

Squaring the Circles: The Reach of Colonial America

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In 1721 in South Carolina, the royal governor received a precious present: a deerskin map conveying a complex world of native peoples and their intricate interconnections. The gift came from Indian chiefs who met Governor Francis Nicholson at Charles Town (now Charleston), the colony's capital and leading seaport. The chiefs represented villages in the Piedmont, where the people spoke a Siouan language. Lumped together by the British (and subsequent historians) as "Catawbas," the people thought of themselves as belonging to a loose confederation of eleven villages named on the map: Casuie, Charra, Nasaw, Nustie, Saxippaha, Succa, Suttirie, Wasmisa, Waterie, Wiapie, and Youchine. The map also locates two more familiar native peoples—the Cherokee and Chickasaw—who had allied with the Catawbas and the British. Rather than represent natives as one, common mass of Indians, the map introduced the governor to a complex network of diverse peoples. Divided into hundreds of linguistically distinct peoples, the natives did not know that they were a common category until named and treated so by the colonial invaders. The Nasaw map warns us to beware of how much nuance we lose when lumping the many native peoples together as "Indians."

By giving the map, the Catawbas sought to educate the new governor to native diplomacy. Rather than depict geographical proportions, the map conveys social and political relationships between peoples, both native and colonial. The thirteen native peoples appear as circles of varying sizes and locations, with the largest and the most central—for the Nasaw—enjoying a pride of place. Asserting a hierarchy of power, the map defines the Nasaw

as the pivotal and crucial people in a web of relationships that linked the British colonies of the coast with the Indians of the interior. Take us seriously, and treat us with a special generosity, the Nasaw mapmaker insisted.

A selective depiction of social space, the Nasaw map omits many of the peoples then dwelling between Charles Town, on the east, and the Chickasaws of the Mississippi Valley, to the west. Devoted to the Catawbas and their allies, the map excludes the powerful Creek and Choctaw confederations, who offered rival networks of native power. The map assured Nicholson that the Catawba peoples, and especially the Nasaw, were his special and indispensable friends, who served as his proper conduit into the wider native world of the vast interior. Of course, maps made by other native peoples altered the hierarchy and centrality of villages. In 1723, Nicholson collected a similar map made by the Chickasaws, who gave themselves centrality with strong links to the Choctaw and Cherokee and to the English at Charles Town but with only a marginal place allotted to the Catawbas.

The 1721 Catawba map also represents only two colonial polities: Charles Town appears on the left as a cross-hatching of lines at right angles, while a box named Virginia occupies the lower right-hand corner. The well-rounded natives thought of the newcomers as squares. Living in oval wigwams in circular villages surrounded by palisades, native peoples felt spiritually safest in rounded forms, which reflected the natural cycles of seasons and lives. Their conception of the world as a web of social circles derived from their ancestors who, as recently as the sixteenth century, had sustained the Mississippian culture, which featured many ceremonial mounds. In stark contrast, the Indians identified the colonists with their square and rectangular buildings in towns platted as grids: alien and unnatural forms that seemed ominous.

Rather than reject the strange newcomers, the map represents an Indian bid to incorporate them into a native nexus of diplomacy and trade in the hope that the colonists could learn how to coexist in a shared land. Parallel lines connect both Charles Town and Virginia to the native circles. The lines represented paths of safe conduct for traders and diplomats in a world that could otherwise turn violent. The map coaxed the British to approach the other Catawbas via the Nasaw, who claimed a primacy in trade and diplomacy. To contact the Nustie, for example, good manners demanded sending representatives (and presents of trade goods) first to the Nasaw. Far from accepting subordination to the Virginians or the Carolinians, the Nasaw cast themselves as the brokers of commerce and power in a world dominated by native peoples and conducted in native ways. In this map, Indians hold the center, while the colonists remain marginal.

The self-assurance of the map jars our conventional assumptions about Indians, for we usually narrate colonial history as a relentless and irresistible British drive to dominate and dispossess native peoples. Surely, we assume, natives must have quickly recognized an inferiority dictated by their smaller numbers and inferior technology. We do not expect to find them acting as the self-confident teachers of colonists cast as rather obtuse, but

redeemable, students. The map offers an alternative vision of coexistence on native terms, thereby rejecting the colonizers' drive to dispossess native peoples and convert the survivors into Christian menials. Although the governor may not have grasped the intended lesson, the map can teach us more about native thoughts and ways than do the categorical statements of colonizers who lumped all Indians together as immutable primitives meant for eventual conquest.

In addition to the circles, squares, and paths, the map represents three animate beings. First, an especially large human figure wearing a skirt appears to float over the path between Nasaw and Virginia. Lacking a label, she apparently mattered more to the Nasaw mapmaker than to the British copyist. It is tempting to grant her a supernatural power in the minds of the Nasaw. A caption does identify the other, much smaller human figure as "An Indian a Hunting." Evidently male and armed with a musket, he faces an equally small deer. Long a staple of Indian subsistence, hunting deer had become essential to the new and expanding trade with colonists, who valued the hides for tanning to make clothing, especially gloves. By killing deer by the thousands for their hides, the Catawba paid for coveted British manufactures of cloth and metal—including guns and ammunition: goods the natives could not make for themselves. Both by its original material—a deer hide—and by representing a deer-hunting Indian, the map conveyed the trade at the heart of their relationship with the Carolinians.

Finally, in the lower left-hand corner, near Charles Town, the map seems to depict a deployed parachute. But modern eyes trick us into assuming that the English labels define a consistent up and down (or north and south). In fact, the Nasaw intended viewers to circle around the map to view it from every angle without privileging any one side. The apparent parachute is, instead, a ship with a central mast mounted by a pennant and linked by ropes to the deck. In addition to a grid of streets, Charles Town impressed natives as a harbor filled with ships capable of crossing the Atlantic.

The map offers a sophisticated reflection on a changing world where natives killed deer for a transatlantic market while hoping to preserve their traditional spirituality, including a sky woman. The mixed symbols mark the map as at the linkage between two different, but increasingly interpenetrated, networks: the native-made circles and paths of the interior and the Euro-American entrepôts of transatlantic commerce.¹

Two paper copies of the map survive because Governor Nicholson gave them to his patron in England, the Prince of Wales. To render the map meaningful to the prince (and, so, to us), the copyist added the English-language labels: translations and representations of the explanations orally conveyed by the chiefs when they delivered their gift. As a cherished curiosity, the copies enabled Nicholson to repay the favors that had promoted his career. That transatlantic career attests to the broad reach of the English empire (which became British in 1707). Born in Yorkshire in 1655, Nicholson was a veteran army officer, who, during the 1670s and 1680s,

had led troops in Flanders in Europe, Tangier in Morocco, and Boston in New England. He subsequently governed the colonies of New York and Virginia before commanding a failed British bid to conquer French Canada in 1709. A year later Nicholson did capture French Acadia, which became British Nova Scotia, with Nicholson as the first governor. In 1720 he became the first royal governor of South Carolina. Returning to England in 1725, he died in London three years later after a life spent trying to increase the power of an empire along the Atlantic coast of North America.²

HISTORIES

Brought together in 1721, the Nasaw mapgivers and the English governor jointly speak to the efforts by historians in recent years to grasp the interplay of the “Atlantic” and “Continental” networks of human movement, trade, diplomacy, and war in North America. “Atlantic historians” examine the complex interplay of Europe, Africa, and the Americas through the transatlantic flows of goods, people, plants, animals, capital, and ideas. American colonization derived from a global expansion of European exploration and commerce beginning in the fifteenth century. In cannon-armed sailing ships, Europeans created the first global nexus of trade by crisscrossing the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans. Europe reaped wind-fall profits from the new global trade, especially in African slaves sent to the Americas to work new plantations devoted to sugar, tobacco, rice, and cacao. Atlantic history is a subset of the larger, global story of European expansion.

During the sixteenth century, the Portuguese led the way around Africa to India, while the Spanish crossed the Atlantic to explore and colonize the Americas. The Spanish took Mexico, to exploit the gold and silver mines, and the largest islands in the Caribbean, where they developed sugar plantations. Coming second, the French concentrated on harvesting the fish of the northern waters and the valuable furs of the northern forests drained by the St. Lawrence River. That left the intervening Atlantic Seaboard for belated exploitation by the English during the early seventeenth century. Disappointed in their hopes for finding precious minerals, the English compensated by creating profitable plantations and farms that attracted thousands of colonists. They also took over a Dutch attempt to create a New Netherland colony in the Hudson and Delaware valleys, between the English colonies in the Chesapeake to the south and New England to the north. In 1707 the English empire became British with the union of Scotland to England under one king and one parliament.

While necessary to assess the colonial era, an Atlantic approach is not sufficient. As Paul Mapp notes, North America was “where an Atlantic world interacted with multiple other worlds.” To make sense of colonial North America we need to combine Atlantic and continental approaches. Mapp and other “continental historians” seek to restore the importance of native peoples to the colonial story. Rather than treat Indians as un-

changing primitives doomed from the start to conquest and assimilation by the colonizers, the continental approach emphasizes the natives' ability to adapt to the newcomers and to compel concessions from them. Instead of lurking beyond the colonies in an ahistorical "wilderness," Indians have come back into the narrative as central and persistent protagonists who helped to shape every colony.

The new combination of Atlantic and continental history challenges the older orthodoxy that treated colonial America as a story of English cultural "seeds" first planted at Jamestown in Virginia in 1607 and at Plymouth in New England in 1620. According to the older view, "American history" began in the east in the English colonies and spread slowly westward, reaching only the Appalachian mountains by independence. In this story, the continent's Indian peoples and Spanish and French colonies seemed relevant only as enemies, as challenges that brought out the best in the English as they remade themselves into Americans.

According to our national origin myth, common English colonists escaped from the rigid customs, social hierarchies, and constrained resources of Europe into an abundant land of both challenge and opportunity. Rising to the challenge, they made the most of their frontier opportunities to prosper by turning the forest into farms. Thereby, they became entrepreneurial and egalitarian individualists who could only be ruled by their own consent. Inevitably, they rebelled against British rule to form an independent and republican union of states destined to expand to the Pacific. Known as "American exceptionalism," this interpretation casts the colonial period simply as an Anglophone preparation for the United States, defined as a uniquely middle-class society and democracy.³

American exceptionalism relies on some partial truths. Many British colonists did find more land, greater prosperity, and higher status than they could have achieved by remaining in the mother country. And (save for in the West Indies) British America did lack the aristocrats of the mother country, creating a social vacuum that enabled successful lawyers, merchants, and planters to comprise a colonial elite that favored commercial values. Historians long focused on the political participation of common colonists as voters and legislators in the British colonies. And those scholars scoured colonial events, including the revivals of the Great Awakening, for hints of the coming revolution.

But the traditional story of American uplift obscures the heavy costs of colonization. Especially during the seventeenth century in Virginia and the West Indies, thousands of colonists found only intense labor and early graves owing to diseases and Indian hostility. And those who succeeded bought their good fortune by taking lands from Indians and by exploiting the labor of indentured servants and African slaves. Few Indians and fewer Africans experienced colonial America as a world of attractive new opportunities. Between 1492 and 1776, North America lost population, as diseases and wars killed Indians faster than colonists could replace them. And, during the eighteenth century, most colonial arrivals were African

conscripts forcibly carried to a land of slavery, rather than European volunteers seeking a domain of freedom. More than minor aberrations, Indian deaths and the African slaves were fundamental to the success of colonization and the prosperity of the free.

The traditional story also obscures the broad cultural and geographic range of colonial America, which extended far beyond the British colonies of the Atlantic Seaboard. Many native peoples encountered colonizers not as westward-bound Englishmen, but as Spanish heading north from Mexico, as Russians coming eastward from Siberia, or as French probing the Great Lakes and Mississippi River. Each of those colonial ventures interacted in distinctive ways with particular settings and Indians to construct varied Americas—which competed for the trade and alliance of the native peoples in the vast interior between the colonial enclaves.

In recent years, historians have paid greater attention to the broader continent, in general, and to the cultures of native peoples, in particular. These new approaches reveal that colonial societies *did* diverge from their mother countries—but in a more complex and radical manner than imagined within the narrow vision of American uplift for English men. Colonial conditions produced an unprecedented mixing of radically diverse peoples—African, European, and Indian—under stressful circumstances for all. The world had never known such a rapid and intense intermingling of peoples—and of microbes, plants, and animals from different continents. Everyone had to adapt to a new world wrought by those combinations. Thrown together in distant colonies, the diverse peoples from three continents had to find new ways to communicate and to coexist in North America.

The Indians also lived in a new world transformed by the intrusion of diverse newcomers bearing alien diseases, livestock, trade goods, weapons, and Christian beliefs. Ranging across the continent, those processes affected peoples and their environments far from the centers of colonial settlement. Reduced by disease and war, the Siouan peoples of the Carolina Piedmont began to consolidate their villages to form a loose confederation, which eventually became known as the Catawbas. Similar processes of ethnogenesis reshaped native peoples throughout the continent.

Despite the epidemics, the Indians of the interior remained sufficiently numerous and resourceful to slow (and sometimes to reverse) the colonial conquest. For example, on the Great Plains during the eighteenth century, the Indian peoples acquired large herds of horses that endowed them with a new mobility and prowess as buffalo hunters and mounted warriors. Better fed, clothed, and equipped than ever before, the mounted Indians could defy colonial intrusions and even roll back their settlements in Texas and New Mexico.

On the southern Great Plains, the Comanche were the big winners. During the seventeenth century, they had lived as hunter-gatherers in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. During the early eighteenth century, they traded and raided to obtain horses, which enabled them to push south

and east onto the plains to hunt buffalo. By procuring enlarged hunting territories, they improved their bargaining position as traders and their might as warriors. Preying upon the weaker Apaches, the Comanche took women and children captives for trade and for adoption. The many adopted captives and an improved diet of abundant buffalo meat fueled a population growth that starkly contrasted with the demographic decline afflicting most other native peoples. By 1800 the Comanche numbered about 20,000—twice as many as all other native peoples on the southern Great Plains.

Comanche expansion set off a domino effect, as their defeated rivals fled and came into conflict with new neighbors. Reeling from Comanche raids, Apache bands headed westward across the Rio Grande into western New Mexico or they pushed southward deeper into Texas. Many westerling Apache refugees found a more secure haven in the canyons of north-west New Mexico. Along their way west, they raided the Pueblo peoples, taking horses, sheep, cattle, and captives. From their captives, the western bands learned weaving, pottery making, and the herding of domestic animals, especially sheep. These composite and increasingly prosperous western bands became known to the Hispanics as the Apache de Navihu—later shortened to Navajo.

Nowhere did the colonizers find a truly empty land free for the taking. However, by the eighteenth century, no natives lived in a primeval isolation from the impact of colonization. Disease epidemics, slave raids, and trade goods spread far beyond the colonies through Indian intermediaries. For example, few Indians lived farther from colonial power than did the Paiutes of the Great Basin: an arid region barely and rarely visited by the Spanish. And yet Ned Blackhawk reveals that hundreds of Paiutes became slaves in eighteenth-century New Mexico. They fell into captivity from raids by their Ute enemies wielding metal weapons obtained in trade from the Hispanics. That trade in Paiute slaves for manufactured goods sustained a Ute alliance that the Spanish desperately needed to protect New Mexico from other Indians. Such complications prevailed on every frontier as circles and squares overlapped, with both colonizers and natives jostling for an advantage over their rivals.

A hybrid work of cross-cultural translation and explanation, the Nasaw map simplifies to help the governor to grasp a part of the native world. The map focuses on native nations or tribes—the political units most familiar to a European governor. In the process, the map obscures the constituent clans, lineages, and villages—which, in fact, more fundamentally structured the lives of natives. A similar selectivity informs how we write about native peoples, for we remain saddled with a European-derived political vocabulary that casts empires and nations as advanced and complex. In this view, the colonists had coercive state structures with courts, gallows, standing armies, bureaucracies, and hierarchies of command—while Indians did *not*. Unwittingly, we cast their political arrangements as partial, simple, and immature by European standards, for we struggle to grasp their very different modes of complexity, where power derived from the

forms and ties of kinship relations. Juliana Barr concludes, “We need to move away from the European constructions of power that are so familiar to us—those grounded in ideas of the state and of racial difference—and try to understand the world as Indians did—organized around kinship-based relationships.”

In such a system, native women enjoyed more authority, within delimited realms, than did their colonial counterparts. In most native cultures, women owned the villages, their lands, and the crops—while men hunted, fished, and held the more conspicuous roles as orators, diplomats, and warriors. In that native world, so often at war, women enjoyed a special authority as the makers of peace: cherished and elusive. But they also served as the particular targets of raids to take slaves. In his study of natives and colonists in greater New Mexico, James Brooks reveals that female captives became kin with connections in multiple communities both native and colonial. Some even gained leverage from their cross-cultural expertise, becoming interpreters and brokers of trade and diplomacy between Hispanic settlements and native bands. In a constant cycle of trade and revenge, violence disrupted some families to enrich others as men, both colonial and native, tried to defend their own women and children and to take or buy those of other men. This “captive-exchange system” promoted a violent interdependence rather than peace.

DEPENDENCE

Every colonial empire depended on Indian peoples as guides to local plants, landscapes, and animals; as converts for missionary institutions; as trading partners; as slave catchers to retrieve runaway Africans; as raiders to make new slaves of other Indians; and as allies in wars with other empires. Through missions or trade, rival empires tried to build networks of native allies meant to counter those developed by their European rivals. Rather than imposing a pure colonial mastery, those alliances involved the mutual dependence of both colonists and natives. Although natives increasingly relied on European trade goods, they also compelled imperialists to accommodate to native protocols and alliances—often imposing heavy costs and great compromises on imperial visions.

Styling themselves fathers to Indian children, the French longed to dominate all of the natives of the continental interior. But they could never control the dispersed, decentralized, and shifting bands of natives. And in making allies of some, the French had to take on their enemies. Allying with the Algonkin and Huron embroiled the French in debilitating wars with the Haudenosaunee (also known as the “Iroquois”) during the seventeenth century. A century later in the Great Lakes country, the Anishinaabe and Illinois manipulated their French allies into attacking the powerful Fox peoples. Brett Rushforth has shown that these native wars compromised the French dream of a universal trade empire engaging every native people in a vast alliance. Native allies repeatedly set limits to French ambi-

tions by giving to them (or obliging them to buy) captives taken from native enemies—including the Fox. Rejecting those captives would wreck the alliance, but accepting them limited the alliance by alienating the raided peoples. The proliferation of enslaved Indians, known as Panis, in Montreal attested to the weakness, rather than to the strength, of the French empire in the Great Lakes watershed.

Savvy imperialists recognized that Indians determined the balance of power within North America. In 1755 an English trader observed,

The importance of the Indians is now generally known and understood. A Doubt remains not, that the prosperity of our Colonies on the Continent will stand or fall with our Interest and favour among them. While they are our Friends, they are the Cheapest and Strongest Barrier for the Protection of our Settlements; when Enemies, they are capable of ravaging in their method of War, in spite of all we can do, to render those Possessions almost useless.

Despite their reduced numbers, the Indians were skilled guerrilla warriors who dominated the interior passages between the rival colonies. If alienated, the natives could obstruct the advance of their colonial enemy, and their raiders could terrify and destroy outlying settlements.

In regions where the colonizers arrived in relatively small numbers, they had to cultivate native goodwill. In the Great Lakes country during the seventeenth century, the French came by the dozen rather than the thousands. Dependent on Indian trade and protection, the French crafted an alliance based upon mutual accommodations. In the famous phrase of Richard White, the natives and the French found a “middle ground,” where neither could dominate the other, so they had to deal with one another as allies.

Indians were even more powerful in eighteenth-century Texas, where colonial missions, presidios, settlements, and trading posts were few, isolated, and vulnerable oases in a native world. In colonial North America, such a native-dominated landscape was more common than, say, Massachusetts or Virginia, with their powerful concentrations of British colonists. Juliana Barr concludes that the native peoples of Texas treated the French and Spanish intruders as “just another collection of bands like themselves.” To survive, the newcomers had to offer appealing trade goods, adopt the protocols of native diplomacy, and form kinship ties with the natives through marriage or ritual adoption. Readier to marry native women, the French gained an edge over their Spanish competitors.

Where colonists were few and Indians many, the colonizers tried to convert natives through the agency of missions run by priests. During the seventeenth century, Franciscan friars enjoyed remarkable success in Spanish Florida and New Mexico, founding dozens of missions that attracted thousands of native converts. At the same time, French Jesuits compensated for the small colonial population of Canada by building missions in the St. Lawrence Valley and among the Huron people of the Great Lakes.

The inability of traditional shamans to shield their people from the devastating new diseases induced many natives to seek spiritual protection from the missionaries. The ceremonial richness and sacred objects of Catholic worship also impressed the natives, who regarded the crucifixes, rosaries, Agnus Dei medals, and saint's relics as counterparts to the charms and *katsinas* long kept by Indians as sources of spiritual power.

The missions also proffered material and military incentives to entice native peoples. Many Indians coveted European manufactures including metal hoes, knives, fishhooks, hatchets, and cloth blankets—as well as the benefits of domesticated livestock, especially sheep and cattle. Missions often offered a more secure food supply through the seasons than did a traditional, mobile way of life. By converting, native peoples also hoped to secure a military alliance against their enemies. In Canada, the Montagnais, Algonkins, and Hurons sought French help against their Haudenosaunee foes to the south. In Florida, the Spanish promised protection against the Yamasee, Savannah, and Creek peoples to the north of their missions. In New Mexico, the Pueblo peoples needed allies to fend off the nomadic bands of Apache, Navajo, and Comanche who lived in the nearby mountains and Great Plains.

But the conversions were never as complete and irreversible as the priests initially believed, for native peoples regarded Christianity as a supplement, rather than as a substitute, for their traditional beliefs. Natives had long adopted and augmented their spiritual repertoire, clinging to a conceptual framework that regarded supernatural power as diverse and woven into their natural world. They accepted and adapted features of European culture, including Christianity, which they found useful or unavoidable, while privately maintaining their traditional spiritual beliefs. Above all, they tried to preserve a distinct identity and core culture derived from their ancestors. But the missionaries longed to believe that their native converts had forsaken their pagan ways once and for all, without compromise. When suddenly disabused of their illusions, the seventeenth-century missionaries felt betrayed, inflicting excessive punishments that sometimes provoked uprisings. In 1680, for example, the Pueblo peoples revolted, rousting the Spanish from New Mexico. At the end of that century, when the priests and soldiers returned, they behaved with greater circumspection, rebuilding the alliance on terms acceptable to the Pueblos.

Unlike the French and the Spanish, the English rarely developed missions, focusing instead on expanding their farms at Indian expense. Because the Chesapeake and New England colonies attracted many more immigrants than did New Mexico, Florida, and New France *combined*, the English colonists put greater pressure on native lands, provoking more frequent wars. During the late 1640s, a few Puritan clergymen belatedly created mission communities for the natives in New England. In permanent, compact “praying towns” the Indians could be pressured to change their beliefs, behavior, and appearance. By restricting Indians to fixed and limited towns, the Puritans hoped to free up additional lands for colonial

settlement. But the Indians had their own reasons for joining the praying towns, which appealed primarily to smaller groups harder hit by disease and the settler intrusion. They saw the praying towns as their last hope for preserving their group identity on a part of their homeland. Indeed, the praying towns bore native names, including “Natick,” which meant “my land.”

By 1673 the colony of Massachusetts hosted fourteen praying towns with sixteen hundred inhabitants, but most of them collapsed two years later, when other Indians attacked the New English towns. Distrusting the missionized Indians, the colonial authorities sent them to cold and barren islands in Boston harbor, where hundreds died from exposure, malnutrition, and disease. During the spring and summer of 1676, the colonists suppressed the rebels with the help of scouts recruited from the surviving praying-town Indians. Some of the defeated rebels escaped northward to take refuge among the Indians in Canada. Nursing bitter memories, they helped the French to raid New England in subsequent wars between 1689 and 1760.

In Carolina, the English dispensed with missions, relying instead on trade to recruit Indian allies. Compared to their French and Spanish rivals, the Carolina traders offered especially prized trade goods at relatively good prices and on generous credit. Unlike their rivals, the English relied almost exclusively on their economic advantage, rather than on understanding (or converting) the culture of their customers. By offering guns in exchange for deer hides and native captives taken by their allies, the Carolinians secured their own frontier and wreaked havoc on natives who allied with the Spanish in nearby Florida or with the French in Louisiana. Slave raids enabled the Carolina allies to purchase more guns, compounding their military prowess. Raiding also crushed and dispersed rival peoples, opening up their deer-hunting grounds for exploitation by the victors.

The Carolina traders encouraged their allies to attack the Guale, Timucua, and Apalachee Indians who lived in the Spanish missions of Florida. Poorly armed by the Spanish, the mission Indians proved easy pickings for slave raids. Between 1704 and 1706 the Creek, Savannah, and Yamasee raiders destroyed thirty-two native villages and their missions, inflicting horrific casualties and enslaving about ten thousand people. The Carolina gun and slave trade had triumphed over the Spanish mission system as an instrument of colonial influence.

After the destruction of the Florida missions, potential captives became scarcer, and the raiders fell into arrears on their debts owed to the Carolina traders. In 1715 the Yamasees and the Cawtawbas sought to escape their debts by killing traders and attacking the Carolina settlements, killing about 400 and driving hundreds of refugees into Charles Town. But the Indian rebels lost momentum as they ran low on guns and gunpowder. They had counted on a continued supply from the British traders in Virginia, who competed with their counterparts in the Carolinas. Although the traders and leaders of Carolina and Virginia bickered almost constantly, during

an Indian war their national and racial consciousness united them as English and white. Putting aside their rivalries, the Virginians assisted the Carolinians with weapons and troops and with an embargo on the trade in guns and gunpowder to the rebels. Aided by Tuscarora and Cherokee allies, the Carolinians forced the Catawbas to make peace and to help them subdue and enslave the Yamasees.

Threatened by the slave raids of Carolina's allies, the Indians in the Mississippi Valley sought an alliance with the French who founded Louisiana in 1699. From Carolina's success and Florida's failure, the French concluded that a commerce in guns better secured native support than did missionaries, so, in Louisiana, the French made gun trade, rather than missions, their priority in Indian relations. By uniting and arming the Mississippi Valley peoples, the French sought to stabilize them as enduring allies to keep the British away from Louisiana. But the French could not match the quantity, quality, and price of British manufactures, so they had to rely on bestowing trade goods as government-funded presents. Lacking the means to satisfy all the Indian nations on their periphery, the French had to settle for allying primarily with the numerous Choctaws. Unable also to supply the Chickasaws, the French accepted them as enemies who traded with the Carolinians. Indeed, during the 1720s the French encouraged the Choctaws to raid the Chickasaws for slaves.

The vast colony of Louisiana became two very different landscapes: a small plantation core around New Orleans, where settlers prevailed, and an immense hinterland dominated by Indians. In the interior, the French held only a few small and scattered forts hostage to the goodwill of the surrounding natives. French officials claimed that they had a particular gift for understanding and conciliating Indians, but their claim was only half true, for they conducted contrasting policies in Louisiana. In the hinterland, the French made a virtue of their weakness by cultivating some natives as their cherished allies (while treating others as necessary enemies). But, in the colony's core, where the colonists and their slaves were more numerous, the French treated natives as callously as did any other colonizers.

The Louisianans also worked to keep Indians and Africans apart lest they unite to destroy the plantations. To sow antipathies, the French conspicuously employed some trusted blacks in their militias sent to fight the Indians. A few particularly courageous and resourceful black soldiers won their freedom as a reward meant to inspire the exertions of their enslaved comrades. However, colonial leaders rewarded the Choctaw to hunt down runaway slaves and to punish rebel slaves by burning them to death. But the Louisiana elite also distrusted their own lower-class whites as little better, and sometimes worse, than Indians or enslaved Africans. Regarded as felons and vagrants, the common settlers and soldiers of Louisiana found that a white skin brought them far less privilege than it did to the common people of Carolina. In sum, the French relied on blacks and natives to control lower-class whites just as they employed Africans and Indians against one another.