

## **Autonomy and Archival Absence: Native Nations in the Post-Revolutionary Lower Mississippi Valley**

Spanish commander Jean-François Allain knew he had to get a hold of the Tunica chief Lattanash as soon as possible. The commander had received news that the powerful Choctaws were on the verge of launching an attack on the small nation of Tunicas who lived alongside the Spanish fort at Pointe Coupee where Allain served as a commander. It was January of 1771 and over the past several months, Lattanash and Allain had done their best to maintain relationships not only with each other, but with the far more powerful Choctaw leaders. This task was becoming increasingly challenging as over the course of the previous year large groups of Choctaw travelers had taken to descending on the settlements at Pointe Coupee and making lengthy social and diplomatic visits to the Tunicas. The Tunicas complained to Allain that they could not get rid of the Choctaws, and that these visitors were consuming all of their provisions. Lattanash knew he could not deny their Choctaw guests a warm welcome, as the Choctaws were the Tunicas' political allies, and a rejection of hospitality would be a violation of diplomatic norms and could be interpreted as a declaration of hostility. However, he also was not sure that his people could withstand the continued pressure of these extended visits.

In early 1771, simmering Tunica anger boiled over and nearly led to the outbreak of a Tunica-Choctaw war. Just after the turn of the new year, Native inhabitants circulated rumors that a Tunica man had murdered one of the visiting Choctaws. Allain heard that the Choctaws were demanding the head of this Tunica, and threatening that if the Tunicas did not comply and turn over the murderer's skull, they would launch an all

out assault on the village. The Tunicas could not afford a war with the powerful Choctaws, nor could they afford to lose their alliance, and so Lattanash took steps to remedy this situation and to attempt to repair this fraying relationship.<sup>1</sup>

During the 1770s pressure from Euro-American settlers in the Gulf South created a series of chain reactions that led to the breakdown in the diplomatic alliances between the Choctaws and the petites nations. Over the course of the eighteenth century the petites nations had become dependent; not so much on their European allies, as on the support of the Choctaws to help them leverage power in the region. While the Choctaws had always been heavy handed in their diplomatic and social relationships with petites nations, their support in prior decades had helped protect these nations from Creek raiders, land-hungry Europeans, and had garnered them economic opportunities. The dual pressures of an increasing settler population and the erosion of Choctaw support for petites nations placed the petites nations in vulnerable positions, and they lost both large pieces of their homelands and regional influence. Therefore petites nations peoples needed to find new strategies to navigate the revolutionary era in the Lower Mississippi Valley.

The last three decades of the eighteenth century were a period of intense political and demographic change in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Following the conclusion of the Seven Years War, and the cession of Louisiana by the French crown in 1763, rival British and Spanish colonial powers moved into the region and attempted to exert control over the territory along the Mississippi River. This decade was also defined by a rise in tensions among the Creeks and Choctaws and the escalation of violence in the buffer

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<sup>1</sup> Allain to Unzaga, 4/17/1770, Allain to Unzaga, 6/4/1771, Allain to Unzaga, 9/25/1770; Allain to Unzaga 4/20/1770, Allain to Unzaga 4/17/1770, Allain to Unzaga 5/23/1770, Unzaga to Allain 11/14/1770, Allain to Unzaga 10/27/1770, Unzaga to Allain, 4/26/1770, legajo 188a, reel 1, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

zone between these two polities between the Alabama and Tombigbee Rivers. During the 1770s there was another colonial turnover as Spain ejected Britain from the Gulf Coast. Following the conclusion of the American Revolution, Americans began to flood into Mississippi delta and Native nations were faced with yet another massive demographic shift.<sup>2</sup>

As these colonial empires reorganized and vied for political power, the Native nations of the region also underwent momentous social and political changes. This paper investigates the impacts of these changes on Native peoples who were not parts of large, southern confederacies. The three sections of this piece compare the experiences of the small Native polities at Mobile with those who lived at Pointe Coupee, and then analyzes the ways American and Native southerners remember this era.

Focusing primarily on Pointe Coupee and Mobile during the Revolutionary Era provides critical snapshots of the ways these small Native peoples navigated these rapid geopolitical changes. As opposed to New Orleans, which was the center of colonial power, or even Yellow Canes deep in Choctaw territory, Pointe Coupee and Mobile provide ideal cross-sections for study because during the 1760s these were zones of mixed and overlapping sovereignties. These borderlands were home to French, British, and Spanish settlers living under colonial law, but they were also the territory of autonomous small groups of Native nations like the Tunicas, Biloxis, Pascagoulas, and Mobilians. Both regions were the sites of longstanding, multi-ethnic, petites nations settlements that had been joined by groups of French and Spanish settlers during the

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

eighteenth century, and all were on the peripheries of Choctaw territory and therefore within their spheres of influence but not under Choctaw dominion. Therefore comparing the actions and concerns of the petites nations at these three sites provides a better sense of the broad patterns of strategic response to the shifting demographic and geopolitical conditions of the American south.

Although they employed a wide variety of tactics and had varying levels of success, all of the petites nations sought paths that would preserve the community autonomy and political independence that were such an integral parts of petites nations identities. Confronted with Choctaw communities who were under increasing settler pressure and who could no longer afford to protect their petites nations allies, and encountering an exploding settler population that envisioned no future for Native people within the geographic confines of these empires, petites nations migrated to the geopolitical and social margins of colonial territories. In these spaces they found measures of autonomy and forged new communities on the fringes of empire.

*I: Strained Alliances at Pointe Coupee: Choctaw relationships with the petites nations*

When France ceded its colonial claims to Britain and Spain in 1763 the Lower Mississippi Valley was still densely Indigenous and a Native dominated territory. Daniel Usner estimates that there were 32,000 Native people in the region at the time of transition. Larger nations and confederacies, like the Choctaws and Creeks comprised about 78% of this population, while the remaining 22%, about 7,000 people, were part of smaller Native polities (loosely defined as fewer than 1,000 people), like the Tunicas.

The French referred collectively to these smaller polities as the “petites nations.” In comparison, the entire non-Indigenous population of the region was only 9,300 people, only 4,000 of which were people of European descent. A Spanish census conducted in 1769 suggests that by the turn of the decade the total colonial population of Spanish Louisiana was 11,344 persons, including enslaved persons, free people of color, and white settlers, with nearly 4,000 people in New Orleans alone, and the rest spread thinly across the territory. Pointe Coupee was a roughly average settlement in the 1770s in terms of overall size. The 1769 census places the population at about 550 people, which was comparable with the Acadian coast, the Atakapas and Opelousas district, and St. Louis in Illinois, or about two thirds the size of Natchitoches. During the 1760s and 1770s the region of between Pointe Coupee and Natchez, was also home to the petites nations of Tunicas, Ofogoulas, Biloxis, Mobilians, Pakanas, Alabamons, and Chatots. A British estimate from 1771 suggested that these small nations combined could field 298 gunmen, so (using the standard conservative multiplier of 3.5 people per warrior) this means they numbered at least 1,050 people collectively.<sup>3</sup> In addition to being in the midst of an Indigenous borderland, in the Pointe Coupee settlements petites nations peoples outnumbered the settler population at a ratio of roughly 2:1. In effect, in 1771 Pointe Coupee was a small node of French empire within an territory that was controlled by the Tunicas, and that was beginning to come under greater pressure from the Choctaws as they expanded their influence further west.

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<sup>3</sup> Usner, *Indians Settlers and Slaves*, 108-109. 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; “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.

The correspondence from Pointe Coupee then provides us with a valuable sense of local concerns and a critical window into how settler pressure in the gulf south impacted relationships among the large southern confederacies and their smaller Native neighbors. In spring of 1770 Allain began complaining about the near constant presence of Choctaws at the Tunica village alongside his post. They Choctaws came in groups of as many as 100 people, which was nearly as many as in the entire Tunica nation. As far as Allain could tell, the Choctaws seemed to be doing nothing but playing stickball, killing inhabitants' cattle, demanding food from the settlers, and eating all of the Tunicas' provisions. Local inhabitants witnessed these groups of Tunicas and Choctaws trading with their British adversaries in West Florida on the opposite side of the Mississippi River. They heard rumors of plots by Choctaws to assault the post on behalf of the British. Sometimes they even feared that "the normally docile Tunicas will be goaded into hostiles by the Grand Nation" (Choctaws).<sup>4</sup> Needless to say, the French and Spanish inhabitants were terrified. Allain repeatedly issued orders requiring that settlers must carry firearms at all times outside of their homes, but he could do little else except complain to the colonial governor.<sup>5</sup>

The Tunicas were also stressed by the continual Choctaw visits, but for different reasons. The Choctaws stayed for weeks on end, consumed massive quantities of Tunica corn, and their presence prevented Lattanash from traveling to attend to his nation's diplomatic obligations. This meant in 1770 he was unable to make his annual visit to

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<sup>4</sup> Allain to Unzaga 4/20/1770, legajo 188a, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Library of Congress;

<sup>5</sup> Allain to Unzaga, 4/17/1770, Allain to Unzaga, 6/4/1771, Allain to Unzaga, 9/25/1770; Allain to Unzaga 4/20/1770, Allain to Unzaga 4/17/1770, Allain to Unzaga 5/23/1770, Unzaga to Allain 11/14/1770, Allain to Unzaga 10/27/1770, Unzaga to Allain, 4/26/1770, legajo 188a, reel 1, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

New Orleans to reaffirm the Tunicas' alliance with the Spanish and to receive tribute gifts from the Spanish governor to supply his people <sup>6</sup>

Despite the complaints of the settlers, Allain was unable to take action against the Choctaws because Spain's ability to hold onto its claims in the Lower Mississippi Valley was almost entirely dependent upon the colony's relationships with Native nations. The Choctaws were the most powerful polity in the region, and therefore they were also Spain's most essential allies. On a local level, the Spanish post depended on Lattanash's collaboration for military assistance and strategic intelligence, and on the Tunica nation as a whole for vital provisions and labor. By 1770 Lattanash had acquired a reputation as a formidable military adversary, and he held powerful influence among the other leaders of the petites nations at Pointe Coupee. Under Lattanash's guidance, the Tunicas facilitated relationships between the Biloxis, Ofogoulas, Avoyelles, Pakanas, and Chatots and the Spanish, and Allain had been firmly instructed to maintain those alliances to help defend against British expansion. As the possibility of an imminent war with Great Britain loomed, Allain could not risk losing the support of these vital Native allies.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> 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; 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.

Although Allain did not record the Choctaws' explanation for their extended visits to the Tunicas, their actions suggest a political message. Allain's fear and frustration were indications that Choctaw political tactics were working effectively, as the Choctaw's extended stay at Pointe Coupee can be understood as part of a strategy to create diplomatic leverage and remind the Spanish that the Choctaws were the dominant party in their alliance. The Choctaw's decisions to slaughter cattle, demand food, and to play stickball unceasingly should not be understood primarily as acts of desperation and chaos created by pressure from border conflicts with the Creeks and English settlers. Rather these demonstrations of military might were part and parcel of their diplomatic strategy during the revolutionary era.<sup>8</sup>

The Choctaw confederacy was so large and so diverse that it is difficult to talk about a single strategy that the nation employed to confront European empires and the post-revolutionary settler migrations. The Choctaw nation was formed of four divisions, the Eastern, Western, Sixtowns, and Chickasawhay divisions, and these groups often pursued different and independent political agendas. Within each of these political factions, each Choctaw town also enjoyed substantial autonomy, and the towns could choose to participate in or abstain from all divisional and national endeavors. However, the strategies of Choctaw towns during this era can be broadly described as a

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel Usner has written extensively about the difficulty in interpreting raiding and banditry as either acts of "deliberate protest" or of desperation. While by the 1790s Choctaws were increasingly threatened by white settlers on their borders and facing shortages in their villages, the pressure in 1770 was decidedly less intense. Certainly nearby cattle would be a welcome supplement to the food the Tunicas could provide, but the desire for meat does not in and of itself seem to justify the duration of these visits in a single location. Therefore, given that Allain also recorded the extent of their stickball playing, which has clear political messaging, it seems most likely that during this era these raids were part of a concerted political message rather than raids driven primarily by desperation. For a comprehensive analysis of Choctaw banditry in the Natchez region see Daniel H. Usner, *Indian Work: Language and Livelihood in Native American History*, 48-68.

combination of strategic violence, westward expansion, and continued formal diplomatic negotiations with Spain and the United States.<sup>9</sup>

From the 1760s onward, the eastern edge of Choctaw territory was under pressure from European settlers and Creek hunters. Throughout these decades, much of the Choctaws' diplomatic energies were focused on maintaining their own webs of alliances with Britain, Spain, and then the American government. These connections secured their access to European goods and helped them enforce their territorial boundaries. In addition to worrying about European encroachment, the escalating conflicts with Creek hunters in the 1760s and 1770s also encouraged Choctaws to travel further west to hunt.

In 1784 Choctaw leaders signed a treaty with Spain that formally permitted them to travel west of the Mississippi, and by the 1790s Choctaw migrants, traders, and hunters were ranging as far as the Sabine River. Not surprisingly the powerful Caddos and Osages did not take kindly to Choctaw invasion of their territories. Under pressure from both east and west, and facing shortages of access to hunting grounds and provisions, Choctaws increasingly exploited their petites nations allies to sustain themselves. Similarly to events that Allain recorded in the 1770s at Point Coupee, in 1796 the Lieutenant Governor of the Red River district complained that the petites nations of the Tensas, the Apalachees, and the Pascagoulas, in the district "attract the Choctaws who remain for some months consuming all their food and finally abusing them."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Galloway, "So Many Little Republics," 516-517.

<sup>10</sup> Grand Pre to Carondelet, Sept 27, 1796 in Lawrence Kinnaid and Lucia B. Kinnaid, "The Red River Valley in 1796," *Louisiana History*, Vol. 24, No. 2, (1983), 192; F. Todd Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest, 1786-1859* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005, 20-24, 60, 64; Lawrence Kinnaid and Lucia B. Kinnaid, "The Red River Valley in 1796," *Louisiana History*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 187, 192.

In this context then, the forced hospitality, “theft,” and even the stickball the Choctaws played at Pointe Coupee were powerful and symbolic statements of military might and political power. Southeastern Indians referred to stickball as “the little brother of war” and they took this often-violent game very seriously. As the players chased each other up and down the field, colliding and slamming against one another, they demonstrated physical prowess, skill, and bravery. Essentially they were performing their military capability on the doorstep of the Spanish settlement, and they certainly succeeded in threatening the colonists and reminding them of Choctaw military might. Likewise, the act of killing cattle had deep symbolic roots in the region and had long been used by Native people as a tactic to assert territoriality. At Natchez, just upriver from Point Coupee, the Natchez Indians had famously attacked and mutilated French settlers cattle in an effort to send messages that the French were not welcome in their territories in the years before the Natchez launched an all out war against the French. By demanding or taking food from French and Spanish settlers, the Choctaws were also forcing the residents of the region to act in a diplomatically acceptable way, as allies should, even when, like the Tunicas, they tired of these obligations.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Groups of Choctaws pursued similar strategies in British West Florida as well, Their presence at Pointe Coupee and their attacks and their attacks on cattle were not isolated incidents. 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. <sup>11</sup> 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 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. Citizens’ Council at Mobile to Peter Chester, May, 1771, vol. 1, class 21.672, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress; Gage to Shelbourne, 7/24/1768, vol 86, class 5, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress; Greg O’Brien, *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age*, 41; Milne, *Natchez Country*, 176.

These demonstrations of military might helped support the diplomacy of the Choctaw nation as a whole. From 1760 to 1800 the Choctaws expanded the scope of their raids along the gulf coast targeting communities from Natchez to Lafourche and west to Adayes. Relying on the same tactics they used at Pointe Coupee in 1770, during the 1790s Choctaws sought to extend their influence even further west by stealing cattle, raiding settlements, and using prolonged diplomatic visits to the Adyches in eastern Texas. Their continued use of symbolic and performative violence and theft not only garnered badly needed supplies, but as one American official at Natchez put it in 1798, it reminded the settlers that “We live here only upon sufferance and their good will.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore when Choctaw diplomats met to negotiate treaties with Spain in 1784, 1792, and 1793, with Georgia in 1784, and with the US in 1786 and 1792 they entered these discussions against the backdrop of settlers’ fear and their recognition of colonial vulnerability.

The resolution of the Tunica and Choctaw dispute in 1770 is missing from the correspondence of Allain and the Spanish colonial governor. Given that there is no record of a Tunica and Choctaw conflict at Pointe Coupee, and that the Tunica were able to stay and thrive at the post for another decade, we can conclude that Lattanash managed to negotiate a solution that appeased the Choctaws. Considering the need to “cover” the deaths of southeastern Native kin, it is reasonable to conclude that the Tunicas most likely either delivered the murderer or a substantial payment to the Choctaws to settle the matter.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Lawrence and Lucia Kinnaid, “Choctaws West of the Mississippi, 1766-1800” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 83, No. 4 (Apr., 1980), 349-352; O’Brien, *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age*, 10, 51-61; Winthrop Sargent to Timothy Pickering, 9/18/1798, Mississippi Territorial Archives, 47.

Whether or not the Tunicas believed that this murder was justified, they absolutely could not afford to alienate the Choctaws as they recognized that their ability to exercise regional power with the colonial polities was substantially dependent upon their alliance with the Choctaws. Lattanash may have resented the fact that he could not get down to New Orleans to receive his annual gifts from the Spanish governor, but he was absolutely aware that his relationship with the Choctaws was a significant part of the reason he was receiving presents from the colonial governor at all. Less than a decade prior, Lattanash had forced the British and Spanish diplomats to come to the negotiating table and open up an alliance with the Tunicas by engaging his allies, including Choctaw, Ofo, and Avoyelle warriors to assist him in an attack on the British navy. In 1764 this Tunica, Ofo, Choctaw, and Avoyelle contingent attacked a British naval convoy as it ascended the Mississippi. This assault caused minimal casualties and was more performative than destructive, but the attack was enough to cause the British to abort their mission and flee back to New Orleans in terror. As Lattanash had hoped, both Spain and Britain responded to this assault not by demanding reparations, but rather by pleading for the Tunicas' and petites nations' alliances, and paying the Tunicas generously in gifts. The fact that the British responded with generosity rather than retribution is not entirely surprising given that it was less expensive to pay the Tunicas than to fight them, and that

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<sup>13</sup> 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.

the British absolutely could not risk starting a conflict with the Choctaws by attacking their allies the Tunicas.<sup>14</sup>

Over the next decade, Britain and Spain bent their policies to accommodate the Tunicas. This included putting up with the Tunicas' practices of trading and receiving gifts from both British and Spanish merchants and officials, and tolerating Lattanash's habit of simultaneously wearing British and Spanish medals of alliance, thereby flaunting his diplomatic ties to both empires and his simultaneous independence from either. Therefore the Tunica's ability to manage the Choctaws and to maintain their unequal alliance with this much more powerful polity, gave them tremendous leverage with both colonial powers.<sup>15</sup>

While the Tunicas were among the most successful of the petites nations at manipulating these political alliances in order to gain economic advantages and to insulate themselves from violence, nearly all of the petites nations pursued similar strategies during the 1760s and 1770s. The year after the Tunicas attacked the British convoy, the petite nation of Pakanas employed a similar strategy, attacking and destroying British fort Bute until the British opened up negotiations and began giving gifts to the Pakanas to help forge an alliance. Therefore like the Choctaw raids on the Pointe Coupee settlement, or the Tunica assault on the British Navy, Native polities relied on small-scale violence to force the colonial officials to be generous to their Native

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<sup>14</sup> *The New York Mercury*, June 11, 1764 (American Antiquarian Society/ News Bank), 2; Robert R. Rea, "Assault on the Mississippi- the Loftus expedition 1764," *The Alabama Review* vol. 26 (1973), 179-189..

<sup>15</sup> Bjork, "The Establishment of Spanish Rule in the Province of Louisiana," 38-42; 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; "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, Kinnaid, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 154-155; "Three Speeches Given at an Indian Council held by the British at Fort Bute," Bjork, "Documents Regarding Indian Affairs," 408-410.

allies. During the late 1760s and 1770s, not only the Tunicas but also the Mobilians, Chatots, Pakanas, Tensas, Alibamons, Pascagoulas, and Biloxis, all received generous gifts from both the Spanish and the British.<sup>16</sup> Thus during the 1760s and 1770s the petites nations' independence and autonomy was ensured by their interdependence on the Spanish, British, and Choctaws.

However, the accomplishment of this strategy was short lived as their success in negotiating this relationships was not only dependent upon of their ability to use threats of violence and diplomatic finesse, but also a product of the low colonial population and heightening inter-imperial tensions leading up to the American Revolution. By 1788 the colonial population at Pointe Coupee topped 2,000 people meaning that rather than petites nations people outnumbering settlers by two to one, the ratio had been roughly reversed and now there were twice as many colonists and enslaved Africans as Tunicas, Ofogoulas, Chatots, Biloxis, and Avoyelles.<sup>17</sup> The termination of the Revolutionary War then roughly coincided with the end of the time during which the Choctaw and Tunicas relied on similar strategies of violence, raids, and formal diplomacy to protect their communities.

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<sup>16</sup> "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; John Thomas to John Stuart, 12/12/1771, vol. 1, class 21672, Records of the British Colonial Office, Library of Congress; John Stuart to William Howe, 10/6/1777, 695-696, Carleton Papers, Library of Congress; Fabel, *Colonial Challenges*, 108,132.

<sup>17</sup> Pointe Coupee, which had declared absolutely no slave population in 1769, was listed as having 482 white settlers, 4 free people of color, and 1,035 enslaved Africans. Paul La Chance, "The Louisiana Purchase in the Demographic Perspective of Its Time," *Empires of the Imagination: Transatlantic Histories of the Louisiana Purchase*, ed. Kastor and and Weil, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 148.

## *II: Rebuilding Community Beyond Mobile*

The population explosion and shift in the balance of power at Pointe Coupee was even more dramatic at the urban centers of Louisiana. By 1785 the colonial population of the Lower Mississippi Valley had increased to 30,471 with 13,076 white settlers and 16,248 slaves. By 1788 Mobile had nearly 1,500 colonial inhabitants. Although the Native population of the Lower Mississippi Valley also continued to grow during the Revolutionary Era, by 1800 there were 50,000 colonial and enslaved settlers in the Lower Mississippi Valley compared to 40,000 Native people.<sup>18</sup>

With the onslaught of settlers in the 1780s and the withdrawal of Choctaw diplomatic support in their negotiations with European settlers, many petites nations were forced to shift tactics and to leave the colonial settlements that had once been their homelands. Effectively there were three options available to petites nations communities in the 1770s, 1780s, and 1790s as they became rapidly outnumbered by settlers. These polities could join larger nations, like the Choctaws, they could migrate to undesirable locations where there were smaller numbers of settlers, or they could attempt to stay and take advantage of the economic opportunities that expanding European settlements provided.

Petites nations pursued all of these strategies, but the second option was by far the most prevalent. Prior to 1763, Mobile (now known as Mobile, Alabama) was home to the Tensas, Pascagoulas, Biloxis, Chatots, Mobilians, Naniabas, Tohomes, Apalachees, and Pakanas. The city was founded on a multi-ethnic settlement of petites nations at the turn

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<sup>18</sup> Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 114-115, 280.

of the eighteenth century and during the French era these nations provisioned the city and provided essential labor and services in exchange for trade and alliance. During the 1760s, when Creek and Choctaw conflict escalated and the British moved into the region, nearly all of these nations fled west to escape the violence. The Pakanas, some of the Mobilians, and some of the Biloxis joined the settlement of Tunicas, Ofos, and Avoyelles at Pointe Coupee and so they too had witnessed the rising tension at Pointe Coupee in the 1770s. Meanwhile the Chatots, Pascagoulas, and some of the Biloxis moved west to the Red River and they formed joint settlements with the Yowani Choctaws (a village of Choctaws who had decided to leave the nation and relocate west independently). West of the Mississippi these groups were safer from Creek raids, and the groups at the Pointe Coupee post were strategically positioned on an imperial border which both gave them diplomatic power and ready trade opportunities.<sup>19</sup>

The only group that attempted to stay in Mobile after 1763 were the Apalachees. The Apalachees had migrated from northern Florida to Mobile in 1706 to escape Creek slave raids. In Florida they had lived within Spanish missions and embraced Catholicism, and so they settled at Mobile in part because their location there afforded them access to some of the few Catholic priests in Louisiana. Their religion again provided the deciding factor in the 1760s as they chose to stay within the settler population at Mobile in order to observe their faith. Conflicting reports from 1775 indicate both that the Apalachees stayed in Mobile to remain in their church communities, and that the Apalachees also ultimately migrated to the Red River where they settled with some Tensas in 1775 and

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<sup>19</sup> 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; Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana*, 1:101; John Brice Harris, *From Old Mobile to Fort Assumption* (Nashville: The Parthenon Press, 1959), 16; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 28; Smith *From Dominance to Dissappearance*, 24, 64.

formed a new Indigenous Catholic community. It seems most likely, given the reports, that like so many of the other small groups, the Apalachees fissioned into smaller groups with some of the population remaining at Mobile while others migrated west.<sup>20</sup>

*Accepting Amalgamation- The Mobilians, Naniabas, and Tohomes*

While the Tensas, Pakanas, Chatots, Biloxis, Pascagoulas, some of the Mobilians, and Pakanas migrated west to seek out new settlements alongside other petites nations, and the Apalachees attempted to stay, the three other Mobile based petites nations, the Naniabas, Tohomes, and the remainder of the Mobilians, chose to seek protection by settling alongside their longtime Choctaw allies deep within Choctaw territory. The Mobilians, Naniabas, and Tohomes had long been closely allied with the Sixtowns division of the Choctaws. Not only had they forged strong trade and diplomatic relationships with the Sixtowns, but the Choctaws had offered these groups shelter during times of crisis. Archaeologist Patricia Galloway suggests that the Tohomes may have first merged with the Choctaws as early as 1730, and French correspondence from the 1748 indicates that the Tohomes had lived with the Choctaws “for several years” and the two groups were close enough that a Tohome leader known as “The Great Tohome” was involved with Choctaw diplomatic affairs.<sup>21</sup> During the 1750s some Eastern Choctaws in turn sought refuge among the Naniaba and Tohome settlements during the Choctaw civil war.<sup>22</sup> This relationship is important because it seems to explain why the Naniabas and

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<sup>20</sup> “cette nation nest sortie de sa mobile que pour la Religion.”Valentine Layssard to Luis de Unzaga y Amezaga, 3/16/1775, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, Library of Congress, 4-5; F. Todd Smith, *From Dominance to Dissapearance*:19-20, 65.

<sup>21</sup> Louboeuy to Maurepas, 2/16/1748, MPA:FD 4, 312-314; Patiricia K. Galloway, notes on louboeuy to maurepas, 2/16/1748, MPA:FD 4, 315; James F. Barnett, *Mississippi's American Indians* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 86.

Tohomes seem to drop out of the historical records for periods of time during the French era. Moreover this suggests that, like petites nations resettlements at multi-ethnic villages, these migrations were not understood to be permanent integrations, but rather this was simply a mechanism for finding refuge during times of crisis.

Although the Naniabas, Mobilians, and Tohomes may have planned to relocate temporarily and later return to their villages near Mobile once the fighting subsided, they were ultimately unable to do so. In addition to being a center of colonial settlement, these groups controlled some of the most fertile and desirable territory in the region. Even when the Naniabas were living with the Choctaws, they returned to tend their fields at Mobile and collect their harvests each year. This pattern of land use indicates continued territorial claims, and this practice was extremely common among the petites nations. British officials recorded that during the 1770s nearly all of the groups who resettled at Pointe Coupee continued to cultivate their lands on the eastern side of the river, and that they brought back bountiful harvests of peaches and corn to trade at the post.<sup>23</sup>

Once the Mobile-based petites nations had left, the British strove to find a way to acquire title to these lands. First in 1765 they attempted to pressure the Choctaws into ceding these lands. Although the Choctaws signed away their territories near Mobile, during subsequent discussions the Naniaba's, Tohome's, and Mobilians' Choctaw allies were careful to clarify that the limits of their land cessions. In 1770 during a discussion with the British Indian agents regarding land cessions for the region directly around Mobile bay, Choctaw leader Tomatly Mingo of the Sixtowns Divison stood up mid

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<sup>22</sup> 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), 160; Galloway, *Practicing Ethnohistory*, 245-291; Galloway, "So Many Little Republics," 518..

<sup>23</sup> 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.

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.”<sup>24</sup>

Not to be deterred, the British then attempted to acquire these lands through more unscrupulous means. During a conference with Creek representatives at Pensacola in 1771, British officials pressured the Creek leaders to relinquish title to these lands. In an act of remarkable colonial cunning, British officials actually used the fact that the land was clearly Naniaba and Mobilian territory to force the Creeks to agree to this land cession. Much in the same way that the British had claimed to acquire title to Susquehannah, Lenape, and Shawnee territory via the Fort Stanwix treaty with the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) in 1768, the British used Creek signatories to obtain title to this region. When the Creeks initially resisted their attempts to obtain this cession, British Indian agent John Stuart argued that as the Creeks and British were allies, would the Creeks not let the British use the lands as they permit the Naniabas and Tohomes to?

Upon receiving news of this land theft, the Naniaba chief promptly came and met with Stuart to protest this land cession. The Naniaba leader “as well as the Choctaw chiefs insists that the Creeks have not the least right or claim to the lands ceded to his Majest by the Choctaws in 1765 lying in the fork above the confluence of Tombecby and Alabama or Coosa Rivers...said land having time immemorial been possessed by and deemed the property of the Tome’s, Naniabas, and Mobilians, now incorporated with the Chickasawhays and belonging to their district.”<sup>25</sup> Although the Choctaws verbally

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<sup>24</sup> 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.

supported the Naniabas' claims in diplomatic meetings, they did not back up these land claims with military force. All together the Naniabas, Tohomes, and Mobilians numbered only about 350 people in the 1760s and so they were not independently in a position to retake their lands, and therefore they were ultimately unable to regain control of their territories.<sup>26</sup>

After their 1763 relocation to seek refuge the Mobilians Naniabas and Tohomes were not able to return to their homelands, and no further records indicate that the groups were either willing or able to leave the Choctaws again. Therefore although they may have joined their Choctaw allies thinking this would be a temporary refuge, they were ultimately integrated into the Choctaw nation. Thus while the Tohome, Naniaba, and Mobilian communities survived, and they almost certainly maintained town level autonomy and separate cultural identities at least for a time, in saving their communities they lost their land and political independence and ceased to be petites nations after the 1770s.

### *III: What Happened to the Petites Nations? Archival Silence and Oral History*

Compared to the 1760s and 1770s, the Spanish colonial records and American territorial papers from the 1790s and 1800s contain only sporadic references to the petites nations. Nearly all of the Spanish colonial records that discuss Indian nations are filled with accounts of diplomatic summits among the Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws.

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<sup>25</sup> John Stuart to Early of Hillsborough, 2/6/1772, DAR vol. 5, 33; Kathryn E. Holland Braund, "Like a Stone Wall Never to Be Broke: The British Boundary Line with the Creek Indians, 1763-1773" *Britain and the American South, From Colonialism to Rock and Roll*, ed. Joseph P. Ward, 72-74.

<sup>26</sup> Jay Higginbotham, *The Mobile Indians* (Mobile: Sir Rey's, 1966), 80.

These large confederacies continued to meet in international councils, to maintain pressure with low levels of violence, and to negotiate boundaries and land cessions, and so they appear frequently in diplomatic documents. The petites nations, by contrast, no longer had the military muscle or the support of the Choctaws to enable them to continue also participating in these kinds of international diplomacy, and so they are strikingly absent from present receipts, multi-national summits, and discussions of imperial strategy. While the Southeastern confederacies negotiated, and the Western Confederacy fought the American government in the Ohio River valley, the petites nations responded in other ways to American and Spanish land pressure in the area following the American Revolution and their approaches left a far less prodigious paper trail.<sup>27</sup>

Both American and Indigenous southerners retain stories that explain how the petites nations faded from view in the Gulf south. American records portray a story of tribal decline and a seemingly inevitable march towards extinction. Typical of the eighteenth century version of this narrative is Hutchin's 1784 account of Louisiana in which he explains that "About 60 miles from New Orleans are the villages of the Humas and Alibamas. The former were once a considerable nation of Indians, but are reduced now to about 25 warriors; the latter consists of about 30." Of the Tunicas he writes that "on the East side of the river, and opposite to the upper plantations of Pointe Coupée, is the village of the Tonicas, formerly a numerous nation of Indians; but their constant intercourse with the white people, and immoderate use of spirituous liquors, have reduced

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<sup>27</sup> In 1790 the American Government launched a massive offensive to take possession of the Ohio River Valley and open the land to American settlers. Miamis, Ojibwe, Odawas, Potawatomis, Shawnees, as well as other Ohio River Valley groups forged a confederacy to confront American Expansion and they fought American army forces with stunning success in the early 1790s until they were overwhelmed and forced to cede territory in 1795; Michael F. Conlin and Robert M. Owens, "Bigger than Little Bighorn: Nomenclature, Memory, and the Greatest Native American Victory over the United States," *Ohio Valley History* (Summer 2012), 3-23.

them to about twenty warriors.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, American territorial papers from 1803 describe the petites nations as existing in communities of 50 to 100 persons like the “Wanderers of the tribes of Bilexis & Choctaws on Bayou Crocodile which empties into the Teche, about 50 Souls.”<sup>29</sup>

The stories of the petites nations during this era are not those of dominance, political power, and artful diplomacy, and they were not able to exercise the same level of regional influence as they had over the past century. Their fall from diplomatic power has led historians to describe this era as defined by the process of petite nations’ slide into alcoholism and disappearance. As F. Todd Smith argued in his aptly titled 2005 publication *From Dominance to Dissapearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest, 1786-1859*, during this era the petites nations were overwhelmed by settlers, and the collective numerical advantage that small nations had previously enjoyed was gone by the 1780s.<sup>30</sup> Both anthropologists and historians have also frequently portrayed this as an era of both political and cultural decline.<sup>31</sup> Smith is correct in his assessment of the loss of petites nations diplomatic power and the crucial role of population shift, and this is an essential component of petites nations histories. However we must be careful not to undersell the strategies of petites nations who increasingly embraced obscurity and inaccessibility as strategies of survivance.

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<sup>28</sup> Hutchins, *Historical Narrative and Topographical Description* (1784), 39.

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Clark, An Account of the Indian Tribes in Louisiana. Enclosed in letter to James Madison, 9/29/1803, *Territorial Papers*, IX, 62-64.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, *From Dominance to Dissapearance*, xv.

<sup>31</sup> Brain, *Tunica Archaeology* 206-208; Brasseur, *The Founding of New Acadia, 182-183*; Galloway this nation has always served the French well, 20; Dave Davis, “Ethnogenesis” 478. Many scholars actually put the decline and disappearance of the petites nations at a much earlier point, and while Dan Usner’s work has been massively influential in refuting narrative of petites nations dependency and decline in the early period, many historians still consider the petites nations to begin to decline in the 1730s. 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), 314

By the mid nineteenth century, American southerners had popularized narratives of petites nations disappearance that supported U.S. claims to their gulf homelands. Gulf coast mythology is full of legends of vanishing Indians. Many of these stories tell of star-crossed lovers, inter-tribal conflict, and the dramatic melting away of small Native nations into the natural surroundings.<sup>32</sup> 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. One of the most famous of these stories, tells of the forbidden love between a Biloxi princess and a Pascagoula prince. As the legend goes, when the Biloxi princess Miona attempted to wed her lover Olustee (yes, really Olustee) her father, the chief, threatened to kill all of the Pascagoulas for stealing his daughter. Allegedly the couple drowned themselves to avoid this fate, and because the Pascagoulas were so distraught by the loss of their young prince, the entire tribe then committed suicide by plunging themselves into the waters of what we now call the Pascagoula River. As the story goes, the song the Pascagoulas sung as they plunged headlong into the waters reverberates on the waves to this day and makes a sound like the river itself is singing.<sup>33</sup>

The Tunicas and Biloxis descendants remember different stories. Their stories neither suggest they crumbled in the wake of American empire, or vanished into the bayous leaving nothing but their names on the landscape of the Gulf south. Instead, they

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<sup>32</sup> 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.

<sup>33</sup> Federal Writers Project in Mississippi, *Mississippi Gulf Coast, American Guide Series*, Works Progress Administration (Gulfport: Gulfport Printing Co, 1939), 95-96; Theda Perdue, "The Legacy of Indian Removal," *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 78, no.1, (2012), 22-23.

understand this era as a time of reorganization and migration. By the 1780s the multi-ethnic settlement on Pointe Coupee had shattered. Similar to the Mobile territory, this too was prime land. Without a border, without a war, and while confronting a burgeoning settler population, the Native people could no longer hold onto this prime riverine territory, and so they made other arrangements to protect their communities from further violence. In 1920 Sesostrie Youchigant, a former chief and a fluent Tunica speaker, spoke to California linguist Mary Haas about his people's origins.

Two of his many stories speak specifically to this era. The first explains the demise of the Avoyelles, and the second touches on community fission and migration. First in his account of "The Tunica and the Spanish Defeat the Avoyelle," Youchigant explains that the Avoyelles betrayed the Tunicas during a feast by attacking the Tunica visitors and killing their chief. He says that the Tunicas then exacted vengeance, and that with the help of the Spanish they destroyed the entire Avoyelle nation.

Although to non-Tunica audiences this account may seem obliquely narrated and the framing is much the same as the Tunica's origins stories that feature non-human actors and forces, there are clues in this account that suggest that the Tunicas may have integrated the Avoyelles. Youchigant's story describes the process by which the Avoyelles and the Tunicas shared a meal, "something you didn't cook?... hominy not cooked?" the Tunica chief asked the leader of the Avoyelles. After sharing a meal the two chiefs affirmed their friendship, "now the chief the both friends they made," but then the Avoyelles suddenly attacked them and killed their chief.<sup>34</sup> The archival record supports

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<sup>34</sup> These translations are a bit awkward in English because I have transcribed them exactly as they appeared in Mary Haas' field notes. Haas recorded the phonetic Tunica as spoken and then the direct English translations of the words. Haas was primarily interested in "salvaging" the Tunica language and so she was more interested in preserving syntax and structure than in creating sentences that would sound graceful to

Youchigant's recollection that the Avoyelles were destroyed during the Spanish period, and in conjunction with this history illustrate a possible narrative of tribal integration. The very last diplomatic record that mentions the Avoyelles is a present receipt from 1777 that lists the Tunicas and Avoyelles as jointly receiving their gifts from the Spanish governor.<sup>35</sup> In 1908 ethnologist John Swanton recorded that one Tunica had had an Avoyelle grandmother.<sup>36</sup>

Close analysis of this story may suggest that the Tunicas relied on traditional patterns of diplomacy, violence, and forced adoption to rebuild their communities during the Spanish era. Youchigant's description of corn eating, chiefs discussing international relationships, a sudden betrayal, and then the complete destruction of the nation, all sound very similar to the methods that petites nations commonly used to sever and/or integrate multi-ethnic settlements between 1690-1740. While living in multi-national clusters of villages provided protection and economic opportunity, it also came with risks as it was very difficult to sever relationships or resolve disputes when polities lived in such close proximity. If a nation would not or could not leave, and they also could not get rid of their neighbors, they sometimes relied upon surprise attacks to chase out the other village and to capture women and children to integrate into their own community. Given the sudden disappearance of the Avoyelles, the Tunicas' memories of mass killing, the evidence of close social, political, and geographic connections during the French and

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modern English language speakers. Mary Haas, informant "Sam Young," Mss.Ms.Coll.94 Mary Rosamond Haas Papers, Series 2, subseries Tunica, box. 40, notebook 3, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 113, 115

<sup>35</sup> Bernardo de Galvez to Jose de Galvez, 9/15/1777 and King's approbation of the Same, 12/23/1777, Mississippi Provincial Archives: Spanish Dominion, Reel 1 Doc 16, ledger 1, 197 (Pensacola: University of West Florida).

<sup>36</sup> Swanton, "Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley 274; Mary Haas, informant "Sam Young," Mss.Ms.Coll.94 Mary Rosamond Haas Papers, Series 2, subseries Tunica, box. 40, notebook 3, 101-125.

Spanish eras, and finally the memories of Avoyelle ancestry and identity that survived through to the twentieth century, it seems quite plausible that the Tunicas killed many of the Avoyelles over this dispute, and then, as was customary, they integrated the women and children. This could have both strengthened the population of the Tunicas following a smallpox epidemic in the Lower Mississippi Valley, and it would explain the sudden disappearance of the Avoyelles.<sup>37</sup>

While the Tunicas and Avoyelles fused together, other petites nations communities fissioned apart and migrated to regions that were under less pressure from settlers. Youchigant's telling of "The Origins of Indian Bayou" help explain how the Biloxis came to join the Tunicas during the Spanish era. In this account he recalls that while "the American Govenor gave them land there," that the Biloxis sold their land and "His people all every which way they go live," and that portions of the Biloxis went to "Long/Grand Island" and to Pinewood Louisiana.<sup>38</sup> This story is again supported by other contemporary and historical evidence. Today the land near Grand Isle Lousiana is largely underwater due to coastal erosion, but within the adjacent Terrebonne and LaFourche parishes, the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw band of Muskogees, The Isle Jean Charles Band of Biloxi-Chitimachas, the Grand Callou DuLac Band of Biloxi-Chitimachas, the Bayou Lafourche Band of Biloxi-Chitimachas, and the Pointe-au-Chein Indian Tribe all trace their lineage to Biloxi ancestors. The bayous of Lafourche and Terrebone are in difficult terrain and much of the travel in this region today is still done via small propeller boats that can navigate the marshy grasses and narrow waterways. Therefore until the

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<sup>37</sup> Ethridge, *Chicaza to Chickasaw*, 140, 144, 175, 177, 185, 190, 217; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 22-24; la Harpe, *Historical Journal*, 71-75.

<sup>38</sup> Mary Haas, informant "Sam Young," Mss.Ms.Coll.94 Mary Rosamond Haas Papers, Series 2, subseries Tunica, box. 41, notebook 6, 35-51. Quote from page 35-37.

twentieth century these Biloxi and Chitimacha descendants were largely undisturbed by either white settlers or the federal government. In the Bayous they fished, hunted, grew sugar cane and only traveled up to New Orleans to sell their fish and baskets and to buy essentials.<sup>39</sup>

As to the group that went to Pinewood, in 1775 Spanish records indicate that there were some Biloxis living in Rapides Parish (about 60 miles east of Pinewood) with their old Pascagoula allies. By the 1780s a segment of the Biloxis were living at Bayou Boeuf also known as Indian Creek, (an additional 30 miles north and east) and had settled in close proximity to a group of Choctaws. By 1805 at least some of this Rapides group had relocated further east again to the area near Marksville in close proximity to the Tunicas.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout the 1780s and 1790s the pattern seems to be one of land sales, and relocation to inaccessible and undesirable terrain and efforts to develop economic relationships with local settlers. In Avoyelles parish the Tunicas and their Ofogoula and Avoyelle allies worked to made themselves integral to the functioning of local economies. Instead of providing provisions and labor to the fort at Pointe Coupee, they began providing meat and services within settler communities, and cultivating a reputation as both harmless and essential Native neighbors. As they had for decades prior, the Tunicas also continued to trade in valuable information and petites nations that were within proximity to colonial settlements also sometimes garnered good will from

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<sup>39</sup> Cain Burdeau, "Native Americans in Bayou Seek Federal Recognition," *The Washington Times*, 11/25/2015; Barry Yeoman, "Reclaiming native ground: Can Louisiana's tribes restore their traditional diets as waters rise?" *The Lens*, 2/9/2017.

<sup>40</sup> Brian Klopotek, *Recognition Odysseys: Indigeneity, Race, and Federal Tribal Recognition in Policy in Three Louisiana Indian Communities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 42-43. Klopotek's research suggests that these two communities eventually united and that the descendants of both are identified today as members of the Tunica Biloxi tribe.

settlers by assisting slaveholders. For example in 1784 Acadian settlers down in Lafourche parish paid 12 Houma men to help them track down enslaved people who had fled into the bayou and in 1796 two Tunica women reported an alleged slave revolt at Pointe Coupee.<sup>41</sup> Nations like the Chitimachas and Houmas, who lived further from colonial settlements, brought meat, fish, and baskets to trade in New Orleans and they migrated seasonally between the city and the bayous. Further west the Atakapas, who were more insulated from the brunt of colonial expansion participated in the black market and sold stolen horses and cattle from eastern Texas to Louisiana settlers.<sup>42</sup>

These combinations of migration to distant or difficult terrains and economic connections to white settlers provided the petites nations communities with relative autonomy on the margins of colonial society. However, these strategies also rendered them largely invisible to the American state as small Native polities largely vanished from maps of the region by 1800 and petites nations peoples are absent from legal records save for a handful of land sales. Although these strategies helped petites nations avoid forced removal by the federal government in the early nineteenth century, it also meant that most of these communities had limited or no formal written titles to their homelands. Therefore by 1826 the Tunicas were already seeking federal government assistance in obtaining recognition of their lands near Marksville as American squatters invaded even these territories. From 1826 until 1978 when the Tunica Biloxi tribe finally received federal recognition, Tunica, Biloxis, Ofogoula and Avoyelle community fought

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<sup>41</sup> Brain, *Tunica Archaeology*, 304-308; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 246, 358, 366-368; Carl A. Brasseaux, *The Founding of New Acadia: The Beginnings of Acadian Life in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 183.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, *Dominance to Disappearance*, 30; Usner, *American Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley: Social and Economic Histories* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 111-127; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*: 168-171.

for visibility and land rights. In asserting their rights to these lands they were forced to continually confront the narratives of tribal decline and disappearance that began to take root in the late eighteenth century as they moved to the peripheries of the colonial view.

The experiences of the petites nations in the 1780s and 1790s do not form a narrative of diplomatic might and military prowess as they did in prior decades, but they do form compelling stories of how the Tunicas, Biloxis, Chitimachas and others managed to avoid the crushing engine of the American settler empire. Through migration, community fission and fusion, political reorganizations, and new economic initiatives, they maintain their families, small pieces of territory, and their political and social autonomy as small Indigenous nations. Thus while the closing of the Lower Mississippi Valley borderlands forced the petites nations to the margins of colonial society, many of these communities found ways to once again adapt and protect their communities in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Similar to the stories of so many Native peoples who lived through eras during which their homelands were overrun by non-Native settlers, the stories of the petites nations at the turn of the nineteenth century are marked by the tragedies of land loss and violence, but they are not fundamentally narratives of social decay and declension. For more than a century petites nations peoples had navigated violence, dislocation, and political upheavals wrought by colonial networks. The conversion of the Gulf South into an Indigenous borderland to a plantation economy was radically different than the upheavals of the eighteenth century. However, for those who were able to employ the strategies that they had developed over the past century, including migration, economic reinvention, and multi-ethnic settlement fission and fusion, they were able to not just

survive, in many cases to hold onto their lands and cultures through to the present century. Today the Pascagoula River may sing, but so to do the Tunica Biloxi, in the Tunica language, on their tribal lands in Louisiana. <sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Lex Talamo, "POW WOW!! Tunica Biloxi Tribe hosts 22<sup>nd</sup> Gathering," *Shreveport Times*, 5/22/2017.