Yamasee war in 1715 the trade in southeastern captives steadily diminished and the power and population of the Tunicas' old enemies the Chickasaws fell. The nation still suffered from bouts of fever and smallpox, but the mortality rates were not high and surely an improved diet helped them better fight these illnesses.¹¹⁵

Part of the Tunicas' success during this period stemmed from their ability to successfully market themselves as indispensable allies of Louisiana. In the 1730s and 40s, the Tunicas leveraged their records of loyalty during the Natchez War and their continued support of Louisiana's military during the Chickasaw wars to firmly cement

¹¹⁴ Spear, *Race Sex and Social Order*, 59.

¹¹⁵ Synder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 76-79.

their relationship to the French. In addition to provisioning the fort, the French relied upon Tunica guides and patrolmen to help control their people. As evinced by the deserters who found refuge with the Ofogoulas and Quapaws, French authority extended only as far as the walls of the forts in the areas outside of Louisiana's metropolises. Therefore the French came to depend on the Tunicas and other small nations to help carry their influence and French law far beyond the borders of the lands that the French actually controlled. Almost all of the petites nations provided the French with assistance for patrols and military missions at least sporadically. However, the Tunicas and their Ofo allies' locations alongside French forts mean that policing the backcountry and protecting and supplying the French became their primary economic activities.¹¹⁶

During the last decades of the French empire in the Lower Mississippi Valley, the petites nations and the French formed mutually beneficial relationships that allowed the petites nations to begin to recover from the hurricane of violence that they had experienced in the first third of the eighteenth century. Although across much of the North American continent Native American peoples who lived in close contact with Europeans progressively lost power and suffered greater violence as the century progressed, this was not the case in the Mississippi River Valley.¹¹⁷ Rather, the conclusion of the slave trade, the low population of settlers in Louisiana, and the consequent chronic shortage of labor within the colony meant that petites nations

¹¹⁶ Bienville to Maurepas, 4/23/1734, MPA: FD, 1: 228; Perier to Maurepas, 4/10/1730, MPA: FD, 1:121, Louboey to Maurepas 10/12/1739, MPA: FD, 1:406; Bienville to Maurepas, 8/10/1733, MPA: FD, 3: 624, Bienville to Maurepas March 15, 1734, MPA: FD, 3:635.

¹¹⁷ Jean M. O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees: Indian Land and Identity in Natick, Massachusetts, 1650-1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 171-205; Daniel K. Richter, *Before the Revolution: America's Ancient Pasts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 388-409; DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 67-127.

continued to determine the terms of their relationships with Europeans and were able to hold onto their lands.

6
**Navigating the Transition:
Tunica Diplomacy After the Seven Years War**

In October 1772, Lattanash, the Great Medal Chief of the Tunicas, journeyed down the Mississippi River to British Fort Bute to clear up a misunderstanding. Charles Stuart, the Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, suspected that the Tunicas were thinking of reneging on their alliance with the British and was deeply concerned that they might relocate their village to Spanish territory. Stuart had good reason to question the Tunicas' loyalty to the British. He knew that groups of Tunicas frequently left British West Florida and spent days across the river in Spanish Louisiana. Even more disturbing, Stuart had recently heard that the Tunica chief was engaged in political negotiations with Spanish officials on the other side of the river. Lattanash hoped that a council with the British Superintendent would allow him to assuage Stuart's concerns and to explain his motives for meeting with the Spanish at Pointe Coupee. While Lattanash intended to convince Stuart that the Tunicas desired British friendship and wished to remain allies of the British King, the Tunica chief did not plan to apologize for his people's regular border crossings, or for his attempts to win the favor of the Spanish. Rather, as he would bluntly explain, the Tunicas desired "to be friends with all the white people near us" in both Spanish Louisiana and British West Florida.¹

¹ "Three Speeches Given at an Indian Council held by the British at Fort Bute," in David K. Bjork, "Documents Regarding Indian Affairs in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1771-1772," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1926), 409-410; "Talk Between Charles Stuart and Small Tribes on the

Following the conclusion of the French and Indian War, the petites nations had to adapt to a changed colonial landscape. After six decades of French presence in the Lower Mississippi Valley, in 1763 the French officially ceded control of their territory in the region and abruptly concluded their political alliances with the Native peoples in these lands. In exchange for peace, French King Louis XV surrendered France's North American territories. To placate France's Spanish allies, Louis XV gave Spain the western half of Louisiana and then ceded the eastern territory to victorious Britain. The settlement left Spain with a wide stretch of land along the gulf coast from New Orleans to Texas. Britain in turn claimed the territory south of the Yazoo River and east of the Mississippi and called the province West Florida. In transferring control of this territory, French officials assumed they could also seamlessly shift the alliances they had built with the local Indian nations to Spain or Britain, depending on which side of the Mississippi River the nation called home.

Mississippi," October 17, 1772, fr. 806, vol. 74, reel 6, pt.1, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.



Figure 11- Spanish Louisiana and British West Florida²

The two decades following the Peace of Paris were a tense time for all the people who lived in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Not only were the Indigenous groups of this region apprehensive of the arrival of the newcomers, but the Spanish and British were worried about each other as well. Both anticipated that another imperial conflict was on the horizon. As they established colonial governments along the gulf coast, British and Spanish officials watched each other warily across the Mississippi, each convinced that the other was plotting to invade and conquer its lands. The gulf coast territories that the empires inherited from France were sparsely settled by Europeans and surrounded by powerful Indian confederacies. To make matters worse, to the north a militant pan-Indian and anti-British movement led in part by the Ottawa prophet Pontiac was gaining ground.

² Bernard Romans, "A General Map of the British Colonies in America," London: R. Sayer and J. Bennett, 1776. Map Detail.

In essence, as British and Spanish colonists entered the Lower Mississippi Valley in the 1760s, they perceived themselves as beset by enemies on all sides, and they were quite aware of the fragility of their claims to the region. As neither Spanish nor British officials had sufficient soldiers to defend these territories on their own, they sought help from the region's local Native polities. Thus throughout the 1760s and 1770s, the defensive strategies of both Spanish Louisiana and British West Florida were primarily focused on building alliances with local Indian groups.³

Petites nations like the Tunicas were key components of these British and Spanish defensive plans. By the 1760s, most of these petites nations lived near the Mississippi River, and consequently, directly on the new imperial border. 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 his royal possessions in North America."⁴ To enforce this "fixed and definite" border, both Spain and Britain turned to local Indian nations. It seemed to these imperial officials that the petites nations locations directly along the Mississippi placed them in an ideal location to provide

³ Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 305; "Cedula and Orders 286", October 30, 1781, 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, 192, Survey of Federal Archives Tulane University, New Orleans; Gilbert C. Din, "The First Spanish Instructions for Arkansas Post November 15, 1769," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (October 1, 1994), 312-319; "Francisco Rendon to Carondelet," 5/4/1795, Dispatches of the Spanish Governors of Louisiana 1766-1792, Survey of Federal Archives, Louisiana, 5: 218, Special Collections, Tulane University, New Orleans.

⁴ The Spanish King accepted Louisiana largely because he envisioned the colony serving as a buffer zone for the more prosperous Spanish settlements in Mexico. Through Louisiana and along the northern boundaries of Spanish control in Texas, Spanish officials aimed to resettle Indians along the edges of their colonial possessions in hopes that these Native peoples could act as a human fence against Spain's enemies. The rapid expansion of Britain across the North American continent during the eighteenth century worried Spanish officials and they feared that British officials also had their eyes on Louisiana. David Knuth Bjork, "The Establishment of Spanish Rule in the Province of Louisiana," (diss. University of California, 1923), 100; 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*, vol. 37, no. 2 (1996), 171-175.

essential border security for the colonies. Of course, this plan could be successful only if the colonists could secure loyalty from the petites nations, as dual alliances could compromise their military responsibilities. In order to avoid conflict over access to these valuable Indian groups, Spanish and British Indian agents agreed to deal only with Indian nations who resided on their respective sides of the border. However, this policy did not work out quite so cleanly in practice. As Lattanash's attempts to ally with "all the white people" illustrates, this transition did not proceed as smoothly as Spain and Britain as their officials hoped.⁵ The Tunica chief did not feel that his people should be bound by these imperial map lines or strong-armed into exclusive alliances, a view that most of the petites nations shared.⁶

Even though their tribe numbered fewer than 80 people by 1770, Tunica leaders believed they were in a position to reject the exclusivity ordered by the British and make their own demands.⁷ As Honored Man of the Tunicas Mingo Tallaija bluntly put it, "If the French King has given away his right to his people's lands, what is it to me? He has not given away my lands or myself."⁸ The Tunica leaders had good reason to be confident. By 1772 their nation had been forcing the British to negotiate on Tunica terms for nearly a decade and had sixty years of experience dealing with weak and insecure European colonists. They had witnessed the tense exchanges between the competing

⁵ d'Abbadie, *A Comparative View*, 107-113, 124, 138; Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen*, 134-138.

⁶ Din "Protecting the 'Barrera'", 183-211; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 105-107; Bjork, "The Establishment of Spanish Rule in The Province of Louisiana," 11-12; Alan Taylor, *The American Colonies* (New York: Viking, 2001), 385-386.

⁷ Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 316-317.

⁸ Talk between Charles Stuart and the Small Tribes on the Mississippi, 10/17/1772, fr. 806 vol 74, reel 6, pt. 1, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

colonial governments, and they were confident that that both British West Florida and Spanish Louisiana were sufficiently vested in maintaining the friendship of the Tunicas to accept their terms.

Although many petites nations were able to determine the terms of their relationships with French settlers during the early eighteenth century, it is perhaps surprising that a tiny Indian nation like the Tunicas would believe they were still in a position to “call the shots” after this imperial transition.⁹ 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. The entire non-Indigenous colonial population, including enslaved people, was only 9,300 people, which meant that small communities of American Indians comprised roughly 17 percent of the total number of residents in the Lower Mississippi River Valley.¹⁰ Given that there were only 4,000 people of European descent in all of French Louisiana in 1763, they, like the petites nations, desperately needed a strong network of allies to survive in the region.¹¹ The trick for the petites nations would be to convince the Spanish and British newcomers that their individual alliances would be essential for colonial success.

By examining regional political networks, it becomes easier to understand why the petites nations merited the attention of the colonial newcomers. Through the previous six decades the petites nations constructed an extensive web of diplomatic alliances. In

⁹ DuVal, *Native Ground*, 12.

¹⁰ Usner, *Indians Settlers and Slaves*, 113, 279.

¹¹ Jeffrey Brain, George Roth, and Willem de Reuse, “The Tunica, Biloxi, and Ofo” in *The Handbook of North American Indians*, 14: 139; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 108.

the wake of the Natchez War, the petites nations developed close, service-based relationships with French settlers. These partnerships provided them with diplomatic power that they then used to bolster their positions within the Native geopolitical sphere. By the 1760s the Tunicas had cultivated relationships with the Caddos, Ofogoulas, Biloxis, Choctaws, Avoyelles, and French, and they were successfully using these ties to prosper economically and protect their community. Therefore, it was not just the number of community members but also the extent of a tribe's alliances that determined power in the Lower Mississippi Valley. It was the petites nations' ability to forge and exploit these connections that explains groups like the Tunicas' seemingly outsized influence during the 1760s and 1770s.

The Tunicas' experiences following the Seven Years War help to illustrate a largely unknown narrative of southeastern history. The standard story of the post-1763 imperial transition highlights the ways in which large Native confederacies lost power following the French defeat. While it is certainly true that groups farther east, such as the Catawbas, lost their ability to engage in play-off diplomacy with French and British officials, in the Lower Mississippi Valley, this transition actually increased opportunities for relationships with European settlers.¹² The absence of the French removed political and economic networks that had become important parts of gulf coast Native societies, yet the French had also stoked war among the nations, and so their absence facilitated inter-tribal negotiations. In the 1760s, after nearly a century of population declines, many of the petites nations again began to increase in size, and their communities began to

¹² Merrell, *The Indians' New World*, 205-210; Richter, *Before the Revolution*, 406; David H. Corkran, *The Creek Frontier 1540-1783* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 252.

recover.¹³ Because this transition provided the petites nations with direct access to British officials it facilitated their ability to deal successfully with their English-allied Indian enemies. In other words, by building relationships with the British, the petites nations could hope to gain protection from their old enemies, as British officials tried to discourage conflict among their Native allies. Thus the experiences of the Tunicas and their allies highlight a dramatically different narrative of power and diplomacy in the eighteenth century.

Transitions and Uncertainty in the 1760s

Unfortunately for the Tunicas, the dissolution of French Louisiana threatened to destroy this era of relative calm. In the spring of 1763 news of France's intentions to give up Louisiana reached the Lower Mississippi Valley. The petites nations flocked to New Orleans during July and August to confirm the disturbing rumors of France's imminent departure with the colonial governor. Not only were their old allies leaving, but their enemies the British would be arriving in the region. Louisiana Governor Jean Jacques D'Abbadie did his best to explain how the new border would work. He informed the petites nations that their lands along the Mississippi would be split into two territories and that communities to the east of the river that did not wish to build relationships with the British would need to resettle to the west. This transition ruptured the Tunicas service based economy and threatened to destroy the protection of their multi-national settlement near Pointe Coupee.¹⁴

¹³ Peter Wood, "Changing Population of the Colonial South" *Powhatan's Mantle*, 74-79.

¹⁴ D'Abbadie, *A Comparative View*, 96.

Although the southeastern Indian slave trade no longer threatened their communities the Tunica community was still vulnerable to Indigenous attackers. To the Tunicas' east, the rekindling of an old conflict between the Choctaws and the Creeks threatened to spread into the Mississippi River Valley and pull the petites nations back into the grip of raiders. During the 1760s and 1770s the Choctaws were embroiled in a bitter war with the Creeks over the lands between the Alabama and Tombigbee rivers, and this conflict spilled over into the Mississippi River valley. The Tunicas' connections to the Choctaws threatened to coerce them into yet another regional war, as Creek raiders occasionally targeted the Tunicas and other Choctaw-allied petites nations communities during their raids into Choctaw territory. The Choctaws were either unconcerned or unable to provide protection for the petites nations during this conflict.¹⁵ With the French leaving, the Choctaws caught up in this war, and the Creeks threatening their communities, the Tunicas knew they needed the security of an alliance with another powerful ally to help shield them from these raids.¹⁶

In addition to protecting their people, the Tunicas' relationship with the French had helped them to remain an autonomous community. The combined loss of French military protection at the Pointe Coupee settlement and of access to the services exchange and French trade networks threatened to weaken the nation dramatically and might have meant that they would be forced to integrate or confederate into a larger nation.¹⁷ Perhaps

¹⁵ John Stuart to General Haldimand, March 2 1770, vol. 1, class 21.672, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress; John Stuart's Remarks on Lieutenant Governor Durnford's Letters to the Earl of Hillsborough Relating to Indian Affairs February 18, 1770, vol. 72 class 5, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress; Brain, *Tunica Archaeology* 30-31; Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 174-193.

¹⁶ Brain, *Tunica Archaeology* 30-31; Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 174-193.

¹⁷ Louboeuy to Maurepas, 2/16/1748, MPA: FD, 4:313.

wishing to avoid this fate, the Tunicas decided they would try to develop a new partnership with the incoming Europeans to replace the previous one.

In 1764 the British arrived in the gulf south and struggled with the task of establishing a powerful presence in the region. Just months after his troops' arrival, in March of 1764, British Major Robert Farmar wrote the secretary of war 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, and he complained that the conditions of the fort at Mobile were deplorable. 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."¹⁸ Major Farmar and his commanders were struggling in part because they intended to take the Lower Mississippi Valley by force and expected local Native nations to accept this transition. Unlike their French predecessors, as they began to send in troops to take possession of their new lands, they failed to follow diplomatic protocol and invite the petites nations to share the calumet. This did not bode well for the Tunicas, as they knew that only attacking nations avoided these ceremonies.

The Tunicas' efforts to negotiate these political transitions began inauspiciously. In February of 1764 ominous rumors of the approach of 400 British gunmen began to circulate among the small Indian polities of the Lower Mississippi Valley. Although the Tunicas had been told that their French allies were in the process of leaving the region, and the French governor had asked them to be peaceful toward the incoming colonists, to

¹⁸ Robert Farmar to The Secretary of War, 8/1/1764, *Mississippi Provincial Archives. English Dominion*, ed. Dunbar Rowland (Nashville: Press of Brandon Printing Co., 1911), 1:115.

that point they had heard nothing from the British themselves. If the British were sending gunmen rather than emissaries up the river, the Tunicas reasoned that it could only mean they intended to make war.¹⁹

Further north, Ottawa War Chief Pontiac and the nations of the Great Lakes seethed with venom against the British intruders who had stolen their lands and tried to make their peoples weak and dependent. Their message wound its way down the curves of the Mississippi in late 1763, and the petites nations surely empathized with Pontiac and his followers' frustration at British efforts to assume control of the Great Lakes region. Although the southeastern slave trade had largely dissipated after the Yamasee War in 1715, Pontiac's message of the threat of economic enslavement by the British would have hit home with a petites nations people who within living memory had feared capture and bondage from Anglo-Americans.²⁰

Although the British flotilla would be passing through their territory, the British had made no effort to contact the Tunicas, or any of the region's other petites nations who controlled land along the Mississippi, probably assuming these small nations would not constitute a serious threat to the convoy.²¹ This silence was worrisome to the Tunicas for a number of reasons. First, this flotilla had the capacity to do serious damage to the Tunica village. Second, even if they did not attack, their unannounced passage through Tunica territory meant that the British did not intend to open a political relationship with the tribe. Third, the British held alliances with the Creeks, and the Tunicas feared that a

¹⁹ D'Abbadie, *A Comparative View*, 96.

²⁰ Calloway, *Scratch of a Pen*, 67-76.

²¹ Joseph Purcell, "A Map of the Southern Indian District of North America," 1775, MS map 228, Edward E. Ayer Collection, Newberry Library.

British presence in the region could facilitate more Creek incursions in to their homelands.²²

As word spread of the imminent transition, many of the petites nations who lived in the Mobile Bay region began to migrate west away from the British and out of the crosshairs of Creek and Choctaw warriors. In 1764 most of the Biloxis, Pascagoulas, Chatots, and Mobilians opted to move their eastern villages across the Mississippi River to the western side where they would be safer from Creek attacks and British traders. These groups negotiated with the Tunicas and Ofogoulas and settled in a cluster of allied settlements between Pointe Coupee and Natchez and along the Red River.²³ Some Tohomes and Mobilians sought refuge with their Chickasawhay allies and found refuge directly among the Chickasawhay villages. Other Mobilians and Chatots chose to retreat into Choctaw territory but remain in a separate joint settlement along the Amite River.²⁴ However, neither fleeing west nor seeking refuge with the Choctaws appealed to the Tunicas. They feared that relocation might make the tribe appear weak or fearful and thereby risk their ability to secure a favorable relationship with the British.

²² Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 174-193.

²³ The petites nations peoples did not see these moves as cessions of their hunting or farming territories on the eastern bank. Rather these were practical moves to keep their communities further from harm and most communities continued to travel back to their previous homelands to hunt or tend their fields. Stuart mentions that the Choctaw land cession of 1770 makes reference to the fact that they only have the right to cede the lands west of the Pascagoula River as the boundary line with the small nations on the Mississippi. This agreement indicates the Choctaws' recognition of the petites nations' land claims on the eastern bank, even after many of these nations had relocated to the Spanish side. John Stuart's Remarks on Lieutenant Governor Durnford's Letters to the Earl of Hillsborough Relating to Indian Affairs 2/18/1770, vol. 72, class 5, Records of the British Colonial Office.

²⁴ These Chatots and Mobilians also moved across the river into the Rapides parish of Spanish Louisiana by 1772. Although this mass exodus from the Mobile region has long been attributed to the hatred of the Mobile River Bay Indians for the British, the conflict between the Choctaws and Creeks seems have been the most significant factor in driving the Mobile River nations from their homes. Some Chatots also remained in the region near Mobile and exchanged goods with local plantation owners. Browne to Hillsborough, Pensacola, 7/6/1768, *Mississippi Provincial Archives: English Dominion*, 3:94-95; Gregory A. Waselkov and Bonnie L. Gums, *Plantation Archaeology*, 17, 36-38, 215-216.

The Tunica leaders turned to their esteemed Ofogoula ally Perruquier, a diplomatic master, to figure out how to negotiate this threat. The Tunica chiefs Brides-Les-Boeufs and Lattanash, talked at length with Chief Perruquier and carefully evaluated the possible outcomes of allowing the British fleet to pass through their territories. In 1764 the Tunicas held lands on both sides of the River by Pointe Coupee, while the Ofos lived entirely on the eastern side of the river by Natchez. The Ofos had continued to serve the Natchez fort and therefore, like the Tunicas, they also stood to lose a lucrative economic connection if they could not replace the French. Perraquier, Brides-les-Boeufs- and Lattanash weighed Pontiac's prophecies and discussed their options. They knew that Great Britain had a reputation for destroying Indian nations along their borders, and that British traders dispensed deadly amounts of tafia (rum) and often shorted their customers.²⁵

Their best hope, they decided, would be to attack the British outright as they crossed into Tunica territory. They would execute a stunt that would demonstrate their power and reinforce their territorial control. The Tunicas and Ofogoulas needed to make clear that foreign nations would not be able to cross their lands without abiding by the proper calumet diplomatic protocols. The Ofo and Tunicas leaders called upon their extensive network of allies and recruited support for their assault. They reached out to their relatives among the Avoyelles, another petite nation along the Red River, and to their friends among the Choctaws, asking for help dealing with this British intrusion. Perhaps Lattanash and Brides-les-Boeufs were truly fearful of the British troops; perhaps they recalled the tribe's previous unsuccessful attempts to win British affections through

²⁵ D'Abbadie, *A Comparative View of French Louisiana* 136-137.

peaceful diplomacy in the first half of the century. Either way, they decided they would not passively accept this political transition without shaping the terms of the restructuring. Together with their old Ofo allies, the Avoyelles, and several Choctaws, they met in the early damp spring of 1764 and planned their assault.²⁶

Tunica Land, Tunica Power

On March 15, 1764 fifty Tunica, Ofo, Avoyelle, and Choctaw warriors crouched in the thick brush along the Mississippi river. They waited, with their muskets in hand as they peered through the cypress and moss at the muddy waters. The British regiment led by Major John Loftus slowly paddled into Tunica territory. It had taken the soldiers three weeks to fight their way upriver against the river's heavy current from New Orleans to get to the river bend at Davion's Bluff on Tunica land.²⁷ The further they paddled from New Orleans, the deeper they moved into Indian territory, and dozens of soldiers had deserted rather than face a possible Native assault. Loftus' troops believed they were rowing into an ambush. Pontiac and his envoys had traveled through the region not a week before this British flotilla. Pontiac stopped by the Fort Chartres in the Illinois country to ask the commander for munitions to fight the British and he visited with Native nations upriver from the Tunicas to spread his message of unity and to encourage resistance against the British.²⁸ To add to the tension, a Canadian Indian who was traveling with Loftus as a guide informed the company that they were going to be

²⁶ Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 39; Galloway, "This nation...is very brave," 30.

²⁷ Marion Bragg, *Historic Names and Places on the Mississippi River* (Vicksburg; Mississippi River Commission, 1977), 202, 246.

²⁸ Pontiac did not make it as far downriver as Pointe Coupee, but his message was spread south by other Native peoples along the river. M. de Villiers to M. Loftus, 4/20/1764, *The Critical Period*, 244-245.

attacked before they reached Natchez.²⁹ The by their arrival in Tunica territory, these remaining soldiers were exhausted and on edge.

Quietly, the Tunica coalition loaded their muskets and waited for all twelve vessels to round the bend. Then they fired. Lead flew to the vessels from both banks as the warriors rammed powder and shot into their muskets for a second volley. The Tunica coalition could hear shouting as the soldiers fired wildly at their unseen attackers and attempted to maneuver away from the banks. Feeling surrounded and fearing the worst, Major Arthur Loftus gave the order to retreat, and his oarsmen paddled frantically in the opposite direction, all 200 miles back to New Orleans.³⁰ Remarkably, this Native coalition had repelled the entire regiment without sustaining a single casualty.

The Tunicas and Ofos had managed to thwart the British advance into their territory and had gotten the colonial government's attention, but still they needed to use that momentum to forge a relationship with British West Florida. Lattanash and Brides-les-Boeufs had anticipated British retaliation, and so they moved their people to a Pakana town near Mobile immediately after the assault. Here they relied upon refugee hospitality and diplomatic assistance from the Pakanas. The Pakanas took in the Tunicas and Ofogoulas and sent one of their chiefs with Brides-les-Boueufs to New Orleans to facilitate negotiations with the French. Lattanash, Brides-les-Boeufs and Perruquier's decision to seek refuge with the Pakanas was a careful strategic choice. The Pakanas were another small nation that had been allied to the French, but they also had close connections to Creek Confederacy. The Tunicas knew that the British would be hesitant

²⁹ Robert R. Rea, "Assault on the Mississippi- the Loftus expedition 1764," *The Alabama Review* vol. 26 (1973), 179-189.

³⁰ *The New York Mercury*, June 11, 1764 (American Antiquarian Society/ News Bank), 2.

to attack an ally of the Creek Nation, so their people would be safe there, and indeed the British did not attempt to pursue them.³¹

In 1764, the Spanish had not yet arrived to occupy Louisiana, so D'Abbadie was still acting as the transitional French Governor when Brides-les-Boeufs arrived. The Tunica leader asked D'Abbadie for resettlement on the western banks, and explained that the Tunicas had always been true allies to the French and that they feared British retribution for the attack. D'Abbadie offered the Tunicas use of lands alongside the Acolapissas in the bayous of southern Louisiana to settle on until he was able to acquire a permanent land grant for them along the Red River. As soon as Bride-les-Boeufs returned, the Tunicas crossed the Mississippi and lay low in the bayous, safely out of the reach of British soldiers.³²

Lest this move create political turmoil, Governor D'Abbadie arranged for a meeting among the Tunicas, Ofos, and British officials later that summer. In July in New Orleans, he mediated a discussion of the conflict among the two Tunica chiefs Lattanash and Bride-les-Boeufs, Perruquier and British Captain Philip Pittman.

As Lattanash, Bride-les-Boeufs, and Perruquier formally approached D'Abbadie and Pittman at this meeting, the clinking of their copper and shell bracelets and anklets filled the air with sound. They stood proudly, displaying their French medals of alliance on ribbons around their necks and the prestigious tattoos that covered their arms, chests,

³¹ Spain had not yet appointed a colonial governor to take over Spanish Louisiana and so effectively the French continued to rule Louisiana until 1765 when Ulloa took over. Lawrence Kinnaird, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794* (Washington: U. S. Govt. Print. Off., 1946-1949), xv; D'Abbadie, *A Comparative View of French Louisiana*, 114; Raymond Fogelson, *Handbook of North American Indians*, 14: 653-654.

³² D'Abbadie, *A Comparative View of French Louisiana*, 114.

and faces.³³ D’Abbadie was familiar with these men and had heard stories of their military exploits. Although Lattanash was known only by his Tunica name, “Brides-Les Boeufs” or buffalo tamer and “Perruquier” or wigmaker were French nicknames. Pittman likely also would have heard the tales that had earned Perruquier the title of wigmaker and of Buffalo Tamer and Lattanash’s military exploits. He wisely skipped demanding retribution from these leaders at the meeting.³⁴

The governor admonished the chiefs for their attack and explained that it was the wish of their great French father that they befriend the British. Although the Ofo and Tunica leaders calmly listened to D’Abbadie, they refused to apologize for their assault during this meeting. As Perruquier responded, “the English have always destroyed the nations. . . . When I knew that they were coming into our territory I said: they will make us die, it is better to kill them.”³⁵

Emphasizing Tunica and Ofo control of the region, Perruquier explained that if the British expected to cross through their territory, they would need the friendship of both nations, and to come bearing gifts. From the safety of New Orleans, and with the backing of their French allies, they so successfully persuaded Pittman that the British needed Tunica friendship that he solicited the tribe to move back east of the Mississippi to act as British emissaries in the region. The Tunicas jumped at the offer and by the end

³³ Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 320, 326-327; Robin F. Fabel, *Colonial Challenges: Britons, Native Americans, and Caribs, 1759-1775* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 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.; Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 141-153.

³⁴ D’Abbadie, *A Comparative View*, 139.

³⁵ Bjork, “The Establishment of Spanish Rule in the Province of Louisiana,” 38-42.

of that summer, the tribe had returned to the east side of the Mississippi, about a league above Pointe Coupee.³⁶ By December, the British had them on their annual gift roll.³⁷

The successes of 1764 marked the beginning of this new phase of delicate diplomacy for Tunicas. Although the British were less in need of food suppliers than the French had been, they still turned to the petites nations to help with tracking down criminals, illegal traders, and others in the backwoods.³⁸ Coupled with this continued need for petites nations' services, the new positions of petites nations like the Tunicas on the border between Louisiana and West Florida provided them with some leverage to negotiate with the newcomers. Since the Tunicas were one of the few tribes who chose to move back to British claimed territory after the repartition, the British were desperate to make their relationship with the tribe work, as they did not have as many petites nations as the Spanish living on their side.³⁹

³⁶ D'Abbadie, *A Comparative View*, 122-124; 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.

³⁷ Cambell to Johnstone, 12/12/1764, *Mississippi Provincial Archives: English Dominion*, 1: 266-267; Bjork, "The Establishment of Spanish Rule in the Province of Louisiana," 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.

³⁸ In 1766 the Governor of West Florida complained that he found it "extremely mortifying" to admit that the colony could not muster 500 British soldiers. George Johnston to Mr. Conway, 6/23/1766, *Mississippi Provincial Archives: English Dominion*, 1: 514.

³⁹ Major Robert Farmar to Secretary of War, 11/24/1764, *Mississippi Provincial Archives: English Dominion*, 1: 124-125.

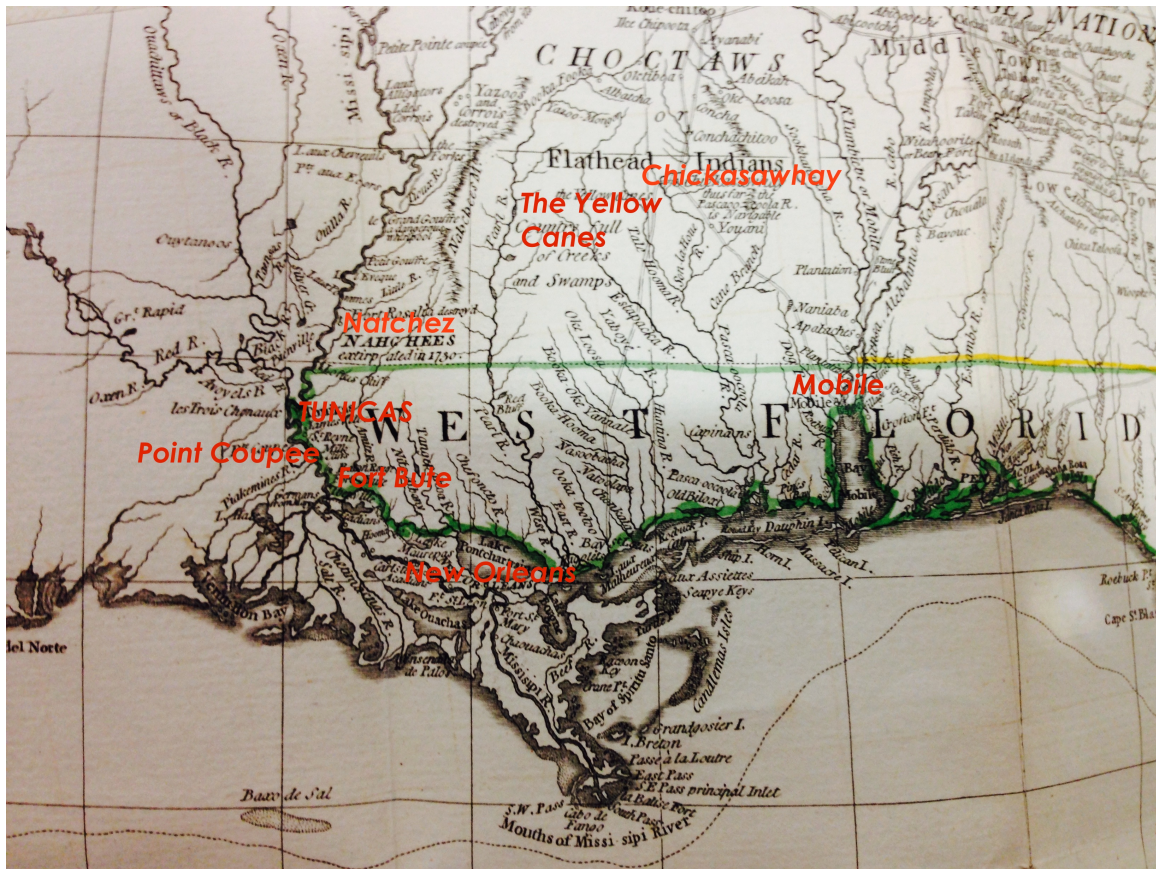


Figure 12- West Florida and Indian Territories in 1776⁴⁰

Britain's primary concerns with these nations throughout the 1760s and 1770s were that they might destabilize the border and that, in the event of a war with Spain, they could overrun sparsely populated West Florida.⁴¹ These fears were well justified, not only because Indians vastly outnumbered the British but also because, as the Tunicas' assault in 1764 had demonstrated, it seemed that in the Lower Mississippi Valley, even these tiny nations presented serious challenges to colonial security. Just one year after the Loftus assault, John Thomas, the British Indian agent in the region, was forced to flee

⁴⁰Map Detail. Bernard Romans, "A General Map of the Southern British Colonies," 1776, Edward E. Ayer Collection, Newberry Library.

⁴¹ Charles Stuart to Peter Chester, 4/16/1770, vol. 1, class 21.672, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

British Fort Iberville after he was tipped off that there would be an Indian assault. Sure enough, a coalition of Alabama and Houma Indians assaulted the fort in 1765, destroying Thomas's possessions and stalling the construction of the fort.⁴² In any event, it did not take the British long to discover that it would be much safer and less expensive to negotiate with the petites nations who controlled the region than to attempt to fight them on their own turf.⁴³

As the Spanish established themselves in Louisiana in the late 1760s, the Tunicas also sought to incorporate them into their alliance network. Fortunately for the Tunicas, the Spanish required less convincing of the value of alliance with the petites nations. Yet the Spanish still struggled 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 possession of the less densely populated lands was to adopt the practices of their French predecessors of territorial control via Indian alliances. They too were aware of the Tunica assault and wished to avoid a similar mishap on their side of the river.⁴⁴

Within a year of his arrival in 1768, the first Spanish governor of Louisiana Antonio de Ulloa was already complaining about the cost of these relationships. 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." Ulloa was frustrated in part because as gulf coast Indians figured out how desperately these weak colonial governments needed them,

⁴² Robert R. Rea, "Redcoats and Redskins on the Lower Mississippi 1763-1776: The Career of Lieutenant John Thomas," *Louisiana History*, vol 11. no.1 (1970), 7.

⁴³ Farmar to Secretary of War, 11/24/1764, *Mississippi Provincial Archives: English Dominion*, 1: 124-125.

⁴⁴ D'Abbadie, *A Comparative View*, 139-140.

they began to exploit these relationships. Drawing on the regional diplomatic customs, they would arrive at British and Spanish forts to speak with the commanders and would expect to be received, fed, and given gifts in keeping with the calumet customs. Ulloa felt trapped by these tactics. and he particularly resented their “threats of attack if they are not gratified every time they come to the forts.”⁴⁵

Within the first decade of occupation, Spanish officials were forced to acknowledge their reliance on Indian nations to support the colony and protect this international border.⁴⁶ Just one year after Ulloa’s initial insistence that excessive generosity was bad policy, the new Spanish Governor Alejandro O’Reilly reversed this approach to diplomatic gift giving. O’Reilly recognized that he would be relying heavily on Indian nations to defend Spanish territory. In addition to diplomacy with the Choctaws, Osages, and Quapaws, between September and October of 1769, O’Reilly hosted deputations of Tunicas, Tensas, Pakanas, Houmas, Bayagoulas, Ofos, Chaouachas, Ouachas, Chatots, Biloxis, Pascagoulas, Mobilians, and Chitimachas. All of these petites nations received medals of alliance and secured formal trade and diplomatic relationships with Spain, but the Tunicas stand out among the records of expenditures. In 1769, the Tunicas were listed as receiving twice as many presents as similarly sized nations, and from 1770 and 1777 they consistently ranked among the top Spanish expenditures for smaller tribes in the Arkansas and Mississippi River Valley region.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ “Ulloa to Grimaldi,” August 4, 1768, Lawrence Kinnaid, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794*, xviii-xix, 61.

⁴⁶ 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*, 130-131.

⁴⁷ In 1769 the Tunicas received presents from the Spanish amounting to 121 pesos 6 reales, and 33 maravedis of silver. In 1771 the Tunicas and Avoyelles jointly received 1212 reales 13 maravedis de plata with the “el gefe en particular” (the chief in particular) receiving a considerable quantity of ammunition,

Their extra generous gifts are especially remarkable in that they demonstrates the outsized influence of a nation who by 1760 had dropped to just over 100 individuals.⁴⁸ Perhaps, as the British constantly feared, these gifts were part of a Spanish strategy to lure the Tunicas over to settle on their side. However it seems most likely, that the Spanish simply recognized that the Tunicas could make either dangerous enemies or valuable friends, and therefore they aimed to keep on good terms with this small nation.⁴⁹

Yet not all of the petites nations were so eager to develop relationships with the British newcomers. In the 1760s and 1770s the Ofogoulas did everything in their power to keep the British out of their territory. When Chief Perruquier told Pittman in 1764 that the British “will make us [the Ofogoulas] die” he was not speaking metaphorically. Shortly after the arrival of the British in the region, a deadly wave of smallpox broke out across the Lower Mississippi Valley.⁵⁰ The devastating epidemic hit the Ofogoulas and Perruquier was still grieving these losses when he met with the commandant of Pointe

silk ribbon, a mirror, salt, cloth, scissors, vermillion, and gunpowder. By my calculations this gift was the equivalent of 152 pesos and 3 reales and therefore represented a roughly 25% increase from their gift just two years prior. This was more than twice the next largest gift to any of the petites nations. The Tensas, Biloxis, Ouchas, Chaouachas, Bayagoulas, Houmas, Pakanas, Chitimachas, Pascagoulas, Mobilians, and Chatots also received gifts ranging in value from 251 reales and 1 marvedi de plata to the Mobilians to 570 reales and 5 marvedis de plata to the Biloxis. Additionally, the Tensa and the Tunica chiefs were the only two petites nations to receive additional presents specially gifted to their chiefs. Cumulatively Spanish expenses to preserve the friendship of the Indians in Louisiana more than quintupled in the decade between 1768 and 1778. “Regalos que se deben hacer annualmente a las Naciones de Indios por Reglamento de Estimado Señor Don Alejandro O’Reily,” no. 2 legajo 274, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Library of Congress; *Statement of Payment for Indian Presents*, 1/9/1770, Kinnaird, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 154-155; Carlos Marichal, “El peso o real de a ocho en España y America: Una moneda Universal (siglos XVI-XVIII)” *El Camino Hacia el Euro: El real, el escudo y la peseta* (Madrid: Banco de España, 2001), 32; Usner, *Indians Settlers and Slaves*, 96-100, 130-131; O’Reilly “Record of Gifts that Should be Given Annually to Indian Nations” 1777, Reel 1, 33-81, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Library of Congress; Joseph de Crue, “Demonstracion practicada por la contadura principal de exercito y de la Provincia de la Luiciana...” 5/31/1786, legajo 597, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Newberry Library.

⁴⁸ Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 316.

⁴⁹ Fabel, *Colonial Challenges*, 104.

⁵⁰ Marc de Villiers du Terrage, *The Last Years of French Louisiana*, ed. Carl Brasseux and Glenn R. Conrad (Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1982), 240.

Coupee in March of 1764 to explain his rationale for the attack. He emphasized that the Ofogoulas had lived alongside the French for many years at their fort at Natchez with no such problems, and he accused the British of intentionally poisoning his people. As he lamented, “the English have scarcely arrived and they have caused nearly all our children to die by the smallpox they have brought.”⁵¹ This plague wiped out an entire generation of Ofogoulas and by 1771 the nation had fewer than 50 people.⁵²

Thus throughout the 1770s Perruquier did everything in his power to undermine British presence in the region. Like most of the petites nations the Ofogoulas relocated to the western side of the Mississippi River following 1763. However, unlike most of the other nations, they appear to have been unwilling to cross back to the eastern side of the river or to deal with British officials and traders. Rather than passively avoiding the British, Perruquier attempted to keep the other nations from dealing with the British as well. In October of 1771 British Indian Agent John Thomas traveled upriver to meet with the Indian nations near Pointe Coupee. Thomas was hoping to convince the nations to return to their former homes on the eastern bank of the river and at least to secure affirmations from the small nations of their alliances with the British. By his estimates the small nations in this region, including the Tensas, Biloxis, Pascagoulas, Mobilians, Pakanas, Alabamas, Chatots, could supply 298 gunmen, and in 1777 another British

⁵¹ Desmazelliers to D’Abbadie, 3/14/1764, *The Critical Period*, 236.

⁵² The estimates for the size of the Ofogoulas in 1771 range from seven to “a dozen” warriors. Using those numbers the total population was likely somewhere between twenty-five and forty-two people. However, all of these estimates come from British sources and given Perruquier’s adamant refusal to work with the British government it was firmly in British interest to emphasize that the Ofogoulas were “of no consequence having only seven warriors.” John Thomas to Haldimand, 12/21/1771, vol. 1, class 21.672, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress; Gov. Chester to the Earl of Hillsborough, Pensacola, 9/28/1771, *Peter Chester, Third Governor of the Province of British West Florida Under British Dominion, 1770-1781*, ed. Eron Rowland (Jackson: Mississippi Historical Society, 1925), 97; Thomas Hutchins, *A Topographical and Historical Description of Louisiana and West Florida* (Philadelphia, 1784), 44-45.

official estimated that the petites nations west of the Mississippi could field 1,500 warriors. Therefore their alliance would determine whether the British could exercise authority in the region.⁵³

Overall Thomas was pleased with his endeavor. First, on October 24 he met with the Tunicas, and then the following day he stopped on the bank of the river just north of Pointe Coupee across from the villages of the Biloxis, Ofogoulas, Pascagoulas, Mobilians, and Chatots. He invited these nations to feast with him and to discuss their annual gifts and alliances. Thomas enthusiastically reported to his superior that he had met with many nations and was having success convincing them to build alliances with his British Majesty and perhaps to resettle on the eastern bank of the river. As he delightedly explained, “The Tonica chief and his warriors have been here and gave me a dance the eagles tail and calumet of peace. Likewise the pascagoulas, choctoes, alibamons, pakana, and tansa.”⁵⁴

Yet Thomas was distressed by his dealings with the Biloxis. He knew that he should not expect the attendance of Perruquier and the Ofogoulas at the diplomatic ceremony, since he was a “a Frenchman in his heart and an enemy to the English,” but

⁵³ This means that the total population of the seven nations near Pointe Coupee and along the Red River was about 1,043 people. With the inclusion of the roughly 105 Tunicas who lived on the eastern side of the river that puts the petites nations population in the region directly along the river between Pointe Coupee and Natchez at 1,148. The 1777 estimates suggests that the total petites nations population west of the river was roughly 5,250. For comparison British officials estimated that there were 300 regular troops and about 3,000 militiamen who could be called to fight in Spanish Louisiana. Additionally there were only 200 settlers at Pointe Coupee in 1699, 104 settlers at Natchez in 1771, and no more than 55 soldiers between the two posts. John Thomas to Haldimand, 12/21/1771, vol. 1, class 21.672, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress; John Thomas to John Stuart, 12/12/1771, vol. 1, class 21.672, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress; John Blommart to John Stuart 8/18/1777, vol. 78, class 5, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress; General Gage, “List of the French or Spanish posts on the Mississippi from the Missouri to the sea” 1/6/1769, vol. 87, class 5, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

⁵⁴ John Thomas to John Stuart, 12/12/1771, vol. 1, class 21672, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

Mathaah Cush, the chief of the Biloxis, had also failed to arrive at the October 24 feast and had not concluded a diplomatic agreement with Thomas.⁵⁵

Mathaah Cush was torn as to whether or not he should ally with the British. During the 1770s the Ofogoulas and Biloxis formed close relationships in the territory near Pointe Coupee. Both groups were Siouan-speaking peoples and Mathaah Cush greatly respected the guidance of Perruquier. After abstaining from the October 24 feast, at the last minute Mathaah Cush changed his mind and decided to meet with Thomas. Although Mathaah Cush was not in attendance, some of the other Biloxi men were, and apparently midway through the meeting they ran back across the river to tell Mathaah Cush they thought he should meet with the English agent. Thomas was stung by his initial refusal to meet, and so when Mathaah Cush finally arrived, Thomas said he would meet with the Biloxi leader only if he followed him a league upstream to his next stopping point. Although Thomas does not say that Mathaah Cush conducted a calumet ceremony with him or gave him eagle feather or other signs of peace, he did say that the Biloxi leader expressed his desire for an alliance and entertained the possibility of moving back to the eastern side of the river. The Biloxi leader also apologized for missing the first meeting, and he excused his absence by saying that he had been deeply influenced by Perruquier who had told him not to come, yet henceforth he said he planned to meet with British diplomats. Thomas was sufficiently pleased with this response.⁵⁶ Thus although Perruquier was ultimately unsuccessful in convincing any of

⁵⁵ John Thomas to Haldimand, 12/21/1771, vol. 1, Class 21.672, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

⁵⁶ John Thomas to John Stuart, 12/12/1771, vol. 1, class 21672, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

his neighbors to scorn the British diplomats, his fierce opposition to British presence emphasizes that not all of the petite nations were willing to follow the Tunicas's diplomatic lead in the 1770s.

Conflicting Claims

Although the Tunicas technically lived on the eastern bank of the river, like most of the petites nations near Pointe Coupee, they planted, hunted, and traded on both sides, so maintaining good relations with both Spain and Britain was essential to helping them maintain their claims to these lands.⁵⁷ Much in the way that the petites nations cultivated relationships with the Choctaws to protect their territory, the Tunicas and other petites nations sought to shore up their territorial claims by forging relations with the Spanish and British.⁵⁸ However, Europeans rarely recognized this desire for dual diplomacy as anything other than the result of colonial officials' machinations. Yet rather than being driven by imperial policies, these multiplicities of alliances were born out of the need to negotiate not only a treacherous colonial power struggle, but also a bloody conflict between the Creeks and the Choctaws.

At the core of these assumptions are misconceptions of the rationale behind the relationships that petites nations peoples held with the British, Spanish, and other

⁵⁷ In 1772 Indian agent Charles Stuart complained that although many of the small nations lived on the Spanish side, they 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. In 1772 the Biloxis, Pascagoulas, and Tunicas all lived on Spanish side but planted corn across the river. In this missive Stuart declares 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, 12/2/1772, vol. 74 rl. 6 pt.1 Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

⁵⁸ Stuart to Durnford, 4/29/1771, no. 8, vol. 74, class 5, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

outsiders and how these relationships shaped control of territories. Both British and Spanish colonial claims hinged upon their ability to classify the petites nations as their vassals and to have them act as the military force and brute labor that helped sustain these claims. However, as had become painfully obvious after the Loftus debacle, European borders and titles meant very little on the ground. Thus by blaming the petites nations' attacks on the French, they stripped them of their political and territorial claims. By placing them in a subservient position to the French, whom the British had already vanquished in the Seven Years War, the British thereby justified their entitlements to these people's territories as the spoils of the Seven Years War.

Yet the powerful influence of the Creeks and Choctaws in the Lower Mississippi Valley forced both Britain and Spain to accept petites nations' multiple alliances and heightened their need for petites nations support on any terms. Under pressure from Creek and Choctaw raiders, both the British and Spanish quickly realized that they would need the petites nations not only to protect their claims against other empires, but to protect their settlements and peoples from other Indian nations. During the 1760s and 1770s southeastern Indian nations came under increasing pressure from the expansion of British colonial settlements on the eastern seaboard. The incursions of Euro-Americans onto Choctaw, Creek, Cherokee, and other Native peoples' territories increased violent conflict both between Native peoples and white intruders and among Native nations.⁵⁹ Therefore as the Creeks and Choctaws battled for control of the buffer zone between their nations, this conflict in turn increased violence against European settlers in the Lower

⁵⁹ Charles Stuart to John Stuart, 12/12/1774, no. 25, vol. 76, class 5, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress; John Stuart to Thomas Gage, 7/3/1773, vol. 3, class 21.672, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress; Gage to Marsh 1/21/1768, no. vol 87, class 5, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

Mississippi Valley. Although the Choctaws and other nations along the gulf coast had occasionally raided French settlements during the first two thirds of the century, after the Seven Years War the number of Choctaw raids on European settlements increased dramatically. Their frustration with the unfair exchange practices of British merchants, lack of gifts or trade goods, personal disputes with European settlers and traders, and the increased pressure on Native territory and resources led the Choctaws to engage in near continual raids on European people and property. Sometimes these raids were assaults against livestock encroaching on Choctaw territory, sometimes they were thefts of coveted goods to compensate for what the Choctaws felt they were owed, sometimes the raids were designed to get the attention of British or Spanish diplomats, and sometimes they were simply explosions of anger and frustration at the social and economic struggles of the Choctaws. Whatever the causes, these attacks caused significant damage to European property and the occasional murders of white settlers.⁶⁰

British settlers felt continuously under siege and unable to protect their people from Indian raids. British officials' failure to secure good relations with the Choctaws in West Florida plagued their settlers and made them question their safety even in the metropolises of the gulf south. In 1768 some citizens of the Sixtown division of Choctaws raided settlements just outside of New Orleans. They killed cattle, stole goods, and terrified the settlers.⁶¹ Three years later, in 1771 the Citizens' Council of Mobile met to compose a letter to the governor of West Florida pleading for more assistance protecting

⁶⁰ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 124-130; Reed to Gage, 3/12/1768, no. 24, vol. 86, class 5, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

⁶¹ Gage to Shelbourne, 7/24/1768, vol 86, class 5, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

themselves against the Choctaws. The Choctaws had been plundering homes outside of Mobile and the citizens were afraid the city might be next. Compounding these fears, the panicked citizens had also heard rumors that the Choctaws had just been in New Orleans receiving presents from the Spanish, and they therefore imagined that the Spanish were coordinating a full-scale assault on the city.⁶²

Likewise the Spanish struggled to protect their settlements from Indian attacks. The Sixtown's assaults on New Orleans frightened its settlers as well, and throughout the 1770s the Choctaws harassed Spanish settlers west of the Mississippi. In 1770 Spanish officials near Pointe Coupee complained that Choctaw raids on the settlements at Natchez had driven the settlers from the Pointe Coupee in fear, and in 1771 they complained that "armed Indians" had been showing up at the homes of Spanish settlers and forcing them to provide them with food.⁶³ As late as 1792 the Spanish were still struggling to protect their people, although this time it was Creek rather than Choctaw raiders who were harassing the settlers at Natchez.⁶⁴ The petites nations sometimes suffered too from these raids, and both Spanish and British officials came to understand that these small polities would be essential allies in their struggle to protect their settlements from Indian attackers. Neither Spanish nor British officials felt that they could influence the Creeks or Choctaws except by bending to their will. As the superintendent of British Indian affairs

⁶² Citizens' Council at Mobile to Peter Chester, May, 1771, vol. 1, class 21.672, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

⁶³ Allain to Unzaga, 1/4/1771, legajo 188a, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; Allain to Unzaga, 9/25/1770, legajo 188a, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Library of Congress; Durnford to Unzaga, 2/10/1770, legajo 188a Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Library of Congress; Allain to Unzaga 4/20/1770, legajo 188a, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Library of Congress; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 128.

⁶⁴ Arturo O'Neil to Mi estimado Señor, 12/28/1793, legajo 39, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Library of Congress.

remarked in 1770, unlike his efforts to form alliances with the smaller nations and the Chickasaws, "this nation [the Choctaws] never can, nor is their friendship to be obtained otherwise than by purchase or compulsion."⁶⁵

While these raids plagued the colonial officials, the ability of the Choctaws to intimidate the Spanish and the British in part helped the petites nations protect their land claims after the Seven Years War. As British and Spanish settlers spilled into the region in the 1760s, 1770s, and 1780s, the fertile lands along the Lower Mississippi River became more densely settled, and petites nations found themselves bordered by European settlers on all sides.⁶⁶ Yet the many of the petites nations were able to hold onto these coveted claims at least until the 1790s.⁶⁷

While the Tunicas, Ofogoulas, Choctaws, and Avoyelles defended their land claims on the ground in 1764, the Choctaws protected their petites nations allies in high-level negotiations and on paper.⁶⁸ In 1765 the Choctaws ceded portions of their territories to West Florida in exchange for alliance with the British and the promise of annual gifts

⁶⁵ Charles Stuart to Peter Chester 4/16/1770, vol. 1, class 21.672, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

⁶⁶ By the mid 1780s there were 16,000 slaves, 13,000 whites, and 1,000 free people of color in Louisiana. This explosion in growth facilitated the rapid sale and development of all available lands along the Mississippi River. Daniel H. Usner, "Indian-Black relations in Colonial and Ante-bellum Louisiana," *Slave Cultures and the Cultures of Slavery* ed. Stephan Palmie (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 154.

⁶⁷ The Chitimachas held onto their lands in bayou plaquemine until 1802 when pressure from Euro-American neighbors convinced the Chief of the nation, "Indian champana unzaga" to sell 35 arpents of his land and move more fully into Bayou LaFourche, MSS 79, 6/18/1802, Spanish Land Grant Papers, Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans; B. Lafon, "Floride Occidental et une Portion du Territoire du Mississippi," 1805, reel 12, pt. 6, Vicente Sebastián Pintado Papers, Library of Congress.

⁶⁸ The Tunicas were not the only nation to use stunt raids to open negotiations with the British. In 1765 the Pakanas raided British fort Bute. Their attack forced the British soldiers and engineers to abandon the fort and to stop its construction. Shortly thereafter the British sent an envoy to make peace with the Pakana's and to negotiate a diplomatic and trade alliance. By these sort of military stunts, petites nations peoples were able to force the British to negotiate with them and to assert control of their territories. Villiers du Terrage, *Last Years of French Louisiana*, 254.

and steady trade to their nations.⁶⁹ While the British pushed the Choctaws to give them larger portions of land near Mobile and along the Mississippi River, the Choctaw leaders emphasized that they had no right to cede those lands, as they belonged to the petites nations. As the superintendent of Indian affairs explained in 1770, “I had my information from the Choctaws themselves and from my deputies sent to the banks of the Mississippi, inhabited by various small tribes entirely distant from and not connected with the Choctaw nation; in actual possession of the lands which has been deemed their property from time immemorial. The Choctaws in settling their boundary line with us declared the lands on the Mississippi to belong to the small nations living on them; and ceded his majesty ‘lands to the westward of the Pascagoula as far as they had any claim or right to cede them’ which indicates their consciousness of having no just claim to the lands on the Mississippi.”⁷⁰ This emphasis on their having “no just claims” is an especially powerful statement of loyalty to the petites nations. Given how fiercely the Choctaws and Creeks fought for control of the lands between the Alabama and Tombigbee rivers, their

⁶⁹ Barnett, *Mississippi's American Indians*, 147-148.

⁷⁰ In discussion in April of 1765 of their cessions of the lands near Mobile, the Choctaw leaders were careful to clarify that these lands specifically belonged to the Naniabas and Tohomes. Even though the nations had sought refuge with the Choctaws, and were living with the Chickasawhays during this time, both they and the Choctaws recognized their continuing claims to the lands on both sides of the junctions of the Mobile and Coosa rivers. Moreover, in their discussions of land cessions for the region directly around Mobile bay, Choctaw leader Tomatly Mingo of the Sixtowns Divison stood up mid conference and said “he had forgot to mention that the Lands from the Nameaba [Naniaba] to Old Tomé were excepted in their cession made to the white people and reserved for the Nameaba and Mobillian Indians.” Ultimately the Choctaws were forced to cede the lands of the Mobilians and Tohomes, as they were most likely vacant by then, but they stood stalwart on the petites nations’ land claims west of the Pascagoula. In another account of the Choctaw’s refusal to cede these lands, John Stuart explained that the Choctaws were great friends of the small tribes along the Mississippi River. He emphasizes that the British must respect the small tribes lands claims because if they do not they may find themselves at war with the Choctaws. His comments both support other mentions of alliance between the Choctaws and Tunicas and suggest that the nations had strong enough ties that some Choctaws might consider going to war for the Tunicas. John Stuart to General Haldimand, 3/2/1770, vol. 1, class 21.672, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress; John Stuart's Remarks on Lieutenant Governor Durnford's Letters to the Earl of Hillsborough Relating to Indian Affairs 2/18/1770, vol. 72, class 5, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress; Gums and Waselkov, *Plantation Archaeology*, 37.

willingness to give up portions of their own lands, and not the petites nations claims, illustrates that the Choctaws valued these relationships and continued to see these smaller nations as important allies.⁷¹

Yet even as the Choctaws supported petites nations land claims, they continued to intimidate and coerce petites nations peoples as they did their Spanish and British allies. As Choctaw peoples became even more pressed by European settlers in the 1790s, the alliances between petites nations people and their Choctaw allies became increasingly strained, and nations like the Tunicas suffered as the result.⁷² In mid April of 1770 the Choctaws and Chickasaws descended on the Tunicas for an extended diplomatic summit. The Choctaws and Chickasaws drank almost continuously and their antics so spooked the Commandant at Pointe Coupee that he forbid the settlers from leaving their homes unarmed. Although no assaults came of the meeting, the Chickasaws and Choctaws remained at the Tunicas for a week, consuming all of their provisions and over-extending

⁷¹ It was not uncommon during the eighteenth century for larger and more powerful Indian nations to cede lands that they held contested control over. For example in the 1730s and 1740s Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) leaders ceded large tracts of lands in Pennsylvania and Virginia to the British. While the Haudenosaunee people claimed control of these territories, in practice these territories were the homelands of the Lenape, Susquehaana and Ohio River Valley peoples, and these Native groups refused to accept the validity of these cessions. Richter, *Before the Revolution*, 374-378.

⁷² In 1794 several Choctaws murdered the chief of the Pascagoulas. Olitopas, and in the following year the remainder of the nation moved to Choctaw territory in Bayou Boeuf. Gregory Waselkov has suggested that this series of event suggests coercion, and that this murder may have been a tactic to force the Pascagoulas to integrate with their nation. Similarly, in 1796 Spanish commander Carlos de Gran Pré complained that the Choctaws were harassing the Tensas, Pascagoulas, and Apalachees who had settled in neighboring villages along the red river. Gran Pré was concerned because “these Indians attract the Choctaws who remain for some months consuming all their food and finally abusing them” and the Choctaws’ presence in the region frightened the Spanish and French settlers in the region. As these examples illustrate, while the Choctaws held alliances and longstanding kin and economic connections to many of the petites nations, the Choctaws dominated these relationships. Although they sometimes protected the petites nations, the petites nations often also sought protection from the forces of their Choctaw allies. Gums and Waselkov, *Plantation Archaeology*, 25; Carlos de Gran Pré to Francisco Carondelet, 9/27/1796, in Lawrence Kinnaid and Lucia B. Kinnaid, “The Red River Valley in 1796,” *Louisiana History*, vol. 24, no. 2 (1983), 193.

their stay.⁷³ The Choctaws repeated this tactic in September of that year, this time bringing 100 men with them. The Tunicas tried to accommodate this entourage, which outnumbered their entire nation, but were short on provisions, and so the Choctaws raided nearby farms and killed livestock for food. This again terrified the European settlers and caused the commander of Pointe Coupee to issue a mandatory arms order.⁷⁴ The following month, the Tunica chief lamented that he wished to go to visit with the governor of Louisiana and receive his annual gift, but the Choctaws' frequent visits had rendered him unable to leave.⁷⁵ By January Tunica and Choctaw relations had reached a breaking point, and a Tunica man killed one of the visiting Choctaws. The Choctaws demanded that the Tunicas turn over the head of the murderer immediately and threatened retribution if they did not. The Spanish correspondence does not indicate whether or not the Choctaws carried out this threat, but it does indicate that the Spanish commandant felt powerless to influence the matter one way or another. The Spanish commander spoke with Lattanash about the Choctaws intentions, but he was unable to

⁷³ Elongating diplomatic meetings was one strategy used by both the Chickasaws and Choctaws to convince diplomatic officials to comply with their demands. In 1771 a British Indian agent complained that he "could not get quit of my Indians" visiting his post on a diplomatic envoy. The Chickasaws had well overstayed what he believed to be a reasonable length for a diplomatic visit. He lamented that "the Chickasaws notwithstanding I gave them the handsomest presents of any nation plagued me for eight or nine days..." By arriving en mass with a considerable quantity of armed leaders, Choctaw and Chickasaw diplomats were essentially able to hold British and Spanish diplomats hostage until they acquiesced to their demands. This is the same tactic the Chickasaws and Choctaws used with the Tunicas in the 1770s. John Stuart to Haldimand, undated, vol. 1, class 21.672, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

⁷⁴ Allain to Unzaga, 9/25/1770, legajo 188a, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Library of Congress.

⁷⁵ Allain to Unzaga, 10/27/1770, legajo 188a, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Library of Congress.

offer any protection to the Tunicas, and so they were most likely compelled to comply with the Choctaw demands.⁷⁶

Even though Tunicas and Choctaws sometimes clashed while resolving conflicts between their nations, when it came to dealing with the Spanish and British, the Choctaws continued to protect their small allies. Although their massive and lengthy presence at the Tunicas' village in December of 1770 may have irritated Tunica officials, the Choctaws' extended diplomatic sessions made the Tunicas and their petites nations allies appear more powerful in the eyes of European observers. In December 1771 John Thomas asked his supervisor for assistance settling a land dispute with Mr. Canty, a British settler. Canty claimed that he had been given a land grant to settle on the "old fields" of the petites nations, and he was anxious to begin planting on these valuable lands that had been previously cleared by Native women. Yet Thomas knew that although many of the petites nations lived on the eastern side of the river, they still used and owned these fields. Thomas was afraid that if Canty claimed this title and he would attack the Indian owners as trespassers when they returned to use the land. As he explained, if Canty claimed title "in firing on the Indians it would probable be the means of an Indian War. It is true the Nations of Indians are but small. It ought to be Considered that such

⁷⁶ In Governor Ulloa's instructions to the military commander of Louisiana he makes clear that he should do his best to settle conflicts between Indian nations and stop them from going to war against each other. However, he follows up this statement by saying that "pues, si alguno de ellos insiste en proseguir, es forzoso dejarlos" (if one of these nations insists on proceeding [to make war] you are forced to leave them [alone]). Despite Spanish claims to control the Indians in Louisiana, as this correspondence and the impotence of the commander at Pointe Coupee make clear, in reality Spanish officials in Louisiana recognized that they could not control the actions of Indian nations in the region. Ulloa to Riu y Morales "Instruccion para el modo de parlamentar y hacer los regalos a las naciones de Indios," 3/9/1769, legajo 2357, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Newberry Library Special Collections, Newberry Library, Chicago; Allain to Unzaga, 1/4/1771, legajo 188a, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Library of Congress.

Rash proceedings would alarm the Great Chactaw Nation as those Little tribes are in great Friendship with them.”⁷⁷

Although the Tunicas resented the Choctaws’ heavy-handed approach, their alliance was invaluable both to their own people and to their diplomatic allies. Although the Spanish, British, and Choctaws all attempted to coerce the small nations into bending to their wills, these webs of alliances allowed petites nations people to use these same projections of dominance to their own advantages. To protect themselves from exploitation and violence from outsiders, whether they were Creek, British, Chickasaw, Choctaw, or Spanish, the Tunicas cultivated extensive and often conflicting alliances.⁷⁸ Their few numbers necessitated that they have a wide range of allies to request support from, and although these multiplicities of alliances vexed British and Spanish officials, they were absolutely essential if the Tunicas were to maintain their lands and diplomatic influence. Thus the problem for British and Spanish understanding of Indian diplomacy in the eighteenth century was that imperial officials failed to recognize that they were competing not only with their European rivals but also with the Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creeks, and the petites nations’ own interests. It was one of these same sort of imperial

⁷⁷ John Thomas to John Stuart, 12/12/1771, vol. 1, class 21.672, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

⁷⁸ The Pascagoulas exploited as similar system of alliances that helped them navigate shifting political currents after the Seven Years war. Between 1764 and 1773 the Pascagoulas moved four times, first to the Amite River in British west Florida to escape Creek raiders, then they accepted a Spanish offer to settle near present day Rapides parish, then in 1772 Choctaw raids drove them out of that region and so they retreated back to British west Florida until a new wave of Creek attacks chased them back into Spanish Louisiana. In 1772 they were negotiating with the British to see if they could return to their homelands if the British would protect them from the Creeks. In each of these instances they relied upon their conflicting and extensive connections to find safe harbor for their peoples and escape violence at the hands of larger and more powerful Native nations. “Talk Between Charles Stuart and Small Tribes on the Mississippi,” 10/17/1772, fr. 806 vol. 74, reel 6, pt.1, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress; Gums and Waselkov, *Plantation Archaeology*, 25.

misunderstandings that Lattanash sought to rectify in 1772 as he headed down to Fort Bute.

Negotiating on Tunica Terms

During the ten months preceding Lattanash's October visit in 1772, relations between English and Spanish colonial officials had become especially strained as the result of Tunica diplomacy. Since 1764 the Tunicas had taken full advantage of the prestige they gained from the Loftus assault, marketing themselves as regional power brokers among the region's Native nations and maintaining a steady presence on both sides of the border.⁷⁹

However maintaining these dual alliances was difficult, and by the early 1770s both British and Spanish officials were frustrated by their inability to secure the exclusive alliance of the Tunicas. The situation was not improved by Lattanash's attempts to flaunt his people's multiple alliances by simultaneously wearing both his Spanish and British medals. In December of 1771, Lattanash reported to the British Indian Agent at Fort Bute, John Thomas, that Bathazar de Villiers, the Spanish commanding officer of the fort across the river at Pointe Coupee, had attempted to wrest his British medal from his neck while he was negotiating with the Spanish official. The Spanish officer was trying to force Lattanash to sever his ties with the British and therefore attempted to get Lattanash

⁷⁹ In 1764 Captain Campbell reported that the Tunicas (presumably Lattanash and Bride-Les- Boeuf) had promised to "bring in the Arkansas" and convince the nation to move across the river and settle in British territory. This is especially remarkable given the Arkansas (Quapaws) were at least four times the size of the Tunica nation in 1763.

Captain Campbell to Governor Johnstone, 12/12/1764, *Mississippi Provincial Archives: English Dominion*, 1: 267; Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 132-133.

to relinquish his British medal. Given the severity of this gesture, John Thomas recognized this move as nothing less than an international provocation.⁸⁰

British and Spanish officials exchanged a flurry of correspondence over the incident. Villiers accused Lattanash of lying and manipulating Thomas. Thomas threatened to encourage other Indian nations to relocate to British West Florida. British Deputy Superintendent Charles Stuart berated Thomas for risking pitching British West Florida and Spanish Louisiana into conflict over the incident, and ultimately both Stuart and Lattanash had to come to Fort Bute to straighten things out in person.”⁸¹

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.⁸² 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.⁸³ Then in the mid 1770s, as a possible rupture between England and its Atlantic colonies loomed, Spanish and British officials again readied for a multi-theater confrontation.

Regardless of British hopes and Spanish fears, Lattanash had no intention of agreeing to an exclusive relationship with the British. In October 1772 at Fort Bute, Lattanash approached the British confidently. His allies, including Pascagoula, Biloxi,

⁸⁰ 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; “Three Speeches Given at an Indian Council held by the British at Fort Bute,” Bjork, “Documents Regarding Indian Affairs,” 408-410.

⁸¹ Villier to Thomas, 11/25/1771, Thomas to Unzaga y Amezaga, 12/4/1771, and Thomas to Villier, 12/5/1771, in Bjork, “Documents Regarding Indian Affairs,” 399-408.

⁸² John Stuart to William Howe, 10/6/1777, 695-696, Carleton Papers, Library of Congress.

⁸³ Fabel, *Colonial Challenges*, 108,132.

Choctaw, and Alabama chiefs, accompanied him. Lattanash spoke first at this council as he attempted to explain the situation. He addressed Stuart, saying, “I heard you [were] angry at my having this Medal [and a Spanish flag]. why would you be angry at that[?] I had the medal before the English [came] here... *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?*”⁸⁴

Lattanash sent a clear message to his people’s colonial allies that their relationships with the Tunica people and their use of Tunica territory would happen on Tunica terms. As his people physically straddled the border, Lattanash liked to wear both Spanish and British medals at all times. Lattanash seemed to enjoy exhibiting his ability to cross political and territorial boundaries and the resulting vexation this display caused his European allies, especially when other petites nations also began requesting dual medals. Proudly displaying evidence of his people’s connections, Lattanash reminded Europeans that they were powerless to stop this practice.⁸⁵

By the 1770s not only the Tunicas, but also the Alabamas, Pascagoulas, Chitimachas, Houmas, and Biloxis had mastered the diplomatic tactics needed to maintain a dual European alliance structure. The petites nations were always crossing the river, always talking about wanting to move over to the British side, and always arriving

⁸⁴ “Talk Between Charles Stuart and Small Tribes on the Mississippi,” 10/17/1772, fr. 806 vol. 74, reel 6, pt. 1, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

⁸⁵ Statement of Payment for Indian Presents, January 9, 1770, *Kinnaird, Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 2:154-155; “Charles Stuart to John Stuart,” 12/2/1772, fr. 793, v. 74, rl. 6, pt. 1, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress; Charles Stuart to John Stuart 11/15/1772, vol. 74, class 5, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress.

at Spanish forts looking for presents.⁸⁶ During talks with colonial officials, these petites nations simultaneously portrayed themselves as tiny, weak, and dependent and then used this image of powerlessness to reaffirm their need for multiple relationships. To the Spanish officials, the petites nations stressed that they needed access to more trade goods, as Spanish officials were unable to compete with the plentiful and inexpensive goods offered by British traders. To British officials, they emphasized their need to be able to cross the river and stay on the Spanish side to protect themselves from Creek raids. The British knew that they were unable to either control the Creeks or offer the petites nations adequate military protection. Thus the petites nations leaders argued that in order to be able to protect their poor, tiny communities, they must continue to hold dual alliances.⁸⁷

Despite their occasional rhetoric of weakness, the Tunicas clearly did not think that they were powerless or at the mercy of colonial officials. Rather, their choice to remain as a small, non-confederated polity was a conscious decision, and their efforts to secure ties with Indigenous and European polities alike were part of their efforts to preserve their independent community. Throughout the century, their attempts to form relationships with the Choctaws, Chickasaws, British, French, Spanish, and other petites nations all served to help protect their people against the forces of disease, war, and colonialism that threatened to fracture their nation. Their ability to navigate the changing geopolitical landscape of the Lower Mississippi Valley and forge connections to newcomers helped this nation survive not only the eighteenth century, but maintain their homelands in Louisiana to this day.

⁸⁶ Ulloa to Grimaldi, No. 17, 8/4/1768, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 2: 61-62; Fabel, *Colonial Challenges*, 121, 128-129.

⁸⁷ Kinnaird, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 2: xix, xxii-xxiii.

Conclusion

In Jackson County, Mississippi, the Pascagoula River sings. According to local legend, long ago, a young Biloxi princess named Miona fell in love with a Pascagoula prince called Olustee, and the two ran away to wed. When Miona's father, the chief of the Biloxis, discovered their wedding plans, he became enraged and threatened to kill all of the Pascagoulas. The young couple heard of these plans and plunged headlong into the river, sworn to drown themselves before they would be torn apart. The Pascagoulas were heartbroken by the loss of this prince, and the whole tribe followed them into the water, singing their death song as they went. Thus the Pascagoulas vanished from the region, leaving only their name on the river and their voices in its current.¹

Gulf coast mythology is full of legends of vanishing Indians. Nearly all of these stories tell of star-crossed lovers, inter-tribal conflict, and the dramatic melting away of small Native nations into the natural surroundings.² These stories are convenient. They help explain how places like Bayou Goula and the Mobile, Tensaw, Biloxi, Pascagoula, and Tangipahoa rivers got their names, as well as how these tribes conveniently disappeared to make room for subsequent French, Spanish, British, and American settlers. Yet far from being the vanishing precursors to European settlement, the Native

¹ Federal Writers Project in Mississippi, *Mississippi Gulf Coast, American Guide Series*, Works Progress Administration (Gulfport: Gulfport Printing Co, 1939), 95-96.

² Edmund Boudreaux, *Legends and Lore of the Mississippi Gulf Coast* (Charleston: The History Press, 2013), 50-55; Laura F. Hinsdale, *Legends and Lyrics of the Gulf Coast* (Biloxi: Herald Press, 1896), 3-7, 33-35; Thomas J. Carruth, *Tales of Old Louisiana* (Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1979), 60-61.

nations who gave this region its distinctive place names were integrally connected to the development of the colonial south, and many of them still reside not far from their people's ancestral homelands.

During the eighteenth century the Biloxis, Pascagoulas, and other petites nations forged relationships with a host of newcomers who immigrated into their Gulf Coast territories. At the turn of the eighteenth century these petites nations were suffering from devastating epidemics and violence that threatened to destroy their peoples. Indeed the slave trade, war, and disease caused the small polities of the region tremendous suffering; however, many nations were able to develop strategies that helped their peoples survive this chaos and rebuild their communities. The abilities to adapt to new economic opportunities and forge extensive political and social networks to the other peoples of the gulf provided the petites nations with substantial regional power that helped insulate their nations against these violent forces. By relying on the systems of diplomacy, social integration, and military regulation that they had constructed in the late seventeenth century and forging service-based relationships with European newcomers during the eighteenth century, many of these nations were able to protect their people and preserve their autonomy. Not only did many succeed in sustaining their peoples, but their interactions with one another and with the French, Spanish, British, Choctaws, Creeks, and Chickasaws fundamentally shaped the lives of all of the inhabitants of the gulf south.

Although it is easier to trace the histories of larger confederacies and nations within the archives, we should not lose sight of the fact that many of the Southeastern Indians who interacted with colonists in Charleston, Pensacola, and New Orleans were not part of these more-studied peoples, or that in the densely Indigenous parts of the

southeast, the French, Spanish, and British settlements all themselves began as petites nations. Additionally, as many scholars of Indian history have shown, even within large confederacies power was rarely centralized, and leaders had to rely on their abilities to form connections to external groups to exert influence.³

If we are to write seventeenth- and eighteenth-century southern regional history rather than merely the history of European colonies, we must include non-confederated groups, as they clearly influenced the lives of their Indian, European, and African neighbors. While it may be tempting to dismiss these small, Indigenous groups from eighteenth-century histories because their small populations do not seem especially threatening, we should not assume that size was the only mechanism of power in the early southeast.

Today there are fourteen state-recognized Indian tribes in Louisiana and more than 55,000 people within the state who identified as Native American on the 2010 census, many of whom are the descendants of the eighteenth century-petites nations.⁴ After the conclusion of the American Revolution the petites nations were faced with a new set of challenges as American settlers swarmed into the region and federal Indian policy threatened their allies. Yet by relying on their strategies of networking, adapting economically, and continuing to live in joint settlements, which they had mastered in the eighteenth century, many Native groups were able to both escape removal and preserve

³ Greg O'Brien, "Supplying our wants: Choctaws and Chickasaws Reassess the Trade Relationship with Britain," *Coastal Encounters: The Transformation of the Gulf South in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Richmond F. Brown (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 79; DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 5-8.

⁴ Brian Klopoteck, *Recognition Odysseys: Indigeneity, Race, and Federal Tribal Recognition Policy in Three Louisiana Indian Communities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 41-59; Tina Norris, Paula L. Vines, and Elizabeth M. Hoeffel, "The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2010," 2010 Census Briefs (January 2012), 7; Governor's Office of Indian Affairs, "Louisiana Tribes" (Office of the Governor, 2012), <http://www.gov.state.la.us/index.cfm?md=pagebuilder&tmp=home&cpid=564>.

their homelands. By considering their historical experiences, we can begin to understand how nations like the Tunica-Biloxis and Chitimachas both persisted and persevered in the face of centuries of incredible odds.

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