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Intimate Frontiers: Indians, French, and Africans in Colonial Mississippi Valley

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INTIMATE FRONTIERS: INDIANS, FRENCH, AND AFRICANS
IN COLONIAL MISSISSIPPI VALLEY

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IN COLONIAL MISSISSIPPI VALLEY

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History

By

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ABSTRACT

Historians have agreed that the French were more successful than their competitors in developing cordial relations with Native Americans during the conquest of North America. French diplomatic savoir faire and their skill at trading with Indians are usually cited to explain this success, but the Spaniards relied upon similar policies of trade and gift giving, while enjoying considerably less success with the Indians. *Intimate Frontiers* proposes an alternative model to understand the relative success of French Colonization in North America. *Intimate Frontiers*, an ethno-historical examination of the colonial encounters in the Lower French Louisiana, focuses on the social relations between Europeans, Indians and African in colonial Mississippi Valley. It examines the importance of the intimate bonds forged between settlers and natives in maintaining diplomatic alliances in the region even after the French left Louisiana in 1763. My work brings sexuality and intimacy into the political arena, challenging the prevailing view that power was defined solely by political and military alliances.

There are three key components to my study. The first part shows how the French and Quapaws forged social ties in early Arkansas through adoption and sexual unions, allowing them to face their common enemies, the Chickasaws, as brothers. The second section examines the mutual commercial interests and intimate relations between the Osage Indians and the Chouteau family of St. Louis. Given his kinship connections with the Osage and his economic power in the region, Pierre Chouteau became the first U.S. Indian Agent for the Osage. The final section demonstrates that Africans (both free and runaway slaves) and Indians created economic and intimate ties that allowed them to negotiate life among Europeans. African men and Choctaw women entered into sexual unions, allowing their progenitors, the *girfs*, to claim their freedom, following the status of their Indian mothers.

This dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this modest achievement to my dear parents.

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INTRODUCTION

“Spanish civilization crushed the Indian; English civilization scorned and neglected him; French civilization embraced and cherished him.”

Francis Parkman

“The [Arkansas] Indians live with the French who are near them more as brothers than as neighbors, and it is yet to happen that one has seen any misunderstanding between the two nations.”

Antoine Simon Le Page du Pratz

Intimate Frontiers re-examines the patterns that characterized the early encounter between the French, Spaniards, Africans, and Native Americans in the Mississippi Valley. It looks at the cultural, economic, and political exchange between them on an every-day basis. *Intimate Frontiers* describes how people exchanged goods, developed friendships, and formed sexual and marital unions. It shows how settlers, slaves, and Natives used sexuality, marriage, and kinship as a political instrument. It also examines the ways in which formal diplomatic and trade treaties have been driven by informal social and cultural concerns in the frontiers.

Unlike their competitors, the Spanish and English, the French generally established excellent relations with the Natives in the New World. In New France and in the colony of Louisiana, the French secured military alliances and established commercial relations that earned the loyalty of the majority of the Native American tribes they encountered.¹ The French often used their influence on the Indians to defend their interest in North America. They counted on their Indian allies during the several “French and Indian Wars,” to resist or attack both European enemies and hostile Indians. I argue that intimacy, not diplomacy, created and maintained the French-Indian alliance throughout Colonial Era.

¹ The French-Natchez relation is the exception for this generalization. During the Natchez Massacre the Natchez, Chickasaws, Yazous, and other tribes conducted a joint attack on the French Post at Natchez in 1729. Natchez warriors killed 145 men, 36 women and 56 children and took numerous captives. A French-Indian expedition on December of the same year wiped the Natchez from the geopolitical map. Daniel Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 72-73.

Historians have agreed that the French were more successful than their competitors in developing cordial relations with the Native Americans during the conquest of North America.² Scholars have argued that the French interest in trade and economic exchange made them the least dangerous of the European powers present in North America for the Natives.³ French diplomatic *savoir faire* and their skill at trading with Indians are usually cited to explain this success, but the Spaniards relied upon similar policies of trade and gift giving, while enjoying considerably less success with the Indians. The focus on economics and diplomacy of the empires in these borderlands ignores a crucial aspect of the encounter: the intimate day to day relationships created between the individuals on the frontiers.

Intimate Frontiers proposes an alternative model to understand the relative success of French colonization. This study is the first to examine the importance of social relations between the Europeans, Indians, and Africans in the Mississippi River Valley. My work brings sexuality and intimacy into the political arena, challenging the traditional view that power relations were

² Francis Parkman, *France and England in North America: A Series of Historical Narratives* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1868); Sharon O'Brien, *American Indian tribal governments* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); Arrell Morgan Gibson, *The American Indian: Prehistory to the Present* (Beverly: Wadsworth Publishing, 1979), James Stuart Olson, Raymond Wilson, *Native Americans in the Twentieth Century* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1984); Paul S. Boyer *et al.* *The Enduring Vision 1877: A History of the American People* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2011); and others.

³ James R. Gaines, *For Liberty and Glory: Washington, Lafayette, and Their Revolutions* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 10.

defined solely by political and military alliances. French, Spaniards, and Americans introduced the Indians to a common diplomacy of signing treaties and military alliances symbolized by gift giving; however, the French, unlike their competitors, also conducted diplomacy based on kinship and social obligation. The French used kinship, adoption, and marriage, as well as trade and diplomacy, to strengthen their relations with the Indians.



Figure 1. Map of 1700's Mississippi Valley (Archives, Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, France)

In the Mississippi Valley, colonial powers all used the gift-giving policy with the Indians, but the Spaniards and later the United States enjoyed less success than the French did. In fact, gift giving is, in its nature, an Indian policy that Europeans and Americans accommodated. Although Spain initially tried to use missionaries to force Indian loyalty, Spaniards, like the French, relied upon a policy of trade and gift giving, but the “Spanish were eventually bested by the French.”⁴ In fact, unlike the French, the other colonial powers considered the gifts given to the Natives as “bribes” to pay for their loyalty rather than gifts to seal friendship and kinship. The French, Spaniards, and United States offered Indian chiefs medals as a sign of a mutual economic, military, and diplomatic understanding. However, the Indian nations remained loyal to the French even after signing treaties with the Spaniards and the Americans and wore their medals. Historians have not given enough attention to the strategic importance of intimate relations between Europeans and Indians. The reality is that colonial frontiers were messy, complicated, and informal regions in which individuals used their social connections as a means to negotiate their ways at the frontiers.

The main difference between the French and other European powers in North America was rooted in their intimate and social relations with Indians rather than their political and diplomatic skills. During the settlement of British North America, notions of proper sexual behavior were closely linked to the settlers’ identity as Christians, civilized, and English. Thus,

⁴ David La Vere, “Between Kinship and Capitalism: French and Spanish Rivalry in Colonial Louisiana-Texas Indian Trade,” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 64, No. 2. (May, 1998): 197-218. In fact, even after Louisiana became Spanish, Spanish government had to rely on French diplomats, but their control over the Natives was still very limited.

alternative sexual arrangements were seen as threatening to the establishment of English societies in North America. Puritans and Anglicans alike sought to punish premarital sexual relations and informal marriages. As early as 1691, Virginia banned marriages between Anglo-American women and men of African or Indian ancestry.⁵

Spaniards were the first to encounter the different Indian groups along the Mississippi River, during Hernando De Soto's '*conquista*'.⁶ They enslaved hundreds of native women to bear their children and serve as concubines.⁷ In their accounts, the Spanish were shocked by the Frenchmen who, unlike the *conquistadores*, had accepted the natives' request to marry "*indias*."⁸

⁵ Jennifer Spears, "Whose Sexual Revolution?" *Reviews in American History* 31 (2003): 495-502.

At the beginning of settlement, the French policy encouraged *métissage*. They perceived intermixing as an arm of evangelization and a means to achieve their dream of forming a "unique nation." As the policy of "frenchification" of Indian women resulted in the "indianization" of Frenchmen, French authorities became ambivalent concerning intermarriage.

⁶ George Sabo III, *Paths of our Children*, (Fayetteville: Arkansas Archeological Survey, 2001), 13.

⁷ Antonia Castaneda's work on Spanish conquistadors suggested the use of rape and sexual violence against indigenous women as a military strategy in the southwestern borderlands. Castaneda, Antonia, *et al.*, *Gender on the Borderlands: The Frontiers Reader* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007). Spanish rapes and sexual assaults against the *indias* were believed to dishonor and thus dis-empower native men through symbolic castration.

⁸ Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 87.

Nevertheless, like the French, the Spaniards did intermix with native women, as the large *mestizo* populations demonstrated. However, Spanish suitors often coerced their native partners. Moreover, unlike the French, Spaniards did not marry “*indias*” (Indian women who lived within their own tribes) but instead only Indian women who were brought to the Spanish settlements, where they were “civilized,” that is, Christianized and indoctrinated in European ways. Isolated from their native world, and completely immersed in their new world, these women could not serve as mediators between the two worlds. The story of these women and their role within the encounter is yet to be uncovered.

“The Encounter” has become a subject of interest to many colonial historians and of historians of the West and “frontier” in the last twenty years. The traditional perspective portrayed a conquered Native American population who were passive victims at the hands of the Europeans. “The new Indian history” by contrast, gave credit to Native American agency. It viewed Native Americans as actors who negotiated with Europeans, rather than as passive victims. Richard White’s ‘Middle Ground’ was a place in which neither Indians nor Europeans could control each other, resulting in violence on both sides. As a result Indians and Europeans forced each other to create a place of cultural exchange and therefore had to accommodate the other.⁹ White took the traditional scholarship on the encounter a step further, explaining the

⁹ In terms of European-Indian encounter and interaction in North America, Richard White’s *The Middle Ground* in the colonial *Les Pays d’ en Hauts* (Great Lake region), inspired many studies. His work provides a foundation to my project at two different levels. First, his “Middle Ground” offers a pattern of European-Indian encounter and interaction in the Great Lakes region. This pattern became a point of departure for scholars seeking to identify the context of Indian-

political and economic factors that gave birth to a cordial relationship between French and Indians.¹⁰

Since Daniel Richter's *Facing East*, scholars have attempted to tell the story of the interaction from the Indian perspective. Richter challenges the Eurocentric perspective that described a European conquest and an American resistance or accommodation. Facing east, he said, demands that we tell a different story, one that is much more complicated and recovers the voices of those who have left no records of their thoughts. Although it is impossible to fully recover the story through their eyes, Richter suggests that we can attempt to "look over their

European relations. Others followed his lead in characterizing Indian-European relations by describing the encounter as a "divided" or "native" grounds. See *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region 1650-1815*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), x.

¹⁰ On the intimate aspect of the encounter in the Great Lake Region, White argued that French needed Indians as allies, partners in exchange, and sexual partners. Sexual relations between Frenchmen and Indian women facilitated trade throughout the West, where Frenchmen found Indian women as their only option as sexual partners. For Indian women, the Frenchmen offered an alternative to polygamy that resulted from warfare. White urged historians to avoid the cliché that portrayed promiscuous Indian women as most of sexual contact took place between French and single women, who did enjoy sexual freedom but were not prostitutes. Indians saw marriage as an integral part of their alliance, wrote White. He viewed these women as a bridge to the middle ground. Yet for all this, White did not devote more than few pages on the subject. See White, *Middle Ground*, 544.

shoulder” to reconstruct a “cloudy vision” of the way they might have understood the world within the encounter.¹¹ *Intimate Frontiers* takes Richter’s perspective in telling of the encounter between Indians, Europeans, and Africans in the Mississippi Valley facing east.

Stephen Aron’s *American Confluence* examined the encounter in *Le pays des Illinois* (Upper Louisiana), the region of the confluence of Missouri, Ohio, and Mississippi Rivers. It was a meeting point and cultural cross-roads, where Native groups and colonists contested for occupancy. Aron describes a region where France had to deal with strong native groups such as the Osage, but faced colonial competition from Spanish and British authorities as well. Aron’s narrative viewed the Osage Indians as actors who negotiated a middle ground on their terms.¹² Like White, Aron devoted few paragraphs to address the importance of what he labeled “intercultural diplomacy” that resulted from intermarriages between Frenchmen and Native women—a diplomacy that was closely linked to intercultural economics. I argue that intermarriage between Frenchmen and Indian women paved the way to diplomacy and economics in the Mississippi Valley, while I emphasize the Native women’s place at the heart of the trans-Atlantic world economy. Additionally, *Intimate Frontiers* displays the importance of social ties that enabled the French, Indians, and Africans to find enough common ground to pursue their respective goals, shaping colonial policies throughout eighteenth century.

¹¹ Daniel Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 317.

¹² Aron examines this region of confluence within the frontier (meeting of people) and borderland (meeting of empires) context, demonstrating how the geopolitical situation of the region affected French-Indian relations. See, Aron, *American Confluence*, 15.

More recent work has also written Indian history while “facing east.” Both Juliana Barr and Pekka Hämäläinen viewed the Indians of the Southwest as masters of their ground during the encounter with the Europeans.¹³ While Barr emphasized that the natives Caddos, Ouachitas, and Comanches remained a dominant force in the land of the Tejas; Hämäläinen’s *Comanche Empire* argues that the Comanches were not only able to resist the Spanish conquest, but also created an empire that advanced at the expense of the world’s largest empire at that time. He narrated a story of Indians who dictated the rules and of the Europeans who resisted and struggled to survive, facing east from the Indian country. Interestingly, Hämäläinen confessed that according to conventional ideas of empire, the Comanche empire did not exist.¹⁴ He goes further to assert that many of scholars who attempted to tell the story of the encounter facing east failed to do so. In order to recover the full dimension of Indian agency, he argued that scholars must look at how Indian policies affected Europeans rather than merely as defensive reactions towards the conquerors. My project attempts to restore the voice of the Natives and understand diplomacy within the Indian context.

This facing east literature has moved beyond the traditional histories of the encounter and allowed us to see the story from the other side for the first time. However, it remains one-

¹³ Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007)

¹⁴ In his study, Hämäläinen traces the rise, expansion, and fall of the Comanche Empire. He emphasized the role Comanche policy of adoption and kinship played in the creation and expansion of their empire. See Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1-3.

sided. Scholars have moved from a story that glorified the Europeans to one that empowered the Indians. In writing from the Indian perspective, scholars have erased the European perspective. It is possible that facing east scholars might have attributed to Indians too much power. Therefore, it is important to incorporate both sides stories into our narrative in an attempt to paint the whole picture of the encounter.

This work then, attempts to tell the story of the two worlds that collided from both sides. It frames the encounter as an intimate frontier- a place where individuals met and socially interacted- as well as a place where the political powers fought and negotiated, a borderland. To recover the intimate aspect of the encounter in the Mississippi Valley, I rely mostly on European, French and Spanish, sources that tell us about both Indian and French actions.¹⁵ The Natives' voice can also be recovered sometimes, as Indians told stories that French explorers and missionaries recorded. Yet in neither case do the surviving records necessarily uncover the intimate aspect of the story. They often reveal the actions without revealing the motives. European sources on the Indians can be read both facing west and east to reconstruct the intimate aspect of the story. In all cases, though, records should be looked at with care, as authentication remains a problem.

My approach to this problem relies on race and gender studies in places such as New France and the Southwest. This work focuses on the social aspects of the encounter in miscegenation, captivity, kinship, and intermarriage. Several recent studies have taken a helpful approach to these questions. Jennifer Spears' study of "Colonial Intimacies" in Louisiana

¹⁵ Unless otherwise noted, I have provided the translations from the original French and Spanish documents.

explores French officials' attitudes toward intermarriage between French colonists in Louisiana and its Natives as well as between the colonists and their African slaves. She asserts that the debate between secular and religious officials over the propriety of permitting intermarriages between Indian women and Frenchmen was never settled, although they did agree to prohibit sexual intercourse between colonists and Africans.¹⁶ In her quest to understand why relationships between Europeans and Indians and between Europeans and Africans brought different sexual policies in French Louisiana, Spears concluded that sexuality was in some instances used to construct and maintain boundaries between colonizer and colonized as cross-sexual intercourse was prohibited, and at other instances as an instrument of assimilating the colonized to the colonizer's life.

Spears shows how public debates and colonial ideologies about sex are far easier to uncover than private practice. Spears's work has laid out the difficulties in uncovering the private aspect. Spears faces "west" as she examined the European men and their sexual intercourse with either Indian or African women. I approach the topic facing east: from the world Native women and Frenchmen, as well as Native women and African men, created. Spears looked at how the state used sexuality as a political tool, shaping colonists' sexual behavior to maintain hierarchy and racial boundaries while I argue in terms of how Indian, French men and African men used sexual intercourse for individual social, economic and legal purposes.

Similarly, Saliha Belmessous' work on miscegenation and race during the encounter confirmed that sexuality and intermarriage were used as an instrument of the French policy to

¹⁶ Jennifer Spears, "Colonial Intimacies: Legislating Sex in French Louisiana," *William and Mary Quarterly* 60: 1 (January 2003): 75-98.

assimilate Indians into their society in New France. She argues that in the seventeenth century, French policy toward the indigenous peoples of New France relied on the assimilation of the natives to French religion and culture. *Francisation*, or “Frenchification” in English, was based on miscegenation between colonial and native peoples in order to strengthen the nascent New France. Although historians have stressed that racial prejudice was the result of colonial exploitation, she argued that it was only after the “assimilationist” approach had failed that racial prejudice emerged in New France. She insists on the central role played by the state in the promotion of assimilation policy between the French and Amerindians.¹⁷ Belmessous demonstrates the State promoted miscegenation as a mean to strengthen their colony. Most importantly, Belmessous shows that primary sources that had been used over and over again by different scholars might still have something new to say.¹⁸

¹⁷ Belmessous concluded that the failure of the assimilation policy was crucial in terms of cultural and racial prejudices toward Amerindians. See Belmessous “Assimilation and Racialism in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century French Colonial Policy,” *American Historical Review* 110: 2 (April 2005): 322-349. Her book, *Assimilation and Empire*, is forthcoming.

¹⁸ She says: “Familiarity with mostly well-known and often-quoted sources from the Correspondance Générale, the Série C^{11A} of the Archives des Colonies (the sources of civil government) especially, has prevented scholars from questioning the significance of those sources over the issue of race. Indeed, familiarity seems to have engendered tediousness and reluctance to go beyond what these sources have already told us—or seem to have told us—about related or different issues. Yet these sources still have a lot to say about the significance of *francisation* and its racial outcomes.”

Other scholars have pointed to the correlation between miscegenation and captivity. Tanis Thorne's work *The many Hands of my Relations* traces the development of a *métis* culture in the Lower Missouri River valley, which resulted from widespread sexual intercourse between Frenchmen and Indian women. She recognized that miscegenation and slavery were often closely associated.¹⁹ More recently, Carl Ekberg's *Stealing Indian Women* is devoted to the practice of Indian slavery in the Illinois Country during colonial era. While captivity remains at the heart of the book, Ekberg devoted a chapter to explore the lives of individual Indian slaves within the Illinois Country villages, examining how they were baptized, married, and bore children. He also showed how Indian slave women served as concubines to powerful men, including Auguste Chouteau in St. Louis.²⁰

These two works illuminate the Indian slave trade in French and Spanish Louisiana by demonstrating that the terms of Indian "slave," "domestic," "concubine," and "wife" were used interchangeably by Europeans. The French would have, and probably did, use the term "slave" for their Indian wives when the French laws prohibited intermarriage, and identified them as "wives" when the Spanish laws prohibited Indian slavery. Additionally, while miscegenation and slavery may have been practiced by the British, who also enslaved and traded Indian women, the French considered the captives as "slaves" within the Indian context of captivity. Among the Indians, a captive or "slave" was often adopted and assimilated into the community to replace

¹⁹ Tanis Thorne, *The many Hands of my Relations: French and Indians on the Lower Missouri*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996).

²⁰ Carl Ekberg, *Stealing Indian Women: Native Slavery in the Illinois Country*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

those who died at the hands of her tribe. In his work, Alan Gally concluded that within “the Native American society, ownership of individuals was more a matter of status for the owner and a statement of “otherness” for the slave than it was a means to obtain economic rewards from unfree labor.” Gally insists that for Europeans the economic reward was more important than the issue of status.²¹ Among the British however, the status of a captive Indian woman was equal to the one of a slave within the European context, where slaves could not be incorporated into the community as equals.

The Indian woman is at the center of Juliana Barr’s work on Native women in colonial Spanish Texas. Barr looks at three specific chronological models of Indian-Spaniard interaction, placing women at the heart of the Encounter. She emphasized that in the land of the Tejas not even a “middle ground” emerged as the natives remained a dominant force. While she explored the different ways in which Indians dictated their terms within the encounter, women remained central figures in this process. Whether through intermarriage, their image, or presence, women promoted peace.²² Barr argues that it is necessary to move away from European constructions of power to pursue the Indian perspective. We need to understand the world as Indians did—

²¹ Alan Gally, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South 1670-1717*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 8.

²² Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

organized around kinship-based relationships. Barr utilized the Tejas' creation story and her imagination to narrate a very creative and solid tale of the encounter from the Tejas' country.²³

Intimacy was not limited to Indians and Europeans. It also characterized relations between Indians and African. Scholars have looked at the encounter of the three peoples in the Lower Mississippi Valley, including Daniel Usner's "frontier exchange economy," in which French settlers, Indians, and Africans engaged. His study reconstructed the trade system that involved direct, face-to-face transactions between Indians and French traders or merchants joined by African slaves. Goods were not sold for money but were bartered using an agreed-upon schedule of values. Usner examined the economic context in which these people interacted with each other. He traced the change in the "frontier exchange" during the second half of eighteenth century, evolved from a network of interaction into a strategy of survival. Africans, Indians, and Europeans found a common ground to preserve their means of production and exchange.²⁴ While Usner only briefly mentioned the "liaisons" between Indian women and African slaves, *Intimate*

²³ Barr opened her book with the Encounter between Spanish explorers and Caddo Indians in late seventeenth century. She explained that the portrait of the Virgin Mary brought by the Spaniards prevented the Caddo Indians to identify them as potential enemies. The Spaniards then asserted that the Virgin was their mother and the mother of the Caddos as well. As a result, the Caddo drew parallels between the Virgin Mary and their own "mother" from their own creation story. These parallels argued Barr, made the Caddos identify with the Spaniards, who now became "brothers" and allies.

²⁴ See Daniel Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

Frontiers addresses the importance of these liaisons for both Indian and African community and their impact on their progenitors.

In Lower Louisiana, Choctaw Indians socially and sexually intermingled with Africans. In her work, Gwendolyn Hall narrates the story of the Afro-Creole culture that developed in Eighteenth century Louisiana. Hall devotes parts in her book to explore Africans' relations with the Choctaws. Africans first encountered Indians as fellow slaves. The encounters between African slaves and Native slaves, who knew the land, undermined discipline among slaves of both races in 1720s New Orleans. Sharing the same fate, they ran away together.²⁵ Hall affirms that many African slaves took part of the Natchez Massacre of 1729 against the French. French policy makers sought to preserve order and control by prohibiting Indian slavery.

Africans who lived among the Natchez and Choctaws created social ties and kinship with these Indians. Hall pointed at family ties within plantations as well as in the woodlands and Indian villages. Black-Indian people, designated as *grifs*, emerged as a distinctive group in Louisiana. Hall pointed at the black-Indian mixing in Pointe Coupée, where lawsuits demanding freedom for Black-Indian slaves of maternal Indian descent were recorded. While Hall touches on these intimate relations between African settlers and Indians, African Creole-Culture remains the heart of her work. The “Iceberg” remains unexplored on the law suits that granted freedom to the *grifs*.

²⁵ Gwendolyn Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995).

Ira Berlin has contextualized African slavery within a changing process as the meaning of bondage has changed from one generation to the other and from one place to the other. In his *Generations of Captivity*, Berlin traces the experience of generations of Africans and African-Americans in slavery. He distinguished different generations, in where slavery defined and redefined. The “Charter Generation,” argued Berlin, counted those who succeeded in incorporating themselves into the colonial societies during early settlement, regardless of their status as slaves. The next generation however, the “Plantation Generations,” or the ones who experienced bondage with the plantations, where race took a different meaning, created an “African” identity in consequences of their “black race.” Berlin has labeled two more generations in his study: the “Revolutionary Generations” and the “Migration Generations.”²⁶ African-Indian intermixing altered the experience of African slavery, creating different experiences for different generations of African slaves in colonial Louisiana.

I argue that African and Indian intimacy in Louisiana affected colonial governmental policies on the institution of slavery and redefined race at the frontier. Slavery bound the “first generation” of Africans and Indians together, who saw each other as equals came in to close contact. They engaged in a mutually beneficial intimate relationship that enabled them to collaborate and to resist slavery, as the mixed couples often running away together. Consequently, French officials exhorted the end of Indian slavery to prevent the African slaves from running away. Similarly, the laws in Spanish Louisiana redefined race in the frontier as the colonial government officially ended Indian slavery while they kept the Africans in bondage.

²⁶ Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A history of African American Slaves* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 7, 8.

Because of these circumstances, the second African Indian generation and the mixed children, *the grifs*, became aware of the burden of their African heritage, while their Indian heritage offered hope for freedom.

On the French encounter with Arkansas Indians, specifically Quapaw and Osage, Kathleen DuVal's *Native Ground* and Morris Arnold's work offer a context for my own. Arnold surveys the legal, social and economic lives of European settlers and Indians in Arkansas. Arnold emphasized the friendly relationship that developed between the French settlers at the Arkansas Post and the Quapaw Indians from their first encounter.²⁷ DuVal developed the concept of "Native Ground," and applied this encounter pattern on the Lower Mississippi Valley. She asserted that only relatively weak Natives desired the kind of compromises inherent in a middle ground, and that "cohesive native peoples preferred to maintain their own sovereign identities," claiming their "native ground." DuVal pictured the Arkansas Valley as home to a few large and relatively cohesive tribes who claimed their native ground.²⁸ Regarding intimacy between Indians and Europeans, while Arnold believed that there were many reasons that pushed

²⁷ Judge Morris Arnold's work remains authoritative in the study of colonial Arkansas. His work includes, *Unequal Laws Unto a Savage Race; European Legal Traditions in Arkansas, 1686-1836*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1984); *Colonial Arkansas, 1686-1804, A Social and Cultural History* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1991); and *The Rumble of a Distant Drum: The Quapaws and the Old World*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000).

²⁸ Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 5.

Frenchmen and Quapaw women to form sexual and even marital unions, DuVal claimed the opposite. She argued that despite the closeness of French-Quapaw relations, only few Quapaw women married Frenchmen as there is little evidence of sexual contact between the two people.²⁹ My work re-interprets the absence of marriage records, arguing that the absence of records did not mean absence of intermarriages. As sparse as they are, the records themselves are not as conclusive as DuVal argues, as Indians did not customarily record marriages.

George Sabo's archaeological and anthropological study of Natives in contemporary Arkansas can help us to face east in the Mississippi Valley.³⁰ Creation stories of tribes are deeply

²⁹ In her more recent work, DuVal insisted that because scholars have shown that many French Canadians intermarried Indian women in New France, historians tended to assume that the French Canadians kept similar tradition in colonial Louisiana, an idea that she dismisses. DuVal argued that because the Quapaw were patrilineal, it is very unlikely that intermarriages between Frenchmen and Quapaw women could have happened. However, there is evidence of widespread intermarriages between French and other patrilineal Indian tribes, such as the Osages in Louisiana. DuVal, "Indian Intermarriage and Métissage in Colonial Louisiana," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Volume LXV, Number 2, (April 2008): 267-268.

³⁰ George Sabo's work offers a first overview on the cultural beliefs and practices as well as socio-political structure of three different tribes of French Louisiana. Sabo focuses on the three major tribes that lived in what is today Arkansas. He explores the lives of Quapaw, Osage, and Caddo Indians and developments from the ancient prehistoric era to the twentieth century. The period before the Encounter with the French explorers and settlers remains pertinent for my work. Sabo, *Paths of our Children*, (Fayetteville: Arkansas Archeological Survey, 2001).

reflected in the Natives' social and political structure. For instance, within some of the Mississippi valley tribes developed a patrilineal system. Among the Quapaws and the Osage, the Frenchman was adopted into the tribe as he married into the tribe in order to provide lineage for their *métis* children. This offers a better understand of Indians' expectations and intentions from the inter-marriages with the Frenchman, who becomes kin.

Intimate Frontiers also illuminates the diverse participation of Indian women within the encounter. Because of her sexuality and hospitality, the Indian woman was at the heart of relations between Indians and Europeans. My task is to examine the larger politico-economic context of their contribution to colonial life, answering two questions. The first asks how social and intimate relations developed between Frenchmen and Indian women were key to the French diplomatic success with the Indians, while the second examines how Africans' sexual intimacy with Indian women secured freedom for their offspring. I evaluate the encounter between the Quapaw, Osage, Choctaw, French, and Africans from the upper to the lower Mississippi from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, exploring how the lives and actions of individuals shaped relations during the conquest. Using a comparative approach that narrates the story of the encounter from the European and Indian perspectives, I recover the voices of Natives by rereading sources that are familiar to historians. These clearly show that Indians, Africans, and French used sexual and kinship diplomacy to achieve and maintain political, economic, and legal gains during their encounters.

Intimate Frontiers also offers an ethno-historical examination of the colonial encounter between French, Native Americans, and Africans in the Lower French Louisiana. Kinship, sexual intermingling and intermarriages strengthened the ties between the three people that

sustained their diplomatic relations. Intimacy enabled individuals to shape, rather than merely reacts, to European and American politics and diplomacy on the frontiers. As I evaluate the encounter between the Quapaw, Osage, Choctaw, French, and Africans in the Upper and Lower Louisiana throughout the encounters, I argue that the lives and actions of individuals shaped its colonial government. On the frontier, Indians, Africans, and French, men and women, used sexual and kinship diplomacy to achieve and maintain political, economic, and legal gains during their encounters.

There are three key components to my study. The first part shows how the French and Quapaws forged social ties in early Arkansas through adoption and sexual unions, allowing them to face their common enemies, the Chickasaws, as brothers. The second section examines the mutual commercial interests and intimate relations between the Osage Indians and the Chouteau family of St. Louis. Given his kinship connections with the Osage and his economic power in the region, Pierre Chouteau became the first U.S. Indian Agent for the Osage. The final section demonstrates that Africans (both free and runaway slaves) and Indians created economic and intimate ties that allowed them to negotiate life among Europeans. African men and Choctaw women entered into sexual unions, allowing their progenitors, the *grifs*, to claim their freedom, following the status of their Indian mothers. *Intimate Frontiers* offers a new perspective to the study of Mississippi Valley frontier, showing how sexuality and intimacy allowed these individuals to shape, rather than merely reacts to, European and American politics and diplomacy.

PART I:

Liaisons and Alliances: French Settlers and Quapaw Indians

“Habitants, voyageurs, and coureurs de bois spent much of their time in Indian villages where they lived not as conquistadors but as consorts.”

Stephen Aron

“Your children, les Akancas, have lamented your absence for fourteen harvests and six moons, we thought you were dead.”

Quapaw Indians to Jean Bernard Bossu

In a tale passed on for generations, the O-Gah-Pah remember that during creation time the heaven and the earth were separated, the breath of the sky set their Ancient Ones ashore and fell into the water. The tale also recalls that the Early Ones, who once lived east of the River near the great waters, were driven out by their enemies (the Iroquois). During a winter, they embarked upon a long journey from their homeland in the lower Ohio River Valley, descending the Father of the Waters or Big River (Mississippi River). A big storm separated the brothers during their crossing of the river and gave birth to the Osage, Omaha, Kansas, and Poncas, people who went up the river. Separated from their kinsmen, the O-Gah-Pah came to be known as the "lost tribe." They were the people who went down stream on the River, O-Gah-Pah –from which the name Quapaw derived. The Quapaw established four villages Kappa, Tongigua, Tourima, and Osotouy, near the confluence of the Big River and a newly found river (Arkansas) and made it their new homeland.

The downstream people hunted and grew crops. Men fished and hunted deer, bear, and buffalo, as well as managed political affairs and warfare. Women grew corn, beans, and pumpkins, and gathered wood and wild foods. In addition to cooking and rearing children, weaving baskets, and producing pottery vessels, they also butchered the hunted animals and prepared the hides. During warm seasons, deerskin skirts were women's only covering while men went naked. In cold season, both men and women wore leggings, moccasins, and robes. Married women wore their hair loose, but unmarried women wore their hair in braids knotted behind each ear.

They built longhouses, each being occupied by several related families. The houses surrounded an open plaza where ceremonies were performed. Everything they had came from Waha kon Dah, the great spirit symbolized by the sun. They lived in a universe is structured by reciprocal relationships between communities and powerful spiritual forces. The Quapaws performed

ceremonies for planting, harvesting, hunting, warfare, adoption, and marriage, to sustain the balance between their world and the other. The Sky People performed rituals involving spiritual affairs, while the Earth People performed the rituals that maintained the physical balance of the community. The Quapaws were patrilineal, as their children were members of their fathers' clan and moiety. Meanwhile, kinship relations were extended to guests in the calumet ceremony, through adoptions and marriage. The calumet ceremony used sacred pipes to unify the two parties under the obligation of reciprocity. The guests were received at a platform built near the plaza, where the ceremonies were held.

Many winters had passed when the Quapaws of the Kappa village noticed the approach of two bark canoes which descended the Big River. The downstream people encountered the pale-faced people for the first time. Frightened and uncertain about the intentions of the bearded visitors, the Quapaws shot few arrows towards them. Accustomed to the culture of the natives, the French chief who wore a black robe held out the calumet, to indicate good intentions. The strangers were escorted by two individuals from the Illinois tribe, who introduced the Quapaw as the Akensea, later spelled Arkansas, the Illini word for the "broken off" People. The Quapaw people, their river and land would be known as the Arkansas by the French. As the French seemed to pose no immediate threat to them, the Arkansas received their guests with the Calumet. The Calumet ceremony symbolized hospitality, kinship, and reciprocal obligations, insisting upon the guests' participation. As part of gift exchange between the two parties, a painted deerskin was placed ceremoniously on the Black Robe's shoulders. The strangers were carried, on the shoulders and backs of their host, to the plaza which was covered with willows and bear skins. The ceremony continued with two days of drumming, singing, dancing, and

*feasting. The visitors were rocked all night to the rhythm of the drums. Before returning up the River, Black Robe erected a big cross in the village as a symbol of their friendship.*³¹

³¹ Velma Seamster Nieberding, *The Quapaws: Those Who Went Downstream* (Miami: Dixons, 1976), David Baird, *The Quapaw Indians: A History of the Downstream People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), and *The Quapaw People* (Phoenix: Indian Tribal Series, 1975); George Sabo III, *Paths of our Children*, (Fayetteville: Arkansas Archeological Survey, 2001).

‘Facing East’ from Indian country, this passage relates the story of the origins of the Quapaw Indians, one of the Dhegiha Sioux speaking tribes, and their encounter with the first explorers of the Mississippi River, Father Jacques Marquette, Louis Joliet, and several members of their expedition, who reached the Quapaws’ land in June of 1673. The Quapaws informed the French visitors that the Big River empties into the Gulf of Mexico, and the journey would take scarcely 10-days from the Kappa village. However, the Quapaws convinced Marquette and Joliet that it would be too dangerous to continue their journey, because of unfriendly Indian tribes that occupied the lower river Valley. The Quapaws also feared that their European ally would enter into alliances with other rival Indians. The French explorers ended their journey as suggested by their new allies and headed back to Quebec, the heart of New France, with the news of their discovery.³² As a result, the French crown urged New France’s officials to launch more expeditions to expand the colony southward. The second French-Quapaw encounter came on March 12, 1682 through Robert Cavalier *Sieur* de La Salle’s explorative voyage of the Mississippi River.³³ Henri de Tonti, who accompanied La Salle, set up Arkansas Post among the Quapaws in 1686.³⁴ The settlement at Arkansas Post is one of the first permanent settlements in Colonial Louisiana, and marked the beginning of the French-Quapaw friendship.

The friendly alliance that French settlers and Quapaw Indians forged at Arkansas Post is a good example of the cordial relations that developed between the French and the Native

³² Coleman, *The Arkansas Post*, 6.

³³ Arnold Morris, *Unequal Laws Unto a Savage Race; European Legal Traditions in Arkansas, 1686-1836*, (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1985), 1.

³⁴ Coleman, *The Arkansas Post*, 8.

Americans. Because of geographical isolation and raids by their common enemies, the Chickasaw and Osage Indians, the Quapaw and the French settlers at Arkansas Post sealed military and diplomatic alliances and forged social obligations through kinship, sexual intimacies, and intermarriages that enabled them to live together.³⁵ This marked the beginning of the long friendship that allowed them to survive among their common enemies in the Mississippi Valley to create a “world” of their own.³⁶

³⁵ In search of deerskins and Indian slaves, the English created a military alliance with the Chickasaws, making them one of the most powerful tribes in the Mississippi Valley. For more on Chickasaws see Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*. The Osage remained one of the most powerful Indian groups in the Mississippi Valley during the colonial period. For more on the Mississippi Valley Indians, see George Sabo III, *Paths of our Children*.

³⁶ Colin Calloway, *New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), xiv.



Figure 2. Map of the Arkansas Indian Territory (Henry de Tonti, *Relation de la Louisiane et du Mississippi*).

Scholars have emphasized the close relationship of French and native people in the lower Arkansas River Valley. The considerable body of recent literature on the lower Arkansas River Valley, notably the works of Morris Arnold and Kathleen DuVal, has eliminated the need for debate when it comes to the strength and longevity of the diplomatic, military, and economic ties that existed between the French and Quapaw people.³⁷ However, this emphasis on economics and diplomacy overlooked the intimate aspect of the French-Quapaw relations. While Arnold has granted the possibility of sexual unions and intermarriages between Frenchmen and Quapaw women, Kathleen DuVal recently suggested there is little evidence to support the notion that such French-Quapaw intermarriages took place at all; DuVal insists that the unions Frenchmen established in Arkansas more likely involved captive women of different tribes.³⁸ Yet, colonial

³⁷ Judge Morris Arnold remains the pioneer and authority of colonial Arkansas in general and French-Quapaw relations in particular. He has written several books where he treated different aspects of life during colonial Arkansas, including socio-economic and legal aspects. Arnold emphasized the friendly relationship that developed between the French settlers at Arkansas Post and the Quapaw Indians from their first encounter. Arnold's work includes but is not limited to, *Unequal Laws Unto a Savage Race; European Legal Traditions in Arkansas, 1686-1836* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1984); *Colonial Arkansas, 1686-1804, A Social and Cultural History* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1991); and *The Rumble of a Distant Drum: The Quapaws and the Old World* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000). For more on the Quapaws, see also George Sabo III, *Paths of our Children*.

³⁸ In contrast to Richard White's "Middle Ground," DuVal introduced the concept of "Native Ground" to describe French and Indians encounter in the Mississippi River Valley. See *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of

records hint that unions between French and Quapaws were more common than previously thought. These unions will highlight the kinship that tied the French and Quapaw Indians even after the diplomatic treaties ended with the transfer of Louisiana to Spain in 1763.

Kathleen DuVal argues that only relatively weak natives desired the kind of compromises inherent in a “middle ground.” She argues that the Quapaw existed in a Native Ground, where they dominated Europeans during their encounters.³⁹ DuVal makes this argument in the course of portraying an Arkansas River Valley that was very different from the “Middle Ground” Richard White has suggested existed in the Great Lakes region. Because they were equally powerful, White argues, Indians and whites could not control each other, and therefore each had ultimately to accommodate the other. During their earliest encounters, both Europeans and Indians had used violence to acquire and protect their existing goods and potentially acquire more wealth at their rivals' expense. But to avoid exterminating each other, Europeans and Indians were eventually forced to create a place for exchange: a middle ground.⁴⁰ DuVal counters

Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 84; DuVal, “Indian Intermarriage and Métis sage in Colonial Louisiana” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Volume LXV, Number 2, April 2008, 267-268.

³⁹ DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 5.

⁴⁰ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), x. Other scholars, including Jeannie Whayne, have used the middle ground model in describing colonial Arkansas. See *A Whole Country in Commotion: The Louisiana Purchase and the American Southwest*, edited by Patrick Williams, S. Charles Bolton, and Jeannie Whayne, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2005).

White, depicting the Arkansas River Valley as home to a few “large and relatively cohesive tribes from the time the French arrived through the early nineteenth century.” She argues that the Quapaw occupied Native Ground, in which they “retained the right to manage the surrounding lands, living and hunting on them as they wished and controlling the access of other native and European outsiders.”⁴¹

The French and Quapaw encounter did indeed depart from the middle ground pattern in that their relationship did not emerge out of violence. French and Quapaw never used violence against each other; as Jean Bernard Bossu, asserted, the two nations lived in “*Terre Blanche*” (white land), which meant there had been no blood spilt between the two peoples.⁴² DuVal’s understanding of French-Quapaw relations is based on an assumption of Quapaw strength. Yet, in contrast to other peoples of the region, particularly the Osage and the Chickasaw, the Quapaw had a relatively small, powerless presence in the lower Mississippi Valley. They likely could not have dictated the terms of their encounters with the French by use of force even had they wished

⁴¹ DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 5, 7.

⁴² Jean-Bernard Bossu was a French naval officer who traveled up the Mississippi Valley and left an extensive account of his observations on the French colony and its inhabitants. He visited the Quapaw in 1751, 1756, and in 1770-1771. Although scholars have pointed out some inconsistencies and historical inaccuracies in his letters, they remain an important primary source on the early period of the history of Louisiana. *Nouveaux Voyages dans L’Amérique Septentrionale ; Contenant une collection de Lettres écrites sur les lieux, par l’auteur, a son ami M. Douin, Chevalier, Capitaine dans les troupes du Roi, Ce Devant Son Camarade Dans Le Nouveau Monde* (Amsterdam : 1777), 97.

to do so. The Quapaws were badly outnumbered by their neighboring enemies. In 1700, Tonti reported that there were only about three hundred Quapaw warriors.⁴³ In contrast, in 1702, the French estimated a population of two thousand warriors for the Chickasaws and five thousand for Choctaws. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Osage numbered nearly ten thousand. By the end of the eighteenth century, Quapaw population declined as the number of their warriors was estimated around two hundred in 1794.⁴⁴

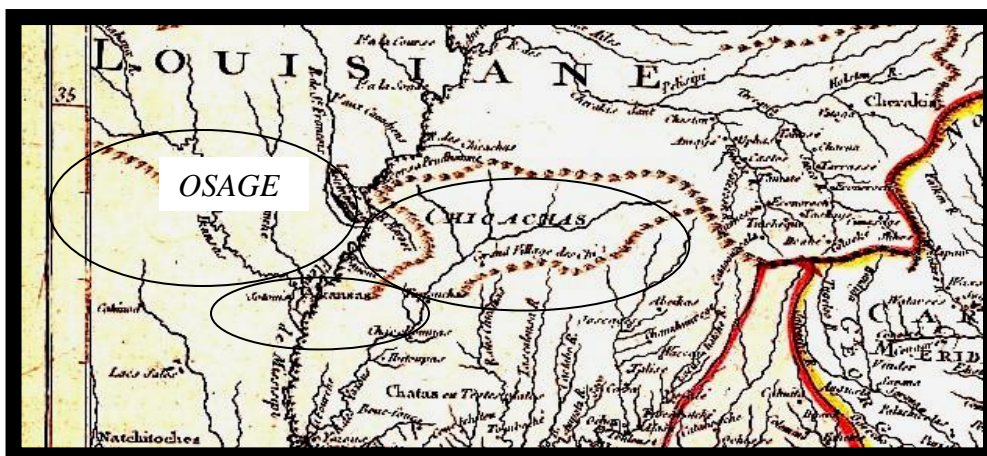


Figure 3. (Arkansas) Quapaw, (Chicachas) Chickasaw, and Osage Territories of Influence (P. Hennepin, *Voyage en un Payes Plus Grand que L'Europe*)

⁴³ For more on the Quapaw population see appendix I from Arnold's *The Rumble*, 157-160.

⁴⁴ It is hard to estimate the Quapaw population by the time the French arrived. However, in 1687, Henri Joutel, a French sailor who accompanied La Salle during his second voyage, asserted that the Quapaw population 'could' muster 700 warriors. By 1699 Father Montigny observed that epidemics, mainly smallpox, wiped out the Quapaw populations within a decade. Arnold, *The Rumble*, 157-58; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 18; Kathleen DuVal, "Choosing Enemies: The Prospects for an Anti-American Alliance in the Louisiana Territory" *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, (Autumn 2003): 235.

Instead of creating a Native Ground, the Quapaws joined the French in a struggle against their common enemies. As equally weak players in the colonial lower Mississippi Valley, the Quapaw and French could not control their enemies but sealed military and diplomatic alliances and created intimate ties that allowed them to survive. The two cemented these alliances by kinship, sexual intermingling, and intermarriages, which strengthened the ties between the French and Quapaw to create an unbreakable kinship, making the two people become “one.”⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Kathleen DuVal argues that only relatively weak natives desired the kind of compromises inherent in a “middle ground,” and that “cohesive native peoples preferred to maintain their own sovereign identities.” She pictured the Arkansas Valley as home to a few large and relatively cohesive tribes who maintained their claim to their native ground during the French conquest. DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 5.

CHAPTER 1:

The Encounter: Cohabitation and Kinship at Arkansas Post

“The [Quapaws] have always exhibited an unfailing fidelity to the French, without being drawn to the by fear or self interest. They live with the French who are near them more as brothers than as neighbors, and it is yet to happen that one has seen any misunderstanding between the two nations.”

Antoine Simon Le Page du Pratz

“The Chikachas, [Chickasaws] became our enemies since they killed and burned the French Black Robe.”

Quapaw Indians to Jean Bernard Bossu

In January 1995, an unprecedented exhibition of the three Robes of Splendor in Little Rock, Arkansas, brought Quapaw Indians from all over the country to the lands of their ancestors, the place that the French called “les pays des Arkansas.” The Robes of Splendor, buffalo hides painted by the Quapaw probably given in the eighteenth century to a Frenchman, crossed the Atlantic to France more than 200 years ago and returned to their native soil for this exhibition for the first time. In her speech, Grace Goodeagle, Chairman of the Quapaw tribe, declared “the tribe is excited at joining with our brothers and sisters and friends from across the seas in France to reaffirm a friendly alliance made between our people in the 1700’s in southeast Arkansas.”⁴⁶

The Three Villages Robe tells the story of the French and Quapaw’s alliance to struggle against common enemies facing east from Indian country. Painted after the French-Quapaw raid against the Chickasaws in 1736 or 1740,⁴⁷ the robe depicts the Quapaw and French struggle in the Mississippi Valley against their enemies. It displays the Arkansas Post and the three villages of the Quapaws located in one side opposite to Indian enemies, the Chickasaws. A line was drawn to show the Quapaw warriors moving from their villages, through the French settlement on their way to a battle against the Chickasaws: their common enemies. The details of the paintings show that the French helped to complete the painting by writing the names of the Quapaw towns over the picture of each one in French.

⁴⁶ Address of Grace Goodeagle (1996), Core Family Papers (MC 1380), box 25, folder 15. Special Collections, Robes of Splendor, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

⁴⁷ This idea was suggested by Judge Morris Arnold, author of several books on the French Quapaw relations in colonial Arkansas.



Figure 4. The Three Villages Robe (Arkansas Special Collection, Fayetteville, AR)

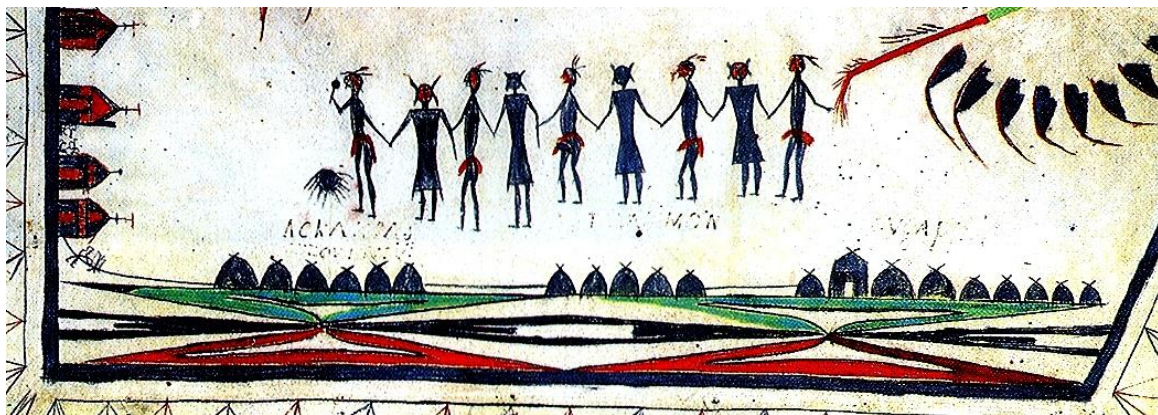


Figure 5. Details from the Three Villages Robe, Showing the three Quapaw villages and Arkansas Post located in on one side and the writings of Ackansas, Ouzovtovovi, Tovarimon, and Ovoappa in French.

I. The Spanish and Quapaw Conquest of the Mississippi Valley

During the conquest of North America, Spanish, French, and British colonial powers fought what came to be known as the Great Wars for Empire, as the winner would become the only imperial power remaining in the northern part of the western hemisphere. While exploring the newly found lands and claiming large territories by either crown was relatively easy, occupying the claimed land was harder. Economic, military, and demographic resources were needed to protect their colonies from each other and crush Native American resistance. Although they claimed the large territories of New France and Louisiana, the French remained relatively weak by contrast to the Spaniards and the British. Thus, French cohabitation with the Natives became key for the French survival during the Great Wars for Empire.

In the Valley, the Mississippian Indians received the earliest European explorers of North America: the Spaniards. Following the discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus in 1492, Spanish conquistadors explored the newly found lands to claim whatever valuables they could find and gain glory.⁴⁸ The Spanish were the first explorers of the Mississippi River Valley. The conquest of Mexico by Hernando Cortez in 1521 and the defeat of the Incas in Cusco by Francisco Pizarro in 1532 inspired Hernando de Soto in his expeditions in the interiors of North America. In 1539, de Soto reached the west coast of Florida, accompanied

⁴⁸ Sabo, *Paths of Our Children*, 7-8. While Juan Pónce de León ventured along the Atlantic coast of the Florida peninsula in 1521, Lucas Vásquez de Ayllón, along with about six hundred settlers, established a temporary colony on the coast of present-day Georgia in 1526. Two years later, following the same steps, Pánfilo de Navárez and his four hundred soldiers arrived at the western coast of Florida peninsula in search of resources in the region.

by seven hundred individuals including soldiers, craftsmen, priests and at least two women to establish a settlement in the New World. Eventually, de Soto crossed the Mississippi River in 1541 and explored the Mississippi River Valley in search of gold that he never found. De Soto followed the White and Arkansas River and explored the region for two years, during which he encountered several Native tribes including the Casqui, Pacaha, Tula, Anilco, and Guachoya.⁴⁹

The Natives of the Lower Mississippi Valley attempted to rely on kinship to establish an alliance with the Spanish *conquistador*. A Spaniard recorded that one of the Chief of the Casqui Nation, who welcomed them, offered skins and fish and then expressed his desire of offering “de Soto one of his daughters to unite his blood with that of so great a lord.”⁵⁰ However, the Spaniard failed to understand the Native way. Instead, de Soto attempted to pass for a god, with no success. In 1542, as the Spaniards ran out of food and supplies, the ailing de Soto sent a message to an Indian cacique, Quigualtam, the leader of the Anlico province located farther down the Mississippi River, claiming that he was the “son of the sun” and demanded obedience. Accustomed to being served and obeyed, Quigualtam replied that he wanted to see de Soto “dry up the great river” to prove his claim. In anticipation of an attack by Quigualtam, de Soto launched a pre-emptive strike.⁵¹

De Soto failed like other conquistadors to secure the Mississippi Valley for Spain. After his death, the remaining 200 to 300 men constructed seven boats that took them down the

⁴⁹ Sabo, *Paths of Our Children*, 8, 13, 16.

⁵⁰ Buckingham Smith, *Narratives of the Career of Hernando de Soto in the Conquest of Florida as Told by a Knight of Elvas* (New York: Bradford Club Series, 1991), 115.

⁵¹ Sabo, *Paths of Our Children*, 19.

Mississippi River. They subsequently reached Cuba by 1543. However, their presence had forever changed the power in Mississippi. They introduced Old World diseases while aggravating existing conflicts between the tribes, changing the demographics of the Natives in lower Mississippi Valley. By the time of French exploration a century later, some of the well organized and populous towns described in the Spanish accounts had disappeared.⁵²

Scholars believe that the emigration of the Quapaws occurred after de Soto's visit and before the first French expedition on the Mississippi of 1673. During their migratory voyage with their Dhegiha Sioux kinsmen, the Quapaws, whether because of fog as the legend asserts, or by conscious decision, separated from their kinsmen. Instead of going north up the Mississippi and the Missouri, they went south to Arkansas River.⁵³

The Quapaws based their political institutions and social organization on kinship. The tribe was divided into two divisions, the Sky and Earth, and each was sub-divided into clans that adopted a guardian spirit, usually animals and celestial phenomena, and assumed its name: Crawfish, Elk, Beaver, Bear, Buffalo, Wolf, Thunder, Star, and Sun.⁵⁴ To bind the tribe members, individuals from all four villages belonged to each of the two divisions (moieties) Sky and Earth and of the twenty one clans. To create kinship bonds within the tribe, the division between Sky People and Earth People also regulated marriage. The young men and women had

⁵² Sabo, *Paths of Our Children*, 29.

⁵³ Frederick Hoxie, *Encyclopedia of North American Indians: Native American History, Culture, and Life From Paleo-Indians to the Present*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 525.

⁵⁴ Baird, *Quapaw People*, 7.

to look outside their clan and moiety for marriage partners. Each Quapaw village had a hereditary chief and but the decision making involved a council of male elder, the *Wapinan*.⁵⁵

Within the Quapaw tradition, the labor was divided between the Quapaw men and women. The men hunted turkey, deer and buffalo in abundance as reported by father Pierre Du Ru who traveled up the river from New Orleans. During his visit among the Quapaws, Du Ru insisted that “it is only at Arkansas that I began to see deer and wild bull.”⁵⁶ The Quapaw also fished. Meanwhile, the Quapaw women were described as harder working than men. In addition to cooking and rearing children, they cultivated corn, beans, squash, and from the forest, they gathered walnuts, fruits, seeds, and roots.⁵⁷ Joutel explained the different sorts of corn bread prepared by the Arkansas women, which they served with smoked meat. The women cooked all kinds of dishes, and “did all the work except hunting.”⁵⁸ At the eve of the encounter with the French, the Quapaw counted approximately two thousand and five hundred individuals.

By the time of their encounter with the French, the Quapaw had not consolidated their control over the region and were required to make expeditions against Illinois Indians farther west.⁵⁹ Once they arrived at the Arkansas Valley, the Quapaw found themselves in a dangerously isolated situation, where they had to fight for the right to settle there against the already established tribes. They faced challenges from the Tunicas, Yazoo, and Koroas to the south,

⁵⁵ Hoxie, *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, 525.

⁵⁶ Journal of Pierre Du Ru, 1700, National Archives, Washington D.C..

⁵⁷ Sabo, *Paths of Our Children*, 36.

⁵⁸ Henry Joutel, *An Historical Journal of the Last Voyage Performed by Monsr. De la Salle*, 134.

⁵⁹ David Baird, *Quapaw Indians*, 14.

who regularly attacked the Quapaw settlement. Meanwhile, Quapaw hunters clashed with the Taovayas, Guichitas and Panis Noirs whenever they ventured further west. From the north, Iroquoian-speaking groups who expanded their influence into the Illinois country attacked the Quapaw occasionally.⁶⁰ The Quapaw needed weapons to challenge their enemies. Bows and arrows were inefficient against the Chickasaws, who had acquired guns from their British allies.

II. Intimacy, Kinship & Alliance at Arkansas Post

Kinship remained at the heart of the Natives' culture. The other was either a kin or a stranger. However, the stranger could be incorporated into the Natives' socio-economic network through adoption, captivity and marriage.⁶¹ During their colonial experience in the Mississippi River Valley, Frenchmen were incorporated into the Quapaw tribe, creating bonds of "brotherhood." The ceremony of the Calumet, "peace pipe," was known as the most important symbol of kinship and alliances. The Quapaw used the ceremony "to create kinship relations between the participants, so that allies would be bound by sacred obligations toward one another."⁶² During the ceremony, the distinguished guest was escorted to the center of the council house where his face was washed and he was given the seat of honor. Then, buffalo and goat skins were draped over the ground and the calumet was placed upon the hides.⁶³ Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet were the first Frenchmen to smoke the calumet among the Quapaw during the encounter in 1673.

⁶⁰ DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 69.

⁶¹ Barr, *Peace Came*, 10.

⁶² Sabo, *Paths of our Children*, 40.

⁶³ Baird, *The Quapaw Indians*, 19.

The Quapaw women brought the Frenchmen into the Quapaw's intimacy as they accomplished their task of hospitality. Among the Quapaws, hospitality was at the center of kinship while women were at the heart of hospitality. On March 12, 1682, the Quapaws welcomed another Frenchman, Robert Cavalier *Sieur de La Salle*, during his explorative voyage of the Mississippi River. Approaching the Kappa village, the French explorers detected the beat of Quapaw drums, who had been informed by the arrival of their French allies.⁶⁴ Father Membre, one of the friars who accompanied La Salle, recalled "the courtesy and fine treatment we received from these barbarians. They let us lodge where we wanted, swept the place clean for us, and gave us firewood for the three days we spent with them." Membre was pleased by the treatment the women with "pretty with white complexions," gave the Frenchmen. The Quapaw women were "so well formed that we were in admiration of their beauty and their modesty," wrote Membre.⁶⁵

La Salle assigned Henri de Tonti, a French Italian officer who accompanied him, the task to set up a French trading post among the Quapaws. Tonti lost his right hand in the explosion of a grenade, replacing it with a metal hand. In 1686 the Quapaws assisted "Tonti of the iron hand" as he built a French settlement among their villages.⁶⁶ Arkansas Post was the first French (and European) permanent settlements west of the Mississippi River. The French were convinced that the Quapaws' hospitality and friendship "gives idea of the good-hearted qualities

⁶⁴Arnold, *Unequal Laws*, 1.

⁶⁵ Philip Marchand, "Ghost Empire: How the French Almost Conquered North America," McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto, Canada, 2007, 352.

⁶⁶ Coleman, *The Arkansas Post*, 8.

of these savages,” as Father Membre confessed.⁶⁷ At the Post, French and Quapaws lived together and became intimate.

The French seemed to understand the importance of the kinship established by La Salle to preserve the Quapaw’s friendship and loyalty. After La Salle’s death in Texas, his brother, Henri Joutel, and a few others headed to Quebec and passed through the Quapaw’s land in July 1687. The Frenchmen were relieved to find themselves among the people who entered in an alliance with La Salle five years earlier. They were also delighted to see the cross left by Fr. Marquette as a sign of mutual friendship, as Joutel recalled: “we met with other parcels of Indians, who were coming to meet us, and expressed extraordinary kindness...at the village we discovered a great cross ...and a house built after the French fashion...the nation we were then with was called Accancea.”⁶⁸ The French men took refuge among the Quapaws at the Arkansas Post, who supplied them with provisions and provided them with guides for the journey on to the Illinois country.⁶⁹ During his stay, Joutel informed the Frenchmen of LaSalle’s death but decided not to reveal the fate of the Quapaw kin who had established the alliance with them in fear of losing their loyalty, and were concerned this would destabilize the fragile Arkansas Post.

From the Quapaw’s perspective, intimacy was a way to bind themselves to the French, who represented their only potential European ally and partner for trade and exchange. To the south, the neighboring Caddo Indians established trade relations with the Spanish from whom

⁶⁷ Marchand, “Ghost Empire,” 352.

⁶⁸ Joutel, *An Historical Journal*, 175.

⁶⁹ Baird, *Quapaw Indians*, 25.

they acquired European manufactured goods, including guns and bullets, as well as horses.⁷⁰ As they became increasingly threatened by the neighboring Chickasaws, who had acquired guns from the British and established a lucrative slave trade, the Quapaw benefited from their alliance with French settlers and colonial agents mainly through the development of trade relations. To solidify and advance their relationship with the French, they allowed traders, settlers, and military personnel to build and occupy the Arkansas Post in their lands.

III. The Quapaw and French as Military Allies

The Quapaw, then, lived in the shadow of the neighboring powerful tribes who attempted to create their own “native grounds” with each other and the Europeans. In 1698, a smallpox epidemic out broke among the Quapaw, reducing their population by two-thirds and leaving the tribe with less than 300 warriors.⁷¹ In 1699, Father Montigny reported that there were about two hundred Quapaw warriors. By contrast, in 1702, the French estimated a population of two thousand warriors for the Chickasaws and five thousand for Choctaws. By the mid-eighteenth

⁷⁰ The Caddo Indians were another major group that lived in Arkansas. Their communities were located around the Red River in southwest Arkansas and east Texas. For more on the Caddo Indians, see Sabo, *Paths of Our Children*; Barr, *Juliana, Peace Came in the Form of a Woman* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); and Usner, *Indians Settlers, and Slaves*. On nineteenth century Caddos, see Todd Smith, *The Caddos, the Wichitas, and the United States* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1996).

⁷¹ Baird, *The Quapaw People*, 27.

century, the Osage numbered nearly ten thousand.”⁷² Succeeding epidemics in the next seventy years cut this number by one-half. By the end of 1700, the Quapaw population was counted by hundreds instead of thousands, and was gathered in two instead of four villages.⁷³ In 1770, Demazillieres, Commandant of Arkansas Post, described a weak Quapaw tribe whose members knew that outside help was necessary if they were to survive an attack from their more powerful neighbors, as demonstrated by an episode in which “the Alcansas tribe thought the Chactas were coming to attack them and we were asked to supply them with powder and bullets.”⁷⁴

In fact, during their first encounter with Father Marquette in 1673, the Quapaw expressed their desire for guns, telling Marquette that the armed Indians he had encountered up the river, the Chickasaw, were their enemies who cut off their passage to the sea and prevented

⁷² It is hard to estimate the Quapaw population by the time the French arrived. However, in 1687, Henri Joutel, a French sailor who accompanied La Salle during his second voyage, asserted that the Quapaw population ‘could’ muster 700 warriors. By 1699 Father Montigny observed that epidemics, mainly smallpox, wiped out the Quapaw populations within a decade. Arnold, *The Rumble*, 157-58; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 18; Kathleen DuVal, “Choosing Enemies: The Prospects for an Anti-American Alliance in the Louisiana Territory” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Autumn 2003: 235.

⁷³ Baird, *The Quapaw People*, 27.

⁷⁴ “Arkansas Post Investigation, Translations of French and Spanish Documents, 1712-1785, *Archivo General de Indias Sevilla*, Arkansas Colonial Papers, (MC 432), Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

them from establishing commerce with the Europeans.⁷⁵ In 1721, French soldiers at the Arkansas Post reported that the Quapaw “had recently situated all of their villages on the Arkansas River for protection from the Chickasaws.”⁷⁶

The “long time foes,” Chickasaws and Quapaws, were engaged in a “potentially endless chain of reciprocated homicides” against one another. The Chickasaws occupied a large territory strategically surrounded by the Mississippi, Yazoo, Tombigbee and Tennessee Rivers. In search of deerskins and Indian slaves, the English created a military alliance with the Chickasaws, making them one of the most powerful tribes in the Mississippi Valley. As the Chickasaws had access to guns through the British well before the Quapaw acquired them from the French, the Chickasaws dominated the Quapaw early on, and continued to do so for many decades thereafter. The Quapaws and Chickasaws were at war when La Salle sealed an alliance with them in 1682.⁷⁷ French travelers reported an “ancient animosity that existed between the Quapaw and Chickasaws.”⁷⁸ Bands of Chickasaws frequently raided to enslave Quapaws, “hundreds of whom they traded to the English at Charles Town for guns, ammunition, and horses.”⁷⁹ In 1749, when

⁷⁵ Arnold, *The Rumble*, 19. In search of deerskins and Indian slaves, the English created a military alliance with the Chickasaws, making them one of the most powerful tribes in the Mississippi Valley; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*.

⁷⁶ Jeter, Marvin, “European Explorers in the Mississippi Valley,” Arkansas Archeological Survey, 2001.

⁷⁷ Arnold, *The Rumble*, 71.

⁷⁸ Baird, *The Quapaw People*, 6.

⁷⁹ DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 69.

Chickasaw raiders took a number of Quapaw women and children captives.⁸⁰ The Quapaw repaid this attention by carrying out isolated raids on the Chickasaws. They were not always victorious.

As a result of their territorial expansion, the Osage occasionally clashed with the Quapaw as they hunted too far down the Arkansas River, a territory claimed by the Osage. The Osage remained one of the most powerful Indian groups in the Mississippi Valley throughout the colonial period. During this era, the Osage expanded their territory, “taking control of large portions of Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Kansas,” at the expense of other Indian tribes.⁸¹ Osage control of the region increased to occupy more than 500 miles of the Arkansas River Valley by 1758, while the vulnerable Quapaws could only watch “with alarm as Osage dominance grew.”⁸² By the mid-seventeenth century, the Osage intensified their attacks against the Quapaws and Caddos, “stealing horses and skins.” A growing fear of the Osage bound all Indian villages on the northwestern periphery of the Lower Mississippi Valley more tightly.⁸³

IV. The French Needed the Indians

Similarly, the French needed the Indians to pursue their colonial ambition. In 1682, La Salle reached the mouth of the Mississippi River and claimed the whole valley for France and named the region Louisiana to honor King Louis XIV. La Salle reported of hospitable Native tribes, such as the Quapaw, who offered trade opportunities and diplomatic alliances necessary for the

⁸⁰ Baird, *The Quapaw People*, 21.

⁸¹ Sabo, *Paths of our Children*, 76.

⁸² DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 111, 117, 148.

⁸³ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 107.

French survival. The speculations over an eventual Spanish expansion into the eastern frontiers of the colony of Louisiana from Pensacola prompted the French to establish more settlements. The French crown ordered the establishment of posts along the “Big River.” These widely scattered trade posts’ survival was bound to their relations with Native American tribes.⁸⁴ The inhabitants were primarily traders, who established intimate contact with the Indians among whom they lived, rather than colonists *per se*. This attachment to the Indians was to maintain sovereignty over the French newly claimed colony of Louisiana situated between their rivals: the British and the Spaniards.⁸⁵

Strategically located at the confluence of the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers, Quapaws were critical to the economic and geopolitical survival of the French in the region. Initially built for commerce with the Quapaws, Arkansas Post provided the colony economic support. Rumors of the presence of gold in the Arkansas River attracted entrepreneurs such as Bernard de la Harp,

⁸⁴ Baird, *The Quapaw People*, 18.

⁸⁵ Baird, *The Quapaw Indians*, 24. It was La Salle’s second voyage that demonstrated the French-Spanish rivalry on their western borderlands. Blessed by the King, La Salle left the port of La Rochelle, France in 1684, accompanied by two hundred colonists to establish a settlement at the mouth of the Mississippi River. La Salle, accidentally or intentionally, missed the “Big River” and landed in Tejas (Texas), a territory claimed by the Spaniards. The Spaniards launched expeditions to capture the “invaders” and immediately sent a missionary among the Indians to ensure their loyalty and prevent them from forming an alliance with the French. It is very plausible that La Salle missed the river intentionally in order to expand the boundaries of the colony of Louisiana.

followed by settlers and adventurers, as early as 1722 and it was indeed only a rumor.⁸⁶ French influence was mostly represented by nameless *coureurs de bois* and voyageurs who engaged the Quapaw in a lucrative fur trade. The revenues from the fur and skin trade at Arkansas Post with the Osage tribe alone averaged \$18,750.00 annually during colonial era.⁸⁷ The area was also a source of bear oil (manteca), very important to the Europeans as a preserving agent. Arkansas Post produced and shipped between 1,250 and 1,500 gallons of the oil annually to New Orleans.⁸⁸ In 1765, Captain Philip Pittman said that people at Arkansas Post subsisted by hunting and sent to New Orleans every season “great quantities of bear’s oil, tallow, salted buffalo meat, and few skins.”⁸⁹ In 1775, the principal merchant at the Post, François Menard, contracted for ten thousand pounds of buffalo tallow. In 1793, Captain Pierre Rousseau reported that he encountered two pirogues on the Mississippi River belonging to Mr. Menard coming from Arkansas “loaded with peltry and salted meat” going to New Orleans.⁹⁰

As the first permanent European settlement west of the Mississippi River, Arkansas Post became of extreme geopolitical importance for the French claim in the region. Located between the two French colonies New France and Louisiana, the Post connected French

⁸⁶ Baird, *The Quapaw People*, 20.

⁸⁷ Arnold, *Colonial*, 62.

⁸⁸ Coleman, *The Arkansas Post*, 25.

⁸⁹ Letter from Captain Joseph Orieta to Luis de Unzaga, Governor of Louisiana, December 5, 1770, *Papales de Cuba, Legajo 107, Archivo General de Indias*, Seville, Spain.

⁹⁰ Letter from Captain Don Fernando de Leyba to Governor Unzaga, May 10, 1771, *Papeles de Cuba, Legajo 107, Archivo General de Indias*, Seville, Spain.

possessions in North America. Although weak and small, the Post had a geographical and diplomatic value. The Post represented the only French presence in the region and thus became a target for raids from the powerful Indian tribes of the Mississippi Valley, while the Quapaw were courted by their European rivals.



Figure 6. Map of the Arkansas Post Location (Archives, Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, France)

The stability of the Post and thus the French presence in the Mississippi Valley was threatened by the British competition throughout eighteenth century. On the eastern borderlands between the British colonies and French Louisiana the two colonial powers contested for control of North America. Colonists from Carolina reached out to the interior of the continent and engaged in trade with Indian tribes, such as the Chickasaws, on the frontier as early as 1670. Given the strategic location of their settlement, the French and Quapaw believed allegiance was critical to any European power aspiring to dominate the Mississippi River Valley.⁹¹ By 1700, Governor Joseph Blake reached out to the Quapaw. The delegates, a group of traders, carried presents of ammunition and other merchandise to establish a commercial and political relationship with Britain. Another British attempt to create an alliance with the Quapaw was made by Thomas Welsh, a Carolina trader, who convened a council of the Quapaw and other Indians in the region in 1708, in the midst of the Queen Anne's War, a larger colonial conflict between France and Britain.⁹²

At the end of the Great Wars for Empire, the British Empire continued its efforts in challenging the Spaniards on the western borderlands. By 1769, a third British attempt to destabilize Arkansas Post, now in transition of transfer to the Spanish authority, came from an Englishwoman known as Magdelon. The English established a trading post opposite to mouth of the Arkansas River, on the east side of the Mississippi River. Few months later, Magdelon and ten British traders entered the Arkansas River and visited the Quapaw villages. They took

⁹¹ Baird, *The Quapaw People*, 18-19.

⁹² Baird, *The Quapaw Indians*, 27, 29.

advantage of the political vacuum in the colony to attempt to convince the Quapaw that they would soon “depend on the English” for manufactured goods, including guns and ammunitions.⁹³

As a gateway to the west, Arkansas Post attracted French adventurers who challenged the Spanish hold in New Mexico. As early as 1739, Pierre Mallet and his younger brother Paul left the Post and followed the Arkansas and Canadian Rivers in search of rich resources and opened a trade route for commercial exchange with Indian tribes further west. As a result of the Mallet’s successful journey, the Post became home to an increasing number of French hunters and traders who engaged in a profitable trade with the distant region of the Southwest.⁹⁴ To protect its territories, the Spanish soldiers intercepted the “invaders,” confiscated their goods, and imprisoned them. In an attempt to end the threat of a French expansion into its borderlands, the Spanish crown urged the French authorities to close the Arkansas-Canadian route and prevent further French intrusions. Governor De Kerleréc demanded help from the Quapaw chief, Guedetonguay, in 1756 to stop further commerce between Arkansas Post and New Spain, in order to avoid another imperial geopolitical conflict.⁹⁵

The dominant Indian groups in the lower Mississippi Valley threatened the French Post as well. As early as 1687, Henri Joutel, who traveled from the land of the Tejas to Arkansas Post, reported that the Quapaws “were amazed at our having passed through so many nations, without having been detained, or killed, considering what a small number we were.”⁹⁶ Of all the

⁹³ Coleman, *The Arkansas Post*, 55, 56.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 31.

⁹⁵ Baird, *The Quapaw People*, 22.

⁹⁶ Joutel, *An Historical Journal* , 176.

challenging native tribes, the Natchez Indians offered the bloodiest and most bitter resistance to the French presence in the Louisiana during the first decades of eighteenth century. The Natchez villages were populous and prosperous thanks to their animal resources and fertile soils, appropriate for tobacco plantations. The Europeans and their African slaves, employed by the Company of Indies, introduced disease that decimated their population with the first two decades of eighteenth century.⁹⁷ Several quarrels between the French and the Natchez that involved killing and revenge from both parties succeeded throughout 1720s. However, an Indian alliance formed between the Natchez, Chickasaws, Yazous, and other confederate tribes to conduct a joint attack on the French Fort Rosalie at Natchez in the year of 1729. As a result of what became to be known as the Natchez Massacre, the Natchez warriors killed 145 men, 36 women and 56 children and took numerous captives. A French-Indian expedition on December of the same year destroyed the Natchez. The survivors found refuge among strong Indian tribes, including the Choctaws and the Chickasaws.⁹⁸

The Chickasaws also targeted Arkansas Post throughout the French period and into the early years of Spanish authority. Allied with the traditional enemy of and competitor to the French, the British, the Chickasaws came to be known for their warlike tendencies towards the French. To neutralize the Chickasaws, the French offered the Choctaws, already at war with them, “one gun, one pound of powder and two pounds of bullets for each Chickasaw scalp,” as early as 1721.⁹⁹ The French organized several expeditions against the Chickasaws. Within the

⁹⁷ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 65, 66.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 72-73.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 65.

next decade, however, the French experienced bitter reprisals.¹⁰⁰ In 1749, a group of about one hundred and fifty Chickasaw warriors attacked Arkansas Post, burned the settlement, and took captives.¹⁰¹ In 1770, Chickasaws crossed to the Arkansas River to pillage the French hunters of their powder. The post was attacked again in 1783 by the Chickasaws and their British allies.¹⁰² The isolation and weakness of the post showed the French need to help the Quapaws to secure their shaky hold in the region.

The French were present in smaller numbers than the Quapaws. The number of settlers and soldiers at the Post was forty one in 1723. Even though the French government was eager to protect its strategic trade post by establishing a permanent garrison; throughout the century the population remained under four hundred individuals.¹⁰³ Much like members of the weaker Indian

¹⁰⁰ Coleman, *The Arkansas Post Story*, 37.

¹⁰¹ Arnold, *Unequal Laws*, 22.

¹⁰² During the attack, launched on April, several French settlers were taken captive. In a letter from the Captain of infantry J. Dubreuil Commander of the Arkansas Post to James Colbert, subject of his British Majesty, who resided among the Chickasaws, he informed him that “several persons [taken] captive and had carried off some property as well.” The Commander requested Colbert to return the captives and pay for the stolen property. A request to which Colbert decided he was “within my rights for not paying.” Jacobo Dubreuil; Anna Lewis, “Charles III, Arkansas Reports for the Year 1783,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 20, No. 4. (Mar., 1934), 537-549. See also Arnold, *The Rumble*, 108, 113.

¹⁰³ For more details on Arkansas Post population see appendix II from Arnold’s *Colonial Arkansas*, 179-181.

tribes in the area, French settlers and hunters were often targeted by the Osage. Hunters who dared to venture onto the river and into Osage territory were systematically attacked. In 1721 six Frenchmen tried to travel up the river to acquire horses from the Wichitas, but the Osage ambushed and killed them.¹⁰⁴ Osages killed several other Frenchmen and their slaves in the Arkansas region in 1733 and 1740.¹⁰⁵ Antoine Lepine was robbed of his hides, gun powder, and weapons by the Osage; Lepine survived the ordeal and returned to the Arkansas Post “in very bad shape.”¹⁰⁶ Commandant Leyba informed Governor Vaudreuil that the Arkansas Post was “the weakest in the colony,” and feared that the Osage might destroy it.¹⁰⁷ The French could neither dominate the Indians nor negotiate a middle ground with the vast majority of the tribes in the region. The exception to this rule were the Quapaws, who sought to form bonds with the French in the hope that their common enemies might not be able to overwhelm combined French-Quapaw forces as easily as they had done when the two groups were separate.

V. Brothers in Arms: The French and Quapaw Military Alliance

As equally weak colonial players in the lower Mississippi Valley, the Quapaw and French could not destroy their enemies, so instead they created ties and formed military and diplomatic alliances and that allowed them to survive. As a result, French and Quapaw became valuable

¹⁰⁴ Arnold, *The Rumble*, 60.

¹⁰⁵ Arnold, *Colonial*, 113.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from Captain Orieta to Governor Unzaga, September 11, 1771, *Papeles de Cuba, Legajo 107, Archivo General de Indias*, Seville, Spain.

¹⁰⁷ Letter from Fernando de Leyba to Governor, January 4, 1772, *Papeles de Cuba, Legajo 107, Archivo General de Indias*, Seville, Spain.

military allies. As early as 1721, Second Lieutenant de la Boulaye and his company of thirteen soldiers joined the Quapaws at first lien military post built among them. French needed their Arkansas allies to contain the British interest they themselves could not destroy.¹⁰⁸ Without their Quapaw and Choctaw allies, the French would have undoubtedly had to abandon the Mississippi during the Natchez uprising in 1729, as noted by Colonial Governor Etienne De Pérrier. “[The Quapaw] are so necessary for us that one cannot do too much in their favor.” “Their attachment to the French kept the English from passing the Mississippi after the Natchez Revolt.”¹⁰⁹ In fact, because of the raids and floods, Arkansas Post moved several times. When the French moved the Post to Ecores Rouges, the Quapaw, their brothers and sisters, moved with them.¹¹⁰ The French relocated twice more, and the Quapaws moved with them each time.

The Quapaw were also present in French campaigns against rival Indian groups. For instance, in 1736 the French-Quapaw alliance launched successful attacks against the Chickasaws.¹¹¹ Guedetonguay, the Medal Chief of the Quapaws lost one of his sons and had another one wounded during a battle between the two perpetually warring groups. In 1739, when Colonial Governor Jean Baptiste Lemoyne, *Sieur de Bienville* planned an expedition against the Chickasaws via the Bluffs, the Quapaws provided guides and hunters. In 1740 the French gathered a force of 3,600 men, including the Quapaws, to eradicate the Chickasaws, who quickly

¹⁰⁸ Baird, *The Quapaw People*, 19.

¹⁰⁹ Arnold, *The Rumble*, 24.

¹¹⁰ Core Family Papers (MC 1380), box 25, folder 15. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

¹¹¹ Arnold, *Unequal Laws*, 76.

petitioned for peace. Throughout the 1740s, a military detachment was maintained among the Quapaws; in return, their chiefs were annually honored in New Orleans.¹¹² Eventually, a 1784 pact put an end to Chickasaw depredations against their weaker neighbor and allowed the Quapaw to “enjoy the presents lavished upon them and to engage in the commerce confined to Fort Carlos [Arkansas Post].”¹¹³

After they secured an alliance with the French, the Quapaw on several occasions urged the Arkansas commandant to launch an attack against the powerful Osage. By the 1770s old enemies the Chickasaws and Quapaws formed an alliance, joined by a rag-tag collection of Indians from other tribes, in an ill-fated “effort to destroy the Osage.”¹¹⁴ In 1771, a Quapaw war party led one of the few successful attacks against an Osage party, taking five Osage scalps and two female prisoners.¹¹⁵ But this minor success did nothing to stop the Osage from their raids and reprisals on both the Quapaws and the French settlers and hunters of Arkansas Post.

Both French and Spanish authorities used the gift giving diplomacy with Indian tribes, including the Quapaws. During the French (1699-1763) and Spanish (1763-1801) regimes, Louisiana governors made annual distributions of presents to strengthen Quapaw support.¹¹⁶ Governor De Kerleréc, noted that the Quapaw “in general [is] a brave nation, which merits

¹¹² *Ibid*, 25.

¹¹³ Baird, *The Quapaw People*, 47.

¹¹⁴ Arnold, *The Rumble*, 108.

¹¹⁵ Arnold, *Unequal Laws*, 72, 75.

¹¹⁶ Hoxie, *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, 525.

friendship and bounties from the French.”¹¹⁷ From the Quapaws’ perspective, gift-giving was part of their kinship and alliance created with the French since they smoked the calumet with Marquette and La Salle. Although they too offered gifts, the Spaniards did not forge a close relationship with the Quapaws. In 1770, De Mazellieres reported to the governor that the Quapaw disliked the new Spanish official, Commandant Joseph Orieta, and they “speak only of abandoning the Post.”¹¹⁸

After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the Quapaw attempted in vain to create a relationship with the Americans similar to those with the French and Spaniards. The Americans, who were strongly established in North America did not need military support; instead they needed and wanted land. As other Native tribes throughout what would become the United States of America, the Quapaws ceded their lands after signing treaties in 1818, in 1824, and in 1834, they were removed, initially to Texas and then finally to the reservation in the Indian Territory of Oklahoma.¹¹⁹

By 1803 however, commerce with Europeans had changed the Quapaws life style and tribal organization. Economically, the Quapaws, like many other tribes in the region, devoted most of their time to hunt skins and pelts in much demand by the Europeans and ignored agriculture. In addition, the Quapaws, like other Natives, became dependent of European goods, including alcohol. By 1786 the Quapaw chiefs urged the Spanish authority to prohibit the selling of liquors among their people. Socially, trade and “the presence of military garrison meant that

¹¹⁷ Baird, *The Quapaw Indians*, 36.

¹¹⁸ Coleman, *The Arkansas Post*, 55,56

¹¹⁹ David Baird, *The Quapaws*, 100.

many white men took Quapaw women as mates.”¹²⁰ In fact, a few Quapaw-French mixed race families remained in Arkansas until the late nineteenth century. The Quapaw still living in Arkansas were encouraged to move into the reservation to be adopted and added into the tribal roll to receive revenues from the Federal government.¹²¹

Throughout their colonial experience, the French considered the Quapaws to be their strongest and most faithful allies in the lower Mississippi Valley. According to Colonial Governor Louis de Kerleréc in 1785, “The Arkansas [Quapaw] nation commenced to be attached to them [The French] as soon as they knew them, and never varied in their attachment to us. In vain did the British solicit their attachment to them. This Arkansas nation is still the only one which has never soaked their hands in French blood. We live among them without defiance.”¹²² In fact, as the commandant of the Post generally had monopoly of the trade, the Quapaws had to accept poor quality goods at higher prices. They paid twenty deerskins for one and a half yards of stroud, while sixty buffalo hides were spent to purchase a single gun, and one hide for only ten bullets.¹²³ The British offered better goods for cheaper prices which would have been attractive to the Natives, yet the downstream people remained attached to the French. The Spaniards offered annual gifts and medals to the chiefs, but the Quapaw remained loyal to the French.

¹²⁰ Baird, *The Quapaw People*, 30.

¹²¹ Billie Rice Family Papers, Private Collection, Quapaw Town, Oklahoma.

¹²² Core Family Papers (MC 1380), box 25, file 15, Special Collections, Robes of Splendor, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

¹²³ Baird, *The Quapaw Indians*, 36.

The next chapter will show how the Quapaws' allegiance was not determined by economics and military alliance alone. The Arkansas Post Commandant noticed that "the Quapaw's attachment to us has led them to follow this settlement in the various moves that it has made; their private and political interests won't allow them to move away. Our common security depends on the ease with which we can rally to each other's assistance. Our alliance has always been this way."¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Balthazar de Villiers, Commandant of Arkansas Post, 1778, "Arkansas Post Investigation, Translations of French and Spanish Documents, 1712-1785, *Archivo General de Indias* Sevilla, Arkansas Colonial Papers, (MC 432), Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

CHAPTER 2:

Sexual and Marital Unions between the Quapaw Women and Frenchmen

“The [Quapaw] women are better made than those of the last village that we passed.”

Father Henri Joutel

“[At the Arkansas Post] many of our compatriots took Indian wives, a default of whites, from the beginning of the settlement... [it was] a pleasure seeing these women who were showing a great affection towards the French, they prefer them to the Spanish.”

Jean Bernard Bossu

Father Marquette in 1673, Robert LaSalle in 1682, and then Jean Bernard Bossu in 1751 sealed kinship ties for the French with the Quapaw. In his accounts of the Mississippi Valley Indians, Jean Bernard Bossu reported that the French were welcomed upon their arrival and that “all the Indians came to receive us offering us a hand and the calumet.”¹²⁵ Bossu gave a detailed description of the Quapaw hospitality extended when he danced and smoked the calumet with the Quapaw during a ceremony.¹²⁶ During his first trip, the Quapaws adopted Bossu, a French naval officer, who acted as a military adviser during their war against the Chickasaws.¹²⁷ When Bossu returned a second time to the Arkansas Post in 1770, the Quapaw received him in the most welcoming way. “Your children, *les Akancas*, cried your absence since fourteen harvests and six moons,” confessed the Quapaw.¹²⁸ Bossu recalled that “their women were extremely beautiful,” and had no qualms about revealing that at the Arkansas Post “many of our compatriots took

¹²⁵ Jean-Bernard Bossu, *Nouveaux Voyages aux Indes Occidentales; Contenant une Relation des différent Peuples qui habitent les environs du grand Fleuve Saint-Louis, appelé vulgairement le Mississippi; leur religion; leur gouvernement; leurs moeurs; leurs guerres et leur commerce.*

Paris: 1768, 130. Bossu was a French naval officer who traveled up the Mississippi Valley and left an extensive account of his activities and observations. He visited the Quapaw in 1751 and in 1770-1771. During the “discovery” of the Americas, travel accounts were meant to be sensational and thus should be read and interpreted with care. Although there are some questions as to the credibility of his accounts, scholars, including Morris Arnold, believe that there is much validity to them, though they should be read with a degree of caution.

¹²⁶ Arnold, Morris, *The Rumble*, 87.

¹²⁷ Bossu, *Nouveaux Voyages aux Indes Occidentales*, 100.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 233.

Indian wives, a default of whites, from the beginning of the settlement.¹²⁹ Bossu affirmed that it was “a pleasure seeing these women who were showing a great affection towards the French, they prefer them to the Spanish.”¹³⁰

Throughout human history, sexual relations have created and maintained bonds. While the institution of monogamous marriage, from the European perspective, was meant to unite two people legally, marriage was also a way of creating and maintaining social connections. Both sex and marriage can be used as political instruments for diplomatic and economic purposes among Native and European societies. During the conquest of North America, Indians and French relied on sexual intimacy and intermarriages between Frenchmen and Indian women to create bonds between the two people. In the West, Frenchmen found Indian women as their only option as sexual partners. Through marriage, French *coureurs de bois* and hunters established the necessary kin connections with Indians that were vital for their settlement in the Indian territories.¹³¹ Similarly, the Indian woman secured a provider of European goods including cooking pots and beads for themselves and military allies and guns for their people.

¹²⁹ Samuel Dickinson, *New Travels in North America by Jean-Bernard Bossu, 1770-1771*, (Natchitoches: Northwestern State University, 1982), 44.

¹³⁰ Bossu, *Nouveaux voyage dans l'Amérique septentrionale, Contenant une collection de Lettres écrites sur les lieux, par l'auteur, a son ami M. Douin, Chevalier, Capitaine dans les troupes du Roi, Ce Devant Son Camarade Dans Le Nouveau Monde*. Amsterdam: 1777, 106.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 68.

I. Concubinage at Arkansas Post

Sexual intimacy is one way the French and other native peoples created and maintained social bonds. The French understood that sexual relations were part of a broader relationship with the Natives. *Habitants*, *voyageurs*, and *coureurs de bois* spent much of their time in Indian villages where they lived not as *conquistadors* but as consorts.¹³² Extant colonial correspondence also offers some hints of sexual unions in which Frenchmen kept Quapaw “concubines”.

In De Virzaga’s letter to the Governor on June 26, 1770 he told of “an unpleasant affair” involving a man who kept an Indian widow, and her three daughters, in his house. Similarly, within the same year, Demazellieres, commandant of the Post, reported that Francoeur, a French hunter, had come from the “Arkansas River with [wife]¹³³ and children; they are in great poverty, the children not even having a shirt.”¹³⁴ The mixed-race couple sought help from both their French and Quapaw kin: “we helped him a while, then he sought help from the Arkansas tribes,”

¹³² Stephen Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 2006), 15.

¹³³ The original word the translator used was ‘woman,’ however; the French word ‘*femme*’ means both ‘woman’ and ‘wife.’ Because of the grammar (absence of the article *une*) and the semantic of the sentence, I think the word ‘wife’ is more appropriate here.

¹³⁴ Demazellieres interpreted the nakedness as evidence of poverty, while it could have been actually evidence of the wild way of life with the “savages.”

Demazellieres informed the Governor.¹³⁵ Demazellieres promised to help them bring their belongings from the river. He had ordered them “to go to the city to get married and have the children baptized.”¹³⁶ De Villiers, commandant of the Post in 1776, expressed his hope to the governor that Arkansas Post could become what he called a “respectable Post,” though he doubted that such a thing could ever happen as “the families of the hunters are for the most part lazy people of bad breeding.” He claimed that the hunters and Indian women gave birth to “bastard *métis* kids.”¹³⁷ Although the officials were scandalized by what they seemed to consider *concubinage*, these couples very well might have had married in the Indian way. Once again, it is not clear whether these half Indian children were actually Quapaw, and we will probably never know for certain. But given the hunters dependence on the Quapaws for their survival, it seems likely that the hunters would have sought intermarriage to Quapaw women as an easy means of assuring this survival.

¹³⁵ “Arkansas Post Investigation,” Translations of French and Spanish Documents, 1712-1785. *Archivo General de Indias Sevilla*, Arkansas Colonial Papers, (MC 432), Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Core Family Papers (MC 1380), Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville; Jacobo Dubreuil; Anna Lewis, “Charles III, Arkansas Reports for the Year 1783,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 20, No. 4. (Mar., 1934), pp. 537-549.

II. French Policy on Intermarriage with Indians

The main difference between the French and other European powers in North America was in their use of social and intimate liaisons to further political and diplomatic goals. During their first encounters with the Indians, Spaniards enslaved hundreds of native women to serve as concubines.¹³⁸ Consequently, the Spanish were shocked to learn that many Frenchmen had taken “*indias*” as wives. This term designated Indian women who remained “uncivilized” and lived among their people with their French spouses within the Indian tradition. Although they did intermix with native women, as the large *mestizo* populations demonstrated, Spaniards did not marry “*indias*” but instead only Indian women who were brought to the Spanish settlements, where they were “civilized,” that is, Christianized and indoctrinated in European ways, were deemed worthy of marriage.¹³⁹ While the former, the “*india*,” created kinship ties between her nation and her “Indianized” French husband, the latter was “Europeanized” among the Spaniards, isolated from her native world, and completely immersed in her new “civilized” world. She, then, could not serve as a mediator between the two worlds.

The French authority changed its policy concerning intermarriage and sexual unions between Frenchmen and Indian women to serve its specific political purposes in New France and

¹³⁸ Antonia Castaneda’s work on Spanish conquistadores suggested the use of rape and sexual violence against indigenous women as a military strategy in the southwestern borderlands.

Castaneda, Antonia, *et al.*, *Gender on the Borderlands: The Frontiers Reader* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007). Spanish rapes and sexual assaults against the *indias* were believed to dishonor and thus dis-empower native men through symbolic castration.

¹³⁹ Barr, *Peace Came*, 88.

Louisiana. Unlike marriage with the African women, prohibited by the *Code Noir*, marriage with the Indian women seemed to follow the same rules as marriage with the Europeans.¹⁴⁰ The French Royal Ordinance of 1639 defined marriage in strict legal terms, where the ceremony had to have the formal consent of the bride's and the groom's parents and a required number of witnesses. Marriages that failed to comply with these regulations were legally invalid.¹⁴¹ However, as *concubinage* became more frequent within the French colony, French authority eased marriage regulations and encouraged intermarriages. As the need to increase the population to fortify the colony grew, the Church encouraged *métissage* in order to form a strong nation in New France.

Sexual encounters in the Mississippi River Valley were very similar to those experienced in New France. As early as La Salle's second voyage to Louisiana, Henri Joutel, who accompanied La Salle in this journey, asserted that he blessed the marriage of a Frenchman, *Sieur Barbier* and an Indian woman.¹⁴² On his way to Arkansas Post, Joutel wrote of two

¹⁴⁰ Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 1. In 1724, a code of laws to govern the French colonies in the Caribbean, *le Code Noir*, was enacted in Louisiana. The code restricted the whites' behavior as they could not marry or live in *concubinage* with *mullattoes* or blacks, whether slave or free.

¹⁴¹ Aubert Guillaume, "*Français, Negres et Sauvages:*" *Constructing Race in Colonial Louisiana*, (Ph.D. Dissertation, Tulane University, 2002), 39.

¹⁴² Joutel asserted that when Barbier went out hunting he usually sent with him some women and maids, to help the hunters to dress and dry the flesh. Eventually, Joutel was informed that

Frenchmen who lived among the Ceniz Indians, Buter and Grollet. He was astonished that “they had, in that short space of time, so perfectly inured themselves to the customs of the natives that they had become mere savages.” He described them as naked and asserted that they “had taken several wives, been at the wars, and killed their enemies with their firelocks, which had gained them reputation.” Joutel relates the story of a couple of two other unnamed French that he labeled “half-savage Frenchmen,” who were already incorporated among other Indian tribes, with their Indian wives, living in the Indian way.¹⁴³ Marriage in the Indian way between Frenchmen and Louisiana’s Indian women was a widespread practice as early as the late seventeenth century.

As the French officials realized that intermarriage with Indian women meant the ‘Indianization’ of the Frenchmen, intermarriages were banned. As early as 1714, Father Henri Roulleaux de La Vente argued that “in order to populate the colony [we need] to permit

Barbier used to slip aside from the company, with a young maid he had kindness for. In a private conversation with Joutel, he expressed his desire to leave to marry that young woman. Joutel affirmed that he “made some difficulties of it at first, but at last, considering they might have anticipated upon matrimony, I took the advice of the Recollet Fathers, and of M. Chedeville, the priest, and allowed them to marry.” Joutel added that following this example, other Frenchmen asked for the same privilege. Henri Joutel’s journal indicated during Robert LaSalle’s expedition among the Ceniz Indians, he had blessed many of these unions himself. Henri Joutel, *An Historical Journal*, 72, 128, 155.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 117.

marriages between Frenchmen and Catholic Indian women.”¹⁴⁴ De La Vente understood that as long as the Frenchmen remained among the Indians and their wives and children “uncivilized,” these unions neither populated nor benefited the colony. The same year, Governor Cadillac qualified the French colonists of Louisiana as “a mass of rascallions from Canada, without subordination, with no respect for religion, and abandoned in vice with Indian women, whom they prefer to French girls.” He also qualified as “intolerable” the fact that “all the soldiers had Indian wives who cooked for them and waited upon them.”¹⁴⁵ As the situation remained unchanged, Governor De Vaudreuil reversed the course of the policy and banned intermarriages with Indian women a year after.¹⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the laws did not prevent sexual unions and intermarriages between the Frenchmen and the “*sauvages*”. The French needed Indians as allies, partners in exchange, and sexual partners. Sexual intimacies and intermarriages between Frenchmen and Indian women facilitated trade. Through marriage, French *coureurs de bois* and hunters established the necessary kin connections with Indians that were vital for their settlement in the Indian

¹⁴⁴ Jennifer Spear, “Colonial Intimacies: Legislating Sex in French Louisiana,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 1, January, 2003.

¹⁴⁵ Albert James Pickett & Thomas McAdory Owen, *History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi From the Earliest Period*, (Birmingham: Webb Book Company, 1900), 188.

¹⁴⁶ Belmessous Saliha, “Assimilation and Radicalism in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century French Colonial Policy,” *American Historical Association*, Vol. 110, no 2, April 2005.

territories.¹⁴⁷ It was within this economic system, in which the Indian women did all the work, that French and Indians came in close contact.¹⁴⁸ In fact, the French officials who were in constant contact with the Indians did not enforce the laws. The commandants of the French posts often overlooked these unions. Additionally, priests allowed and often celebrated intermarriages between Frenchmen the Indian women, which they preferred over ‘*concubinage*’ and the birth of illegitimate *métis* children.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, Frenchmen often found Indian women as their only option as sexual partners. In fact, French Posts commandants and governors in French Louisiana frequently asked for French women from the homeland.

In consequence of the complaints made to the Minister, French authorities sent women from France in an attempt to put an end to miscegenation. The king agreed to send one hundred women annually, to increase the colonial population in Louisiana; twelve women taken from a house of correction in Paris arrived at the colony by 1713. After their arrival, the King’s girls, as they became to be known, were to live with Sister Gertrude, a catholic nun, until they might marry.¹⁵⁰ Yet the French continued marrying Indian women. The French women remained unmarried. Duclos, Commissary General, speculated that the “girls were too ugly and badly formed to secure the affections of the men.” He asserted that in the future, “if they were only to

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, x, 60, 68.

¹⁴⁸ Patrick Yung, “French-Indian Intermarriage and the Creation of a Métis Society,” website, <http://www.uwgb.edu/wisfrench/library/articles/metis.htm>

¹⁴⁹ White, *The Middle Ground*, 70.

¹⁵⁰ These girls were also to remain under the surveillance of the Ursuline nuns until marriage.

Pickett & McAdory Owen, *History of Alabama*, 154.

be offered girls as ugly as these they would rather attach themselves to Indian females.”¹⁵¹ More girls were sent from France in response to the officials’ complaints concerning the need for wives. In 1720, twenty-five women arrived. In 1727 vessel arrived with few women, who, unlike many others who had been sent to Louisiana, had not been taken from the house of correction. Clearly, the arrival of a larger number of French women in Louisiana did not mark an end to the French-Indian sexual relations; however, marrying Indian women was a matter of practicality rather than preference.

III. Marriage at Arkansas Post

Arkansas Post attracted some of these French marriageable women, but it was more practical for the French hunters to marry Quapaw women as a means to establish economic and diplomatic alliances. They not only secured protection of their families but could also, like Quapaw men, “rely entirely upon the work of their squaws for the necessities of life.” They took advantage of the expertise of their working the skins and pelts, as Arkansas Post produced a thousand deer skins per a year.”¹⁵² According to Dumont de Montigny, the Indian women were “very hardworking. They have the cares of the household, they till the soil, sow and reap, and cook the meals...when her husband kills a deer or a buffalo, he never brings it home...he tells her where to find the animal and she walks in her husband’s track to find it and carries it to the hut.” The woman cooks what she needed and trades the rest of it to the French or smoke the meat and dries

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Jean Baptist Le Moyne Bienville, “The Indians of Louisiana, their populations & the trading that can be done with them,” National Archives, Washington D.C..

it in order to preserve it.¹⁵³ The Quapaws fraternized with the French *coureur de bois* who came among them to trade for furs or salt and who stayed to take their women for wives.¹⁵⁴

Scholars have debated the occurrence of Quapaw-French intermarriages. Some have assumed the close relationship between French and Quapaw included sexual intermixing and intermarriage. Because of their skills and qualities, argues Morris Arnold, Quapaw women were ideal partners for the French hunters of Arkansas. Similarly, David Baird wrote that because of trade and “the presence of military garrison meant that many white men took Quapaw women as mates.”¹⁵⁵ Joseph Key has also concluded that marriage enabled the Quapaws to create stronger bonds with other Indians and French creoles in the lower Mississippi.¹⁵⁶ Most recently, Kathleen DuVal has claimed the opposite, arguing that there was no evidence of French-Quapaw intermarriages.

DuVal has argued that because scholars have shown that many French Canadians intermarried with Indian women in New France, those same scholars have tended to assume that the French Canadians kept a similar tradition in colonial Louisiana. But noting the varying

¹⁵³ Dumont de Montigny, “The History of Louisiana,” National Archives, Washington D.C. Although the account is not describing a particular tribe, but rather Indians in Louisiana, the Quapaw women probably had similar duties.

¹⁵⁴ Velma Seamster Nieberding, *The Quapaws: Those Who Went Downstream*, (Miami: Dixons, 1976), 21.

¹⁵⁵ Baird, *The Quapaw People*, 30.

¹⁵⁶ Joseph Key, “The Calumet and the Cross: Religious Encounters in the Lower Mississippi Valley,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. LXI, NO. 2, Summer 2002, (165).

practice of different Indian groups, DuVal argues that this was not the case with the Quapaws. The only clear example of French-Quapaw intermarriage is that between Michael Bone and Marie Louise, but DuVal insists that the story of Marie Louise was exceptional.¹⁵⁷ She argues that it was very unlikely that intermarriages between Quapaw women and Frenchmen could have happened because the Quapaws were patrilineal. Because children born of these unions would have traced their lineage through their French father, DuVal contends that it was not in the Quapaws interest to intermarry with the French.

In theory, the patrilineal characteristic of the Quapaw people could have been a barrier for intermarrying the French, but in a colonial Arkansas River Valley where survival was far from guaranteed and any measure one might take to increase the likelihood of one's survival would have been at least considered, it seems unlikely that the Quapaw would have clung so dearly to their patrilineal traditions, especially once their numbers began to decline drastically in the eighteenth century. Kathleen DuVal herself has shown that the Osage abandoned certain beliefs and began to intermarry with the French when faced with “military dominance decline in the late 1700s.”¹⁵⁸ Facing a worse demographic crisis than the Osage, and facing the beginnings of that crisis as many as one-hundred years before the Osage finally relented and abandoned tradition in the name of survival, the Quapaw very likely could have done the same.

¹⁵⁷ The evidence for Michael and Marie Louise Bone's marriage is found in the baptismal record of their son Jean Baptiste: see Core, Dorothy, *Abstract of the Catholic Register of Arkansas 1764-1858* (DeWitt: DeWitt Publishing, 1976), 37; see DuVal, “Indian Intermarriage and Métissage in Colonial Louisiana.”

¹⁵⁸ DuVal, “Indian Intermarriage,” 303.

Although there are few surviving records documenting intermarriage between the French and the Quapaw, intermarriage might have been more common than previously thought. Although we do not have marriage certificates to document them, these unions are revealed through several writings about the Post. A careful examination of Catholic baptismal and marriage records, colonial correspondences, and travelers' accounts hint at Quapaw-French unions celebrated according to Christian or Indian rituals.

DuVal rightly points out that there is no clear evidence for intermarriages between a Frenchman and Quapaw women, however, the absence of official and baptismal records documenting additional cases is not evidence for the nonexistence of intermarriages. In fact, there are very few records documenting any aspect of life at Arkansas Post. DuVal based her analysis on the few extant sacramental records from colonial Arkansas Post known to contemporary scholars.¹⁵⁹ DuVal's argument is based in large part on the five Quapaw baptisms and one burial recorded at the Post, none of which “shows evidence of *métissage*.” However, these records are taken from an abstract that “only begin[s] in the 1760s,” as DuVal admits.¹⁶⁰ As the vast majority of Arkansas Post marriages, baptisms, and burials for which we have documentary proof took place during the last decade of the eighteenth century, these records can hardly be said to tell the whole story of life at the Post, which was established in 1686.

In contrast to French settlements in Illinois such as Kaskaskia, Ste. Genevieve, or St. Louis, Arkansas Post was weak and small. The harsh climate, the epidemics, the floods, and

¹⁵⁹ The sacramental records were gathered and published under *Abstract of Catholic Register of Arkansas* by Dorothy Core.

¹⁶⁰ DuVal, “Indian Intermarriage,” 293.

isolation made the post “the most disagreeable hole in the universe,” according to the Commandant of Arkansas Post, Balthazar de Villiers.¹⁶¹ It is hardly surprising there is only one clear record that documented intermarriage between Quapaw women and Frenchmen since only a few were celebrated by the Catholic Church, and therefore documented for posterity. The first priest, Father Paul du Poisson, who arrived and took up residence at Arkansas Post in 1727, died two years later during the Natchez Massacre.¹⁶² Priests were assigned to the Post only intermittently, and during one long period – 1758 to 1792 – the Post had no priest.¹⁶³ In addition, the absence of a provincial notary resident at Arkansas Post forced marriage contracts to be executed in New Orleans, a city far enough distant as to place a financial barrier to many of the Post’s residents. Others, such as Montcharaux, an interpreter, had gone to Pointe Coupée as a Spanish official reported in 1770, “to marry a *métis* Indian girl who was a resident of the Parish.”¹⁶⁴ For almost half of the eighteenth century, then, there were no Catholic marriages celebrated in Arkansas at all.

DuVal contends that the Indian brides of Frenchmen around Arkansas Post mentioned in travelers’ accounts and sacramental records were most likely captives from other tribes, rather than Quapaws. Although it is certainly possible that all of the Indian women mentioned in these documents were captives, there is no evidence to establish this fact. Some of these intermarriages, as DuVal rightly pointed out, involved Indian women from other tribes such as

¹⁶¹ Arnold, *Colonial*, 25.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 30.

¹⁶³ Arnold, *The Rumble*, 45.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 92.

the Kances and Osage. In fact, within the sacramental records, including baptism, marriage and burials at Arkansas between 1764 and 1820, there is evidence for the presence of eight Indian women from various Indian tribes, living in the parish or its surroundings. Interestingly, the Frenchmen involved in these unions such as Duchassin, Elem, and Deral, are not to be found (identified) as Quapaws in the colonial records including the Roll of 1890. Clearly, these intermarriages were not French-Quapaw. However, within the same Catholic Register, several other women were simply identified as Indians.

The Roll of 1890 was created by the Department of the interior Office of Indian Affairs on February 7th 1890.¹⁶⁵ Submitted and approved by Mr. T.J. Morgan, Commissioner, it numbered 193 members of the Quapaw tribe. After 1890, the Quapaw council voted unanimously to reject the applicants for adoption of certain persons of Quapaw descent residing in Arkansas and who never lived on the Quapaw reservation as well as other members of Quapaw families residing on the Osage reservation, “who claimed a right to adoption with all the immunities, privileges and benefits of the Quapaw Indians residing now on the reservation, set apart by the US government, under the treaty proclaimed April 12th 1834.” The Quapaw Agent concluded that “the lists heretofore approved are undoubtedly incomplete...the roll approved may 27, 1889 was prepared for the purpose of distributing certain grazing funds. It did not include any persons who were not actually on the reservation.” The agent argued that, even though they are acknowledged to be of Quapaw descent, the Quapaws in Arkansas who failed to remove to the reservation had lost their tribal rights. Because of their refusal to move to the

¹⁶⁵ A copy of the Roll can be found in the Core Family Papers Collection, Box 28, File 15, Arkansas Special Collections, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR.

reservation the French-Quapaws of Arkansas were not allowed to be counted as Quapaws since their share of lands and governmental funds were not counted, and the Quapaw listed in the rolls were reluctant to share their economic gains.¹⁶⁶ Several French-Quapaw descendents, although recognized to be Quapaw, cannot be found on the tribal rolls. This shows the presence of Quapaw-French unions that cannot be found in the records.

Based on the notion that the patrilineal Quapaws were unlikely to allow their women to marry Frenchmen, DuVal assumes that the women in these accounts were all captives from other tribes. However, given the lack of evidence testifying to the insurmountable nature of the Quapaws' patrilineal beliefs, the fact that the women were found in and around Quapaw territory, and the vague use of the term "Indians" to describe many of the women, it seems quite likely that they were Quapaws. Indeed, among the Frenchmen involved in intermarriages with these unidentified Indians there were Michel Bonne and François Coussot. A Mr. Bone, possibly a descendant of Michel Bonne, is referred to in 1819 Thomas Nuttall's travel account as a French—Quapaw half breed, while the name Coussot appeared in both Nuttall's accounts and the Quapaw Roll of 1890.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ The documents related to the dispute concerning the rights and adoptions of Quapaw who did not live on the reservation are held by Billie Rice in Quapaw Town, Oklahoma. Copies of the Quapaw Rolls can also be found in the same collection.

¹⁶⁷ Thomas Nuttall, from Pennsylvania, traveled in the Arkansas Territory in 1820s. See "A Journal of travels into the Arkansas Territory During the Year of 1819....on the Manners of the Aborigines" by Thomas Nuttall, Musée Du Quai Branly Archives, Paris, France. For the burial record see Core, *Abstract*, 13.

Furthermore, juxtaposing the Catholic Church records with the first Quapaw rolls, the official list of Quapaw people recorded by the office of Indian Affairs by late nineteenth century, strengthens the possibility that these women were Quapaws. In the case mentioned above, both Dardenne and Sauvage were included in the rolls as members of the Quapaw tribe. Moreover, given that records showed that the Quapaws were not as heavily involved in Indian women slave trade as the neighboring Chickasaws and Osages, it becomes even more likely that, at least some of the Indian women mentioned were Quapaws rather than captives.¹⁶⁸

The Catholic Register records, of the period between 1764 and 1820, raise questions about other possible Quapaw wives or daughters linked to Frenchmen of Arkansas parish. On January 12, 1789, Marie Augustine, born in 1788, “a child of Marie Felicite, Arkansas [Quapaw] Indian” was baptized. Her godmother and godfather were Francois and Marie Augustine Valliere. The next day, a Marie Joseph Félicitée, an eighteen-year-old Arkansas Indian, most

¹⁶⁸ There is evidence that the Quapaws were victims of Chickasaws captive slave trade with the Indians. During the 1749 Chickasaws’ attack on the Post, they took eight women and children as slaves. In 1782, Commandant of Arkansas Post Lieutenant Luis de Villar’s daughters were taken captives by the Chickasaws, who were eventually saved and redeemed by Sarasin a French-Quapaw. A year later, another Chickasaws’ attack, resulted in “several persons [taken] captives.” Arnold, *Unequal Laws*, 22, 65; David W. Bizzell “A Report on the Quapaw: The Letters of Governor George Izard to the American Philosophical Society, 1825-1827,” *Pulaski County Historical Review*, (73); Jacobo Dubreuil; Anna Lewis, “Charles III, Arkansas Reports for the Year 1783,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 20, No. 4. (Mar., 1934), pp. 537-549.

likely Marie Augustine's mother, was also baptized. Her godfather was another Valliere, Joseph the Commandant of Arkansas Post.¹⁶⁹ Although there is no direct proof of family ties between the two Arkansas Indians and the Vallieres, there is enough evidence to raise the question concerning the link that these Quapaw females might have with the Vallieres, who appeared in the Quapaw Roll of 1890.

Travelers' accounts also hint at intermarriages between Frenchmen and Quapaw women and their incorporation into the tribe. Du Pratz's Arkansas Post grew stronger because those who formed it had the wisdom to live in peace with the natives and treat as legitimate the children that they had with the girls of Arkansas, whom they married out of necessity. Louis Dubroca reported that French *habitants* of Arkansas Post had acquired the habit of living with Indians in Canada, a habit that led them to marry the Arkansas girls without any difficulty, forming unions that "had the happiest consequences."¹⁷⁰

DuVal's sense of the rarity of intermarriage might be shaped by a narrow definition of marriage, based on the European construction of the institution. From this perspective, evidence for French-Quapaw intermarriages would have been registered by the colonial administration or the Catholic Church. However, many Quapaw-French unions may not have been solemnized in the European manner and thus would not be documented in French or Spanish records in any case. Instead, they were celebrated according to Indian rituals. Indeed, some colonial officials in

¹⁶⁹ Core, *Abstract*, 12, 13.

¹⁷⁰ Arnold, *The Rumble*, 8, 11.

Louisiana tolerated marriages done in the ‘Indian way.’ They believed that the Indian wives would convert to Christianity and marry according to the church rituals.¹⁷¹

Although these marriages were not recorded, surviving French colonial correspondence suggests that they occurred, and the Quapaw Indian roll of 1890 confirms the fact. The roll contains the names of all those of Quapaw or Quapaw-French descent who were eligible to receive Quapaw lands in the Indian Territory.¹⁷² On August 7th 1770 Demazellieres, Commandant of Arkansas Post, informed the Governor that the Bonfous, who had been up the Arkansas River with women were back at the fort and “Old Dauteuil and Causet have let me know that they are coming back.” He stated that there were seventy children at the fort who had not been baptized and requested a minister to marry the people and baptize their children.”¹⁷³ The names Causet and Dauteuil appear on the rolls of the Quapaw Indians of 1890, suggesting that both Old Dauteuil and Causet married Quapaw women in the Indian way, giving them the lineage needed to be part of the tribe and receive a share of the land and governmental benefits guaranteed to the Quapaw.

¹⁷¹ Guillaume Aubert, “‘Français, Negres et sauvages:’ Constructing Race in Colonial Louisiana” (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 2002), 53.

¹⁷² The earliest Quapaw tribal Roll, known to scholars, was made in 1872 and included 93 Quapaw individuals. This Roll is held by Billie Rice, in Quapaw Town, Oklahoma.

¹⁷³ “Arkansas Post Investigation, Translations of French and Spanish Documents, 1712-1785. *Archivo General de Indias*, Sevilla, Arkansas Colonial Papers, (MC 432), Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

IV. Marriage “*a La Façon du Pays*”

For their part, women of many tribes sometimes engaged in unions with Frenchmen because intermittent periods of warfare often led to a scarcity of native men. At other times the intermarriages were a means of securing economic-diplomatic advantages. While Frenchmen offered an alternative to the polygamy that resulted from warfare, Indians saw marriage as an integral part of their alliance.¹⁷⁴ It is difficult to determine whether these marriages resulted from women’s decisions or their families’ political negotiation. Some combination of both factors was likely at work. While travelers reported that chiefs of different tribes offered their daughters to Frenchmen for marriage, Bernard Diron d’Artaguiette, an officer in the French army, testified that Indian women “are mistresses of their bodies and generally liked all the Frenchmen to whom they refuse none of their favors, in return for a few glass beads or other trifles.”¹⁷⁵ Whether it was for economic or sexual benefits, this suggests Indian women exercised agency in making the decision to become intimate with Frenchmen.

Because of their marital traditions, Quapaw Indians had limited marriage opportunities and thus allowed intermarriages. The division between Sky People and Earth People regulated marriage. Thus the Quapaw mates were chosen from the clan of which they were not a part. While marriage between non-relatives occurred only after parental approval and was announced publically, polygamy was not common among the Quapaws.¹⁷⁶ The marriage was celebrated with no more than a “frugal and sober feast,” but when the union was consummated the groom

¹⁷⁴ White, *Middle Ground*, 62.

¹⁷⁵ Arnold, *The Rumble*, 10.

¹⁷⁶ Baird, *The Quapaw Indians*, 12-13.

presented his wife with the leg of a deer and the bride presented her husband with an ear of corn. It was just as simple for the couple to divorce. Children born to any marriage union received names from the *Wapinan* and were reckoned to be of their father's clan.¹⁷⁷

Vaugine de Nuisement, who, like Bossu, traveled within the French colony of Louisiana in the mid eighteenth century, offered insights into how marriages were celebrated “*a la façon du pays*” among the Illinois Indians. He observed that marriage among the “*sauvages*” in general, was no more than an association between two parties who came together.¹⁷⁸ For instance, he reported that when a man falls in love, he went hunting and left the product of his hunt at the potential wife's door. If her mother liked the potential husband, she prepared the suitor's offering and sent some of it with her daughter to the potential father-in-law. The ceremony began by smoking the calumet and exchanging vows in the evening, the husband slept with his wife. The next day, the wife went to the *cabanne* of her parents-in-law. The wedding was ended with a big feast, singing, and dancing.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Baird, *The Quapaw People*, 7.

¹⁷⁸ Vaugine de Nuisement, a captain of the French marines, traveled and explored the French colony of Louisiana. He departed from New Orleans to go to the Illinois country in 1752; on his way up the Mississippi, the winter obliged him to stay at Arkansas Post for a little while. Rene, Cruchet, “France et Louisiane. Médecine et littérature. Montaigne et Montesquieu at home: La vie en Louisiane de 1752 à 1756; journal du voyage de m. Vaugine de Muisement” *Romance language series*, no 2, (Louisiana State University Press; 1939), p. 45-86.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Quapaw women most likely intermarried with Frenchmen “*a la façon du pays,*” according to Quapaw rituals. In such rituals, when a man wanted to express his desire to marry a woman, he needed to take his blanket and roll it over the woman’s shoulder. If she accepted, they were married.¹⁸⁰ If agreed to the choice of their daughter, Quapaw woman’s family would adopt the Frenchman in order to gain the Quapaw lineage. Marriage and adoption would often have been celebrated at the same ceremony, without any record, other than oral tradition, of either transaction.¹⁸¹ The adoption ritual described by Bossu might have been a marriage celebrated “*a la façon du pays,*” but a marriage that the discerning Frenchman decided was not to be shared with his eighteenth century French readership, many of whom would have undoubtedly looked askance at such a union.

Bossu’s experience with adoption by the Quapaws reveals how they incorporated Frenchmen into their tribe. After attending a festive ritual and receiving a painful tattoo, Bossu became the Quapaw’s ‘war chief’ and was asked to choose one of the daughters of the Quapaw Casique (chief) as a wife. He claimed that in order to bring him into the fold as a valuable ally,

¹⁸⁰ This tradition was explained to me by Billie Rice, the librarian at the Quapaw office tribe and the granddaughter of the last full blood Quapaw chief: Victor Griffin, leader of the Quapaws from 1929 till his death in 1953. “My grandfather taught me about the traditions of our people and wanted me to teach the young generation,” she said. It is impossible to know whether the ritual described by a contemporary Quapaw Indian was the same practiced during the encounter. Because of the strength of oral tradition among the natives, however; it is very likely that the ritual was more or less the same.

¹⁸¹ Arnold, *The Rumble*, 58.

the Quapaw offered to give him a “red” wife. They told him that they would be flattered if he decided to settle among his children, “the Arkansas warriors, who are begging you, as they need you to lead them and make them feared by their enemies the [Chickasaws].”¹⁸² Bossu never revealed whether or not he took a Quapaw wife.

Contemporary accounts also suggest the Quapaw saw marriage as an integral part of their alliance with the French, bringing sexuality into the political arena. Through marriage, Quapaw women secured alliances between their own clans and tribes and those of their mates. Consequently, a union between an Indian woman and a Frenchman allied her clan and tribe with his people: the French. Because the Quapaw were patrilineal, the Frenchmen were adopted by the tribe to assure the continuation of the Quapaw's lineage.¹⁸³

The story of Nicolas Labuxière is a concrete example of Quapaw's incorporation of Frenchmen. Labuxière was a French soldier who was appointed as an interpreter between the Quapaws and the Spanish colonial administration. Soon, Spaniard Fernando de Leyba, commandant of Arkansas Post, discovered that Labuxière was leaking sensitive information to the Quapaws while simultaneously withholding Quapaw secrets from his Spanish employers. Labuxière was arrested soon after Leyba determined that he was a spy, but while he was being escorted to jail, Labuxière encountered an Indian whom he asked to “tell my father the great Quapaw chief” about the arrest. Shortly thereafter the Quapaws sent word that they intended to use whatever force necessary to free the Frenchman from his

¹⁸² Bossu, *Amerique Septentrionale*, 99-111.

¹⁸³ There is evidence of widespread intermarriages between French and other patrilineal Indian tribes, such as the Osages who “adopted French traders and interpreters, who sometimes married Osage women.” DuVal, *Native*, 122. For more on adoption see Arnold, *The Rumble*, 58.

confinement; Labuxiére's Spanish captors immediately released him. It is probable that the Quapaws had adopted him earlier, and he very well might have been the husband of the chief's daughter.¹⁸⁴ Even though Leyba acquiesced to Quapaw demands and released Labuxiére as quickly as could have been reasonably expected, the Quapaw chief soon sent a message to the Spanish government in New Orleans asking for the removal of Captain Leyba, as he did not like the Quapaws and "could not even speak French."¹⁸⁵

In the story of Saracen, a French-Quapaw tribal chief, we find another example where the evidence, circumstantial though it might be, suggests that French-Quapaw intermarriage was much more commonplace than previously thought. Saracen was born at roughly the same time

¹⁸⁴ Arnold, *The Rumble*, 95-96.

¹⁸⁵ Arnold, *Colonial*, 155. There were other instances, in which the Quapaws chose a Frenchmen, who lived among them and spoke their language to represent them under Spanish rule of Louisiana. For example, in a letter of October 15, 1783 from Dubreuil, commandant of Arkansas Post, to the governor of Louisiana, concerning a hunter "Antonio Lepine [who became keeper of the arms of the Indians under the Spanish rule] begs to follow another occupation that is to be interpreter to these Indians...[he knows] perfectly the language of the Arkansas and the true way of dealing with them." In fact, "the Indians [Quapaws] with great supplication have asked this," he added. This case displays that hunters usually live among the Indians, most likely marry among them, and acquire their language are considered to be one of them. Core Family Papers (MC 1380), Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville; Jacobo Dubreuil; Anna Lewis, "Charles III, Arkansas Reports for the Year 1783," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 20, No. 4. (Mar., 1934), pp. 537-549.

that a Frenchman named François Sarazin, a French soldier who also served as an interpreter to the Quapaw, was plying his trade in Quapaw country. The similarities between the chief's name and the Frenchman's surname, when viewed in light of the fact that the young cadet just happened to be in close contact with the area Quapaw around the time the future chief was born, is too close to simply write off as coincidence without at least considering the possibility that Sarazin fathered Saracen. Moreover, the fact that, very late in Saracen's life, a United States official reported that Saracen's rivals within the tribe cited his alleged "half-breed" status when claiming that the Chief had no right to represent them during territorial negotiations with the U.S. serves to support this author's contention that Saracen was likely the product of French-Quapaw intermarriage.¹⁸⁶ Obviously Saracen could not have grown to become chief if he was not considered Quapaw by those who knew the circumstances surrounding his birth. Therefore, if Sarazin was the chief's father, which seems quite likely, the Frenchman was likely adopted by the tribe when he married Saracen's mother, thereby preserving the boy's Quapaw lineage and allowing him to eventually claim the esteemed position that was his birthright.¹⁸⁷

Although not abundant, the very few Catholic Church records on Arkansas Post contain a handful cases of possible French-Quapaw intermarriages. Father Pierre Gibeault, who arrived at the Post in 1793, married five couples who had previously contracted civil marriages and/or

¹⁸⁶ DuVal, "Indian Intermarriage," 295.

¹⁸⁷ Saracen led a group of Quapaw families back to Pine Bluff from their reservation on the Red River in 1824. "Saracen," Core Family Papers (MC 1380), box 25, file 15 Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

those celebrated in the Indian way.¹⁸⁸ In fact, Father Gibeault had a long record of sanctioning Indian-French liaisons. In his letter of April 26th 1769, the Bishop of Quebec expressed his concerns about Father Gibeault, who had done good work at Michilimakinac Post, “except for celebrating a marriage between a Frenchman and a sauvagesse.”¹⁸⁹ Gibeault justified his action by asserting that he was unaware of the prohibition and added that he simply wished to suppress illicit intimacy between the Frenchmen and the “sauvagesse.”¹⁹⁰

At Arkansas Post, Fr. Gibeault pursued his mission with the same conviction, celebrating marriages involving Frenchmen who intermarried or lived with Quapaw women. He married Barthelemi Quebec and Marguerite, “an Indian of the Cances nation” on August 19th 1793. The next day, he baptized Therese, eighteen years old, the “daughter of Barthelemi Quebec

¹⁸⁸ Arnold, *Colonial*, 94.

¹⁸⁹ Mathias Kiemen, *Colonial Indian missions: the record of Catholic missionaries to the American Indians, 1521-1848* (New York : American Press, 1946), 8. Father Pierre Gibault was a Canadian-born priest who served in different settlements in New France and Louisiana including Kaskaskia, Cahokia, Arkansas Post, and New Madrid. He belonged to a group of secular clergy; the Seminary Priests of Québec, who were not a Religious Order but rather a loosely organized community of diocesan priests. This might explain Father Gibault’s liberal attitude in ‘legalizing’ what the Catholic Church considered to be clandestine marriages between Frenchmen and “sauvagesse.”

¹⁹⁰ Letter from the Bishop of Quebec, April 26th 1769; undated letter from Fr. Pierre Gibeault sent from the Post of Vincenne; anonymous letter sent on October 27th 1802, Diocese of Quebec Collection: box 4 folder 3-e, Cushwa Center, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame.

and Marguerite, his wife.”¹⁹¹ Fr. Gibeault also married François Coussot and Genevieve Berthelemi (identified as Indian in the baptism record of their son Pierre), ‘his wife’; and Joseph Imbault and Marie Bolton his ‘wife’.¹⁹² The last two examples most likely are in fact intermarriages between Frenchmen and Quapaw Indian women. First, when Gibault referred to a French unmixed couple, he mentioned the names of the brides’ and the grooms’ parents. Second, the phrase “his wife,” was never mentioned with the unmixed couples. Significantly, unlike Barthelemi Quebec who had married a non-Quapaw woman, both Coussot and Imbault appeared in the roll of the Quapaw Indians of 1890.

Similarly, Gibeault’s successor at the Post, Father Pedro Janin, pursued the same mission of celebrating French-Indians unions and baptizing their progeny. For instance, in 1796, Janin baptized “the legitimate daughter of Barthelmy St Germain and Margarita Sauvage, an Indian woman.”¹⁹³ Though the record did not specify which Indian nation Margarita was from, Sauvage, also spelled Salvage, also appeared in the roll of the Quapaw Indians of 1890. This suggests that Margarita was Quapaw.

Although written records of intermarriages remain rare, the Quapaw Treaty of 1824 revealed some intermarriages between French and Quapaw Indians. The treaty awarded lands to

¹⁹¹ Core, Dorothy, *Abstract of the Catholic Register of Arkansas 1764-1858* (DeWitt: DeWitt Publishing, 1976), 23. For the Baptism of Pierre Coussot, born in 1790 and baptized in 1797 see Core, *Abstract*, 31.

¹⁹² Core, *Abstract*, 18.

¹⁹³ Velma Nieberding to Mr. Howard Stebbins, 10th May 1975, Core Family Papers (MC 1380) Box 25, Folder 15, Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

the Quapaw people and Quapaw descendants. Many of the descendants of the Imbeaus and the Cousotts who received awards under the treaty had already removed to Oklahoma.¹⁹⁴ Joseph Valliere was another French-Quapaw descendant granted land under the treaty. In fact, the Catholic Church records listed, “Jan 26, 1789, was baptized Joseph, grandson of Pahe, Sauvage Arkansas [Quapaw].”¹⁹⁵ Though there was no Catholic record of the marriage of Joseph’s grandfather and Pahe, it is quite possible that the couple might have married in the “Indian Way.”

While mid-eighteenth century travelers related stories of Frenchmen who married Quapaw women, early nineteenth century traveler Thomas Nuttall narrated the story of their descendants. In 1819, Nuttall traveled through the American territory of Arkansas and spent some time with French-Quapaw families. Nuttall began with a brief history of the French settlement at Arkansas Post by Chevalier de Tonti “who left ten of his people, at the [Quapaws] earnest request, to settle among them” in 1685. According to Nuttall, these French settlers, later joined by Canadians, lived on peaceful terms with the natives and often entered into intermarriages with them. Nuttall complained about certain Frenchmen who lived by “adopting the manners of the Indians, and becoming hunters rather than by any regular industry or attention to the arts and conveniences of civilized life.” He further confirmed that the families that resulted from of this

¹⁹⁴ Mrs. Norman W. Core to Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Wilkerson on January 26th 1974, Core Family Papers (MC 1380) Box 25, Folder 15, Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

¹⁹⁵ Velma Nieberding to Mr. Howard Stebbins, 29th May 1975, Core Family Papers (MC 1380), Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

intermingling were scattered along the banks of the Arkansas River during the time he made his way through the area.¹⁹⁶

More importantly, Nutall chronicled clear cases of French-Quapaw intermarriage. He told of how he was hosted by a Quapaw-French family at one point during his travels and encountered others of Quapaw-French heritage shortly thereafter. Nutall described his host, a Mr. Bone, as a half-French, half-Quapaw *métis* who served as interpreter to those Quapaw who lived in Pine Bluff. The writer also mentioned the existence of two or three other *métis* families living in the neighborhood. Following breakfast, Nuttall and his travel companions left the Bones and soon encountered two other French-Quapaw families mentioned in the records, the Cusots and Bartholomes, who were headed by French hunters following “Indians in habits.”¹⁹⁷ Mr. Bone and the hunters who adopted Indian manners were almost certainly born during the late eighteenth century.

Nuttall's claims are bolstered by an 1825 report on the Quapaws which asserted that the Quapaw interpreters were exclusively “French Creoles or Half-breeds.” Because they were not in “constant intercourse for nearly a century with the colonists, there is not among them the slightest approximation to a civilized state” the report continued.¹⁹⁸ Ironically, it was these French-Quapaw “half-breeds” who prevented the Quapaws from going extinct “three generations

¹⁹⁶ “A Journal of Travels into the Arkansas Territory during the Year of 1819....on the Manners of the Aborigines” by Thomas Nuttall, Musee Du Quai Branly Archives, Paris, France, 76.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 77.

¹⁹⁸ David W. Bizzell, “A Report on the Quapaw: The Letters of Governor George Izard to the American Philosophical Society, 1825-1827,” *Pulaski County Historical Review*: (70-72).

after their colonial arrangement ended.”¹⁹⁹ Indeed, in the 1880s, the Quapaw population living on the reservation in the Indian Territory had declined to a mere forty individuals. Quapaw representatives were sent to Pine Bluff in order to persuade those Quapaws who remained in Arkansas to join the tribe at the reservation to strengthen the tribe.²⁰⁰

Long after the French hunters, the Quapaw Indians, and even Arkansas Post itself had faded, the evidence of French-Quapaw intermarriage remained in one of the earliest rolls of the Quapaw tribe, approved by the Chiefs and Councilors in the Quapaw tribe of Indians residing in the reservation in the Indian Territory, on February 8th 1890. Surnames like Quapaw, Red- Eagle, and Buffalo; or Me-Kali-Tun-Ka, Sin-Tah-Hah-Hah were listed right alongside those of Villiers, Dardenne, Imbeau, Derrinseaux, Cousatte, and Tousey.

French-Quapaw relationships went beyond mutual economic benefit and protection. The two nations exchanged a mutual respect because the French maintained human relations with the Quapaw. Whether to serve diplomatic purposes or to satisfy sexual needs, whether through “*concubinage*” or marriage in both Christian and Indian way, unions between the French and the Quapaw nourished their daily lives. Sexual intermingling and intermarriages strengthened the

¹⁹⁹ Arnold, “The French-Quapaw Métis,” 50. Among these French-Quapaw who remained in the woods of Arkansas after the removal, there were 16 Barthelemews, 22 Bonnes, 34 Coussots, 20 Dardennes, 18 Valliers, 11 Duchassins, 22 Imbeaus, and 7 Sauciers.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

friendship and military alliance that existed between the two groups, creating social obligations that sustained the relationship after the Spanish gained control of Louisiana 1763.

Because of geographical isolation and a shared vulnerability to raids by their common enemies, the Chickasaw and Osage, the Quapaw and the French settlers at Arkansas Post sealed military and diplomatic alliances and forged social obligations through kinship, sexual intimacy, and intermarriage that enabled both to survive. The two groups engaged in a long friendship that helped all involved face the perils of the eighteenth century Mississippi Valley with a great deal more confidence than they would have been able to muster had no such alliance existed.

At the end of the French and Indian War, the formal alliance between the Quapaw and French authorities based on mutual benefit and protection came to an end. However, the bonds created between the two nations through marriage and cultural intermingling remained unchanged, suggesting that the strength of sexual unions and kinship transcended that of diplomatic treaties. Anonymous French settlers and unnamed Indian women used their agency to shape the intimate relations which laid the groundwork for diplomatic relations between their respective nations, thereby insuring French colonial success among the Natives in North America. As the balance of power changed in 1763, the French crown tried to convince the Quapaws that they were maintaining their previous diplomatic relations through the Spanish. The Quapaw and their French kin resisted the Spanish authority, favoring a possible alliance with their former enemies the Osage and the Chickasaws over acquiescence to the demands of the same Spaniards who had earlier deemed Native American women fit only for *concubinage*.

PART II:

Friends and Kin: French and Osage Indians in St. Louis Frontier

“Most of the coureurs de bois, fugitives from church among the Osages, seemed interested only in furs and mines and trade with the Spaniards. The only other interest they had in the Little Ones had to do with their women. They all took the widows or married the girls... some of them married by Osage formula and some just sharing their robes with venturing widows.”

John Joseph Mathews

In the beginning, there were no humans in this world. One day, Wah 'Kon-Tah, the creator of the universe, separated the earth, sky, air, and water from the middle waters and created things on earth. The Tzi-sho, Sky People, descended into the earth and met the Hunkah, Earth People. The two people joined together to create the Ni-U-Ko 'n-Ska, the Children of the Middle Waters (the Osage). These were the words that had been handed down to them from their fathers so their moccasin prints would not be washed from the earth.

The Children of the middle waters lived near the great waters before they took a long journey to make their homes in the Place-of-the-Many-Swans (near the forks of the Osage River). The Osage community is organized around clans which belonged to the Sky or Earth People. Osage children belonged to their father's clan. Each clan appointed representatives to participate in village and tribal councils to advise the two tribal chiefs who represented each of the Sky and Earth People. The Chief of the Sky People was responsible for peace making and the Earth People Chief was responsible for making war.

In the villages, the houses were built on both sides of the main road which ran parallel to the Sun father's path. In the center of the village, the two chiefs lived on the opposite sides of the main path. The Sky People lived besides their chief, while the Earth People lived on the other side, with their chief. Rectangular in shape, the house frames were covered with buffalo hides and woven mats. Built by women, they were large enough to accommodate several related families. Each had a smoke hole in the roof and a door, except for the Chief's house, which had two doors. Special houses were built for the council meetings and rituals. Women also constructed the interior furniture and utensils. While women managed domestic affairs, men managed political affairs, defended the villages, and waged wars. The elders made the most important

decisions for the tribe including appropriate conduct, maintaining the sacred knowledge and traditions, and advising the chiefs in times of peace and war.

The Osage hunted, gathered and gardened to provide themselves. Women were responsible for gathering fruits, nuts, and roots from the forest as well as growing corn, beans, squash, and pumpkin, most of which was dried and stored for winter use. However, hunting remained a much more important economic activity among the Osage. Men hunted bison, deer, bear, elk, beaver, and other small animals. Among the Osage, life was organized around their economic cycle. In springtime, women from each family sowed the seeds in their own plots and tended the plants until they were well established. During the summer, Osage families traveled west to their hunting camps. In autumn, they returned to their permanent villages, right on time for harvesting their crops. In the fall, the Osage traveled once again for more hunting and returned for spring planting. While the men hunted, the women worked the hides. The hides were used to manufacture clothing and moccasins and trade goods as well.

Osage men shaved their heads and eyebrows. They left a scalplock of hair running from above the forehead to the neck. The women wore their long hair loosely down their backs. Both wore leggings, moccasins, with buffalo or bearskin robes for men and deerskin dresses for women. They pierced their ears, wore bracelets and tattooed themselves. Young women were closely guarded by the older ones until marriages were arranged.

The Osage waited during many winters before they met with the I'n-shta-heh or Heavy Eyebrows, who had already encountered most of the other tribes in the region. Their chief, a Black Robe, immediately offered the peace pipe and their friendship. The Osage were eager to exchange some of their products for the horses and muskets their neighbors, enemies and

*kinsmen, had already acquired from the Heavy Eyebrows. The children of the middle waters soon became their partners in business and brothers in life.*²⁰¹

²⁰¹ From Frederick E. Hoxie, *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, George Sabo III, *Paths of Our Children*, John Joseph Mathews, *The Osages: Children of the Middle Waters*.

The above story re-tells the origins on the Osage Indians as it was handed from the elders. It is also a “creative” attempt to recover the missed story of their first encounter with the French. A young Osage man must have reported the arrival of several canoes coming up the Missouri River. All he could tell was that the party was composed of Illini Indians and white men. At the news, Osage warriors and elders were preparing to receive the strangers and decide whether the party was coming in peace. Curious, Osage women must have left their daily tasks to see the unexpected guests, especially the white men they had heard about before but would encounter for the first time. Initially suspicious, the Osage saw the calumet, the symbol of peace, presented by the white man with the black robe. The peaceful visitors became guests as the women must have offered their best buffalo robes and dishes to the white men who might provide the tribe with European goods. This meeting created the opportunity for the Frenchmen and Indian women to meet within an intimate frontier.

Linguistically, the Osage, like the Quapaws, belong to the Dhegiha Sioux language family, a group which includes the Quapaw, Ponca, Omaha, and Kansa tribes. The Osage most likely moved with their kinsmen from the Ohio River Valley across the Mississippi, like the Quapaws, and settled south of the Missouri River, the Smoky Waters. Their population totaled about 10,000, outnumbering most of their neighbors.²⁰² There, they were forest dwellers who occupied a series of villages along the Missouri and Osage Rivers, west of St. Louis. Physically impressive, as they often stood over six feet tall, the Osage controlled a vast territory.²⁰³ With the

²⁰² DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 104.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 69.

white westward movement, many tribes joined forces against the Osages, including the Potawatomis, Sacs and Foxes to the north, and the Quapaws and Caddos to the south.²⁰⁴

Like their Quapaw cousins, the Osage Indians were first visited by French explorers as early as late seventeenth century. Their encounter with Father Jacques Marquette and businessman Louis Jolliet during their expedition down the Mississippi in 1673 was the first documented European contact with the Osage. The two Frenchmen established contact with the Indians and paved the way for a friendship between the two nations to allow commercial exchange before they continued their voyage down to the Arkansas River. Another French expedition, coming from Canada, reached the Missouri River in February 1682 led by Rene Robert Cavalier, *Sieur de la Salle*. The Frenchmen camped near the mouth of the “*Grande Rivière des Emisourite*,” (Missouri River) which they thought could lead them to the Pacific Ocean.²⁰⁵ Meanwhile, the news that the Missouri River area had many beaver became a major factor in drawing French traders and *coureurs de bois*. During the 1690s, several Frenchmen established themselves among the natives along the Missouri River, including the Osages. By 1704, there were more than one hundred Frenchmen in the Missouri River.²⁰⁶ The Osage were more prepared than the Quapaws for a large-scale trade with the Europeans.

The Osage occupied a very strategic site that connected the Great Plains to the Mississippi River Valley, which allowed them to benefit from their friendship and partnership

²⁰⁴ Sabo, *Paths of Our Children*, 76.

²⁰⁵ Kristie C. Wolferman, *The Osage in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 18-19.

²⁰⁶ Wolferman, *The Osage in Missouri*, 20.

with the Heavy Eyebrows until their removal in 1820s. Scholars have referred to them as the “fringe Plains” tribe as they ventured onto the Great Plains for extended buffalo hunts



Figure 7. Map of the Osage Country (Jean Baptiste le Mercier, *Mémoires Historiques sur la Louisiane*)

twice a year.²⁰⁷ Once equipped with French guns, they hunted more extensively than the Quapaw did. As a result, they became the “middlemen” in the fur trade throughout the eighteenth century. They channeled fur, horses, and other commodities east-west and *vice versa*. With guns and horses, the Osage built an economic “empire” as early as the eighteenth century. The Osage expanded their zone of influence at the expense of the neighboring tribes, taking control of parts of Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas.²⁰⁸ The powerful Osage took military risks to gain advantages over their neighbors.

Scholars have reached a consensus concerning the war-like Osage and their domination in the region. In his *The Osage and the Invisible World*, Bailey argues that the Osage saw war “as a necessary evil, but necessary only for self-preservation.” They sent their men to war in order that tribal life might continue.²⁰⁹ In his scholarship on Indians and French settlers in Colonial Arkansas, Morris Arnold pointed at the Osage attacks against their cousins and neighbors, the Quapaws, as well as French hunters.²¹⁰ More recently, historian Kathleen DuVal has argued that in the Arkansas River Valley the Osage retained their sovereignty “over the land and over their interactions with Europeans.” The Osage took advantage of French “exchange to

²⁰⁷ Frederick E. Hoxie, *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, 449.

²⁰⁸ Sabo, *Paths of Our Children*, 75.

²⁰⁹ Garrick A. Bailey, *The Osage and the Invisible World: From the Works of Francis La Flesche*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 34.

²¹⁰ Morris Arnold, *The Rumble of a Distant Drum: The Quapaw and Old World Newcomers, 1673-1804* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 27, 48.

build their own trading empire, expanding onto new lands and casting out native rivals.”²¹¹ Other scholars have analyzed the economic, social, and political role gained by the Chouteau family throughout the second half of eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, using Indian labor and collecting the most “precious fur from throughout the region.”²¹² Shirley Christian, however, pointed out that the Chouteau brothers “had been students” of the Osage Indians since their adolescent years, while other scholars argued that Osage leaders’ friendship with the Chouteaus was a mutually profitable one as the Chouteaus distributed an astonishing amount of goods to the Osages.²¹³

Some scholars have described the importance of Osage women within their tribe. The role of men and women was equally important among the Osage Indians, emphasizing the role of the wife as the “life-giving.”²¹⁴ Similarly, Louis F. Burns asserts that all the work done in the fields was performed by women or under their direction, arguing that within the Osage culture “there is a special relationship among a woman, earth, and the seeds she planted.” He drew parallels between the role of women who brought new human life into the visible world which they nourished and tended until that new life could stand alone with her role when she planted

²¹¹ DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 8.

²¹² William E. Foley and C. David Rice, *The First Chouteaus: River Barons of Early St. Louis*, (Urbana Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 9.

²¹³ Shirley Christian, *Before Lewis and Clark: The Story of the Chouteaus, the French Dynasty That Ruled American’s Frontier*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004), 6 and DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 172.

²¹⁴ Bailey, *The Osage and the Invisible World*, 79.

seeds.²¹⁵ Most critical to the Frenchmen were the Osage women's role in preparing buffalo and deer hides for the European market. It was tradition among the Osage on the hunts that the men cooked the ribs while the women were busy preparing the meat and the hides.²¹⁶ Osage women cleaned and dressed thousands of furs and shaved and tanned most of them to make leather.²¹⁷ Their skills were so necessary for the hunt that during winter, the Frenchmen took women with them to flesh the hides with fleshers and metal scrapers, making those who remained in the villages jealous.²¹⁸ As the fur trade in the Missouri River Valley grew, the French need for the Osage women increased. Frenchmen and Osage women thus became partners in business and intimacy.

French diplomacy in Missouri was initially ensured by the French *coureurs de bois* such as Bougmont as well as the Missouri Indian princess, and later by the Chouteau brothers and their Indian wives. Within these frontiers, it was the intimate relations that allowed the relative success of French diplomacy. From the Indian perspective, political relations could not be separated from social relations. It is at the social level that people, not politics, interacted and intermingled, allowing diplomacy between the nations. Over and over, governments choose trappers, traders, and women to be their diplomatic representatives. It was the intimate contact

²¹⁵ Louis F. Burns, *Osage Indian: Customs and Myths* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 108.

²¹⁶ Mathews, *The Osage*, 84.

²¹⁷ DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 109.

²¹⁸ Mathews, *The Osage*, 98.

established by individuals, not the signed treaties that were often broken, which maintained the ties between French and Osage.

The Osage entered into a dependency relationship with the French *coureurs de bois* and then with the Chouteau family. The Osage needed the French as allies. As trade and exchange with the Europeans intensified competition for resources, violence increased among the Osage and their neighboring tribes as well as towards their French allies. On several occasions, the Osage killed French hunters who were “attempting to get past the Osages in order to trade with their enemies.” Immediately, the Osage chiefs explained and apologized for the actions of “foolish” members of the tribe and requested to restore “good friendship” and declared that “they did not want to cause any more trouble.” By the 1750s Osage-French trade was so active that Indians in Illinois complained that “the French traders carry their best goods to the Missouri tribes.”²¹⁹ Similarly, the partnership between the Osage and the Chouteau brothers dominated during the period of French and Spanish rule and continued into the American era.

The intimate ties forged by the trappers and Indian women enabled the diplomatic alliance between the Osage and the French under the French, the Spanish, and the United States’ rule. Individual chiefs, Osage women, traders, and interpreters had more influence over their daily interaction and exchange than did the colonial administration. Hundreds of individual *voyageurs* worked along the rivers and streams of Louisiana, exchanging guns, ammunition, and other goods for furs and skins. As a result, the French *coureurs de bois* and *voyageurs* fraternized

²¹⁹ DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 109, 111.

with the tribes, learned their languages, ate their food, and married their women.²²⁰ During the first two decades of the eighteenth century, the French royalty had to rely on a *coureur de bois*, Etienne de Veniard, *Sieur de Bourgmont*, who lived among the Osage and Missouri tribes to establish a French fort, *Fort d'Orleans*, in the region.²²¹ It was his influence on these tribes that convinced five tribal chiefs and a Missouri woman to travel across the Atlantic to seal diplomatic ties with the King of France two years later.²²² As part of the diplomatic delegation that traveled to Paris, the Indian woman took an active diplomatic role.

In 1763, as French Louisiana territory west of the Mississippi River became Spanish, Spanish officials who showered the Indians with gifts had to learn the hard way that the French gift-giving diplomacy was not the key to Indian loyalty. In fact, Indians, traders, settlers, and interpreters often joined to resist and manipulate French and Spanish administrations. In 1770, the Quapaw Indians and French settlers at Arkansas Post threatened to settle with the Osage

²²⁰ Mathews, *The Osage*, 116. In the French trading system the licensed trader, *voyageur*, represented a vital link between French government officials and the native tribes. The license stated the amount of goods he had to trade, the Indians with whom he would trade, the route to be taken to his destination, the number of his employees, and even what he would pay for the furs he purchased. The *coureurs de bois* however, were unlicensed traders and trappers who lived beyond the control of French Officials. Gilbert C. Din and A. P. Nasatir, *The Imperial Osages: Spanish-Indian Diplomacy in the Mississippi Valley* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), 27-28.

²²¹ Wolferman, *The Osage in Missouri*, 26.

²²² Mathews, *The Osage*, 204.

rather than be ruled by the Spaniards, whom they disliked.²²³ The Spanish government of Louisiana failed to control the Osage Indians as the Osage and their Chouteau “brothers” negotiated for their mutual benefit and survival. The Americans would undergo the same learning process after Thomas Jefferson’s Louisiana Purchase, as Pierre Chouteau, United States first Indian Agent, worked to maintain the Chouteau –Osage control in the region. The next two chapters focus on the intimate aspect of the business relationship between the Frenchmen and the Osage and explore the Osage women’s role in the establishment of these relations and their contribution to the trans-Atlantic fur trade.

²²³ Coleman, *The Arkansas Post*, 55-56.

CHAPTER 3:

The First Encounters with the Children of the Middle Waters

“Isolated and lost in a borderless empire, the French of the western frontier got close to the Indians, and the missionaries denounced concubinage between settlers and the squaws in the posts and villages from Arkansas to Missouri.”

Véronique Wiesinger

Scholars of the European-Native encounter have realized the problematic aspect of the traditional euro-centric understanding of Native Americans organization and concepts and its impact on the historical interpretation. The Osage social, political, economic, and religious organization cannot be understood apart from one another. Within the Osage tradition, men and women played complementary roles in maintaining the tribal unity and sustaining every aspect of their community. They understood that the survival of a people was a result of their collective ability to defend themselves. “The elderly emphasized the long-term survival of the group and not the survival of individuals in their own right,” and anticipated that individuals and families who acted separately would eventually be destroyed.²²⁴ To achieve unity, Osage organized their tribe into twenty four patrilineal clans, which represented both religious and social units. Each clan had symbols that included animals, plants, celestial bodies and others. Nine clans were grouped as the Sky People and fifteen clans belong to the Earth People Moiety.²²⁵ To bind the tribe together, Osage children were product of unions between the Sky and Earth people.

Osage women and the Frenchmen engaged in intimate relations that sustained diplomatic and economic relations that benefited the two people. Women’s diverse participation on the frontier placed them at the heart of a trans-Atlantic trade. Because of her sexuality, her work on the hides, and hospitality, the Osage woman played a crucial role in establishing and maintaining contact between the Osage and the French nations. The social and intimate relations developed between Frenchmen and Indian women were key to the French diplomatic success with the Indians and to the Osage women’s higher position within their tribes.

²²⁴ Bailey, *The Osage and the Invisible World*, 34.

²²⁵ Sabo, *The Paths of Our Children*, 42.

I. The Osage Women

Europeans believed the conduct of war, religion, and politics were part of men's sphere for North American Indians. Yet among the Osage, these three were closely related and Osage women took part in all three activities. During wartime, the Osage warrior raided, killed, and captured the enemy while the Osage woman sent him courage through prayers. The woman's duty began with the pre-battle ceremony and carried to the battle field through the *Rite of Vigil and the Sending of Courage*. As the warrior began his journey, usually at night, the woman was required to remember him. At sunrise the next morning, the woman painted the parting of her hair red and put a narrow blue line on the right cheek, "one horizontally on your forehead, and one on your left cheek like that on the right." This was the symbolic painting by which the Osage woman sent courage and strength to the warrior and prayed for his success.²²⁶ These rituals must have become part of the Osage woman's routine, as the Osage people were engaged in constant warfare against neighboring enemy tribes with whom they competed for political power and control over the region's resources.

²²⁶ The ceremony continued as "before the sun rises on the fifth morning," the Osage woman "must arise and go out of your house and take from the earth a bit of soil and put it on your head. You must give all your thoughts to the warrior who has gone against the enemy...in this way you will aid him. When the shadow of evening comes...remove from your head the soil of earth repeating these words: "I remove from my head the soil of the earth and wipe my hands upon the body of the chief of our enemies that he may come to his death at the hands of our warriors." For more details on the complete ritual, see Bailey, *The Osage and the Invisible World*, 79.

The Osage emphasized reproduction to allow the growth of the population with the tribe and the increase of its political and economic power as well. Osage women performed the most basic requirement for the survival of a people by giving birth and raising children to adulthood. In the second part of the *Rite of Vigil and the Sending of Courage* ritual, the Osage woman was instructed on her duties as a mother as the instructor pledged: “you have a child. There is in you the same desire that there is in all good mothers to bring your children successfully to maturity. In this, you need the aid of a power that is greater than that of the human being.”²²⁷ It was also the instructor’s task to teach the Osage woman about the rite by which an appeal could be made to the power that was to bless her child. The ritual began with the procurement of the skin of an old male buffalo by the father of her child. Then, she was to soften the skin with her own hands, and “when you have made it soft and pliable, take some red paint and with it draw a straight, narrow line from the head, through the length of the body of the skin, to the tip of the tail.” Because the straight line represented the path of the power of the day that lives forever, the mother was requested to let each child to whom she had given birth to “sleep role in planting, growing, and nurturing crops. The ceremonial planting of the corn was at the heart of the Osage traditional teachings to their women. When the *Buffalo and Corn Songs* were sung, the elders invited the women to be present in order to receive instructions in the rites they must follow when planting the corn.”²²⁸ During the ceremony, the instructor explained to the women that the planting of the field was their responsibility and that it had “to do with the feeding of your children.” The planting ritual required the women to rise with the sun to begin their task. For this task, the women were to paint the parting of their hair in red to “represent the path of the force of

²²⁷ Bailey, *The Osage and the Invisible World*, 79.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, 175.

the day and will make the paths of all the animals converge toward you, for upon them you and your children must depend for food.”²²⁹ This responsibility placed the Osage woman in a position of a provider as well, which was part of the men’s sphere from the European perspective.

Women remained at the heart of Native tribes’ diplomacy as they were at the center of the tribe’s hospitality. Because women grew, gathered, prepared, and served the food, they came into intimate contact with the guests and potential allies. As they arrived among the Natives, the French were delighted by the ‘savages’ hospitality and the treatment offered by their women. The Osage women must have embraced the arrival of the Heavy Eyebrows and warmly welcomed them, as “they kissed the men and made them sit on a braided mat very well done, and placed them near the captains, who presented them with the peace pipe.”²³⁰ Then the ritual of smoking the Calumet and feasting began, attaching the two people together.

Osage women’s work on the hides was central to the tribal life and later to their economic and diplomatic relations with the Europeans. The Osage used both raw and tanned hides in their daily lives. Some of the hides were used with the hair still on them, but often they

²²⁹ The women are then instructed on how to gather ceremonially the roots of the water lily for food for their little ones. “The water lily with which you feed your children is also a sacred food and should be gathered with proper ceremony. It is a symbol of life.”For the complete story on the ceremony, see Bailey, *The Osage and the Invisible World*, 176-179.

²³⁰ *Voyage au un Pays plus Grand que l’Europe Entres la Mer Glaciale et le Nouveaux Mexique par P. Louis Hennepin*, Archives du Musée du Quai de Branly, Paris, France. The original text reads, “Les femmes allait embrasser les hommes, elle les fire assoir sur des nattes très bien travaillées et les placèrent prés des capitaines, qui leur présentent le calumet de paix,» 233.

had their hair removed. Women removed the hair from the buffalo hide using the ash-lye method. They boiled the hide in a water and wood ash solution, which loosened the hair making it easier to scrape off. However, for hides to be used in making parfleches to make bags, the Osage women hammered off the hair with a rounded stream stone. The hide was then covered with buffalo dung on both sides and kept moist for three to five days to be tanned. The hide was then cleaned with buffalo brain. Once the oil of the brain loosened the fibers, they laid the hide over a log and beat it with a bat sized stick until it was pliable. The hide was then smoked and stored.²³¹ The Osage woman's skills with the hides and the fields were critical for the Osage man, whose status depended on his wife's reproductive and productive abilities as well as his ability to provide and protect his family. These same skills also proved to be critical for the French trappers and traders during the encounter.

Additionally, the skills of Osage woman were evident in the articles she produced, mainly for cooking use. The women used the peelings stripped from canes to make fine strainers, while other strainers with larger openings were used to sift the grains. They also made baskets to carry corn and other grains they grew in their yards. With feathers from the tail of the turkeys, "which they know how to arrange," the women made fans for themselves and European women as well.²³² They could sell these small articles to the French or exchange them for European goods such as cooking posts and knives.

²³¹ Louis F. Burns, *Osage Indian: Customs and Myths* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 106.

²³² *History of Louisiana by Montigny*, 153-154. National Archives, Washington D.C.

II. Marriage among the Osage

As among the Quapaws, Osage marriage partners belonged to different clans that represented each of the Sky and Earth People divisions and usually came from different villages. Often, Osage parents chose the wife for their son and arranged their marriage. Nevertheless, as a proof of his ability as a provider, the suitor had to bring gifts to the woman's family. If the marriage proposal was accepted, the family kept the gift; if it was declined, they returned the gift. Because women outnumbered men in the tribe, an Osage man would often take his wife's sisters as additional wives. If a man was killed at war, an Osage man often married his brother's widow to provide for her and her children.²³³

Osage tradition distinguished two forms of recognized marriages and considered puberty to be a marriageable age. The *Me shin* ceremony was for the union of young men and women who had never married before. During the ceremony, gifts between the two families were exchanged. The young woman was often escorted by her uncle and "delivered" to the home of the groom with the saying "We give to you our daughter." The marriage was completed as the groom's parents "delivered" their son to the bride's parents saying "We give to you our son." The *O me ho* marriage celebrated the union of two people when at least one of the parties had been married before. A man who wished to marry a widow or a *divorcée* sent a messenger to her with his proposal and gift. If her parents and uncle were dead, she sent the messenger to her nearest living relatives. If the family approved, the groom was escorted by the messenger to the

²³³ Sabo, *Paths of Our Children*, 44.

bride's lodge. By sitting side by side, they were married.²³⁴ The latter required fewer arrangements and had much less formality than the *Me shin*, making it easy and tempting for the French hunter and trader.

The Osage woman must have had a say in her marriage as well. When a suitor manifested his interest in a woman, he would simply ask her if she wanted to go with him to become his wife. Initially, the woman would not respond to her suitor. She preferred to wait for the signs that might have been sent by the spirits; customarily a dream would show her the way. The woman held her head with her hands and thought about the suitor without saying a word to see images of her future. She then "followed the dream" as she made her decision to accept or refuse the proposal, as Frenchman Louis Hennepin noticed.²³⁵

Following the tribes' customs, the Osage women must have followed the same process as they decided to enter in intimate relations with the Frenchmen. However, French suitors might offer more exotic goods that might be obtained as 'wedding' gifts. These probably influenced some Indian women's decisions. French explorer, Dumont de Montigny, witnessed that marriage bonds among the Indian nations of Louisiana were "much more respected than it is among the civilized. Before marrying, the man is "expected to give presents to all the relatives of his future bride," he added. The Frenchman had also noticed that the Indian women, with the blessing of their parents, "freely hire themselves out to Frenchmen as mistresses for an ell of a cloth...and

²³⁴ Louis F. Burns, *Osage Indians*, 76-79.

²³⁵ *Voyage au un Pays plus Grand que l'Europe Entres la Mer Glaciale et le Nouveaux Mexique par P. Louis Hennepin*, Archives du Musée du Quai de Branly, Paris, France, 295.

their virtue is never proof against some presents.”²³⁶ The Frenchman’s description shows the liberty the Indian women had to accept their French suitors’ gifts if their families approved these intimate unions.

III. Intimate Encounters with the Heavy Eyebrows

Frenchmen of the western frontier got close to the Indians. Missionaries denounced *concubinage* between “settlers and the squaws in the posts and villages from Arkansas to Missouri.”²³⁷ During the early encounter with the French, Osage women often engaged in a matrimonial or a sexual union with Europeans. An Osage woman usually married a white man within a *Me shin* marriage ceremony. At times, the women cohabited with white trappers or traders, which was referred to as *Ka shon le me gro ka*, among the Osage. At other times, however, an Osage woman might enter into a marriage situation unknown to her tradition. This happened when a white man married an Osage woman legally under the white man’s law. Within the Osage patrilineal society, the “foreigner” had to be adopted into the tribe and become kin for their children to belong to the tribe. Most of the unions with the Europeans were made in the Indian way. But, it

²³⁶ *History of Louisiana by Montigny*, 156. National Archives, Washington D.C.

²³⁷ Véronique Wiesinger *et al.*, *Sur le Sentier de La découverte : Rencontres Franco-indiennes du XVIe au XXe siècle* (Paris : Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1992), 48. The original text reads: «*Isoles et perdues dans un empire sans frontière, Les français de l’Ouset se rapprochent des Indiens, et les missionnaires dénoncent le concubinage avec les squaws dans les postes et les villages de colons de L’Arkansas au Missouri.*»

was not until about 1897 that the Tribal Council decreed that Osage women with white husbands and children of such marriages were to be considered members of the Osage tribe.²³⁸

Soon after the first documented French contact with the Osage occurred in 1673, through Father Marquette and Louis Jolliet, several Frenchmen reached the Osage villages, settled and married among them. In May 1693, two French traders accompanied by some Kaskaskia Indians reached out to the Osage in order to make an alliance and create trading ties. These *coureurs de bois* lived among the Indians, learned their language, and nourished a friendship, ensuring the beginning of a very successful fur trading relationship. In 1699, the Jesuit missionaries at Cahokia expressed their disapproval of the “scandalous and criminal life” of the *coureurs de bois* who were known for “living in the sin with Indian women and leading a “savage” life.”²³⁹ The Osage customs tend to support the idea that much of the rapid population growth came from absorption of alien groups. For the Osage, adoption was akin to a blood relation. Adoption was considered to be a “new birth.” The adopted person was given a name from his or her new father’s clan.²⁴⁰ Some of these Frenchmen were running away from “civilization” were delighted to be “born again” and begin a new life as they were adopted into the Osage tribe.

While the Osage woman may have chosen the Frenchman for romantic reasons, they were also extremely interested in the manufactured European goods that were not yet easy to acquire during these first years of the encounter. Often times, the women were present as the

²³⁸ Louis F. Burns, *Osage Indian*, 79.

²³⁹ Wolferman, *The Osage in Missouri*, 18-19.

²⁴⁰ Burns, *Osage Indian: Customs and Myths*, 85.

Frenchmen are welcomed into the tribe, smoked the calumet, and exchanged gifts with the tribal Chiefs and elders. The Frenchmen came into close contact with the Native women as they played the role of the good hostesses. As he distributed the knives, hammers, and scissors, the Frenchmen must have had glimpses of the women who were impatient to receive beads and needles to make fashionable dresses. Henri de Tonti recalled an eye contact with a Native woman and exchanged smiles between the two individuals as the woman admired a pair of scissors and “seemed to ask for.” The Frenchman reported that as he “delicately put the case of scissors into her hand, she strongly held my mine,” to make him understand that these women were not so reluctant towards the Frenchmen and that they could get close to the Frenchmen.²⁴¹ Women were interested in the European goods for themselves.

The Osage received more French explorers in the early eighteenth century and established ties between the two nations. The *coureurs de bois* and trappers developed short-term and long-term intimate ties with the Osage that ensured their commercial success. The story of Étienne Véniard, *Sieur de Bourgmont*, illustrates the unofficial initiative taken by Frenchmen who established themselves among “the savages” before he became an official representative of France. In France, young Bourgmont was convicted of robbery and had taken the first opportunity to flee to New France. Once in the New World, he started a new life working for a tannery before he joined the military and became a commandant at Fort Pontchartrain at Detroit.

²⁴¹ *Relation de la Louisiane et du Mississippi par le Chevalier de Tonti, Gouverneur du Fort Saint Louis, aux Illinois*, Archives de Musée de Quai de Branly, Paris, France, 120. De Tonti does not identify the Indian tribe he had encountered as this incident happened. However, these reactions might have happened among the Osage as well as any other neighboring tribe.

However, in 1706 he clashed with the Ottawas and deserted, “first running off with a colleague’s wife and then taking up life as a *coureur des bois*.”²⁴² Bourgmont would have never dreamt of being received as a hero by the King of France a few years later.

His experiences among the Missouri Indian tribes transformed his life from a deserter and woodsman into a businessman and diplomat. As early as 1712, as commandant of Fort Detroit, Bourgmont allied with the Osage and Missourias to fight the Fox Indians as they threatened Fort Pontchartrain. In 1713, Bourgmont described the area as “the finest country and the most beautiful land in the world; the prairies are like the seas and filled with wild animals; especially oxen, cattle, hind and stag, in such quantities as to surpass the imagination.” He reported about “the Auzages [Osages], another savage nation, allies and friends of the French... [whose] entire commerce is in furs, [and that] they are a splendid race, and more alert than any other nation... They hunt almost entirely with the arrow; they have splendid horses and are fine riders.”²⁴³ He also declared that they produced the best furs of the Missouri region. He lived among the Osage and is believed to have had fathered several children among them.²⁴⁴

The Missouria, Osage neighbors and allies, incorporated the French *coureur de bois* into their tribe as well, as he married one of their one of their women. After he established ties with the Osage, Bourgmont began living with the Missourias in their Grand River village. There, he began a relationship with a Missouria woman, whose identity remains hidden. Their union must have given her a higher position within her society as she would have become a source for

²⁴² Elliott West, “The West Before Lewis and Clark: Three Lives,” unpublished paper, 10.

²⁴³ Wolferman, *The Osage in Missouri*, 4, 22.

²⁴⁴ Mathews, *The Osage*, 169.

European goods for herself and her family. Similarly, Bourgmont must have secured position in his new Indian family. Their union grew in its diplomatic weight for both Bourgmont and Missouria after their son, a *métis* later called “Little Missouria,” was born. Little Missouria represented the blood ties between the two nations and elevated both Bourgmont and his consort’s position among their Indian tribe. In the meantime, he explored the Missouri River farther than any white before him, and is believed to have reached at least as far as the mouth of the Platte River and perhaps beyond.²⁴⁵ Because of his position and trading success among several Indian peoples, as well as his geographical explorations, he also earned an exceptional position within his French society.

In fact, his achievements took him back to Paris in 1719 to be decorated by the King of France. During a short colonial war that raged between the French and the Spanish, Bourgmont participated in the French Conquest of Spanish Pensacola in May 1719.²⁴⁶ In France, Bourgmont was recruited by the French royalty and was given a royal commission as “Commandant de la Rivière du Missouri.” Moreover, Bourgmont was promised a reward and a royal rank on the condition that he established a fort on the Missouri.²⁴⁷ The former voyageur had become “a man of incomparable value,” who was admired by all natives of the region. With his status among the

²⁴⁵ Bourgmont wrote two accounts of what he saw during his expeditions into the west: *The Exact Description of Louisiana* (1713) and *The Route to be Taken to Ascend the Missouri River* (1714), from which the first European map of the region was drawn. West, “The West Before Lewis and Clark,” 10, 11.

²⁴⁶ Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 33.

²⁴⁷ Mathews, *The Osage*, 195.

Osage and Missouriia, Bourgmont “would be able to undertake everything.” Bourgmont himself boasted that “with the Indians nothing is impossible.”²⁴⁸ In 1723, he built the first post in Missouri, Fort Orleans, in the honor of the Duke. The fort was built in the center of Missouri.²⁴⁹ Soon, the post became a meeting point for Indians and traders and a starting point for French westward explorations.

In June 1724, a year after establishing Fort Orleans, Bourgmont led an expedition to make peace with the Paducas and Apaches Indians. He was accompanied by eight Frenchmen, a hundred Missouriias and sixty-four Osages as well as his twelve year old mixed-blood “Little Missouriia” son. Bourgmont knew Indian nature very well, since he had conducted business with them and lived with them. He was also able to speak his wife’s Siouan language well.²⁵⁰ His main goal was to establish contact with Apache Indians to allow trade with the Spanish at Santa Fe and to guarantee safe passage among the Northern plain Indians. In October of the same year, a peace conference between French, Missouriia, Osage, and Apaches was held. The parties exchanged gifts, agreed to live in peace, and began to trade with each other.²⁵¹ The Frenchman returned from this successful expedition to establish a growing business and influence on these Native tribes. He was then, an ideal candidate to become a diplomat in representing the French government among these Native nations.

²⁴⁸ Henri Folmer, “Etienne Veniard de Bourgmont in the Missouri Country,” *Missouri Historical Review* 36, no. 3 (April 1942): 284–85.

²⁴⁹ Christian, *Before Lewis and Clark*, 28.

²⁵⁰ Mathews, *The Osage*, 197, 199.

²⁵¹ Wolfeman, *The Osage in Missouri*, 26

IV. An Indian-French Marriage in Paris

The Missouri Indian tribes were soon to travel across the Big Waters to engage in diplomatic talks with the Great Chief of the Heavy Eyebrows, while the marriage of their daughter to a “French war chief” would link the nations together. Bourgmont wanted to show his success in France by exhibiting the Indians to his circle of influence and provide the French empire more allies. Initially, the delegation counted fifteen individuals including a woman, a Missouriia tribe chiefs’ daughter.²⁵² The identity of the latter is not known, but she was probably born about 1700, likely in a village located in today’s north central part of the state of Missouri.²⁵³ A ceremony was organized to bless their trip and bring their people back safely. During the

²⁵² Mathews, *The Osage*, 203, 204.

²⁵³ A report in Paris provides the only name for her in the record: Ignon Ouaconisen. The same article said she “passed as [Bourgmont’s] mistress” (“*passait pour sa maîtresse*”), making Elliott West believe that she could have been his Missouriia wife. We do know however, that her people, the Missouriias (sometimes spelled Missouriis), and their close relatives the Otoes had migrated to the region from north of the Great Lakes. Speakers of a Siouan language, the Missouriia were allies of the Caddoan-speaking Pawnees. They were patrilineal and lived in permanent riverside villages. They relied on gardening large plots of corn, pumpkins, squash and beans, on gathering wild plants and on hunting bison on the plains, West, “The West Before Lewis and Clark,” 9. For more on the history and cultural of the Missouriia, see Marjorie M. Schweitzer, “Otoe and Missouriia,” in Raymond J. DeMallie, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians. The Plains*, vol. 13, part 1, William C. Sturtevant, gen. ed. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 447-61.

ceremony, one Missouriia chief expressed his love for the French and his scorn of both the Spanish and English nations, as from the Indian perspective, it was critical to secure the protection of the “French father.” The group traveled down the Mississippi to New Orleans. Once there, Bourgmont was not allowed to continue the journey with all of “his *sauvages*.” He took one chief from each of the Osages, Missouriia, Mitchigameas, and Illini tribes and the daughter of the Missouriia chief.²⁵⁴ Bourgmont’s mixed-blood son has also made the trip to France as a symbol of an intimate/kinship tie between the French and the Indians.

Once they reached France, the Indian delegation met with fifteen- year-old King Louis XV and the *Duc and Duchesse* d’Orleans. The *Peau Rouges* and the “Princess” of the Missouriia became vogue in Paris. The French were fascinated by these “*sauvages*.” At Fontainebleau lords and ladies crowded close for a look at the delegation and soon found the chiefs “as full of spirit and good sense as ordinary men.”²⁵⁵ The Indians conversed with the King and were given coats and taken to masked balls and to the theatre. They were also taken to the Bois de Bologne to hunt rabbits with the king. The Indian chiefs told this “Great Father” that they wished to have French protection and help against their common enemies such as the Fox Indians.²⁵⁶ The king, meanwhile, paid special attention to *La Belle Sauvagesse*, the Missouriia “Princess.” Among other things, he gave her a watch set with diamonds. Meanwhile, the *Duchesse d’Orleans* arranged for the baptism of the *Sauvagesse* in Notre Dame de Paris, and stood as her god-mother.

²⁵⁴ Mathews, *The Osage*, 204.

²⁵⁵ West, “The West Before Lewis and Clark,” 15.

²⁵⁶ Ellis and Steen [eds.], “Indian Delegation,” 392–401.

She also arranged the Indian woman's marriage to a French officer, Sergeant DuBois. He had served Bourgmont during his explorations on the plains and then on the trip to France.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ Mathews, *The Osage*, 205, 206. For more on DuBois, see West, "The West Before Lewis and Clark," 17.



Figure 8. The Peaux Rouges in Paris 1724 (Bibliothèque François Mitterrand, Paris, France)

The Indian chiefs' delegation fulfilled their mission as they signed treaties and exchanged gifts to seal the two parties' friendship and alliance during their two month trip. They returned to Missouri with stories about their trip. Unfortunately, few of their impressions of France were recorded. They did however; tell the story of how the French built "five cabins, one on the top of the other," in reference to a five-story building.²⁵⁸ Impressed by French surgeons' skill at *Les Invalides*, the chiefs must have explained to their people how the French could provide another eye or arm so natural "that it will not be noticed," if you were to lose one.²⁵⁹ Their people were probably impressed by the gifts they received from their Great Father who assured them of his eternal friendship, especially "the rifle, gold chain, a painting of their royal audience, and a jeweled chiming watch."²⁶⁰ The gifts symbolized the kinship between the king and his children, *les Peaux Rouges*, and the reciprocal obligations between them.

As for the "Princess," she connected the French and the Indian tribes in Missouri through her marriage. She returned from her trip to Paris with gifts and souvenirs, including "blouses with puffed sleeves, a flowered flame-colored linen dress, a petticoat, a pair of corsets and gold and silver ribbons."²⁶¹ But she also fulfilled an important diplomatic role as she returned with a husband, a French chief of war. A former *coureurs de bois*, Dubois was promoted to the rank of captain and assigned to command *Fort d'Orleans*.²⁶² Because their

²⁵⁸ Comments on the ship, coach and buildings in Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 213.

²⁵⁹ Bossu, *Travels*, 83; Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 213; Ellis and Steen [eds.], "Indian Delegation," 391–92.

²⁶⁰ Bossu, *Travels*, 83; Ellis and Steen [eds.], "Indian Delegation," 402.

²⁶¹ Ellis and Steen [eds.], "Indian Delegation," 394, 396.

²⁶² West, "The West Before Lewis and Clark," 17.

marriage was blessed by both the Missouri and French authorities, it gave Dubois and the “Princess” a prominent social, economic, and political position within the two communities. The experiences of this “Princess” demonstrate the powerful role of Indian women in creating alliances with the French on the “Intimate Frontier.”



Figure 9. The Missouri Princess with her French Husband in Missouri (Bibliothèque François Mitterrand, Paris, France)

Bourgmont and his *métis* son returned to Missouri to experience harsh competition with other French traders. During his trip to France, a trip from which his Native family doubted his return, his kinship ties were severely damaged. In fact, Bourgmont's status and fame in Paris allowed him to marry a wealthy widow who soon gave him a daughter.²⁶³ Once he had returned to the Missouri region, he found it unalterably changed as the number of French voyageurs and unlicensed dealers grew. Moreover, Dubois was killed not long after his return to Missouri, thus the intimate ties he had established with the Indians through his marriage to the "Princess" was dissolved. Fort Orleans was abandoned.²⁶⁴ As the kinship between the Frenchmen and the Indian women discontinued, the formal alliance between their nations disappeared.

In 1744, Fort Cavagnal was built to control trade between French and Indians of the Missouri River. The French authority gave Joseph Deruisseau trading rights and the authority

²⁶³ West, "The West Before Lewis and Clark," 12.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 17. According to Historian Elliott West, the "Princess" did not remain long with her people as she traveled up to Kaskaskia in the Illinois country, where she married another time, to a French agent named Marin. West pointed to "the myth" concerning the idea that *Fort d'Orleans* was not abandoned because of the declining French interest but because Dubois was killed, Charles Gayarré, *History of Louisiana. Vol. 1: The French Domination* (New Orleans: F. F. Hansell and Bro., 1903), 395-96. In a later version, even more fanciful, she was driven back to savagery by the discomforts of her French corset. Richardson Wright, *Forgotten Ladies: Nine Portraits From the American Family Album* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1928), 13-30. This tradition is effectively demolished in Villiers de Terrage, *La Découverte Du Missouri*, 115-24.

grant licenses to others to set up small posts along the river. By 1748, Governor Vaudreuil of Louisiana complained that the Osage had “too frequently” robbed French traders who operated on the rivers of the plains, but insisted that the “French had never been in open war with them.” On the eve of the French and Indian Wars, the Osage warfare against the plains’ tribes continued, although Osage attacks on Frenchmen apparently declined.²⁶⁵ The growing number of French hunters and traders in the region forged intimate ties with the Indian tribes, which allowed the continuity of their alliance with France. Some Indians learned to speak French, some converted to Catholicism, while others intermarried with the French.²⁶⁶ The Osage became staunch allies who could be counted on to fight against tribes unfriendly to the French.

V. A New Era

By the mid-eighteenth century, the French-Osage alliance was tested when competition on the borderlands of the French, British, and Spanish empires began. The three empires engaged in the Great War for Empire to determine control over the lucrative fur trade at the heart of the continent. From the east, the British pushed into the French territory, in an attempt to establish contact and trade relations with the Indians. Meanwhile the Spaniards came over the plains to drive out the French and barred them from exploring the west through the Arkansas River to reach Santa Fe and trade with the Plains’ Indians.²⁶⁷ By the mid of eighteenth century, the

²⁶⁵ Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 45.

²⁶⁶ Wolferman, *The Osage in Missouri*, 29.

²⁶⁷ Sur le Sentier de La découverte : Rencontres Franco-indiennes du XVIe au XXe siècle (Paris : Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1992), 48. The original text reads: «Par la Rive

conflict was reaching a climax. In 1754, the French and Indian War began and the sides were chosen. During the conflict, a French army officer was stationed at the Big Osage village.²⁶⁸ His primary duties must have included maintaining the Osage alliance with France.

As the battle raged at the heart of the continent, the Osage warriors took part in the conflict within the French lines. During the war, Governor Louis de Kerlérec of Louisiana sent a report detailing the Indian nations that allied with the French in the Missouri River. He stated that the Big Osages had seven hundred warriors and provided skins, horses, and mules. While it is plausible that the Osage helped the French at Niagara during the conflict, without doubt, the Osage played an extremely important role in helping the French and other Indians to push back British Major General Edward Braddock's forces in 1755.²⁶⁹ Braddock was marching against Fort Dusquesne, located at the forks of the Ohio River. About two hundred Osage Warriors joined other French-allied Indians to ambush Braddock's troops and the colonial militia led by young George Washington.²⁷⁰ The Osage resentment towards the British continued as one of their chiefs visited the French commandant at Fort de Chartres, during the transfer of power in the region, to inform him about the British presence in the area. The British regiment would have been attacked by the Osage if the French commandant had not restrained them.²⁷¹

des Arkansas, les français débouchent dans les plaines du Sud et des marchands viennent a Santa Fe en territoire Espagnol.»

²⁶⁸ Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 48, 49.

²⁶⁹ DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 109.

²⁷⁰ Terry P. Wilson, *The Osage* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), 25.

²⁷¹ Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 54.

The change in the balance of power after the treaty of Paris 1763 and the increase in demand for Missouri fur affected the Osage as the principal fur traders in the region. The Osage used their geographical advantage to control trade long the Missouri River. Their contact with other Europeans and their competition for an alliance with the Osage induced a split in the tribe as some of the people established themselves in the Three Forks, in Arkansas. They became known as the Little Osages.²⁷²

In particular, the fur trade increasingly affected the Osage women as their daily work and responsibilities grew. Traditionally, Osage women built houses, tended children, and manufactured household items, including pottery and wooden tools. They also made clothes, gathered edible plants, and gardened.²⁷³ After the European fur trade became important, hunting beaver became the major economic activity among the Osage. The women saw a drastic increase in their work as they made the fur ready for the European market and the leather industry. They were so overwhelmed that the “retired warriors began to cook the meals for their towns as women simply no longer had the time.”²⁷⁴ Between 1790 and 1804, fur trade from the Missouri River region at St. Louis amounted to more than two hundred thousand dollars.²⁷⁵ This business continued regardless of who owned the Louisiana Territory.

The year 1763 witnessed a change in the power balance in North America that forced Natives and settlers to negotiate within the new era. Defeated in the French and Indian War of

²⁷² Hoxie, *Encyclopedia*, 450; and Kristie C. Wolferman, *The Osage in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 9-10.

²⁷³ Wolfeman, *The Osage in Missouri*, 14.

²⁷⁴ DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 109.

²⁷⁵ Wolfeman, *The Osage in Missouri*, 25.

1754-1763, France ceded its possessions in North America to its Spanish and British competitors. As part of the peace negotiations signed in 1763, the western part of French Louisiana was annexed to the Spanish empire. As the Spanish crown was slow to send officials to begin their rule in Louisiana, the residents continued life as if they were still in a French colony. French traders, who had established trade relations with the Native tribes, worked to maintain their relationship with the natives after diplomatic ties with France had broken.

When the French rule ended in the Missouri Valley, the Osages had had three-quarters of a century of contact with Europeans and almost as much of friendship with the French. The 1763 treaty in Paris divided the French colonial possessions in North America between their competitors. Yet the French friendship with the Osage insured a mutual control over fur trade.

By the mid-eighteenth century, as the French lost control of their territories, other French hunters and traders established themselves among the Osage. Voyageur Perrin du Lac, wrote in his travelers' account *Les Deux Louisianes*, published in Paris in 1805 that "the inhabitants had never stopped being French and hated the Spanish government, no matter how good the latter has treated them."²⁷⁶ The next chapter will show how the Chouteaus and Osage Indians gradually became intimate and business partners, forging a kinship that maintained their friendship as they resisted the Spanish control over their business. The Osage would not escape the removal, the fate of all the Indians nations in the region under the American era, however, their kinship and partnership will survive as their intimate and business partnership continued.

²⁷⁶ Bernard Cottret *et al* d. *Naissance de L'Amérique du Nord: Les Actes Fondateurs 1607-1776* (Paris : Les Indes Savantes, 2008)139. Perrin du Lac's original: «Les habitants n'on jamais cesse d'être François et de détester le gouvernement espagnol, malgré la douceur et les ménagements avec lesquels ils ont toujours été traites. »

CHAPTER 4:

The Osage Indians in Sho'to To-Wo'n

“Brother: as thou hast, since a long time, fed our wives and children...therefore, take thou on the Riviere a la Mine the quantity of land which may suit thee and anywhere thou pleases.”

An Osage Chief to Pierre Chouteau in 1792

During the first half of eighteenth century, Frenchmen such as Claude Du Tinsé and Étienne Bourgmont explored the Missouri River, and played a critical role in maintaining ties with the Osage, who fought for the French Empire during the Great War for Empire. French *coureurs de bois* and traders, including the Chouteaus, who established intimate relations with the Osage, kept the Spanish from exercising a complete control over French Louisiana during the second half of eighteenth century. The Spanish government forbade trade with the Osage but they could not enforce it as voyageurs did not agree with the policy. In 1774, despite a trade embargo, some Indians from Illinois saw seven canoes loaded with every type of merchandise and ammunition in one Osage town. The St. Louis trade report of May 19th 1775 reported that the Osage traded 22,200 pounds of fur.²⁷⁷ As the Spanish attempted to enforce the regulations against the Osage, the Chouteau brothers intervened to protect their Osage “brothers” and their fur trade.

Indian women, with the Missouria *Sauvagesse* who traveled to Paris as the best example, maintained the ties between the two worlds, Indian and French. Like the Missouria princess, Osage women engaged in intimate unions with French traders and businessmen including the Chouteaus. Un-named Indian women engaged in relations with both Auguste and Pierre Chouteau during their young adulthood as they spent a great deal of time in the Osage villages. Both brothers and their children fathered Osage children, helping the family’s fur trade business and the diplomatic representation of their brothers and kin, the Osage, for three generations. Although the Chouteaus traded with other Indian nations including Osage enemies such as the Sac and Foxes, the Pawnees, Kansas, as well as Osage cousins Quapaw and Omaha, their attachment to the Osage remained sacred. This shows that while trade and economic gain

²⁷⁷ DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 122.

brought the Chouteaus and Osage together, intimacy kept them together, even after the French have left the Mississippi Valley.

The story of the Chouteau brothers' economic empire began with the daring initiative of their step-father Pierre Liguist de Laclède, who founded St. Louis. From New Orleans, Laclède sent his step-son Auguste, just fourteen years old, up the Mississippi River. He reached a limestone bluff a short distance from the junction of the Missouri River in February 1764. His mission was to begin a settlement and trading post to extend the profit of Maxent, Laclède and Company. Despite his youth and inexperience, Auguste quickly proved that he was worthy of his step-father and employer's confidence. For more than half a century, Auguste and his younger brother Pierre acted as "merchants, Indian traders, bankers, land speculators, governmental advisors, public officials, and community leaders."²⁷⁸ The Chouteau family economic empire was a result of the Chouteaus' 'close ties with the Osage women as well as their economic interdependency with the Osage tribe.

I. The Chouteau Family

Behind the scenes, a French woman, Marie Thérèse Bourgeois, played a vital role in the establishment of her family's empire among the Indians. She was born in New Orleans on January 14, 1733 to Nicolas Charles Bourgeois and Marie Joseph Tarare. Her father passed away unexpectedly when she was six, leaving her mother with three children and another on the way.

²⁷⁸ William E. Foley, Charles David Rice, *The First Chouteaus: River Barons of Early St. Louis* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 1.

A year later, Marie Joseph married Nicolas Pierre Carco and together, they formed a new household for her four children.²⁷⁹ There is a widely held supposition that Marie Thérèse spent her childhood at the Ursuline convent in New Orleans, although no record survives that supports this assumption.²⁸⁰ Regardless of whether she was raised in her family or by the Ursulines, Marie Thérèse married René August Chouteau on September 20th 1748. He was born in the village of L’Hermenault in the Western Province of Poitou on September 2, 1723 to a *notaire* or solicitor. He had immigrated to North America some time before his marriage to become a “New Orleans inn- and tavern-keeper.”²⁸¹

The couple gave birth to one legitimate child, mentioned in René Chouteau’s testament as René Auguste. Pierre, Marie Thérèse’s second son however, was born in 1758, long after the couple separated and the identity of his father remains a mystery. The date of birth of Auguste is also obscure while baptismal records showed that a René Chouteau, presumably Auguste, was born on September 7, 1749.²⁸² In any case, René Chouteau Senior traveled back to France and abandoned his family in New Orleans shortly after the birth of Auguste. Between 1752 and 1767, René disappeared from the colonial records. Not much is known about his life and activities

²⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

²⁸⁰ Foley & Rice, *The First Chouteaus*, 9.

²⁸¹ Mary B. Cunningham and Jeanne C. Blythe, *The Founding Family of St. Louis*, (Midwest Technical Publications, 1977), 2.

²⁸² Foley & Rice, *The First Chouteaus*, 2. Later Chouteaus generations in St. Louis assumed that René Chouteau was in fact Auguste, since as an adult, Auguste, like his father, was sometimes called René Auguste. This could explain the absence of baptismal record for Auguste.

during these years, while the New Orleans census included Marie Thérèse as the Widow Chouteau.²⁸³ Apparently, Marie Thérèse Bourgeois Chouteau did not expect to see her husband again as she soon engaged in a relationship with another man.

A few years after her husband abandoned her, Marie Thérèse built a new life with Pierre de Laclède Liguist. Laclède was born in Bedous in the Pyrenees on November 22, 1729, to a prominent family of attorneys and officeholders. A graduate of the Université de Toulouse, Laclède, like many young French bourgeois, sailed to America to build his own empire. He reached New Orleans in 1755 and soon established himself as a successful wholesaler, joining the circle of some of the most prominent businessmen in the community. Soon he impressed the young and determined widow. Their union brought four children in New Orleans: Jean Pierre, born on October 10, 1758, Marie Pelagie, on October 6, 1760, Marie Louise, born on December 4, 1762, and Victoire, born on March 3, 1764.²⁸⁴ Madame Chouteau's long-standing relationship with Laclède "legitimized" their children as the couple as the couple could not legally marry.

When René Chouteau resurfaced in Louisiana in 1767, he claimed his right as a husband and father in vain. Because the church prevented her from divorcing her absent husband, Marie Thérèse and her four children fathered by Laclède were baptized Chouteau and René Chouteau's name was entered in the church baptismal register as their legitimate father.²⁸⁵ On July 29, 1767, Chouteau boarded on a ship from La Rochelle, France, to Louisiana. Once in

²⁸³ Foley & Rice, *The First Chouteaus*, 2.

²⁸⁴ Stan Hoig, *The Chouteaus: First Family of the Fur Trade* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 3.

²⁸⁵ McDermott, "Laclède and the Chouteaus: Fantasies and Facts."

New Orleans, Chouteau found his wife, whom he left in her teens with no resources, had become a very respected and wealthy businesswoman. René Chouteau took legal initiative in 1774 to assert his marital rights over Marie Thérèse and disprove the legality of her partnership to Laclède.²⁸⁶ As prominent members of the community in St. Louis, the Laclède-Chouteau family made René Chouteau's inquiry invalid.

II. The Building of St. Louis

Pierre de Laclède's decision to move to St. Louis had changed the lives of the Chouteaus as well as the lives of the Osage Indians. Within the context of the Seven Years War (1754-1763), the French government feared the merchants' inability to provide the Indians goods in upper Louisiana. They granted an eight-year trade monopoly on the Missouri River to Maxent, Laclède and Company. The Osage constituted a crucial part of this trade.²⁸⁷ The fur trade in St. Louis proved to be an opportunity to the Laclède business to recover from the losses caused by the French and Indian War. In 1763, Laclède took part of a trading expedition among the Indian tribes along the Missouri River.²⁸⁸ Marie Thérèse, who initially remained in New Orleans to

²⁸⁶ Foley & Rice, *The First Chouteaus*, 3.

²⁸⁷ Din & Nasatir, *Imperial Osage*, 52. D'Abbadie was born in France in 1726. In 1763 and after twenty years of government service, he was appointed *directeur du comptoir* of the colony of Louisiana.

²⁸⁸ Hoig, *The Chouteaus*, 3. In 1763, Jean Jacques D'Abbadie, the New Governor of Louisiana, introduced new economic policy and granted Gilbert Antoine Maxent, a merchant, trading right with the Missouri Indian tribes for a six years period. Laclède and August took a 700 mile journey to reach the Illinois country.

deliver her fourth child, joined her husband and son a year later. Auguste Chouteau had acquired a solid education that convinced his stepfather to hire him as his clerk.²⁸⁹ Laclède provided Auguste with valuable experience within the world of commerce that was necessary for his success in St. Louis. The three months' journey up the Mississippi took Auguste Chouteau to what would become the birthplace of his economic success and the Chouteau family's empire.

Upon the arrival of the French, the Indians of the region welcomed the opportunity to enter in an exchange with the Heavy Eyebrows again. With a Spanish license, the company's temporary trading post was set at Fort de Chartres.²⁹⁰ Soon, delegations of Indians brought fur to exchange for merchandise. The French traders needed to establish a place for commercial exchange. Laclède needed to find a strategic place for his permanent settlement close to the Indians on the Spanish side of the territory, as the eastern side became British that same year. Accompanied by Auguste, he marked the place that was to become the headquarters of his business company, one that offered access to the Mississippi, Missouri, and Illinois Rivers.²⁹¹ Laclède would name his settlement St. Louis to honor King Louis IX.

In February 1764, Laclède sent Auguste "to proceed and land at the place where we marked the trees; you will commence to have the place cleared, and build a large shed to contain the provisions and the tools...I will join you before long."²⁹² Under Auguste's direction, thirty laborers began to establish the settlement, building a storage shed and several cabins within a

²⁸⁹ Hoig, *The Chouteaus*, 5.

²⁹⁰ Din & Nasatir, *Imperial Osage*, 53.

²⁹¹ Foley & Rice, *The First Chouteaus*, 5,6.

²⁹² Hoig, *The Chouteaus*, 6.

two month period. By the summer, as the British occupied the Louisiana territory east of the Mississippi, Laclède offered refuge to the French in his newly founded settlement. In September of the same year, Madame Chouteau and her children, including 6-year-old Pierre, traveled up the river to be part of the St. Louis community. The family temporarily resided in the trading house, before they moved to the Chouteau Mansion, where they lived until their death.²⁹³ Three years later, the first census for St. Louis showed three hundred inhabitants. Within few years, Auguste Chouteau saw St. Louis grow as the trade with the neighboring Indians increased.

The presence of the Indians in St. Louis provided Auguste an opportunity to gain experience in trading as he observed his stepfather negotiating with them. A group of Missouri Indians, including one hundred and fifty warriors, reached St. Louis and expressed their intention of settling nearby, prompting Auguste to ask Laclède to join the settlement to deal with them. Not knowing the intentions of the Indians, Laclède warned them “as a good Father” that there were six or seven hundred warriors at Fort De Chartres, who could destroy them if they learned about their presence in St. Louis. As the Indians expressed their need for food, he issued them provisions, along with gunpowder and knives so they could hunt and protect themselves.²⁹⁴ Eventually, he convinced them to go back to their settlement. By 1766, the visitor Captain Harry Gordon reported that Laclède was “the principle Indian trader... who takes so good measures that the whole trade of the Missouri, that of the Mississippi Northwards, and that of the Nations by the Illinois River, is entirely brought to him.” Another Englishman reported that the

²⁹³ Christian, *Before Lewis and Clark*, 39.

²⁹⁴ Hoig, *The Chouteaus*, 6-7.

Frenchman “is acquiring a great influence over all the Indian Nations.”²⁹⁵ Meanwhile, Auguste hired Missouri women and children to work in the settlement.²⁹⁶

III. The Chouteaus as Consorts among the Osages

Business linked the Osage Indians to the Chouteaus while intimacy linked the two by blood for generations. As Laclède’s chief clerk, Auguste Chouteau gained a reputation among the neighboring Indian chiefs who traded with them. While some Indians had to travel to St. Louis to exchange goods, Laclède hired agents who went to the neighboring Indian villages to trade for their fur. Throughout his experience in the fur trade, Auguste Chouteau filled many of the primary fur-trade roles himself. He often traveled the rivers to reach the Indian tribes, where he bargained for furs with the Indians.²⁹⁷ As Auguste Chouteau worked ever closer with the Indians, St. Louis gained the name of the Sho’to To-Wo’n among the Osage Indians.²⁹⁸ His half brother, Pierre, accompanied him at a very early age and often stayed among the Indians, for long periods of time learning their ways and traditions.

²⁹⁵ Hoig, *The Chouteaus*, 8. Additionally, the Chouteaus taught themselves the formal bookkeeping and written communication skills (primarily in French) so necessary to their business, conducting trade with the world. The Chouteaus traded with Western Europe, including France, England, and Germany; Africa, more specifically Morocco; as well as the Caribbean and Latin America, primarily Mexico and Peru. “The Chouteau Papers Collection,” Missouri Historical Society Archives, St. Louis, MO.

²⁹⁶ Foley & Rice, *The First Chouteaus*, 6.

²⁹⁷ Hoig, *The Chouteaus*, 10.

²⁹⁸ Mathews, *The Osage*, 277.

Crucial to the Chouteau's success was their intimate relations with Osage women. In 1777, Lieutenant Governor Francisco Curzat declared that trade among the Osage Indians was the "most profitable of all the Illinois nations, since they produced five hundred to five hundred and fifty packets of deerskins annually." The Chouteaus alone enjoyed 40 percent of all trade with the tribe.²⁹⁹ The same year, Auguste's license stated that he had delivered the equivalent of 10,000 deerskin pounds of goods and merchandise to the Indians.³⁰⁰ One visitor reported that "the countenances of the Osage squaws...were bent towards the earth, from the burden of skins or other articles imposed upon their shoulders."³⁰¹ To take advantage of their skills, white traders in the upper Louisiana often had Indian wives, whose children remained within their tribes. These unions linked the two nations socially, economically, and diplomatically through their children, the *métis*, who grew up much like Indians. Both Auguste and Pierre had wives, using the Indian concept of marriage, for sexual gratification, but most importantly to foster trading relations.

Auguste and Pierre had intimate access to Osage women during their teenage years and early adulthood. It is only at the age of thirty-nine that Auguste married, in the Christian way, his first French wife, Marie-Thérèse Cerré, which was very late within the society during the time period.³⁰² However, by the time he was eighteen, Auguste regularly spent his winters among the

²⁹⁹ Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 110.

³⁰⁰ Christian, *Before Lewis and Clark*, 64.

³⁰¹ *Ibid*, 51.

³⁰² Carl Ekberg, *Stealing Indian Women: Native Slavery in the Illinois Country* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 82. Before his marriage to a French woman, Auguste must

Osage. Perrin du Lac reported that accepting, marrying in the Indian way, the daughter of the Kansas Indians, neighbor and kin of the Osage, was a prerequisite for the fur traders.³⁰³ Like other fur traders in the region, Auguste had to respond to the exigencies of the trade and attach himself to the Osage tribe. Young Auguste entered in sexual unions and most likely marital unions, in the Indian way, with at least one Osage woman. In 1767 or 1768, when he was eighteen, Auguste and his Osage mate gave birth to their son Antoine. Antoine must have grown up among the Osage and might have spent some time in St. Louis as well. Antoine Chouteau received a license to trade with Indians from the Spanish in 1792. The list of the fur traders included Auguste and Pierre Chouteau, while it identified Antoine Chouteau as a *mestizo*, the only non-Frenchman. Auguste must have used his connections with the Spaniards to acquire the

have had a relationship with a *métis* slave who belonged to Francisco Curzat and might have fathered two of her children. On August, 24, 1783, Auguste purchased an unborn, “*dans le ventre de sa mere*,” slave child who was most likely his son. The bill specified that the child would not be separated from his mother and that the child could be left with his mother if Auguste chose so. Auguste paid an extraordinary price, 1,450 *livres*, for a child who might not have survived. The child was baptized Auguste on November 2, 1783, the illegitimate son of Marie, a *métis* slave belonging to Francisco Curzat.

³⁰³ Christian, *Before Lewis and Clark*, 51.

license for his son Antoine.³⁰⁴ Auguste built a trustworthy reputation among the Osage. Meanwhile, life among the Osage became second nature to his brother Pierre.

Pierre Chouteau, who from his youth displayed a passion for trading with the Indians, was taken by his brother Auguste into the wilds of the Missouri and spent most of his childhood and teenage life among their Osage partners. As early as 1775, the seventeen-year-old Pierre had already lived among the Osage for long periods, learning their language, their customs and rituals, and importantly, their social and political mores.³⁰⁵ While Pierre's tie with an Osage woman is more obscure, the tribe's deep attachment and trust in him is conclusive. Pierre and his Osage consort gave birth to Paul, born in 1775. Paul worked as an Osage interpreter, usually figuring on Pierre's payroll. Later, Paul accompanied one of the Osage delegations to Washington D.C. and the Osage delegation that traveled to France in 1827-29. Although Paul's identity is debatable, he was sometimes referred to by government officials as "Paul Chouteau" and at other times as "young Chouteau." Records show that "Paul Chouteau" fathered a child by an Osage woman, baptized on September 5, 1803, while he served as a godfather at another baptism.³⁰⁶ Paul was most likely Pierre's *métis* son.

³⁰⁴ Christian, *Before Lewis and Clark*, 87. St. Louis Cathedral's burial records show that Antoine Chouteau, "from Illinois country, son of Auguste Chouteau" was buried in New Orleans on November 4, 1796. He was married to Helene Angelica Docteur.

³⁰⁵ Hoig, *The Chouteaus*, 11, 12.

³⁰⁶ Christian, *Before Lewis and Clark*, 87-89. The confusion about Paul's identity was caused by the existence of a Frenchman Paul Loise and that the two men might have been one. But given

The Chouteau brothers did not integrate their *métis* children into their white families; however, the presence of the Chouteaus' mixed race children maintained the partnership between the Indians and the Chouteaus. Because they remained among the Osage, the children became a bridge between the two cultures. An early resident of St. Louis described how "Pierre's long intercourse and traffic with the tribes of the lower Missouri had given him great influence over them, and they held him in high respect. In their frequent visits to our village he [Pierre Chouteau] kindly allowed them the use of his large grounds for their temporary abiding place... They would often promenade down our Main Street in Indian file to his brother, Col. Auguste Chouteau's residence at Market Street." On May 27, 1778, Laclède died and Auguste was appointed at the head of the family business to deal with both the Indians and the Spaniards.³⁰⁷

IV. St. Louis under the Spanish Rule

The kinship and friendship that resulted from the Osage Chouteau intimate encounters allowed them to renegotiate their ways within the new era. Defeated in the French and Indian War of 1754-1763, France ceded its possessions in North America to the benefit of its Spanish and British competitors. As part of the peace negotiations signed in 1763, the western part of French

the fact that Paul was at the head of the Little Osage Indians, he must have been a *métis* rather than a Frenchman.

³⁰⁷ Hoig, *The Chouteaus*, 16, 14. Laclède died on board of a boat on his way back from New Orleans. The crew buried him "On the south bank of the Arkansas River, at its mouth under the shade of the forest trees, the rude coffin, hastily constructed of the oar-benches of his barge, and which enclosed his body, was deposited in his grave."

Louisiana was annexed to the Spanish empire. As the Spanish crown was slow to send officials to begin their rule in Louisiana, the residents of St. Louis and their Indian partners continued life as if they were still in a French colony. French traders worked to maintain their relationship with their native kin after the diplomatic ties with France had broken.

At the first sign of the Spanish dominance in the French colony, settlers and Natives organized to resist the changes. In March 1766, the Spanish governor Antonio de Ulloa arrived in Louisiana. In an attempt to control the economics of the newly acquired territory, Ulloa issued new commercial decrees that changed trade practices within the colony. Merchants had been accustomed to trading with French ports in the Caribbean, in addition to conducting illegal commerce with the nearby British colonies. Ulloa's new trade decrees ended such trade and fostered resentment among colonists. The leaders of New Orleans' business community led discussions that inflamed the colony. The frustration resulted in a mob insurrection that forced the first Spanish Governor to leave.³⁰⁸

As the Spaniards exclusively assigned the Osage trade to the Chouteaus, who had already established themselves among them, the two forged even closer ties. In the summer of 1767, Spanish royal soldiers arrived at St. Louis, signaling the beginning of a new era. Because of the heavy expenditures during the war, the Spanish control over its newly acquired territory was delayed. Alarmed by the active British presence in the Mississippi valley, Spanish Ulloa dispatched Captain Don Francisco R u to establish a Spanish post at the mouth of the Missouri River.³⁰⁹ The Spanish needed to gain control of the region to eliminate the British intrusions into

³⁰⁸ Bennett Wall, *et al.*, *Louisiana: A History* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 1997), 57.

³⁰⁹ Ekberg, *Fran ois Vall *, 98.

Spanish upper Louisiana. It was also critical to establish contact with the Indian nations in the region in order to take full advantage of the lucrative fur trade they inherited from the French authority. The Spaniards tried to control the Missouri River through the use of licensed traders as the French did before, but would soon learn the hard way that the Osage Indians and French hunters and traders, not French colonial government, controlled the fur trade.

The Spanish era had begun in Chouteau Town with the transfer of power being resisted by the French traders and habitants, who remained in control of the trade center with the Indians. The Spanish established Fort Don Carlos on the Missouri River at the junction of the Mississippi and restricted the Missouri River trade for the Spanish officials. These actions angered the French traders and a general protest against the regulation was organized by St. Louis traders including the Laclède-Chouteau clan. The Chouteaus forced the Spaniards to nullify the regulation. Moreover, because of the 1769 insurrection in New Orleans, the Spaniards were forced to appoint a former French commandant, Captain St. Ange, to administer the province in the meantime.³¹⁰ The Spanish crown sent Alejandro O'Reilly who instituted reforms to encourage economic exchange between Louisiana and other Spanish colonies. Soon, the Spanish officials in St. Louis hired Frenchmen to reconcile residents with the Spanish government. As a result, Frenchmen were hired to survey all of the lots and Pierre Chouteau, who was barely in his teens,

³¹⁰ Foley & Rice, *The First Chouteaus*, 14.

assisted with the project.³¹¹ Even though St. Louis residents swore loyalty to Charles III, the French had managed to maintain their authority on the trade network.

For their part, the Osage showed the same resistance and made the Spaniards understand that they, not the French, were in charge. In the spring of 1770, the Osage raided hunters on the Arkansas River, seizing their arms, munitions, and clothing. They attacked the district of Natchitoches, captured women and children, and stole horses and mules. A year later, the Osage stole horses and killed neighboring Indians.³¹² A Spanish official was worried by the instability created by the Osage whom he described as “one of the most restless, most inclined to thievery, and most evil-intentioned of all nations.”³¹³ Seeking advice from the French, St. Ange suggested that the Spaniards provide the natives some gifts annually in St. Louis.

Indians and French manipulated the Spaniards for their mutual benefits. Among the Natives, gift-giving was part of an exchange that involved two parties. The French understood the importance of the exchange during their early contact with the natives. De Tonti was touched by the gesture of “the best made” and the most amicable woman, who “noticing that I was admiring the necklace that she was wearing around her neck, undid it and gave it to me in a more

³¹¹ O'Reilly's first task was to investigate the insurrection and punish those found guilty. Of the thirteen prosecuted, one was set free, six were sentenced to death and the other six were given long prison sentences. Wall, *et al.*, *Louisiana: A History*, 79.

³¹² Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 70.

³¹³ Ekberg, *François Vallé and His World*, 220.

than fair way.”³¹⁴ Under the Spanish however, gift-giving became an “Indian policy,” not an exchange. Spanish officials showered the Indians with gifts to “pay” them for their loyalty. The French encouraged the Spaniards to give more gifts, in return, the Indians strongly suggested the Spaniards to keep the Frenchmen at the head of the posts or hire them as interpreters.

While O’Reilly, the new Governor, proved better than his predecessor in establishing Spanish authority, Louisiana was still run by its Native and French residents. The laws and *les coutumes de Paris*, which had governed the colony during the French regime, remained essentially unchanged under Spanish colonial governance. In theory, Spanish was the official language and French officials were substituted by Spanish ones; but in actuality, many Frenchmen were appointed to offices, and French remained the most important language in the colony. Because very few Spaniards lived in the region, St. Louis maintained its French character and French language.³¹⁵ Spanish officials relied on the French who, although recent enemies, had the experience and the language skills necessary to deal with the Natives. In 1778, Lt. Governor Fernando de Leyba apologized to Governor General Bernardo de Galvez for sending some documents in French, as “there is not at this post anyone who can write Spanish

³¹⁴ *Relation de la Louisiane et du Mississippi par le Chevalier de Tonti, Gouverneur du Fort Saint Louis, aux Illinois*, Archives de Musée de Quai de Branly, Paris, France, 120. The original text reads: “La mieux faite et celle qui paraissait la plus aimable ayant pris garde que j'admirais le collier qu'elle portait a son cou, le détacha et me l'offrit d'une manière tout a fait honnête.”

³¹⁵ Wolferman, *The Osage in Missouri*, 34.

even moderately well unless it is a soldier, of whose services I have not availed myself because of the many errors which he makes.”³¹⁶

The Spanish appreciated the Chouteaus’ influence with the Osage and hoped to establish good relations with them through the French. During the war with Britain, the Spanish relied on the Chouteau brothers to use their fortune and influence with the Osage to enlist their help for the protection of St. Louis. On May 26, with the help of five hundred Osage warriors, the Spanish and French resisted the British during the Battle of St. Louis. On another occasion, Lt. Governor Don Francisco Cruzat was angered because the British distributed medals and flags to the Indians. He immediately hired Auguste to contact the Indians and make them return the British gifts. Chouteau was then sent to New Orleans to obtain medals and Spanish flags to replace the British ones. Auguste managed to convince the Sac and Fox Indians to ally with the Spanish instead of the British in the fall of 1780.³¹⁷

For the Chouteaus, it was also crucial to establish a connection with the Spanish authority in hope of regaining their trade monopoly in the region. Intimate ties connected the Chouteau family with important Spanish officers, under whom they operated for more than four decades. A cousin of the Chouteau brothers, Julia Papin, married Benito Vasquez, a member of the Spanish militia at St. Louis and later a civil authority. Two daughters of Laclède’s business associate Gilbert Antoine de Maxent married Spanish governors of Louisiana.³¹⁸ These ties allowed the Chouteaus to establish themselves within the colonial government circle. The

³¹⁶ Foley & Rice, *The First Chouteaus*, 15.

³¹⁷ Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 59, 133.

³¹⁸ Hoig, *The Chouteaus*, 12.

Chouteaus were also to use their influence over the Spaniards to protect their business partners and kin the Osage.

Encouraged by the Chouteaus, Spanish officials showered the Osage with gifts to maintain peace in the region. In order to maintain the loyalty of the Indians, the Spaniards increased the amount of money spent on gifts and merchandise for the Indians. The government's budget for Indian affairs during the war period (1776-1785) was three and one-half times bigger than the amount spent from 1766 to 1775. Galvez authorized Cruzat to distribute gifts to the natives including the nations on the east bank of the Mississippi in order to attract "to our devotion those tribes of the English district."³¹⁹ The Osage Indians received their share of the Spanish presents, as an official insisted that "the intentions of court are to maintain" to insure tranquility among the Indian nations. Meanwhile, in February 1780, the Osage pillaged and killed hunters in the woods near the Arkansas Post, including Pierre Borde, a soldier at the post. In May, the Osage killed another soldier and injured another man on the Arkansas River.³²⁰ The Osage proved that Spanish gifts alone would not buy peace in the region. Intimate ties and friendship were necessary to maintain political and diplomatic relations in the frontier.

V. Manipulating the Spaniards

The Osages, with whom the Chouteaus were most closely connected, were the most problematic tribe for the Spanish colonial government in upper Louisiana. Supplied with guns and

³¹⁹ Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 131.

³²⁰ *Ibid*, 120, 121.

ammunition by the French, the Osage dominated the region by the second half of the eighteenth century. The Osage constantly raided weaker neighboring tribes. The Spanish tried to establish control over them as early as 1779. Governor Bernardo de Galvez was unhappy with Osages “atrocities [committed] against the subjects of the King” while they received his annual presents to maintain their friendship.³²¹ The Osage drove away the Wichita Indians of the Arkansas River who retreated to the Red River.³²² Angered by the raids, hunters and inhabitants of the post petitioned in 1789 to go to war against the Osage saying; “we are robbed by the Osages not only of the products of the hunt but even of our shirts.”³²³ However, the Spanish urged the settlers to drop the idea as they uncovered the Osage plot against the post itself.

The Osage, backed by the Chouteaus, manipulated the Spaniards by refusing to take responsibility for their actions. Every time the Spanish tried to cut off trade or organize an expedition against them, the Osages sent a delegation to “explain” their acts— often blaming it on few bad Osage men— and apologized while promising that they would prevent these attacks in the future while asking for peace.³²⁴ In 1787, the Osage once more attacked and killed hunters in the Arkansas district. Fearing the Spanish reprisal, the Osage spread the rumor that Big Osage Chief, Jean Lafon, was to bring the murderers to St. Louis. However, Lafon failed to deliver the

³²¹ Kathleen DuVal, “Choosing Enemies: The Prospects for an Anti-American Alliance in the Louisiana Territory,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 62 (Autumn 2003): 62, 3; 236, 237.

³²² Hoig, *The Chouteaus*, 19.

³²³ Arnold, *Unequal Laws*, 76.

³²⁴ DuVal, “Choosing Enemies,” 243.

criminals and declared that he could not answer complaints against the Arkansas Osage.³²⁵ As the Spaniards threatened to ban trade with the Osage, Lafon and several members of his tribe traveled to St Louis to protest in October 1787 saying: “It is not I or the young men who are here who have killed; it is some fools over whom I am not master. Do you not have some fools among your young men?...They are stupid.”³²⁶ He explained the Osage chiefs, like the European ones, were not obeyed all the time.³²⁷ Meanwhile, the Osage were trading with the English.

The Spanish imposed an embargo on commercial activities with the tribe but the Osage and Chouteaus managed to undermine the sanction and worked hand in hand to manipulate the Spaniards for their mutual benefits. Spanish officials were baffled by the Osages’ pledges of loyalty to the Spanish and, at the same time, by their disloyal actions that included robbery and murder. The Spanish proclaimed the Osage enemies of Spain, prohibiting trade with them on May 13, 1787, angering French traders and merchants in St. Louis who had established a lucrative trade with the Osages.³²⁸ The colonists were simply not willing to stop trading with their most profitable partner and faithful allies.

The Chouteaus defied the Spanish official embargo. In March 1791, French hunters who lived among the Osage informed the Spaniards that many hunters remained among the Osage with their wives. They asserted that the tribe continued to obtain merchandise from Pierre

³²⁵ Some Osage began to settle in Arkansas in the 1770s and became to be known as the Arkansas Band of Osage. Wolferman, *The Osage in Missouri*, 10.

³²⁶ *Ibid*, 39.

³²⁷ Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 181.

³²⁸ DuVal, “Choosing Enemies,” 237.

Chouteau on the Kansas River, including “barrels of gunpowder they had recently brought to the village.”³²⁹ Pierre Chouteau denied that he continued trading with the Osage even though he admitted that had traveled up the Kansas River that same spring. He reported that the English acquired furs from the Missouri River tribes. According to him, a party of about a hundred Big Osage arrived, inquiring the reason for the Spanish trade ban. Through Chouteau, the Osage expressed their will to travel down to St. Louis to explain that they had made the necessary reparations for the crime to the commandant of the Arkansas Post, who forgave them and offered gifts and flags.³³⁰ The story is one example of how the Chouteaus and their Osage allies collaborated to try to manipulate the Spanish.

Moreover, a Chickasaw war party reported that the Osage were well armed and that there were about ten St. Louis traders, including Chouteaus in their village. The Chickasaws complained to the Spaniards about the Frenchmen who exchanged goods with the Osage suggesting that “if the great chief of New Orleans had all those who carry goods to the Osages Killed, there would be no one to carry it.”³³¹ The Chickasaws affirmed that goods were “pouring into their village” as a captive Osage woman revealed that despite the ban, ten barges from the Illinois arrived at Osage villages during the summer of 1792.³³² The same year, the Osage killed two hunters on the Arkansas River. In March, the Osage stole horses, killed and pillaged French

³²⁹ Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 208.

³³⁰ *Ibid*, 210.

³³¹ *Ibid*, 235.

³³² DuVal, “Choosing Enemies,” 237.

and Indian hunters, and destroyed property in St. Genevieve.³³³ Shortly after, a Big Osage delegation reached St. Louis for negotiations and blamed the crimes on the Little Osage.

As the Osage continued their aggressions, and as the Spaniards were ready to destroy the Osage, the Chouteaus offered an alternative. The new Spanish governor Baron de Carondelet declared that it was necessary to “finish with them once and for all.” In order to end the “cruelties caused by the Osage,” he ordered the Indian nations to launch an expedition against the Osage so that they could “bring them back to reason.”³³⁴ The French Commandant at St. Louis explained that “the war against the Osages did not favor us...I fear seeing ourselves slaughtered even in our villages...in truth, what nations could ever really succeed in reducing the Osages.”³³⁵ Carondelet seemed less conscious than the French about the danger of declaring war

³³³ Letter to Etienne de Miro, Governor General of Louisiana, *Papeles de Cuba, Legajo 7, Archivo General de Indias*, Seville, Spain. The habitants of St Genevieve, petitioned for an action to be taken against the Osage who “les vexation continuelles de la nation des Ozages du fleuve Misourie; enlevent nos chevaux, pillent les chasseurs Français et Sauvages.”

³³⁴ Letter from Governor Francisco Luis de Carondelet to Ignacio de Lino, June 2, 1792, *Papeles de Cuba, Legajo 18, Archivo General de Indias*, Seville, Spain. « ... La perfidia de los osages, y de la providencia que le parece conviene para contener las las crueldades de esta Nacion sobre lo que tengo tomadas mis medidas y ademas enviare... batas, y fusiles por la ocasion que se presente... excitar a todas las Naciones a que caigan sobre dichos osages, d fin que ostigados se rindan a la razon. »

³³⁵ Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 251.

against the Osage. Meanwhile, the Chouteaus realized the threat of the war on the Osage on the stability and trade in the region.

Auguste and Pierre Chouteau provided an alternative to the war and the annihilation of the Osage because of their influence with the Indians. In the fall of 1793, Pierre Chouteau concluded a treaty with the Big Osage, the “Fort of the Big Osages” treaty, in which the French proposed to build a fort near the Osage villages. The Osage, who had faith in Chouteau, immediately accepted idea, telling their “Brother,” who “since a long time, fed our wives and children [and] always assisted us with thy advice, we have listened to thy words.” The Osage had offered Chouteau to “take thou on the Rivière a la Mine the quantity of land which may suit thee and anywhere thou pleases” to build the fort. The Osage granted Chouteau the lands to build the fort and deposit his merchandise as stipulated in the signed paper. The Osage suggested Chouteau to show that paper in case their “children do trouble thee” and guaranteed him that if some Indian nation “trouble thee, we are ready to defend thee.”³³⁶ The treaty was signed by several Big and Little Osage chiefs including Cheveux Blancs, Tohner Foux, Robal, Le Bombarde, Voi Hahan, Petit Chief, Clermont, Bel Oiseau, Plume Blanche, Soldat du [Chene], and Vent.

³³⁶ Christian, *Before Lewis and Clark*, 93.



Figure 10. Painting of the Osage and Spanish Treaty in New Orleans (Missouri Historical Society Archives, St. Louis, MO)

To protect the Osage and their ongoing trade, Chouteau explained to Carondelet that despite the Spanish restrictions, the majority of the Osage fur had gone to the English, who robbed the Spanish of their most lucrative business in the region. Carondelet was willing to accept peace with the Osages if they were to accept his conditions and restrictions. He wanted to restrict free trade with the Osage, which provided them with guns and munitions that enabled them to expand at the expense of their neighbors. To that end, he permitted only one commercial house in St. Louis as a center for the trade with them and to provide arms and munitions in small quantities for hunting.³³⁷ The agreement between the three parties gave birth to Fort Carondelet among the Osage Indians. In spring of 1794, Auguste and an Osage delegation traveled down to New Orleans to negotiate peace with Governor Carondelet. Once in the capital, the Governor received the Osage with a big reception, where they were entertained with a Spanish military parade, designed to impress them. Carondelet showed his generosity towards the Indian Chiefs who received medals.³³⁸ Once more, Auguste used his persuasive talent to convince the parties to agree.

The construction of the Post among the Osage nation granted the Chouteau brothers more power in the region. “As it is important to appoint a commander for the Post, by the ability and influence which these two brothers have upon their Nation,” the Baron of Carondelet appointed “Lieutenant and Militian Pierre Chouteau to fulfill this charge of Commander.”³³⁹

³³⁷ Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 253.

³³⁸ *Ibid*, 260.

³³⁹ Letter from Baron de Carondelet, on May 21, 1794, Pierre Chouteau Collection, Box # 1, Missouri Historical Society Archives, St. Louis, MO.

Meanwhile, Chouteau urged the Spaniards' generosity towards these Indians and offered his protection to them. The six-year contract stipulated that the Chouteau brothers were granted a trading monopoly with the Osages.³⁴⁰ Meanwhile, between 1794 and 1800, when Osage raids occurred in the region, the Chouteaus mediated with the Spaniards to preserve their friendship with the Osage and protect them. In 1795 for instance, a party of forty Osage warriors attacked and pillaged hunters' camp on the Arkansas River. Immediately, Auguste Chouteau arranged for the burial of the dead and had the Osage return the stolen horses and arms.³⁴¹ Further, warriors under Chief Cheveux Blancs stole horses from Ste. Genvieve district. Immediately, the new Lieutenant Governor, Colonel Carlos Dehault Delassus, ordered Auguste to inform his brother Pierre at Fort Carondelet to recover the animals. Pierre sent word demanding that the guilty men to be turned over to authorities. The chief of the band delivered himself and was held at fort Carondelet.³⁴² At least, that is what Chouteau claimed; it is impossible to know this is the truth or just another trick from Pierre to manipulate the Spaniards and protect the Osage. In 1796, Auguste Chouteau wrote to Carondelet to show his "satisfaction and for the good fortune of the Colony, I see with pleasure that you be the Governor for at least another year" and assured him that the Osage country "continues to enjoy tranquility" as "it seems that there has not been any trouble...since my brother has told me nothing about it."³⁴³ The Chouteaus maneuvered to

³⁴⁰ Letter from Baron de Carondelet, on May 21, 1794, Pierre Chouteau Collection, Box # 1, Missouri Historical Society Archives, St. Louis, MO.

³⁴¹ Mathews, *The Osage*, 283.

³⁴² Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 308.

³⁴³ Letter from Chouteau to Carondelet, on December 8, 1796, Pierre Chouteau Collection, Box # 1, Missouri Historical Society Archives, St. Louis, MO.

compromise with the Spanish government for the protection of their protégés and friends: the Osage.

The Chouteaus' intervention on behalf of their brothers the Osage satisfied the Spaniards while it angered other Indian tribes. A Spanish official at St. Louis reported that he had been "greatly surprised at seeing the confidence which this tribe places in Messrs. Chouteau, and the manner in which they get along with them. For the general peace they are the ones who have greatly contributed to it, in particular Don Pedro Chouteau, Commandant of Fort Carondelet. From the time that these two gentlemen have kept the tribe under their care, their raids against us have diminished in great part."³⁴⁴ For the Spaniards, the Chouteaus, who did not fail to occasionally mention that "the Osage are conducting themselves very well," succeeded in bringing tranquility among the Osage, fulfilling their part of the contract. Further, Chouteau pleaded in the favor of the Osage and expressed their need for help as "all the other tribes of the Mississippi are at war" with the Osage who "have done little hunting" because of fear of being attacked.³⁴⁵ From 1790 to 1803, thanks to the Chouteaus, the Osage received hundreds of guns, blankets, needles, mirrors, and hatchets, thousands of knives, beads, and bracelets, tons of lead, as well as gun powder, rope, silk, shoes, and wool.³⁴⁶ The Chouteaus' actions angered other

³⁴⁴ Hoig, *The Chouteaus*, 22.

³⁴⁵ Letter from Auguste Chouteau to Manuel Gayoso de Lemon, St. Louis on April 14, 1799, Pierre Chouteau Collection, Box # 3, Missouri Historical Society Archives, St. Louis, MO.

³⁴⁶ DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 172.

Indians of the region, including Chief Pacanné of the Miamis tribe who complained about Auguste Chouteau who excessively favored the Osages.³⁴⁷

This criticism of the attachment between the Chouteaus and the Osage sparked Spanish suspicion. The success of Fort Carondelet came under question as the news that “the Osage have done some more of their knavish tricks on the Arkansas River” reached the Spaniards.³⁴⁸ As the critics against Pierre increased, Auguste Chouteau protested affirming the he and his brother Pierre labored to bring peace to the region and that Pierre brought the “two partisans” and put them in the prison of St. Louis “until the governor shall give orders.”³⁴⁹ He maintained that the Osage would be subdued slowly. He assured the Spaniards of the Osage friendship and their commitment to help them in case of crisis despite the violent incidents.³⁵⁰ The Chouteaus’ trade monopoly with the Osages had also created resentment among other traders and hunters in Missouri. In 1800, as Auguste traveled again to New Orleans to request an extension for his expiring license, other merchants in St. Louis protested and petitioned Chouteau’s request, wanting to establish free trade among the Osage.

As the Spaniards ended the Chouteaus’ trade monopoly among the Osage, the Spanish fort was destroyed. In 1802, the Spaniards cancelled the trade agreement signed with the Chouteaus and granted the petitioners trade rights among the Osage. In fall 1802, Pierre

³⁴⁷ Wolferman, *The Osage in Missouri*, 43.

³⁴⁸ Letter from Auguste Chouteau to Manuel Gayoso de Lemon, St. Louis on June 24, 1797, Pierre Chouteau Collection, Box # 1, Missouri Historical Society Archives, St. Louis, MO.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 282.

Chouteau left the fort and soon thereafter, the Little and Big Osage warriors destroyed it.³⁵¹ The end of the official treaty between the Chouteaus and Osage did not cut off the friendship secured by their intimate ties. Instead, the Chouteaus continued trade with the Osage who moved to Arkansas. In fact, the Chouteaus-Osage friendship would allow the two people to negotiate in a new era, after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803.

VI. Resisting the American Manifest Destiny

By the time of the Louisiana Purchase, the United States government courted the Chouteaus for their ties with the Indians and hoped to use their influence with them during the transfer of power. On October 1, 1800, Spain ceded the Louisiana Territory back to France and on December 20, 1803 it was formally transferred to United States rule.³⁵² Immediately, President Thomas Jefferson pledged the United States government to “use forbearance, and open commerce...[so] they, [the Indians], will come to us.” Jefferson felt that the U.S. policy towards the Indians “must rely for their friendship, and not their fears.” Jefferson wanted to designate federal agents who would become the Indians’ “father and friend.”³⁵³

As the Spanish evacuated Upper Louisiana 1804, American officials took charge and began to familiarize themselves with their newly acquired land, its settlers, and its native Indian nations. The Osage, like other Indians in Louisiana territory understood Jefferson’s usage of the term “father” to refer to the U.S. government’s responsibility to provide goods, as they had with

³⁵¹ Wolferman, *The Osage in Missouri*, 44-45.

³⁵² Wolferman, *The Osage in Missouri*, 47.

³⁵³ *Ibid*, 62.

the French and Spanish. As the westward surge of population, which resulted from the purchase, created tensions in the frontier, Jefferson reassured the Osages that now that “the strangers,” in reference to the Europeans, had left Louisiana, “the red and white people there were all now one family.”³⁵⁴ They were all Americans.

The Louisiana Purchase signaled the beginning of a new era, where the Osages and Chouteaus worked together to survive under American rule. With the Louisiana Purchase came the desire for the federal government to push its frontier westward and learn about its new lands, new people, and the possibilities of trade. As a result, several official and private expeditions were launched within the first decade of nineteenth century. During the transfer of Louisiana to the United States, St. Louis was looked upon as “a position where the trade of the Missouri, Mississippi, and the other rivers, was most likely the center” of trade in upper Louisiana. It was also a dominant midcontinent passageway to the American West.³⁵⁵

St. Louis, the Chouteau and Osage trade center, became the gate to the west. The Lewis and Clark expedition was meant to finish the exploration of the Missouri River and find what the French and Spaniards failed to do: a route to the Pacific Ocean.³⁵⁶ As they were getting ready for

³⁵⁴ DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 182.

³⁵⁵ Hoig, *The Chouteaus*, 8.

³⁵⁶ Din and Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 353. The Lewis and Clark expedition alarmed the Spaniards who feared American intrusions and possibly occupation of their borderland territory including New Mexico and Internal Provinces. They were very suspicious over the American attempt to subvert the Indian tribes who inhabited the heart of North America and encourage them to raid Spanish settlements.

the expedition, Thomas Jefferson wrote to Meriwether Lewis, requiring him to acquaint himself “with the names of the [Indian] nations and their numbers; the extent of their possessions; their relations with other tribes or nations; their language and traditions.” The Chouteau brothers played their first role as allies of the United States by offering to find trapper-traders who knew the Missouri River to accompany the Americans in the expedition from St. Louis. They suggested George Drouillard, son of a French Canadian father and a Shawnee mother, who became one of the interpreters on the trip.³⁵⁷

Like the Spaniards, the Americans appreciated the Chouteau family’s influence over the most powerful tribe in the region, the Osage. At the eve of their expedition, the two Americans sent a message to the Indian tribes informing them that the people of the United States became “their fathers and Friends.”³⁵⁸ When the Osage received the message, they burned the letter and refused to believe it.³⁵⁹ However, as speculators and settlers poured into Missouri, the United States quickly made their presence felt on the Osage land. As soon as the Americans took over, the government rejected the Spanish trade licenses. As the Chouteaus continued to trade with the Arkansas Osage under *Grande Piste*, they achieved preeminence within the tribe. As the Americans became acquainted with the region, they realized the importance of the Chouteau family’s influence over the Osage.³⁶⁰ The Americans used this connection to their advantage.

³⁵⁷ Wolferman, *The Osage in Missouri*, 52.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 55.

³⁵⁹ Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 356.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 359.

Pierre Chouteau's offer to escort an Osage delegation to Washington D.C. for diplomatic talks made of him one of the first federal agents of Indian affairs. In the spring of 1804, Pierre was granted the power of attorney and was selected to escort the Osage delegation to visit the president in Washington. The Americans promised "All lands belonging to you, lying within the territory of the US, shall be and remain the property of your nation, unless you shall voluntarily relinquish or dispose of the same. And all persons citizens of the US are hereby strictly forbidden to disturb you or your nation in the quiet possession of said lands."³⁶¹

Convinced by the American good intentions, Chief *Cheveux Blancs* (White Hair) expressed his concern about the division of the Big Osage tribe to Thomas Jefferson. The President promised to try to reunite the Osage people. Pierre Chouteau was appointed as the American Indian agent for Upper Louisiana. It became his duty to provide Indian tribes in Upper Louisiana with the necessary tools and merchandise to civilize the "savages." It was also his task to insure the security of American explorers in the region by obtaining consent of the Indians.³⁶² One of his first tasks was the reunification of the thousand of Big Osage who moved to Arkansas in 1802 with the rest of the Big Osage.

For years, Pierre Chouteau represented the interest of the Osages in Washington D.C.. Soon after he returned home, Pierre wrote to Jefferson suggesting that withholding traders would allow the reunification the Osage. Similarly he sought to obtain a trade license with the Osage from the secretary of war, arguing that it would put him in a better position to "exercise a greater influence in reuniting the Osage." As he had never been granted one, Pierre asserted that the

³⁶¹ Wolferman, *The Osage in Missouri*, 57, 60.

³⁶² Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 360.

whites incited the Osage to war and advised the President to bar anyone else from visiting them without permission. In September 1805, Chouteau visited the Osage to invite some of them to St. Louis, while others would be sent to Washington. As he was not able to unify the Osage, Pierre suggested once more depriving *Grande Piste*, Arkansas Osage, of merchandise.³⁶³ In the same year, the old Osage habits of raiding white settlement and stealing and destroying property resumed. An Osage warrior was arrested by the settlers. Knowing that the Americans were unfamiliar with the Osage mentality, Pierre was worried about the consequences of these acts. Chouteau offered to pay for the damages, explaining that there was no treaty with them that covered such incident and more important, that the Osage did not comprehend the whites' laws. He declared that it was "absolutely necessary to have him [the Osage Warrior] escape a trial."³⁶⁴ This incident demonstrated that the Chouteau-Osage relation remained unchanged. Pierre Chouteau was still covering the crimes of the Osage.

Chouteau continued to try maintaining peace in the region, in vain. Pierre realized that the Arkansas Osage had never visited the President and suggested inviting them to do so, confident that the visit would reduce the jealousy and animosity that separated the two Osage factions. By the end of 1806, a delegation of the Arkansas Osage reached Washington. Jefferson expressed his regrets that the Osage were still divided and hoped they could reunite as "both parties are my children, and I wish equally well to both."³⁶⁵ Soon, complaints reached the capital concerning the French merchant's protection of the Osages and self-interests and that both

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 365.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 368.

“White Hair, Osage Chief, and Chouteau were enemies of the American Government.” Because of suspicions concerning Chouteau’s loyalty to the United States, the Federal Government limited Pierre’s position as Indian agent to the Big Osage.³⁶⁶ But because of Chouteaus attachment to the Osage, The Americans believed that he was still the only white man who had the influence the reunify of the Osage and reestablish peace in the region.

As Pierre Chouteau confessed his inability to reunify the Osage fractions, the American government changed its policy towards the Osage. In 1808, Governor Meriwether Lewis arrived St. Louis. He immediately pressured the Osage as he declared them to be “outside of the U.S. government’s protection” because of their crimes.³⁶⁷ Between 1811 and 1813, Chouteau arranged for the Americans to provide the Osage with 10,000 pounds of flour, 18,000 pounds of pork, 260 gallons of whisky and similar quantities of beef and salt.³⁶⁸ However, Pierre could not stop the American westward expansion that sent the Osage to Indian reservation.

Pierre Chouteau accompanied his Osage kin as they ceded their lands to the United States of American government. On November 10, 1808, a cannon boom announced the opening of Fort Osage. The American militia and chiefs from the Little Osage and Big Osage celebrated. The Indians and the white men signed a treaty and passed a peace pipe to demonstrate their friendship. During the same year 1808, the Osage, like other tribes, underwent the process of removal as they signed the several removal treaties and progressively lost their lands as they

³⁶⁶ Mathews, *The Osages*, 410.

³⁶⁷ Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 373.

³⁶⁸ Foley & Rice, *The First Chouteaus*, 124.

moved to the Indian Territory.³⁶⁹ Governor Lewis ordered Pierre Chouteau to Fort Clark to reassemble the Arkansas Osage who declared the treaty signed by the Big Osage and the United States Invalid. Once again, Pierre was to be present during an important moment of the Osage's history. Pierre was required to impose the treaty on behalf of the Americans. Chouteau was to inform the malcontent Osage that "if they are to be considered our [American] friends and allies, they must sign that instrument, conform to its stipulations, and establish their permanent villages, near the fort."³⁷⁰ As a result, the Little and Big Osage signed the treaty, while the Arkansas Osage ratified it in St. Louis a year later.

As the American government had begun the project of developing the frontier, Pierre Chouteau continued to cover the Osage violence to protect them from the Americans. The Osage "savages" barred the path to civilization and needed to be removed in the view of the Americans. The treaty of 1808 was the first of several treaties that forced the Osage to cede their lands. Within the treaty, Osage ceded an area of about 200 square miles in what is now Southern Missouri and northern Arkansas for \$7,500 in cash and merchandise. In November 1815 the federal government asked the Osage to sell more land in the present-day Arkansas-Oklahoma border region, signed three years later.³⁷¹ In 1816, the Osage continued their raids against settlers. As the news reached the Americans, Pierre Chouteau told the Americans that he would "try to

³⁶⁹ Sabo, *Paths of Our Children*, 76.

³⁷⁰ Din & Nasatir, *The Imperial Osage*, 379.

³⁷¹ Wilson, *The Osage*, 32.

get restoration of the articles stolen” by them and “try to foster a better understanding.”³⁷² Soon, other treaties were signed, and by 1825 the Osage gave up on all of their lands in Missouri and Arkansas. They moved to the sizable reservation granted in south-central Kansas.³⁷³ Pierre Chouteau could not save the Osage from the removal, but his effort to do so was rooted in his kinship with the tribe.

Whether the frontier settlement was ruled by a Spanish King, a French Emperor, or an American President, the intimate frontier linked the French settlers and Osage Indians for generations. The Spanish reliance on gift-giving policy did not secure the alliance and loyalty they hoped to establish with the Osage Indians. Meanwhile, smoking the calumet and fair trade were not enough for the Americans to build the friendship they had established with the French. Unlike the French, the Spaniards and Americans did not intermix with the Osage in order to create an intimate bond between the two people. The friendship the Spaniards and Americans offered the Osage was new. The former attempted to pay the Osage for peace, while the latter focused on forced removal and assimilation. Neither had responded to the Osage understanding of diplomacy and economic exchange that were linked to kinship and intimacy.

³⁷² Letter from Pierre Chouteau to Major William L. Lovely, Indian Agent, St. Louis on May 1, 1816, Pierre Chouteau Collection, Box # 13, Missouri Historical Society Archives, St. Louis, MO.

³⁷³ Sabo, *Paths of Our Children*, 76.

These intimate encounters paved the way to the diplomatic ties between the Indian Chiefs and the French colonial government. During the early French exploration of Louisiana, French hunters and traders came to close contact with the Osage Indians. Whether through Claude Du Tinsé and Étienne Bourgmont or other un-named *coureurs de bois*, Frenchman entered in sexual and marital unions, establishing kinship relations between the Osage and French nations. After the French and Indian War and the break of the diplomatic ties between the two nations, the Chouteau family re-established ties with the Osage and built an economic empire in St. Louis. As partners and friends, the Osage and the French managed to maintain their empires and control over the region during Spanish rule.

While the Osages-Chouteau kinship did not prevent the American expansion, their alliance did not disintegrate even after the removal of Indians into the Indian Territory of Oklahoma. By the 1830s, as the Osage were in an increasingly desperate situation, Pierre Chouteau wrote that “these [eastern] Indians...are now overrunning the former hunting grounds of the Osage.”³⁷⁴ The Chouteaus’ social and economic ties with the Indians were continued by Pierre’s eight sons. At Fort Carondelet, Pierre Chouteau’s sons had spent a portion of their childhood learning the Osage ways and would later become traders among the Osages and other tribes.³⁷⁵

The Chouteaus secured intimate ties and guaranteed kinship and trade relation between the two people within the next generation. They left their mark on the American West through

³⁷⁴ Garrick Bailey, *Traditions of the Osage: Stories Collected and Translated by Francis La Flesche* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010) 12.

³⁷⁵ Hoig, *The Chouteaus*, 21.

their adventures in the fur trade and their close relationship with the Indians. Auguste Pierre (1786-1838) married an Osage woman referred to as Masina and bore his first mixed blood son, August Clement, around 1814 and two more, Auguste Gesseau and Paul Auguste.³⁷⁶ Pierre's third son, Paul Ligest (1792-1851), became a fur trader at the age of fifteen and an Indian agent for the Osages. Auguste's oldest son, Auguste Aristide, escaped from school to go back to the Indian frontier to serve as a treaty interpreter. More members of the Chouteau family engaged with Indians.³⁷⁷ An early nineteenth century travelers account made reference to a Mr. Edward Chouteau, the Major's son, who "took us to two Osage Indians who were in St. Louis." In his will 1853, Chouteau left money for three half-breed children: Louis, born in 1838; Marie Louise, born in 1839; and Sophia born in 1842, which he had by "Rosalie Capitaine, an Indian woman of the Osage nation of Indians."³⁷⁸

³⁷⁶ Christian, *Before Lewis and Clark*, 307.

³⁷⁷ Hoig, *The Chouteaus*, ix

³⁷⁸ Tixier's, 98.

PART III:

Choctaws and Africans in the Louisiana Intimate Frontier

“The defeat of the Natchez could have been complete if it had not been for the Negroes who prevented the Choctaws from carrying off the powder and who by their resistance had given the Natchez time to enter the two forts.”

French Governor Etienne De Périer

A tale of the tribe began as the ancestors who were formed by a spirit from the damp earth of Naih Waiyah, a large mound, came to earth. After coming forth from the mound, the freshly-made Chahta were wet and moist, and the Great Spirit hung them along on the rampart, as on a clothes line, so that the sun could dry them. Another tale tells the story of the Chahta and Chikasa brothers who listened to Fabussa as he guided them during their journey east. The ancestors made a long and hard journey. They walked day after day beyond the Big Waters (Mississippi River) and one night, they planted Fabussa, the sacred pole, at the top of a mound. It was the mound Nanih Waiya. In the morning, she told them that they had reached their new home. From the top of the mound the two brothers split and took opposing ways. Headed southward, the Chahta reached the place that would become their new home. Surrounded by the waters, they built log houses and worked their cornfields (the Tombigbee, the Pearl, and the Chickasawhay Rivers). Gardening, foraging and hunting sustained the tribe. The younger men made up the hunters and warriors of the tribe. They hunted, constructed homes and made tools, and were in charge of politics and the protection of the community. They covered their cabins with mud and bark and built a fireplace at the center which provided heat and served for cooking. Hunting provided food, clothing, and shoes. Women were responsible for tanning the hides and making the clothing. Women and children performed most cultivating, harvesting, and food preparation and in later times entire families joined together on larger plots for cultivation and harvesting. Corn contributed to the majority of the Chahta subsistence diet, and they traded the surplus to neighboring tribes. In addition to corn, they grew a variety of crops including beans, squash, sunflower, sweet potatoes, and tobacco. Gathering plants, fruits, roots, and nuts was the task shared by women, children, and the elderly.

Each village had a chief who met with a council of the elders in the square at the center of the village. The cacique of each Village, or mingo, was responsible for redistributing food and other resources to the members of the village in order to insure equity within the community. Some villages had a war chief, mingo ouma, who managed and led military campaigns. Conflicts between the villages were generally settled by sport. The stickball games pitted teams from different villages against each other. The women from each opposing side often played after the men had completed their game. Winning was a matter not only of skill but of the power of the village's spiritual being whose earthly representative was fire.

The alikchi were men with individual spiritual powers. They could foretell the future and cure illness. The medicine man collected the ingredients which composed the tribal medicine. He secretly stored them away in the dressed, highly ornamented and sacred deer-skin sack which was held sacred in the hearts of the entire tribe.

Their society was organized by two major divisions, or iksas: the kashapa okla (or Imoklasha) and the okla in holahta (or hattak in holahta). The Chahta people were required to marry into their opposite iska, and their children belonged to their mother's iska. Political power passed through the woman's line as a chief's nephew, his sister's son, generally inherited his power. Many winters passed before the Chahta heard about the presence of strange, pale, and hairy faces. The Chahta sent a young warrior to visit the newcomers and invite them for a visit. The next day, the chief of the hairy faces visited the Chahta. Casique Tush-ka-lusa went forward and welcomed the stranger as a brother. They were accompanied by black faces, their captive enemies and their neighboring captured warriors. The Chief of the hairy faces and his warriors traveled to mom-all-binah (Mobila), taking Tush-ka-lusa as captive. The Cacique of mom-all-binah did not welcome the warriors but requested them to leave his territory. Suspicious towards

one another, the warriors from both sides prepared for the battle. The battle ended with the destruction of mom-all-binah, the death of many Chahta souls and many more were taken captive. Soon, the hairy faces left the Chahta country and never came back.

Many winters passed before the Chahta were visited by other pale faces who traveled down the father of waters (Mississippi). It seemed that the strangers were not a threat to the Chahta as they smoked the peace pipe and exchanged gifts. More pale faces reached the Chahta country bringing with them more black faces, their captive enemies.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁹ Patricia Galloway, *Choctaw Genesis 1500-1700* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Frederick Hoxie, *Encyclopedia of North American Indians: Native American History, Culture, and Life From Paleo-Indians to the Present*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 119-121; Valerie Lambert, *Choctaw Nation: A Story of American Indian Resurgence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); Clara Sue Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).

Indians and Africans took part in the French Louisiana intimate frontier. Isolated and confined in bondage under the same conditions, the generation of the first Indian African contact during the first decades of eighteenth century had no awareness of racial superiority of the other. Black or red, the masters treated them both as slaves. Africans and Indians in French Louisiana accomplished the same tasks in the household, the field, or the plantation. Moreover, during wars and conflicts between the French and 'hostile' neighboring Indians or the British, the African and Indian slaves fought side by side in the battlefield. Indians, including Choctaws, and Africans engaged in a mutually beneficial intimate relationship as they collaborated in resisting slavery, often times running away together. After Louisiana became Spanish however, while Africans and Indians continued to collaborate to resist bondage, race was redefined as the Spanish laws freed the Indians and kept the Africans in bondage. These circumstances created consciousness about race among the second generation, as the mixed children of African-Indian descent, *the grifs*, became aware of the burden of their African heritage, while their Indian heritage offered hope for freedom.

The above story also traces the origins of the Choctaw Indians and attempts to paint the picture of their encounter with Europeans and Africans. To explain the origins of the Choctaw people, the elders told several stories. Scholars seem to agree on the validity of this Choctaw creation story that suggests that they migrated from the East. Accordingly, the Choctaws and the Chickasaws lived in the West until they had a vision that told them to lead a march that was guided by the *fabussa*, a sacred pole. In the early 1700s, the Choctaws and Chickasaws were still living near the *Nanih Waiya* (a mound). The Choctaws occupied the territory in what is now south-central Mississippi and parts of Alabama, while the Chickasaws, who headed north,

established themselves in what is now northern Mississippi. Linguistically, they all belonged to the same Muskogean speaking group as the Natchez Indians.³⁸⁰

The Spaniards were the first Europeans who ventured to the lands of the Choctaws. The Choctaws met with Hernando De Soto for the first time in 1541. De Soto took Chief Tuscaloosa as a hostage as he advanced into the interior country with his cavalry. Hostilities between the two parties began immediately, as they battled with Hernando de Soto's cavalry near present-day Mobile, Alabama. The battle left over fifteen hundred Choctaws dead.³⁸¹ The Spanish 'intrusion' was a short-lived one. The Choctaws then met representatives of French and English colonial governments at the end of the seventeenth century, and American settlers in the late eighteenth century.³⁸²

The Choctaw Indians encountered African slaves and walked in the same path towards captivity and joined in their struggle against bondage. The Choctaw must have encountered the African during de Soto's short visit, as at least fifty African slaves accompanied the conquistador.³⁸³ During the first half of the eighteenth century, more African slaves were brought

³⁸⁰ Patricia Galloway, *Choctaw Genesis 1500-1700* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 21.

³⁸¹ Sandra Faiman-Silva, *Choctaws at the Crossroads: The Political Economy of Class and Culture in the Oklahoma Timber Region*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 2.

³⁸² Jesse O. McKee & Jon A. Schlenker, *The Choctaws: Cultural Evolution of a Native American Tribe* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1980), 39.

³⁸³ Patricia Kay Galloway, *The Hernando de Soto Expedition: History, Historiography, and "Discovery" in the Southeast*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2006), 211

to the Choctaws by European traders and settlers.³⁸⁴ Allied with the French, the Choctaws came into close contact with the Africans. French African slaves in Louisiana and Choctaw Indians fought within the same front line during the French campaigns against the Natchez and Chickasaws in 1730's and 1740's. In fact, the Choctaws themselves adopted African slave labor within the tribe. Most importantly, because both Africans and Choctaws were held in white bondage, and often collaborated to resist this slavery, the Choctaws welcomed the runaway Africans among the tribe.

By the eighteenth century, the Choctaws occupied a strategic location at the confluence of three major river systems, the Tombigbee in the East, the Pearl in the West, and the Chickasawhay in the South.³⁸⁵ During the eighteenth century, Choctaws dealt with French and British settlers and hunters. The Chiefs received gifts and medals from both the French and British officials to secure their loyalty in trade partnership. The Choctaws realized that the deerskins that their women tanned were desirable for the Europeans, so they began trading deerskin for cloth, cooking utensils, weapons, and ammunitions. These military alliances with Europeans led to a division within the tribe.

³⁸⁴ McKee & Schlenker, *The Choctaws*, 39.

³⁸⁵ Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi*, 3.



Figure 11. Map of the Choctaw Country (Jean Baptiste le Mercier, *Mémoires Historiques sur la Louisiane*)

Throughout the eighteenth century, the Choctaw remained a large, and thus, a strong nation. In 1700, when the French came into contact with them, they numbered between 15,000 and 20,000 people. By 1730, the Choctaw population was estimated at 16,000 people.³⁸⁶ Historian Daniel Usner Jr. compared the powerful position of the Choctaws in the Lower Mississippi Valley to the one of the Iroquois in New York and the Cherokees in Carolina.³⁸⁷ Because of their power, the Choctaws were courted by the French and the British as their ambitions in the region grew.

Several historians, including Valerie Lambert and Greg O'Brien, have traced the changes in the Choctaw culture from pre-contact to the twentieth century, emphasizing the impact of European contact on the Choctaw heritage. While Lambert focused on the building of Choctaw nationalism, O'Brien explained how the Choctaws "adapted to the European presence."³⁸⁸ Neither scholar has addressed Choctaw-African interaction during the colonial era. Similarly, very few scholars have examined Africans in early Louisiana. Jack D. L. Holmes looked at race relations in Louisiana slave society and the laws that governed intermixing and

³⁸⁶ McKee & Schlenker, *The Choctaws*, 39.

³⁸⁷ Daniel H. Usner Jr., *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 77.

³⁸⁸ Valerie Lambert, *Choctaw Nation: A Story of American Indian Resurgence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 3; Greg O'Brien, *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age, 1750-1830* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), xvii.

marriage between white men and Indian as well as African women within the society.³⁸⁹ While Hans Baade analyzed the laws of slavery in Spanish Louisiana, Kimberly S. Hanger investigated the cultural-legal traditions and material conditions of the free blacks, *libres*, and assessed their place within the slave society of Spanish New Orleans.³⁹⁰ Even fewer scholars have examined intimate relations between Indians and Africans in the colonial era.

Both Daniel H. Usner Jr. and Gwendolyn Hall have examined the interaction between the two people. Hall remains the only one who has studied intimacy between Indians and Africans. Usner depicted a frontier exchange economy in which Indians, European settlers, and slaves participated equally, although certain groups took advantage of others. Indians and Africans met on daily basis, interacted with each other, and exchanged goods.³⁹¹ In her study of the frontier community of New Orleans, Hall described a developing Afro-Creole culture.³⁹² Hall

³⁸⁹ Jack D.L. Holmes, *A Guide to Spanish Louisiana, 1762-1806* (New Orleans: A. F. Laborde, 1970), xii; "Do It! Don't Do It!: Spanish Laws on Sex and Marriage," in *Louisiana's Legal Heritage*, ed. Edward F. Haas (Pensacola: Perdido Bay Press, 1983).

³⁹⁰ Hans Baade, "The Law of Slavery in Spanish Luisiana, 1769-1803," in *Louisiana's Legal Heritage*, ed. Edward F. Haas (Pensacola: Perdido Bay Press, 1983); Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bound Lives, Bound Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

³⁹¹ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 7.

³⁹² Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1992), xiii.

began to explore the Africans' relations with the Choctaws, describing the emergence of a *grif* (descendants of Indians and Africans) community.

In early Louisiana, Indians and Africans encountered each other in bondage and forged intimate bonds. Numerous Indians became subordinate members of colonial society as slaves. Much of the early British activity in the interior Southeast was devoted to enslaving Indians. Urged by the English, Indian nations, particularly the Chickasaws, raided neighboring tribes, including the Choctaws, to capture slaves for trade.³⁹³ These Indians, although smaller in number than African slaves, became an important part of the slave economy in early Louisiana. The 1726 census of the colonial population counted in the *Esclaves* category 159 Indians and 1,385 Africans.³⁹⁴ Bondage on plantations made the African and the Indian walk in the same world. Their collaboration alerted some French officials, who exhorted the end of Indian slavery to prevent the African slaves from running away, while others took actions to divide the two people, instigating African-Indian conflicts to the same end. The next two chapters trace Indian and African intimacy in colonial Louisiana. Chapter Five examines the encounter between the two parties while Chapter Six analyzes the lives of their mixed race children in the region.

For clarity, I use the term “African” to designate anyone of African descent, free or enslaved. I use the term *mulatto* for a mixed white and African descent, while *grif* refers to a mixture of Native American and African ancestry. The terms *métis* and *mistizo* usually refer to the offspring of a white and an Indian, but in colonial Louisiana, the term sometimes referred to the offspring of a black and an Indian, complicating the task of identifying the *grifs*.

³⁹³ Galloway, *Choctaw Genesis*, 196.

³⁹⁴ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 46.

CHAPTER 5:

Bondage: Slavery and the Intimate Encounters

“Africans first encountered Indians as fellow slaves. The encounters between African slaves and Native slaves, who knew the Land, undermined discipline among slaves of both races in 1720s New Orleans. Sharing the same fate, they ran away together.”

Gwendolyn Midlo Hall

The terms “captivity” and “slavery” are used interchangeably and can be problematic to our understanding of the Indian slave trade. Within the Indian culture, captivity was a result of wars against the enemies, thus it referred to those who were not kin. During battle, the warriors were killed while women and children were taken as captives. The captives taken during warfare were often kept and adopted into the tribe to boost its number and replace the lost ones. Contact with the Europeans changed the meaning of captivity, pushing it closer to European notions of “slavery.” The concept of “captive women” became even more complicated under the French colonial rule of Louisiana. Female Indians among the French within the Illinois Country villages were baptized, married to Frenchmen, and bore their children.³⁹⁵ Europeans used terms such as “slave,” “domestic,” “concubine,” and “wife” interchangeably, making their status difficult to define.

Meanwhile, Europeans introduced the Indians to their own institution of slavery, one relying on African laborers in bondage. The transatlantic slave trade brought African slaves during the early Spanish explorations of the New World as early as 1510s. Soon, both African and Indian slaves became necessary for the establishment of the European settlements. During Hernando De Soto’s expedition, for instance, hundreds of Indians were taken from their homelands in chains to bear the baggage of the expedition.³⁹⁶ In the Southeast, the British exploited the native institution of captive adoption. Although such slaves had been found to be

³⁹⁵ Carl Ekberg, *Stealing Indian Women: Native Slavery in the Illinois Country* (Urbana Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007), xiii.

³⁹⁶ Patricia Galloway, *Choctaw Genesis 1500-1700* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 128.

impractical for the British colonies as they found it easy to escape, South Carolinians soon discovered that they could trade Indian slaves for black ones as early as 1671.³⁹⁷ At the crossroads of this traffic, Africans and Indians shared common intimate spaces and paths. Frontier conditions created a place where cross racial intimacy between Africans and Indians became prevalent in colonial Louisiana. Bound in slavery and facing common danger, Indian women and African men came into close contact with one another, creating ties that allowed them to resist captivity and struggle for freedom as they ran away together.

I. The Choctaw Indians

The Choctaws were not a unified group, but the nation was bound by their political and social structures. The Choctaws lived in districts with a weak centralized government. Decision-making was localized in the hands of influential war and peace chiefs drawn from ranked matrilineal clans. Three principal chiefs drawn from district's senior matrilineal *iska* governed the tribal districts. The choice of leaders was based on a combination of heredity, popularity, and personal merit. Through these leaders, communal wealth was redistributed in cycles of feasting and council gathering.³⁹⁸ The three political divisions were bound together by Choctaw traditions based on duality and reciprocity.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁷ Galloway, *Choctaw Genesis*, 201.

³⁹⁸ Faiman-Silva, *Choctaws at the Crossroads*, 7.

³⁹⁹ Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi*, 4.

Choctaw women participated in politics indirectly through their matrilineally linked brothers and maternal uncles. Even though the women did not vote or sit at council meetings, their brothers represented them in political decision making. “It is said that if the women wanted a certain chief, he was almost certain for election. During religious and political gatherings, women and their children sat on one side with their clan while their husbands sat on the other side with their own kin. Chiefly redistribution allowed all community members equal access to resources.”⁴⁰⁰

The Choctaw nation was bound tightly together through its social structures, based on a dual division and reciprocity. Like other Indian tribes, kinship defined relationships within Choctaw culture. They lived in loosely geographically dispersed kin-based bands during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the lower Mississippi Valley. By the eighteenth century, people west of the Pearl River identified themselves as *okla falaya* (Long People) and those east as *okla tannap* (People of the Opposite Side) and those near the head of the Pearl as the *okla chto* (Big People). They lived in districts or matrilineal moieties called the *Inhulahata* or “esteemed people” and the *Imoklasha* or the “people of the other side.” Each divided into several matrilineal clans, called *iksa*.⁴⁰¹ Matrilinealism enabled the Choctaw woman, in the case of her death, to transfer her property to her children, who were looked after by her own clan.⁴⁰²

As in other tribes in the valley, marriage had to be consummated across moiety boundaries. Intra-*iska* marital unions were prohibited. The head of the household was the brother

⁴⁰⁰ Faiman-Silva, *Choctaws at the Crossroads*, 10.

⁴⁰¹ Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi*, 4.

⁴⁰² Faiman-Silva, *Choctaws at the Crossroads*, 12.

of the woman whose household it was; her husband was a guest rather than a relative, and the children belonged to her lineage.⁴⁰³ It was expected that the child's mother's brothers, *immoshi*, would assume a central role in their informal education. These customs still characterized Choctaw society by the late eighteenth century. In 1772 there were still as many as sixty towns, and population was estimated at twenty thousand to thirty thousand.⁴⁰⁴

II. The Choctaws Encounter the Europeans

The Choctaws remained a strong nation in constant competition with their brothers and neighbors the Chickasaw. In 1702, the Choctaw villages numbered 1,146 cabins with an estimated 15,000 individuals, including five thousand warriors.⁴⁰⁵ In the early eighteenth century, a French official warned that a complete destruction of the Chickasaws would allow “the Choctaws, who will no longer have this powerful nation to fear . . . [to] become too powerful and be disposed to abuse it.”⁴⁰⁶ Their large number allowed them to claim a certain authority in the valley.

After De Soto's failed conquest, the French Robert La Salle visited the Choctaws during his expedition down the Mississippi River in 1682. For the first time, the Choctaws were confronted with French colonial ambitions. In 1699, d'Iberville established Fort Maurepas near

⁴⁰³ Galloway, *Choctaw Genesis*, 2.

⁴⁰⁴ Faiman-Silva, *Choctaws at the Crossroads*, 7.

⁴⁰⁵ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 18.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 82.

Biloxi. On March 26, 1702, the Choctaws and their neighboring enemies the Chickasaws, who had already allied with the British, accepted the French invitation to discuss a possible alliance at the newly built fort at Mobile. Four Choctaw and seven Chickasaw delegates listened to what the French officials had to offer. The Choctaws were excited to hear the possibility of gaining arms so that they might be on the same footing as their neighbors. The same year, the French established their settlement in the Choctaw territory, Mobile, from which they sent their traders into the Indian Territory.⁴⁰⁷ The French demanded the end of warfare between the two nations that was encouraged by the British. They gifted both tribes 200 pounds of powder, 200 pounds of bullets, and other items to seal the agreement between the three parties.⁴⁰⁸ The treaty was soon jeopardized as the Chickasaws continued both trading with the British and war against the Choctaws.

Like the neighboring Indian nations, the Choctaws were soon caught within the competition between the European empires. In 1711, the governor of Louisiana declared that the Choctaws were “the key to this country” and that they must be supplied with arms to defend themselves. The French realized that the Indians would be conciliated only by “the presents given to them ... and even more the food that one must not let them lack when they come on visits, together with caresses and evidence of friendship.”⁴⁰⁹ Gift-giving and other hospitable acts served as symbolic expressions of sociable ties between the host and guest parties. However, the

⁴⁰⁷ Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi*, 6.

⁴⁰⁸ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 18, 19.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 26.

Choctaw bands were not all under the same political agreement. There were those who traded with the French and those who traded with the English.

Encouraged by their European allies, the Choctaws and neighboring Indian nations continued warfare against each other in search for captives to trade. Among the Indians, the captives, mostly women and children, taken during warfare were adopted into the tribe to replace the lost ones. As the Europeans paid a good price for captives, especially women, an Indian slave trade took shape. For instance, the British urged their Chickasaw allies to raid their neighbors, including the Choctaws, for captives. Meanwhile, the French promised Choctaw warriors “one gun, one pound of powder and two pounds of bullets for each Chickasaw scalp and 80 *livres* worth of merchandise for each Chickasaws slave.”⁴¹⁰ As a result, a large number of Choctaw and Chickasaw women were taken from Indian captivity into European slavery.

Similarly, the enslavement of Africans was introduced into the Choctaw tribe by the European traders during the first half of the eighteenth century. African slave labor was initially adopted by the Choctaw-white mixed bloods. After the Treaty of Paris 1763, when the British gained control of the eastern part of French Louisiana, settlers who moved westward from North Carolina and Kentucky entered Choctaw territory and married their women, producing mixed blood children.⁴¹¹ The slaves performed several tasks including clearing fields for agriculture and

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid*, 65.

⁴¹¹ Hoxie, *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, 120.

building roads. African slavery enabled the owners to assume an “aristocratic” position. Later, it allowed the Choctaw tribe to be counted among the five “civilized tribes.”⁴¹²

As the balance of colonial power changed in 1763, the Choctaws found themselves at the heart of the European and American competition for Indian trade. The Choctaws’ geographical location placed them in the position of intermediaries between the British and the Spanish Louisiana. As the British built trading posts along the Mississippi, and with the absence of their French allies, the Choctaws exchanged goods with them, allowing British goods to reach the heart of the continent.⁴¹³ Meanwhile, the Choctaws traded with the Spanish as well, and on July 13, 1784, they signed a treaty of friendship and commerce with Spain.⁴¹⁴ A year later, the Spanish complained to the Choctaw Chief Franchimatabé about the American influence among their tribe, charging that he broke his promise. Franchimatabé insisted that he was a loyal man and that even though “the two white chiefs of New Orleans say they are shocked that chiefs of the Choctaw nation have not kept their word...not [to] admit Americans into their territory...it was not I who was responsible...I found myself down to my last shirt.”⁴¹⁵ The Choctaws played the colonial economic competition to their advantage, trading for the best offerings.

After the American Revolution, the Choctaws entered the era of westward expansion and Indian removal by the United States. As early as 1786, the United States established trading

⁴¹² McKee and Schlenker, *The Choctaws*, 39.

⁴¹³ *Ibid*, 44.

⁴¹⁴ Treaty of Friendship and Commerce, New Orleans, July 13, 1784, *Papeles de Cuba, Legajo* 15 A, *Archivo General de Indias*, Seville, Spain.

⁴¹⁵ Greg O’Brien, *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age*, 83.

posts in the Choctaw territory, following the Treaty of Hopewell, with the intent of developing trade with the Indians. An agent was appointed at each post to handle the trade and to report the transactions to the secretary of war.⁴¹⁶ Ten years later, the American government permitted the development of factories in the area as part of the “civilization process.”⁴¹⁷ The restoration of Louisiana to the French and its American purchase of 1803 isolated the Choctaws from their Spanish allies and set off the American campaign of Indian removal from east of the Mississippi River to the western lands. In 1805 the Choctaws signed a treaty ceding a stretch of land that bordered on Spanish territory in Florida. Another treaty was signed in 1816 ceding the land along the eastern boundary, the Tombigbee River.⁴¹⁸ Throughout the Choctaw’s interaction with the Europeans, they also interacted with the African slaves of the French colony.

III. Africans in Louisiana

French civil government in Louisiana began in 1712 when the king granted a charter to Antoine Crozat to establish a settlement in the territory. The settlement was to be ruled and regulated by *the Coutume de Paris*.⁴¹⁹ In 1717, the French crown gave Louisiana to John Law, a Scottish financier, for settlement through his *Compagnie d’Occident*. The company granted the lands to

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid*, 67.

⁴¹⁷ McKee and Schlenker, *The Choctaws*, 44.

⁴¹⁸ Hoxie, *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, 120.

⁴¹⁹ Edward Haas, *Louisiana’s Legal Heritage: Studies in Louisiana Culture* (Pensacola: Perdido Bay Press, 1983), 7.

settlers and to entrepreneurs who wished to establish plantations within the colony.⁴²⁰ Arriving in 1719, the first two slave ships from Africa brought rice seeds as well as African slaves to French Colonial Louisiana under the employ of John Law's Company of the Indies. There were over six hundred Africans brought to Louisiana for agricultural labor with Law.⁴²¹ In 1721, Law's ships debarked two thousand slaves from West Africa to labor and produce crops for the colony's subsistence and exports.⁴²² Between 1726 and 1731, thirteen slave ships landed in Louisiana. Approximately, two thirds of the Africans brought to Louisiana by the French slave trade were from Senegambia, the region between today's Senegal and Gambia. Before their arrival to the American slave market, they were referred to as captives, not slaves.⁴²³ And by 1746, the African population numbered 4,738 individuals, outnumbering the 3,400 Europeans.⁴²⁴

As early as 1724, a code of laws to govern the Africans, *le Code Noir*, was enacted. The Code had already defined the system of slave labor and regulated race relations within the Caribbean colonies.⁴²⁵ The *Code Noir* severely governed some aspects of the slave's life, with an emphasis on cross-racial intimate intercourse. In fact, several aspects of the code originated from the Roman law of slavery, but the French selected aspects that were often detrimental to the

⁴²⁰ Arnold, *Colonial Arkansas*, 9.

⁴²¹ Mathews, *The Osage: Children of the Middle Water*, 188.

⁴²² Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 32.

⁴²³ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 29.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

⁴²⁵ Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Slavery, the Civil Law, and the Supreme Court of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 1.

slave. Slaves in French Louisiana were unable to petition to be sold away from a cruel master or mistress and could not claim the right of self-purchase, unlike the slaves under the Roman law. The laws also prohibited manumission without the permission of the government and freeing the slaves in wills.⁴²⁶ However, the Code also granted the Africans a few advantages. Indeed, the *Code* forbade the sale of young children separately from their mothers. It emphasized that the slaves should be instructed in the Catholic faith and married under its laws. Marriages between slaves were valid and binding under the law if the owners of both slaves consented.⁴²⁷

Meanwhile, the *Code* also restricted the whites' behavior as they could not marry or live in *concubinage* with *mullattoes* or blacks, whether slave or free.⁴²⁸ The reality of sexual conditions surrounding the colony interfered with the enforcement of the code. Many Indian and

⁴²⁶ *Code Noir ou Loi Municipale, Servant de Reglement pour le Gouvernement et Administration de la Justice, Police, Discipline & le Commerce des Esclaves Nègres, dans la Province de la Louisianne, entreprit par Délibération du Cabildo en vertu des Ordres du Roi*, Article 16, Xavier University Archives, New Orleans, Louisiana; Schafer, *Slavery*, 2. Spain transferred Louisiana back to France in 1801 in a secret treaty, but it did not take possession of the colony until November 30, 1803. Twenty days later, the territory was purchased by Thomas Jefferson, but within these twenty days of possession the French reenacted the *Code Noir* and ordered its strict enforcement. But after the purchase, the newly created Superior Court of the Territory of Orleans declared Spanish law, rather than French law, to govern the territory unless it conflicted with American law.

⁴²⁷ *Code Noir*, Article 19.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid*, Articles 6 and 9.

African women lived with Frenchmen as mistresses or common law wives. In 1726, Father Raphael, the Capuchin vicar general of Louisiana, reported violations of the *Code* by the colonists who “maintained young Indian women or *negrresses* to satisfy their intemperance. [While this number] is considerably diminished, there still remain enough to scandalize the church and to require an effective remedy.”⁴²⁹ As Louisiana was transferred to the Spaniards, the African slaves benefited from a less restrictive legal system. Slaves were able to purchase their freedom and buy family members, while they were allowed to go to court to fight for freedom if they were badly treated by their owners.⁴³⁰ A large number of African slaves petitioned and sued for freedom while many slave owners voluntarily emancipated their slaves.

The French colony of Louisiana grew as it depended on the deployment of the African slaves to boost its economy and secure its frontiers. The Africans performed several tasks involved in the settlers’ households including, cleaning, cooking, and working in the agricultural fields. Others worked on plantations where they completed all the exhausting work in growing indigo, tobacco, and sugar.⁴³¹ Similarly, other Africans took part of the military service for the colonial government as they confronted ‘rebellious’ Indian groups in the region including the Natchez and the Chickasaws.

African slaves also became a valuable military resource as the French suffered a permanent shortage of soldiers. In the 1720s, many of the Bambara men, from the Senegal River region who were known for their military skills worked for the French as enslaved soldiers. By

⁴²⁹ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 50.

⁴³⁰ Schafer, *Slavery*, 2.

⁴³¹ Hanger, *Bound Lives, Bound Places*, 7.

1740, a group of approximately fifty “free blacks,” who earned freedom in compensation for their brave actions in the battlefield, constituted a separate company of the Louisiana military forces. Meanwhile, there were three hundred or more African slaves employed in the 1739-1740 campaigns against the Chickasaws, who returned as slaves to their owners’ cash crop plantations.⁴³² Their experience in the battlefield combined with the Indian uprising encouraged the Africans to resist slavery.

In 1730, the African slaves in New Orleans gave hints of their resistance to French bondage. While the French were preparing their campaign against the Natchez Indians, who destroyed the French Fort Rosalie on November 28, 1729 and killed over one hundred settlers, the African slaves conspired on their own revolt in the New Orleans area.⁴³³ The French discovered that they were planning to kill their masters at night and then access the masters’ guns and powder which would allow them to fight the troops. While some of the conspirators were hanged in New Orleans, the French sent three Africans accused of taking part in the Natchez revolt to be burned by the Choctaws.⁴³⁴ By such action, the French hoped to instigate hatred between the Africans and Choctaws that became increasingly problematic as it threatened the prosperity and security of the colony.

Meanwhile, Africans continued to resist bondage and took every opportunity to run away. As early as 1738, a group of Indians caught a runaway African slave named La Fleur.

⁴³² Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 86.

⁴³³ Angie Debo & Clara Sue Kidwell, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Natchez Indians*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 367.

⁴³⁴ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 75.

Some slaves found refuge among the Indians and became part of the community as they intermixed with their women. By 1782, a settler reported that he was attacked by a party of three Choctaws, accompanied by an African interpreter, who explained that the Indians were forced to steal because the Spanish government “was not good.”⁴³⁵ The African was most likely a runaway slave who had joined the Choctaw tribe years before.

IV. Choctaw and African Resistance to Bondage

Indians and Africans encountered one another as they served the Europeans. Like the Africans, Indians were forced into slavery for long periods in colonial Louisiana, although the Indian slave trade was not as large as the trade in Africans. In a census of the colonial population of Louisiana in 1708, 80 Indian slaves were mentioned and no Africans. But as in the British colonies, Indian slaves deserted too easily, and French officials allowed the settlers to sell their Indian slaves in order to get Africans in exchange. One French governor offered St. Domingue officials to exchange three of his Indian slaves for two of their African ones.⁴³⁶ Two years later however, the practice of trading Indians for African slaves was prohibited as Louisiana acquired its first six African slaves around the same time.⁴³⁷ By 1721, the census of New Orleans enumerated 172 blacks and 21 Indian slaves.⁴³⁸ Although Native Americans, including Choctaws, were enslaved

⁴³⁵ *Ibid*, 213.

⁴³⁶ Hanger, *Bound Lives, Bound Places*, 10.

⁴³⁷ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 25.

⁴³⁸ Hanger, *Bound Lives, Bound Places*, 12.

throughout colonial times, the Indians could never meet Louisiana's demand for agricultural labor. Moreover, they often ran away.

Within the first decade of the Indian and African enslavement, the French realized the threat of the interaction between Indian and African slaves and the danger of their potential collaboration. Given their knowledge of the terrain and familiarity with the local tribes, runaway Indians could potentially incite Africans to a mass rebellion against slavery in the colony. As the instances of African and Indian slaves' cooperation occurred frequently, officials began to discourage Indian slavery, especially after a maroon camp made of about fifteen Africans and Indians was discovered in 1727. "These Indian slaves being mixed with our negroes may induce them to desert with them, as has already happened, as they may maintain relations with them which might be disastrous to the colony when there are more blacks," wrote Governor Etienne de Périer, requesting the end of Indian slavery.⁴³⁹ However, Indian enslavement was not officially prohibited in Louisiana until Spanish acquisition.

Choctaw Indians and Africans often found themselves side by side in the French military conflicts against their Indian enemies including the Natchez and the Chickasaws. The French deployed Choctaw warriors and African slaves to fight the Natchez. The Choctaws and the French attacked the Natchez, capturing a numbers of African slaves within the tribe.⁴⁴⁰ Choctaws and Africans were also on the same side during the Chickasaw 'Wars.' In 1736, an army of 460 whites and 140 Africans ascended the Mobile River to join a party of six hundred

⁴³⁹ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 59.

⁴⁴⁰ Marcel Giraud, *History of French Louisiana: The Company of the Indies, 1723-1731* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 411.

Choctaws to fight the Chickasaws. The war was continued in 1739, as the French prepared another invasion of the Chickasaws with an army of one thousand French soldiers, five hundred Indians (including Choctaws), and over three hundred Africans.⁴⁴¹ Aware of the large numbers of French and Indians, the Chickasaws requested negotiations.

After the Natchez massacre of 1729 and the New Orleans African slaves' conspiracy of 1730, the French officials' fear that the two incidents would create solidarity between the two people worsened. A French official did not hide his concerns about "the little [Indian] nations" that might cause "our negroes to revolt." The governor lamented that "the defeat of the Natchez could have been complete if it had not been for the negroes who prevented the Choctaws from carrying off the powder and who by their resistance had given the Natchez time to enter the two forts." Additionally, African slaves were captured among the Natchez by the Choctaws during the same conflict. As the French requested the return of their African slaves, the Choctaws told the French officials that several Negroes whom they tried to return to Louisiana officials "killed themselves on the way."⁴⁴² The Choctaws may have lied to the French to either cover for their African friends and kin, or to keep them as captives to replace their losses during the same conflict. As a result, the French colonial governor dispatched a group of armed African slaves from New Orleans to destroy the Chaouachas, a small neighboring tribe.⁴⁴³ The French hoped that their action would not only keep the others in peace with French settlements, but also prevent African-Indian collaboration.

⁴⁴¹ Debo & Kidwell, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Natchez Indians*, 370, 376.

⁴⁴² Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 73.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*

To continue the “divide and rule” doctrine, the French offered bounties of munitions and alcohol for capturing and returning runaway Africans. In fact, as early as the 1720s, French officials complained about robberies committed by a band of runaways or maroons. Soon the French hired the Indians to capture them. In 1748, a French planter hired an Indian to accompany ten of his slaves on an attack on a camp of armed runaways.⁴⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the French policies did not prevent Africans and Indians from running away together throughout eighteenth century.

Africans and Indians continued to run away together and often sought refuge among the Choctaws. A plantation inventory lists an African slave named Thomas who ran away to the Choctaws, while another young African slave named Francois ran away to join a Choctaw party, where he met five other runaway Africans, some of whom had come from Pointe Coupée. François was then soon joined by a Chickasaw Indian named Joseph, another slave.⁴⁴⁵ Meanwhile, an Indian slave, Cocomina, who was captured by the French, confessed that he had led his fellow runaways to the Choctaws. The captured slave testified that the Choctaws were well supplied by the British. He also affirmed that the Choctaws were hiring runaway slaves to fight the French.⁴⁴⁶ The information confirmed the Choctaw-African collaboration the French officials were worried about.

Moreover, in 1748, a party of Choctaws raided a farm on the German Coast, located a few miles north of New Orleans. They killed the husband, scalped the wife, and took the daughter and an African slave as captives. Immediately, French soldiers were sent to capture

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁵ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 93.

⁴⁴⁶ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 115, 116.

those responsible of the attack, however, they were ambushed by a small band of Choctaws and some runaway African and Indian slaves, who had taken refuge among the Choctaws. The head of the Choctaws apologized for the incident and charged that the fatal shots were fired by the runaway Africans, who apparently were with them. The chief admitted that he had nine fugitive slaves with him, three red and six black. He affirmed that they had fired at the French.⁴⁴⁷

Among the runaways, there were mixed Indian and African couples who joined to achieve their freedom. The intimate frontier was beneficial for both the Africans and Indians as the runaways were most likely incorporated into the Choctaw tribe. The Africans, whether they ran away or were captives among the Choctaws, became intimate enough to learn their language.

V. Choctaw-African Sexual Unions

In bondage, Indians and Africans lived side by side and shared intimate space. Indians resisted slavery side by side with the Africans but also lived side by side with them in the mixed colonial society in Louisiana. Whether in the battles, in the plantations, or in the settlers' houses, the presence of Indians among slave-owners in the towns and countryside brought them into intimate contact with both Europeans and Africans. Censuses reveal that slave-owners counted both African and Indian slaves simultaneously in their households. For instance, in New Orleans, the census of 1726 displayed that on Rue Royale there were "two Indians and four Negro slaves who lived with carpenter Thomas Dezery."⁴⁴⁸ Although the sex of the slaves is not specified, a

⁴⁴⁷ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 115.

⁴⁴⁸ Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 57.

significant percentage of Indian slaves were women, making intercultural sexual relationships likely.

In fact, an undetermined number of Indians entered or passed through Louisiana settlements as slaves. As the French allowed, and periodically encouraged Indian slavery, several women, captured by enemy tribes, were sold to settlers who already owned African slaves. These circumstances led to sexual intercourse between Indian women and African men. Some African and Indian runaway slaves joined Indian tribes. For instance, Cézard, a black slave of Joseph Dubreuil, and his “companion” Angelique, an Indian slave of Goudeau, led escaped slaves to the Choctaw nation. Cézard had the slaves wait for three days before the Choctaws followed their tracks and finally arrived.⁴⁴⁹

The details about Cézard and Angelique’s intimate life are unknown, but it is very likely that they married and raised a family together. Like the French *coureurs de bois*, Africans who joined the Indian tribes such as the Choctaws, lived among them, ate their food, intermixed with their women, and adopted their dress and language and served as interpreters. By 1792, Spanish officials sent a specific order to a commandant at Mobile requesting “to give food daily to the black man... for his work as an interpreter for the Choctaw Indians when they go to the fort.” The official insisted on the fact that his request “was to be fulfilled.”⁴⁵⁰ Within a group of nine runaways in lower Louisiana, there was an Indian man and a black woman who were a couple as

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 93.

⁴⁵⁰ Letter from Governor Carondelet a Manuel de Lanzos, New Orleans, August 18, 1792, *Papeles de Cuba, Legajo 18. Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla, Spain.*

well as a black man and an Indian woman.⁴⁵¹ Although the records do not offer figures on the African and Choctaws sexual unions, the children that resulted from these unions who sued for freedom in the 1790s offer evidence for the African Indian intimate frontier.

Records offer some evidence for African-Indian unions in Upper Louisiana as well. By the mid-eighteenth century, the inhabitants of the Illinois settlements counted 445 African slaves and 147 Indian Slaves.⁴⁵² For instance, in 1743, the baptismal records of *grif* twins revealed the sexual union between Marie, an Indian slave, and a black unnamed man at Kaskaskia. The twins, baptized Madeleine and Pierre-Ignace, and their parents were all owned by Elizabeth, widow of Robert Groston de St. Ange, a former Commandant of the Post. The census of 1752 listed the mixed-blood slave family counting one adult black slave (the unnamed father), one female slave (Marie), and four black children (*the grifs*, including the twins).⁴⁵³

Indian women and African men occasionally intermarried. In 1759, Marie Louise was baptized in Kaskaskia. She was born of the legitimate marriage of an African man named Urbain, and a woman named Marianne, identified as *métis* in some records and Indian in others. Marie Louise's parents were listed as slaves of Francois Drouse, a French settler.⁴⁵⁴ The baptismal record of their daughter, Marie Louise in 1768 at Ste. Geneviève, revealed the sexual union between Marie Anne, a *mulatta* slave, and Le Veillé, an Indian slave who belonged to a

⁴⁵¹ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 18.

⁴⁵² Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 7.

⁴⁵³ Ekberg, *Stealing Indian Women*, 80.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

man named Robinet.⁴⁵⁵ Because the status of children was traced through their mothers' line, Marie Louise was categorized as African. While this remains the only recorded Indian-African intermarriage, there were several cases of unions, official or not, recorded or not, between the two peoples. A portion of the offspring of Indian slave women and freemen grew up as free people of color, while others were confined in French bondage.

Intimacy between the “first generation” African men and Indian women produced a second generation of children who were ascribed by the Spanish to both African and mulatto identities. Under the Spanish law, enslavement of the Native Americans was prohibited and their children with Africans could be freed. By the time of the early Spanish censuses, the Indians were not mentioned. Because Spanish officials outlawed Indian slavery, most of them were classified as persons of African descent, and thus they could remain enslaved.⁴⁵⁶ The next chapter addresses the struggle of the *grifs* for freedom, demonstrating how the Afro-Indians used the European laws to escape bondage.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 81.

⁴⁵⁶ Hanger, *Bound Lives, Bound Places*, 15.

CHAPTER 6:

Bound: The Indian-African Struggle for Freedom

“The wise and just laws of His Majesty very expressly forbid subjects of any quality or condition whatsoever to make any Indian a slave or to possess any such, under any pretext whatever, even though there be an open war against that Indian’s nation. In Consequence whereof, all subjects of His Majesty, and even all transients, are expressly forbidden to acquire, purchase, or take over any Indian slaves.”

Governor Alessandro O’Reilly’s proclamation of 1769

The intimate frontier brought together the first generation of Indian and African slaves in French Louisiana. Isolated and confined in bondage, living under the same conditions, they had no awareness of racial superiority of the other, black or red. The two people exchanged goods, became intimate, and often ran away together. Under Spanish rule however, while African-Indian continued to collaborate to resist bondage, race was redefined as the Spanish laws freed the Indians and kept the Africans in bondage. Under these legal circumstances, the “African-Indian Generation,” their mixed children, *the grifs*, became aware of the burden of their African heritage, while their Indian heritage offered the possibility of freedom.

Sexual relations between the Indians and Africans continued throughout eighteenth century in Louisiana’s intimate frontier. Confined in bondage, Indians and Africans struggled to flee slavery by running away together. Documents from the 1730s and 1740s recorded the departure of Indian and African slaves, who often left together to make a free life among Indian tribes. Although the baptism of their children offered evidence of African and Indian sexual unions, the surviving records of the intimate encounter between African men and Indian women makes their story complicated and hard to trace. However, a generation later, Indian and African children, the *grifs*, and more specifically the *grifs*’ legal battle to gain freedom, offers evidence of the widespread existence of these unions. During the early 1790s, black slaves of African fathers successfully petitioned for freedom in New Orleans as they proved that their mothers were Indian slaves.

In 1763, the Treaty of Paris transferred the colony of Louisiana to the Spanish crown and brought a change, at least on paper, in the laws of the colony and redefined the institution of slavery. In 1763, there were over one hundred Indian slaves, with the most significant

populations held in the city of New Orleans and its neighboring river posts, as well as large settlements such as Pointe Coupée, Ste. Genevieve, and St. Louis.⁴⁵⁷ Unlike the French, the Spanish outlawed the enslavement of the Native Americans and their children. Officially, there were no more Indian slaves mentioned in Spanish Louisiana. In reality, colonists kept their Indian slaves and their children, listing them as persons of African descent.⁴⁵⁸ On several occasions, the court allowed the grifs, presumed Africans or mulattoes, to file for freedom if they could prove their Indian identity.

I. The Spanish Laws on African Slavery

With the newly established Spanish authority in Louisiana came new laws to govern social and economic aspects of the colonial life, including the institution of slavery. Spanish decrees were much more beneficial to the African slaves than the French laws. Scholars have praised the Spanish judicial system in terms of fairness to the slaves over both what preceded it and what came after it. In fact, parts of the Spanish law governing Louisiana were directly contrary to the French *Code Noir* of 1724. For instance, the Spanish laws extended rights to the Africans to complain to the authorities about mistreatment from their masters. In addition, the law obligated the master to offer his slaves the ability to be purchased by others or even to pay for their freedom themselves. If the master was unwilling to set the price or if the price was believed to be excessive, the slave could petition the court to appoint a third party to determine a fair price.

⁴⁵⁷ Weber, Stephen. "The Problem of Indian Slavery in Spanish Louisiana, 1769-1803."

Louisiana History, XXV (Spring, 1984), 119.

⁴⁵⁸ Schafer, *Slavery*, 2.

Meanwhile, the owner could manumit his slave without the government's permission, as was previously required by the *Code Noir*.⁴⁵⁹ As a result, slaves petitioned and sued for freedom, enabling the growth of the free population of African descent.

Economic prosperity during the Spanish era brought more African slaves into the colony of Louisiana. By the time Louisiana became a Spanish possession, the African slave population in Louisiana had reached 5,000 individuals. But the Spanish expansion of plantation agriculture in the 1770s led to the rapid growth of African slave population.⁴⁶⁰ In 1777, a Spanish decree authorized the slave trade between Spanish Louisiana and the French West Indies. Another decree allowed the duty-free importation of slaves from friendly countries. The Spanish banned the importation of African slaves from the West Indies in 1791, when the slave revolt in St. Domingue made them fear a similar rebellion in their own territory. By 1796, Spanish officials banned the importation of slaves of any origin.⁴⁶¹

In the meantime, more African slaves had been imported into the prospering colony. In Pointe Coupée for instance, indigo commerce boomed after the Spanish took over, requiring more slaves. In 1785, Claude Trénonay, a French planter from the same post, purchased forty Africans. By 1791, Trénonay owned 111 slaves and half of them were Africans.⁴⁶² The other half

⁴⁵⁹ Hans Baade, "The Law of Slavery in Spanish Louisiana, 1769-1803," in *Louisiana's Legal Heritage*, ed. Edward F. Haas (Pensacola: Perdido Bay Press, 1983); Hanger, *Bound Lives, Bound Places*, 48.

⁴⁶⁰ Usner, *Indians, Settlers & Slaves*, 107.

⁴⁶¹ Hanger, *Bound Lives, Bound Places*, 11.

⁴⁶² Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 10, 252.

were Indian slaves, who shared a common working and living space in their daily lives with the Africans.

The rapid growth of the African slave population prompted tighter restrictions on their social and economic actions. Unlike the *Code Noir*, the Spanish law did not protect the African slave family as children could be sold separately from parents.⁴⁶³ Another decree prohibited assemblies and *concubinage*. Furthermore, officials inflicted the harshest forms of punishment for the runaways. As early as 1764, a runaway slave, Cesar, was captured and tried for several crimes including theft. He was later convicted and had both his hands amputated. Meanwhile, as they engaged in commercial frontier activities, the slaves stole goods from their masters in ever higher amounts. As a result, officials paid special attention to the slaves' marketing activities, which they knew involved trade in stolen goods. But they were also concerned with Africans' contact with the Indians.⁴⁶⁴ The economic exchange and intimate contact between Indians and Africans created bonds between the two, and inspired them to run away. Africans and Indians mutually encouraged each other by the collaboration and help they could receive from both the Indian and maroon communities.

The bonds and friendship between Indian and African slaves enabled them to collaborate and run away, either to create new or join existing maroon communities. Slave communities in Pointe Coupée counted Africans and Indians who joined the Maroons or Indian tribes. As they were increasingly confined to plantation production of export crops, African and Indian slaves resisted bondage by all means at their disposal. In fact, one of the maroons' settlements was

⁴⁶³ *Ibid*, 304.

⁴⁶⁴ Usner, *Indians, Settlers & Slaves*, 138, 108.

called *Chef Menteur* (French for ‘lying chief’), named after a Choctaw chief who was exiled from his tribe for lying and who retired there with family and followers. St. Malo, a maroon slave, and two other runaway slaves went to *Chef Menteur* where they stayed for three months.⁴⁶⁵

African and Indian intimacy and collaboration at the frontier continued to shape colonial policies towards Indian and African slavery. Spanish authorities arranged with Indian allies to return runaway slaves in exchange of presents and bounties. In the early 1770s the Caddo Indians agreed to return runaway slaves to the Spanish in exchange for muskets. One of them was a slave of mixed Indian and European ancestry who belonged to a planter in Pointe Coupée, more than a hundred miles away.⁴⁶⁶ The Commandant de Attakapa informed the Spanish governor that he was searching for “two armed blacks and a one white who committed excesses including stealing...and it became necessary to take a more effective action to arrest them, alive or dead. A request should be made among the neighboring Indians for their help, which would be compensated with small gifts.”⁴⁶⁷ The Spanish, then, did not bar the runaway slaves from organizing a maroon community at the frontier.

⁴⁶⁵ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 213, 217.

⁴⁶⁶ Usner, *Indians, Settlers & Slaves*, 140.

⁴⁶⁷ Letter from Governor Carondelet to Nicolas Forstall, New Orleans, June 5, 1792, *Papales de Cuba*, Legajo 18. *Archivo General de Indias*, Sevilla, Spain. An excerpt of the original reads: «*El Commandante de Atak-apa hainstrudo a SM segun me informa en carta de 10 de Mayo pasado de hanse en il bosque de los confines de este puesto un blanco con dos negros armados, que han*

In May 1781, white planters discovered two runaway villages in the swamps near Pointe Coupée. The story began after a planter, Macarty, captured a runaway slave belonging to Pedro de San Martin. The two planters followed the path to where the slave was captured to find a cabin of an old free black or slave and a number of maroons' huts and a field of squash. As they heard several voices, the two men decided to go back. The next day, they returned with other neighboring slave owners, who were missing several of their slaves. By that time, however, the maroons had left, and they returned to alert the authorities.⁴⁶⁸ Alarmed by the maroons, the Spanish officials created more repressive measures over these outlawed communities. In 1784, an official explained that in order to make all the necessary efforts to stop the progress of the excesses occasioned by the black maroons, "I resolved to create some rules, and make public the estimation of the funds necessary for these goals."⁴⁶⁹ Soon after, colonial governments legislated and enforced laws that denied slaves much of the mobility they had previously gained.

Meanwhile, racial intermixing redefined race during the Spanish rule of Louisiana. During the French rule, the colonists tended to absorb free people of African descent into the

cometido, y esatan decididos a cometer mayores excesos....empleando los Indios de ese districto a quienes prometera Sm siempre que lo logren un corto presente. »

⁴⁶⁸ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 207.

⁴⁶⁹ Letter, Esteban Rodriguez Miro to Governor Bernardo de Galvez, New Orleans, April 24, 1784, *Archivo General de Indias, Papeles de Cuba, Legajo 3A*. Seville, Spain. The original letter reads: « *Monsieurs, voulant faire tout les efforts possibles pour arrêter le progrès des débordements occasionnés par le marronnage des negres, j'ai résolu faire quelque règlements, rendant publique les comptes de l'emploi des fonds destines a ces objects... »*

white population. The emancipation of mixed race children born in slavery was very informal. Under the Spanish rule however, all acts relating to slaves were to be notarized. A formal document, a *carta de libertad*, was issued once a mixed blood was emancipated. The Spanish had a hierarchal concept of race and created separate social groups among the African population and that of their descendants: blacks, mulattoes, quadroons, and pardos (a mixture of white, black, and red).⁴⁷⁰ As the French inhabitants of Louisiana reported on the slave population within their communities, mixed bloods were categorized according to the color of their skin, and thus many black skinned *grifs* were classified as African slaves.

With the Louisiana Purchase, the laws concerning African slavery became even tighter. In 1803, a new law was passed to favor the planters. It resurrected and reenacted many restrictive features of the French *Code Noir*. The Black Codes of 1806 severely limited the practice of manumission. They disqualified slaves as parties in civil suits and as witnesses against white persons.⁴⁷¹

II. Indian Slavery during the Spanish Era

The new Spanish laws were beneficial to the Indian slaves, who won their freedom under the new regime. In 1763, there were about four thousand white people, five thousand Negro slaves, 200 mulatto slaves and 100 Indian slaves and another 100 free people of color in Lower Louisiana. And by the mid-eighteenth century, the settlements in the Illinois country numbered

⁴⁷⁰ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 260, 240.

⁴⁷¹ Weber, "The Problem of Indian Slavery in Spanish Louisiana," 135.

768 French settlers, 445 African slaves, and 147 Indian Slaves.⁴⁷² In 1769, the Spanish government officially took over the administration of Louisiana. Immediately, the Spanish law prohibited Indian slavery and proclaimed the slaves who descended from Indian women to be free by law. Following the Laws of the Indies, the Spanish crown published a decree on December 7, 1769, that prohibited the purchase of Indian slaves:

*“The wise and just laws of His Majesty very expressly forbid subjects of any quality or condition whatsoever to make any Indian a slave or to possess any such, under any pretext whatever, even though there be an open war against that Indian’s nation. In Consequence whereof, all subjects of His Majesty, and even all transients, are expressly forbidden to acquire, purchase, or take over any Indian slaves.”*⁴⁷³

The decree did not outlaw Indian slavery itself, only the trade of Indian slaves. The law banned even the trade of war captives, which justified both Indian and colonists’ involvement in the Indian slave trade throughout decades. Shortly thereafter, the Spanish colonial government ordered commandants of the different posts to collect census data that enumerated all Indians, including the name, age, and sex, within their communities.⁴⁷⁴ However, the censuses were not necessarily accurate, as Indian slave owners listed them as Africans so they would not lose their slaves under the new law. In the end, the O’Reilly census of 1769 was incomplete as it omitted the entire slave population of Pointe Coupée Post, which was one of the most developed plantation communities in the colony. Pointe Coupée reported 20 Indian slaves in 1745 and 12 in

⁴⁷² Usner, *Indians, Settlers & Slaves*, 108, 7.

⁴⁷³ Patricia Cleary, *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil: A History of Colonial St. Louis* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011), 112.

⁴⁷⁴ Ekberg, *Stealing Indian Women*, 54.

1763.⁴⁷⁵ Meanwhile, the status of the Indians already in bondage was still to be determined by the Spanish crown.

While the decree's ambiguity kept the Indian slave's status unchanged, the lack of its enforcement allowed the Indian slave trade to continue. Illicit trade of captive Indians spread throughout the colony, including St. Louis, which became a center for the slave trade during the 1770's. In 1770 for example, a report reached the Governor of the case of several men who had purchased and paid for fourteen Indian slaves. However, the latter were not listed in the census of Indian slaves in St. Louis for that year. Furthermore, there were some Indian women who appeared in the parish records as slaves but who were not listed in the official slave enumerations.⁴⁷⁶ The illegal commerce of Indian slaves also extended to other parts of the colony during the Spanish period.

As the illegal trade of Indian slaves persisted into the late colonial period, the Spanish colonial government took further action. In 1778, another ordinance declared that "all Indians, of both sexes, who are detained as slaves after the date of the said ordinance of 1770 shall be accounted free." With this decree, Indian slavery, not just the slave trade, became illegal. The commandants of the posts compiled a census listing the inhabitants of the parishes including slaves. In some posts, such as St. Louis, officials used a different taxonomy to classify the individuals on the basis of the color of the skin rather than previous racial rubrics.⁴⁷⁷ In other words, prior to the decree, the slaves were classified as *mulatto* (African and white mixed race),

⁴⁷⁵ Weber, "The Problem of Indian Slavery in Spanish Louisiana, 1769-1803," 117-135, 119.

⁴⁷⁶ Ekberg, *Stealing Indian Women*, 58, 63.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 91.

mestizo or *métis*, (white Indian mixed race) or *griffe* (African and Indian mixed race). After the decree, the Spanish classified the slave as *Blancos*, *Pardos*, or *Negros* (white, tan, and black) based on the skin color. This scheme left no category for the Indians. As a result, the census listed most of the enslaved Indians, the *métis*, and the *grifs* within the *pardo* slaves' (tan) category while those with black skin were listed as blacks.

Consequently, few years after the decree was published, Indian slavery in Louisiana disappeared from official records. The censuses did not mention the existence of Indian slaves within the colony. This forced emancipation contributed to the absence of Indian slaves in the records as many Indian slaves were freed by law. However, the Spanish taxonomy based on skin color made it difficult for the black skinned Indian-African descendants to prove their Indian identity. Those with mixed ancestry became classified as *pardo* (tan), which essentially eliminated Indian slavery from the records. Similarly, the term *métis*, which originally designated white and Indian mixed blood people, became associated with any mixed race person, including black and red, creating even more confusion on the state of Indian slavery in Louisiana.

However, as the 1778 decree abolished Indian slavery, the *grifs* who were kept in bondage fought for their freedom. As many Louisiana inhabitants listed their Indian slaves as Africans or *mulattoes* in order to keep them, several suits were filed by Indian slaves and *grifs* to be granted freedom, because they claimed Indian ancestry.⁴⁷⁸ The typical plaintiff was not a full-blooded Indians but rather a mixed-blood person, Indian and African. If a slave, even if he appeared African, could prove to the court's satisfaction that he was descended from an Indian

⁴⁷⁸ Usner, *Indians, Settlers & Slaves*, 132.

mother, he could be freed without compensation to his master. Between 1790 and 1794, there were at least thirteen cases of this kind recorded in New Orleans.⁴⁷⁹ Meanwhile, descendants of black women and Indian men did not have that right, as the children followed the status of their mother. The *grifs* claimed a special status as Indian based on maternal biological descent alone.

III. Freedom in the Name of Indian Ancestry

The Spanish legal position concerning slave trade and slavery was more or less clear for Indians and Africans but not for their mixed blood children. In post 1763 Louisiana, the enslavement of Africans and their descendants was both maintained and encouraged. On the other hand, Indian slavery was eventually abolished for Indians and their descendants. The situation was complex for individuals with both Indian and African ancestry. The laws redefined race among the black and red slaves as the Indians became protected. Further, the owners' treatment towards their African slaves became harsher. Within this context, the mixed children, *the grifs*, became aware of the burden of their African heritage, while their Indian heritage offered hope for freedom.

On the intimate frontier, in a situation of isolation and bondage, racial lines were blurred and the intimate relations among the Africans and Indians flourished. However, the extent of interracial mixing in colonial Louisiana was hidden by censuses that often misreported the race and status of mixed-race children. The first Spanish censuses were collected in 1769. The data was collected by the French, who then transmitted it to the Spanish officials. In their records, the French often counted free people of African descent who looked white, as white.⁴⁸⁰ In the same

⁴⁷⁹ Weber, "The Problems of Indian Slavery in Spanish Louisiana," 127.

⁴⁸⁰ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 239.

way, they recorded the *grifs* who looked black, as black. However, lawsuits under Spanish rule presented strong evidence that a significant number of individuals of African and Indian ancestry passed informally into the black or mulatto population.

Indians continued to be held, bought, and sold as slaves throughout the early Spanish period as the decree was not enforced. However, in 1787, the case of three Indian siblings, two *métis* and a *grif*, prompted the Spanish colonial authority to re-publish O'Reilly's decree of 1769 that forbade the Indian slave trade in Louisiana. The story began when a Spanish official, Cruzat, who served as a commandant of the Spanish post in St. Louis returned to New Orleans, accompanied by his Indian slaves. Shortly after his arrival at the capital, Cruzat died. As a result, his slaves Pierre and his sister Marie, both identified as *métis*, filed a suit against Cruzat's estate to be freed. Consequently, their half brother Baptiste sued his master, Manuel Bourignon from Ste. Geneviève, claiming his Indian ancestry as well. The three suits were heard at New Orleans in early 1790. They were, apparently, the first instances in Louisiana's courts by Indian slaves asking to be freed under the Spanish law that stipulates that Indians could not be enslaved.⁴⁸¹ The three children claimed to be the children of Catherine, a full-blood Indian woman. Marie was the first to win the court case as she was bought after the ordinance that prohibited Indian slave trade. Cruzat's heir did not contest Pierre's demand, even though he was bought prior to the publication of the decree, as he received his emancipation papers shortly after.⁴⁸²

The situation was more complex for their half brother as Baptiste's father had been a black man. In his case, his master Bourignon claimed that when he purchased him he thought

⁴⁸¹ Weber, "The Problems of Indian Slavery in Spanish Louisiana," 124.

⁴⁸² *Ibid*, 125.

Baptiste was a mulatto, and therefore subject to slavery even under the Spanish law. Baptiste was freed, while his master filed a suit against the party from whom he purchased him in 1788 for deliberately misrepresenting his race. His lawsuit succeeded in recovering the purchase price of 400 pesos.⁴⁸³ Several slaves who claimed Indian descent sued for freedom in the early 1790s. As the *grifs* seized justice to free themselves from bondage, slave owners resisted the *grifs*' legal actions.

In uncovering some of these court cases, Gwendolyn Hall argued that these were only “the tip of the iceberg.” Hall’s findings shed light on the development of what she has labeled the “Afro-Creole Culture” and the Indian, and more specifically, the *grifs*' contribution to it. After 1800, the number of mulatto slaves increased, an increase that must be partially explained by a redefinition of some of the *grifs* as mulattoes. As they became identified as Africans or mulattoes, the *grifs* became part of the Louisiana *creole* culture, a culture born out of the African, French, and Spanish influence in Louisiana.⁴⁸⁴ Her observation seems to be correct as there are probably more cases involving *grifs*' struggle to gain freedom. Hall’s interest in these cases was to document an Afro-Creole culture. Yet these cases also open a window on the African slaves’ and Indians’ intimate frontier.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁴ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 265, 157.

IV. The Grifs' Lawsuits and the Intimate Frontier

The cases offer evidence of the Indian African sexual intermixing and shed light on Indian-African relations in Louisiana's intimate frontier. The extent of *concubinage* and Indian African sexual unions in the colony of Louisiana is difficult to determine. However, over half of the twenty-nine slave owners who signed a petition protesting the freeing of the *grifs* were from Pointe Coupée parish. Like most of the early French settlements, Pointe Coupée, established in 1717, was established as an Indian village five leagues south of the Tunica. In 1729, Pointe Coupée became the front line of defense against the Natchez and Chickasaws.⁴⁸⁵ Between the Natchez uprising of 1729 and the Chickasaw Wars of the 1740s, Choctaws and Africans had many opportunities for intimate relations. By 1746, Pointe Coupée comprised about two hundred settlers and four hundred Africans.⁴⁸⁶ At Pointe Coupée, Indians and Africans gave birth to *grifs* who struggled to gain freedom by the end of the century.

Between 1790, when the first case appeared, and 1794, when the Louisiana colonial government ordered a suspension of all such suits, a total of 13 slaves claiming Indian descent sued for their freedom.⁴⁸⁷ One possible reason for this small number is that *grifs* from other parts of the colony had to go to New Orleans to be heard, which was extremely difficult, as they could be punished by their masters or be considered as runaway slaves and be sanctioned. In fact, the first cases involved primarily slaves from New Orleans or slaves from Spanish Illinois, who could easily demonstrate Indian ancestry, and in general their master did not show much

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁴⁸⁶ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 250.

⁴⁸⁷ Weber, "The Problems of Indian Slavery in Spanish Louisiana," 126.

resistance to emancipating them. Later however, the suits included many *grifs* from plantations at Pointe Coupée. These suits were opposed by planters, who petitioned to suspend them. These cases included: Jean Baptiste v. Morel, Jan 13, 1791; Marriane v. Pomet, Jan 13, 1791; Theres v. Bienvenu, April 27 1791; Julien v. Tallon, July 12, 1791; Joseph v. St. Cyr, July 12, 1791; Ignacio v. Soubie.⁴⁸⁸ Additionally, it is also possible that there are other cases, as the colonial records are scattered across two continents.

A significant number of cases involved slaves listed in Pointe Coupée records as *grifs*. The case of Cecilia, *India Libre*, whose struggle to obtain her own freedom and freedom of her relatives is documented in some detail, opens a window on these legal cases. Cecilia was a *grif* listed as *négresse* in the parish's records. She was a slave who was freed by her white lover who paid for her redemption in 1780. She took the name Cecilia *India Libre* and began to petition to free members of her family, establishing that they were Indian descendants of an Indian woman from Pointe Coupée.⁴⁸⁹ As in the case of Cecilia and her family, many other *grifs* took the same legal path to be freed, shedding more light on the intimate frontier a generation earlier.

Cecilia then petitioned to free her sister Marie Jeanne, pleading the same circumstances. She pleaded that her sister, a slave of Hamond of the Opelousas, was the daughter of an Indian woman. On December 16, 1793 in Pointe Coupée, one of the witnesses in the case, Francoise a free black, asserted that she knew Marie Jeanne's mother to be a full-blood Indian from the "Patoucas nation," who was initially a slave of Mr. Germain, and then of Jean Dequir. She also declared that Marie Jeanne had a daughter named Charlotte, a slave of Hamond, and another

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁹ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 338-340.

daughter Melanie, who had two sons who were slaves in Pointe Coupée. Marie Jeanne was also mother to Santiago (Jacques), Babet, and Nanette, all slaves in Pointe Coupée. The witnesses traced the lineage of Marie Jeanne and confirmed the allegations.⁴⁹⁰ The final judgment of the case is not clear from the records.

The *grifs* understood racial categories and used the Spanish laws for both Indians and Africans to their advantage. Initially, Cecilia unsuccessfully pleaded Indian ancestry to free her niece Nanette. Then, as the Spanish law allowed African slaves to petition the court in cases of ill treatment, Cecilia petitioned Carondelet to free her niece Nanette, charging this time, that Nanette and her children were mistreated by her owner, Mr. Tournoir. She requested that her relatives be freed right away otherwise they would be exposed daily “to many atrocities even worse than those imposed upon the blacks.”⁴⁹¹ Meanwhile, Tournoir’s neighbors witnessed that she had never been mistreated and that she and her son were the best dressed slaves. This also shows that the *grifs* were aware of the racial difference the Spanish laws created, as the most atrocious situation for the *grif* slave was to be treated worse than the African slave.

Similarly, Clara Lopez de Pena knew well the disadvantage for an Indian to be classified as a black. In 1795, Clara Lopez de Pena, a resident of New Orleans, petitioned to request the removal of her baptismal record of her daughter, Louisa, from the baptismal register book of the Africans to the one of the whites. In the court proceedings, Clara complained that her

⁴⁹⁰ Cecilia v. Edmond, Court Proceedings of 1793, (*Diligencias practicadas por Cecilia India Libre, sobre libertan a su hermana Maria Juana Esclava del nombrado Edmond*) in Notarial Acts of Francisco Broutin, Vol. 24, Act 21-31, Notarial Archives, New Orleans.

⁴⁹¹ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 338.

daughter was added to “the book that corresponded for only blacks,” and thus considered Louisa as African. Clara was the daughter of Captain Jose Lopez de La Pena and Louisa Mandeville “as shown in documents number 2, 3, 4, 5.” “You need to fix the mistake” added Clara, who was concerned that race becomes an obstacle for her daughter. There were two witnesses. One, Isiomo Quintero, testified that, “I give faith to what she is saying.” Luisa, a *mestiza*, born on December 21, 1795, testified that she was the natural daughter of Clara Pena, *mestiza libre*, and Don Luis Declouet.⁴⁹²

To prove her identity as a *métis*, Clara traced her Indian ancestry going back to Clara’s mother Louisa Mandeville, *mestiza*, (also known as Louisa Brunet), and Louisa Mandeville’s mother Maria Juana, *mestiza*, daughter of a white man and an Indian woman. Clara demonstrated that there was no black blood in her ancestry and insisted that her daughter, little Louisa, “needed to be put where she belongs to,” meaning the white baptismal register.⁴⁹³ The nickname of her mother, Brunet, indicates that she was dark skinned. Her granddaughter, little Louisa, was most likely dark skinned and was registered in the book for Africans. Although Clara’s request was approved, this might also indicate the possibility of African blood at some point in the lineage. Race was anything but clear on the Intimate Frontier.

⁴⁹² Clara Lopez de Pena Court Proceedings of September 14, 1799, (*Diligencias practicadas por Clara Lopez de Pena para pistificar su descendencia de indio y que la patida de su hija Luisa se traslade del libro de negros al de Blancos*) in Notarial Archives New Orleans Collection, box 4, folder 2f, University of Notre Dame Archives, South Bend, Indiana.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*

In 1793, another case involved Ignacio, son of an Indian named Theresa, who petitioned for his freedom. “Without bad intention,” Ignacio certified that he was telling the truth in declaring that he was the son of a black man and an Indian woman. Ignacio asserted that he had witnesses who could swear “under the penalty of law” that he was the son of Theresa a full-blood Indian, who was a slave of Henriqueta Regnier. Henriqueta was identified as a widow who had recently died. Ignacio explained that he desired to be free so he would not have to serve Henriqueta’s heirs. Additionally, in his petition, Ignacio requested a “defender” (a lawyer), who could help him and represent him at the court and insisted that there was no “malice” behind his request. Ignacio mentioned the names of his witnesses, including Cecilia, Francisca, and Theresa, asserting that the court could call upon them to confirm that he was telling the truth.⁴⁹⁴ The result of the proceedings is not clear from this record.

The circumstances and resolutions of such legal actions like Ignacio’s are difficult to uncover. No evidence can be found on the result of the suits. Because the status of a slave establishing maternal descent from Indians “ground slowly through legal process,” the piles of pages recorded for the court extended over long periods and were not necessarily enough in many of these suits to reach a judgment.

Another *grif* named Marie Jeanne pleaded for her freedom and that of her children, Antoine Sarrasin, *métis*, and Marie Griffe. Marie Jeanne, sixty years old, was held in Pointe

⁴⁹⁴ Ignacio v. Soubie, Court Proceedings of November 8, 1793, (*Diligencias practicadas por Ignacio hijo de un negro, y de una India nombrada Theresa perteneciente a la succession de Dona Henriqueta Regnier viceda que fue de Don Juan Soubie, sobre pretender su libertad*) in Notarial Acts of Francisco Broutin, Vol. 24, Act 24, Notarial Archives, New Orleans.

Coupée and claimed to be a *grif* and a slave of Jean Rondeau. Lacking written evidence, such as a baptismal certificate, she presented the testimony of three elderly whites and a free black woman of Pointe Coupée who knew her mother. Here too, the owner declared he was not aware of her Indian ancestry at the time of purchase, and believed she was a *mulatto*. Further, Rondeau argued that the “continuous unjust lawsuits” were not only economically harmful but politically dangerous as well, encouraging slaves to flee to New Orleans to file suits against their masters.⁴⁹⁵ Soon, he became the leader of the petition demanding an end to the liberation of the Indian slaves.

Planters were not pleased with the Spanish government that was already too lenient towards the slave and free “colored population,” and these cases brought further concerns and fears. The case of Cecilia, a free Indian and daughter of an Indian who filed a suit to emancipate her sister and her sister’s five children and six grandchildren, involved three different planters from Pointe Coupée, Attakapas, and Opelousas. This one case in itself was provocative enough to the angry planters. The case created solidarity among the planters from the three districts, and they petitioned to stop the process. In April 1794, an order indefinitely suspended the hearing of Indian Freedom Suits and slaves were directed to return to their master. As a result of his suit suspension, Marie Jeanne’s son Antoine Sarazin, was enlisted in Pointe Coupée’s slave

⁴⁹⁵ Weber, “The Problem of Indian Slavery in Spanish Louisiana,” 129. The slave owner resisted the court and charged that Marie Jeanne could not prove her Indian ancestry. Additionally, he pleaded that the Spanish law could not apply to the colony of Louisiana, as the Spanish agreed to protect the French residents’ property during the treaty of cession with France.

conspiracy in 1795.⁴⁹⁶ In context of the Haitian revolution and slave revolts, the government answered the concerns of the planters and never re-opened the *grifs*' suits for freedom in the few years just prior to the Louisiana Purchase.

Frontier conditions created a place where cross racial intimacy between Africans and Indians became prevalent in colonial Louisiana. African and Indian slaves often lived on the same estate. Bound in slavery and facing common danger, Indian women and African men came into close contact with one another, creating ties that allowed them to resist captivity and struggle for freedom as they ran away together. The intimate frontier reshaped French perspective over slavery as they became aware the potential danger of these African-Indian unions and their collaboration could generate. Although hidden, these intimacies gave birth to their *grif* children who, a generation later, unfolded the story of this intimate encounter.

However, this story eventually vanished in the early colonial records. Aspects of the laws that governed Louisiana during the Spanish period as well as their color based on social taxonomy washed away the Indian-African existence on the Intimate Frontier. By the early 1790s, *grif* slaves completely disappeared from the Pointe Coupée lists and mulatto slaves increased, indicating a redefinition to prevent *grifs* slaves from claiming their freedom under Spanish law. Racial designations in the lists of slaves were based partially upon physical

⁴⁹⁶ Weber, "The Problem of Indian Slavery in Spanish Louisiana," 132. The abortive slave revolt led twenty-six slaves, including Antoine, to the gallows at Pointe Coupee On May 29, 1795.

appearance and partially upon knowledge of ancestry.⁴⁹⁷ The study cases offer a hint on the bigger painting of the larger *grif* community and the redefinition of race at the intimate frontier.

Other aspects of the Spanish law, such as the abolition of Indian slavery that enabled their children to take legal action to free themselves, offered evidence of the widespread nature of these unions. Indeed, the long and painful legal proceedings show that the *grifs*, who have been presumed by scholars to be only Africans and mulattoes, struggled, like their parents a generation earlier, for the same freedom. Moreover, these cases also reveal the complexity of race relations between Africans and Indians on the Intimate Frontier. It also reveals the Indians and African Indians attitude towards Africans after Spanish colonial rules redefined race.

⁴⁹⁷ Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, 262.

CONCLUSION

The frontier/borderland historiography has tended to focus largely on the diplomatic and economic treaties signed by the competing colonial powers and how individuals, both Europeans and Native Americans negotiated to acquire and protect their respective economic interests. Building on this scholarship, *Intimate frontiers* looks at the daily contacts, exchanges, and relations Indians, Europeans, and Africans established and their outcome to the individuals and its impact on governmental policies.

In the nineteenth century, Native American groups of the Mississippi Valley faced expansionist Anglo-Americans. Unlike the earlier eighteenth century French comers, most of these new settlers did not forge ties of trade or alliances with the Native residents.⁴⁹⁸ The Long knives, unlike the Heavy Eyebrows, wanted to settle the newly acquired land ignoring the natives and resisting incorporation into local ways. As a result, the American policy in dealing with Indians was based on formality rather than intimacy. Gift-giving and other hospitable acts, including intermarriage and sexual unions, served as symbolic expressions of sociable ties between the host and guest parties was not part of the American Indian policies. Although they distributed gifts, goods, and food to the Indians, the Americans viewed their “gifts” as payments for the Natives’ lands rather than means to create kinship or a social obligation.

The French, unlike the Spanish and English, were generally successful in establishing cordial relations with the Natives in North America. In New France and in the colony of

⁴⁹⁸ DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 10.

Louisiana, the French secured military alliances and established commercial relations that earned the loyalty of the majority of the Native American tribes they encountered (The French counted failures with some tribes including the Natchez and the Iroquois). The French often used their influence on the Indians to defend their interest in North America. They counted on their Indian allies during the several “French and Indian Wars,” to resist or attack both European enemies and hostile Indians. The focus on politics and diplomacy to explain this success ignores the informal aspect of the encounter that characterized the frontiers.

Understanding the importance and the weight of intimacy in colonial diplomacy sheds more light on the political, relative, success of the French in Colonial Louisiana. *Intimate Frontiers* re-examines the early encounter between the French, Spaniards, Africans, and Native Americans in eighteenth century Louisiana frontiers. It sheds more light on the impact of the cultural, economic, and intimate exchange between the individuals, on an every-day basis, on the political arena. *Intimate Frontiers* describes how people exchanged goods, developed friendships, and formed sexual and marital unions, enabling them to negotiate frontier life. It shows how settlers, Africans, and Natives used sexuality, marriage, and kinship as political and legal instruments to their advantage.

Intimate Frontiers highlights importance of social relations between the Europeans, Indians, and Africans in the Mississippi River Valley and the impact of their intimacy on politics. French, Spaniards, and Americans introduced the Indians to a common diplomacy of signing treaties and military alliances symbolized by gift giving; however, the French, unlike their competitors, also conducted diplomacy based on kinship and social obligation. As in most colonies during their formative years, Louisiana experienced a high ratio of men to women.

French officials sought to acquire young women from France, which were needed to “draw in the backwoodsmen” from Indian villages. It was the individual initiative of the Indian women and Frenchmen, rather than France’s diplomacy, which resulted in kinship, adoptions, and intermarriages that strengthened France’s relations with the Indians in the Valley.

The intimate encounters between the individual had shaped the French colonial policies. The French, Spaniards, and later the United States offered Indian chiefs medals as a sign of a mutual economic, military, and diplomatic understanding. However, the Indian nations remained loyal to the French even after signing treaties with the Spaniards and the Americans and wore their medals. The reality is that colonial frontiers were informal and complex in which individuals used relations built with other individuals as means to negotiate the frontier. The main difference between the French and other European powers in North America was rooted in intimate and social relations with Indians rather than their political and diplomatic skills.

The friendly alliance that French settlers and Quapaw Indians forged at Arkansas Post is a good example of the cordial relations that developed between the French and the Native Americans. As equally weak players in the colonial lower Mississippi Valley, the Quapaw and French sealed military and diplomatic alliances that were cemented by kinship, sexual intermingling, and intermarriages. These ties between the French and Quapaw to create an unbreakable kinship, even long after the French hunters, the Quapaw Indians, and even Arkansas Post itself had faded.

Whether the geopolitical frontier of Louisiana was ruled by a Spanish King, a French Emperor, or an American President, the intimate frontiers linked the French settlers and Osage Indians for generations. Neither the Spanish attempted to pay the Osage for peace or the

American focus on forced removal and assimilation had responded to the Osage understanding of diplomacy—a diplomacy linked to kinship and intimacy. It was the Indian women’s intimate encounters with Du Tinsé, Bourgmont, and other un-named *coureurs de bois* that paved the way to diplomacy. After the French and Indian War, the Chouteau family re-established ties with the Osage and built an economic empire in St. Louis. The Osage and Chouteaus’ partnership, friendship, and sexual intimacy enabled them to maintain their empires and control over the region during Spanish rule. While the Osage-Chouteau kinship did not prevent the American expansion, their alliance did not disintegrate even after the removal of Indians into the Indian Territory of Oklahoma. The Chouteaus’ social and economic ties with the Indians were continued by Pierre’s eight sons.

Intimacy in early Louisiana also affected colonial governmental policies on the institution of slavery and redefined race at the frontier. Slavery bound the “first generation” of Africans and Indians during the first half of eighteenth century. Because their status as slaves and white ‘racial superiority,’ Indians and Africans saw each other as equals. Confined in the white men’s bondage under the same conditions, black and red came to close contact with each other as they accomplished their daily tasks in the household or the plantation. Indians, including Choctaws, and Africans engaged in a mutually benefic intimate relationship as they collaborated in resisting slavery, often times running away together. As a result, some French officials encouraged the end of Indian slavery to prevent the African slaves from running away, while others took actions to divide the two people, instigating African-Indian conflicts to the same end. Similarly, under Spanish rule Africans and Indians continued to collaborate to resist bondage, while race was redefined as the Spanish laws freed the Indians and kept the Africans in bondage.

Under these legal circumstances, their mixed children, *the grifs*, became aware of the burden of their African heritage, while their Indian heritage offered hope for freedom.

Intimate Frontiers also illuminates the diverse participation of Indian women within the encounter. Because of her sexuality, her work on the hides, and hospitality, the Indian woman was at the heart of relations between Indians and Europeans. The social and intimate relations developed between Frenchmen and Indian women were key to the French diplomatic success with the Indians, whom in return received European goods and a higher position within their tribes. Similarly, Native women's sexual intimacy with African slaves in bondage allowed their collaboration in resisting slavery, while their mixed race children defied colonial laws and redefined the understanding of race on Louisiana frontier.

In the end, *Intimate Frontiers* allowed individuals to shape, rather than merely react, to European and American politics and diplomacy. The encounter between the Quapaw, Osage, Choctaw, French, and Africans from the upper to the lower Mississippi from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, demonstrated how the lives and actions of individuals shaped relations during the conquest. These clearly show that Indians, Africans, and French, men and women, used sexual and kinship diplomacy to achieve and maintain political, economic, and legal gains during their encounters.

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