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The French and Indian Wars: New France's Situational Indian Policies During the Fox and Natchez Conflicts, 1701-1732

Stephen Jay Fohl
Eastern Kentucky University

THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WARS:

NEW FRANCE'S SITUATIONAL INDIAN POLICIES

DURING THE FOX AND NATCHEZ CONFLICTS, 1701-1732

By

Stephen Jay Fohl

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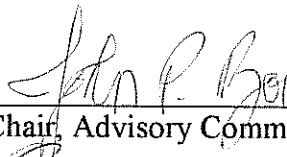

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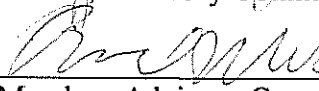

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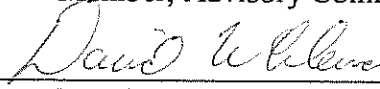

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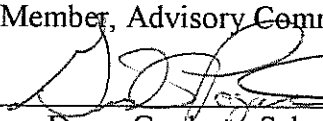

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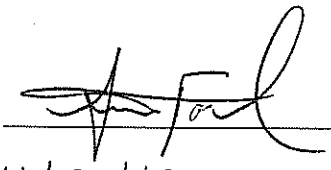
Signature 

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DURING THE FOX AND NATCHEZ CONFLICTS, 1701-1732

By

Stephen Jay Fohl

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Eastern Kentucky University
Richmond, Kentucky
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my cat

Chloe

who kept me company at all hours of the night while it was being written

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I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. John Bowes, for his steady guidance through this rewarding process, as well as the other members of my advisory committee, Dr. David Coleman and Dr. Brad Wood. I would also like to thank Jim Barnett, Director of the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians; the helpful staff at the Mississippi State Archives in Jackson; Simon Gray, for allowing me to organize my thoughts on our daily runs; and Larry Fohl, for accompanying me on the trip down the Natchez Trace that inspired it all. Finally, I would like to express since gratitude to my wife, Dana. It was her motivating words (and threats) that rallied me out of inertia and, ultimately, to the end of this long and arduous journey.

ABSTRACT

This research examines the often-glorified relationship between New France and the American Indians with which that empire came into contact in North America, focusing primarily on the conflicting policies seen during the Fox Wars and the Natchez Wars. Many recent histories of New France, including Richard White's seminal study *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics, 1650-1815*, focus primarily on the lands surrounding the Great Lakes. These histories champion a French Indian policy that was dominated by the fur trade and illustrated by the outbreak of the Fox Wars in 1712. However, New France's Indian policy was not always dictated by the vast and powerful fur trade. Once the French reached the Gulf of Mexico and began settling in the Deep South, priorities changed, and an often-overlooked chapter of colonial French history began.

Much of the primary research on the Natchez Indians was performed by looking exhaustively though the letters, decrees and memoirs written in *The Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion Volumes II, III and IV*. Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz's *L'Histoire de la Louisiane* also proved to be an invaluable primary resource during the process. When dealing with the Upper Country, much of my research focused on the primary source smorgasbord presented online by the *Wisconsin Historical Collections* and the *Michigan Pioneers and Historical Collections*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In Sid Meier's 1994 computer game *Colonization,* France's early ventures in the New World are described as so:

> Though French forts, missions and trading posts soon dotted the Great Lakes region, French settlements were generally small enough to operate in relative harmony with the local native population. Although this relationship was not entirely without incident, the French were often able to cooperate profitably with the natives. This cooperation occasionally extended into the military realm. To reflect the superior ability of the French to cooperate with the native population, the French player's colonies and units cause alarm among the Indians at only half the rate of other European powers."[1]

While Meier's computer game is not a scholarly work, nor the authority on France in the New World, it *is* indicative of France's pigeonholed role in the New World of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that of perennial ally to the Indians.

For those who do not study history for a living or a hobby, it is easier, and more convenient, to understand colonial North America when each European colonizer is wrapped up in a neatly-packaged role. For instance, the English arrived in the New World to build settlements, while the Spanish arrived to plunder and seek gold. The common perception of the French is that they were there to trade, a far less imposing activity than settlement-building and gold-seeking and one that put them in the good graces of the Indians.

This perception is strengthened by the French and Indian War, a poorly-titled conflict that is widely studied in schools. Per my own experience in an American public

[1] Sid Meier, *Colonlization* (DOS version), MicroProse (MicroProse, 1994).

school system, it is "hip" to understand that the French and Indian War was not actually a war in which the French fought the Indians, but a war in which the French *and* Indians fought the English. It is less "hip" to further connect the dots and understand that the French and Indian War was actually a war in which the French *and* Indians fought the English *and* other Indians. This common misunderstanding furthers the over-simplified notion that Indians befriended the French and fought everyone else. It also helps build in the mind the romanticized image of the *Coureur des bois*, rugged, bearded French woodsmen, clad in buckskins, who glided down rivers on canoes with their Indian allies, hunting and trapping and providing the perfect foil to stuffy, tricorne-wearing, Bible-thumping English Puritans and dastardly, morion-wearing, pike-wielding Spanish Conquistadors.

Meier's computer game is not alone, however, in painting a halcyon portrait of French and Indian relations during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Historians – both of the era and contemporary – succumbed to the same fallacy. "Traditional opinion concerning French and Indian relations in colonial North America holds that the natives received better treatment from the French than from the other Europeans who explored and settled the continent," Patricia Dillon Woods admitted in *French-Indian Relations on the Southern Frontier, 1699-1762*.[2] Pierre Francois Xavier de Charlevoix, a Jesuit often referred to as the first historian of New France, and Francis Parkman, a distinguished nineteenth-century historian, greatly contributed to that "traditional opinion." Charlevoix once compared English and French colonists in such a way: "The English Americans … in no way show consideration for the Indians, for they do not believe they have any

[2] Patricia Dillon Woods, *French-Indian Relations on the Southern Frontier 1699-1762* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), 108.

requirement for them. For contrary reasons, the Canadian youth detest peace, and live with the aborigines of the country, from whom they easily gain esteem in war and friendship at all times."[3] In his book, *Pioneers of France in the New World*, Parkman similarly presented a dramatic depiction of colonial Frenchmen as unbridled, symbiotic outdoorsmen, whose cooperative nature, more so than English expansionism and Spanish fanaticism, appealed to Indians. "New England was preeminently the land of material progress," and New Spain represented "a tyranny of monks and inquisitors," Parkman broadly observed. However, New France was populated by "a people compassed by the influences of the wildest freedom – whose schools were the forest and the sea, whose trade was an armed barter with savages." New France, Parkman eloquently lamented, "is a memory of the past. And, when we evoke its departed shades, they rise upon us from their graves in a strange romantic guise. Again their ghostly camp-fires seem to burn, and the fitful light is cast around on lord and vassal and black-robed priest, mingled with wild forms of savage warriors, knit in close fellowship on the same stern errand."[4] Neither Charlevoix or Parkman explicitly stated that French and Indian relations in North America were unblemished; however, both used flowery language to form in the mind the image of organic, unbigoted French pioneers who befriended Indians and, essentially, became like Indians.

This image has displayed a remarkable lifespan. Several twentieth-century accounts of the colonization of North America bought into it wholeheartedly. In his book, *The French and Indian War*, Donald Barr Chidsey wrote that English settlers "took no

[3] Francois Xavier de Charlevoix, as quoted in F.E. Whitton's *Wolfe and North America* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1929), 133.
[4] Francis Parkman, *Pioneers of France in the New World* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1876): ix-x.

interest in the moral well-being of the redskin," while French settlers "were fascinated by the Indians." According to Chidsey, the French "learned the languages, they respected the customs and adopted the habits … the French plunged into the wilderness fearlessly, making astonishing trips of exploration. The English obliterated the wilderness, laying it low as they pushed westward, leaving behind them only stumps."[5] In *Wolfe and North America*, another book dealing primarily with the French and Indian War, F.E. Whitton agreed with Chidsey concerning an innate French attraction to Indians, and vice versa. "The native population shrank before the English as from an advancing pestilence," Whitton wrote, "On the other hand, in the very heart of Canada, Indian communities sprang up, cherished by the Government and favoured by the easy-tempered people."[6]

Realistically, however, French relations with Indians were far more nuanced and far less romantic. The very nature of France's early mission in the New World – the lucrative fur trade – made it so that the French did not impose on Indians with the same ferocity as the colonizing English and conquering Spanish. In fact, the fur trade required the French to actively seek peace *with* and assistance *from* the Indians with which they came into contact. In the eighteenth century, however, France, ever-expanding in its ambition and clout on the continent, engaged in two wars – at essentially the same time, but hundreds of miles from one another – that resulted in the near-annihilation of one Indian tribe and the absolute annihilation of another. The differences between these conflicts – the Fox Wars (1712-1716, 1728-1732) and the Natchez Wars (1715, 1722, 1723, 1729) – underlined a major shift in France's mission in the New World. By the 1720s, the French had morphed from a late-to-the-party, inconspicuous bystander,

[5] Donald Barr Chidsey, *The French and Indian War* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1969), 15-18.
[6] Whitton, 136, 139.

content to trade furs with Indians, to the land-hungry, imperialist model made popular by the English and Spanish.

The historiography of the Fox Wars is vast, and the wars play an especially important role in historian Richard White's expansive, respected treatise on French and Indian interactions in the Great Lakes region, *The Middle Ground*. In *The Middle Ground*, White delivers a thoughtful and well-researched portrayal of the French colonial enterprise, and he does so in a manner far more nuanced and sophisticated than any of the historians discussed in the previous two paragraphs; however, his scope is limited. White paints a portrait of the Fox Wars as an event that shaped all future interactions between the French and their Indian allies, and he paints a portrait of the fur trade as an enterprise that guided all Indian policy in New France. He does not take into account the completely alternate Indian policy that occurred further south down the Mississippi River, a policy that had little to do with the Fox Wars or the fur trade. The historiography of the Natchez Wars is more limited, perhaps because the Natchez Wars, more so than the Fox Wars, fail to advance France's accepted New World personality. Yet, it was the Natchez Wars that more aptly illustrated the direction in which French colonialism was headed and revealed the duality of France's situational Indian policies in North America. The Fox Wars are more easily digested because they revolved around the fur trade and, thus, espoused a French Indian policy centered on non-intervention and the desire for peace. However, French Indian policy was not always based on the fur trade, especially once French boats reached Louisiana and discovered the Natchez bluffs.

The Natchez was a tribe located on bluffs overlooking the eastern shores of the lower Mississippi river in then-Louisiana and present-day Mississippi. Woods noted that

of the three most powerful tribes in the lower Mississippi River basin at the dawn of the eighteenth century, the Choctaw, the Chickasaws and the Natchez, the Natchez were the most enigmatic. Upon their arrival in the region, the French immediately acquired the Choctaw as allies and the Chickasaws (who were already trading partners with the English) as enemies, yet "Louisiana's leaders remained uncertain about their status with the Natchez people."[7]

The English, France's primary North American competitor by the early 1700s, remained uncertain about *their* status with the Natchez people, too. In fact, the Natchez, who Woods describes as patently "different from the other natives of Louisiana," were never fully allied with any colonial power.[8] Early eighteenth century French policy in the New World was to seek peace with Indian tribes not already linked to a European rival. In a letter to Sieur de Muy, the fourth governor of Louisiana, King Louis XIV explained this policy, saying peace with Indians was necessary "in order to get control of their commerce and to prevent the English from coming to trade among them."[9] Yet, over the nearly 30-year period in which they were in contact, the French and the Natchez never truly found peace. Uneasy truces were spoiled by misunderstandings and insults, leading to three small wars and, eventually, the annihilation of the Natchez by the French in 1732.

France's expulsion of the Natchez from existence was an aberration, and, thus, it is not easily understood through the lens of traditional French policy. It is more easily

[7] Woods, 23.
[8] Woods, 23.
[9] King Louis XIV to De Muy, 30 June 1707, in *Mississippi Provincial Archives 1704-1743 French Dominion Vol. III*, ed. Dunbar Rowland and Albert Godfrey Sanders (Jackson: Press of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1932), 51. *It should be noted that this letter never reached De Muy, as he died in Havana on his voyage to Louisiana.*

understood through the lens of failing French-Canadian policy attempting to be applied in French-Louisiana. In Canada and the Great Lakes region, far to the north of the dismal swamps and thick fog of the Mississippi River Delta in an area dubbed "the middle ground" by White, trade – primarily the fur trade – was the prevalent religion, and the French and English attempted to fortify their dominance by creating intricate commercial alliances with and among the various Indian tribes in the region. In the Upper Country, a policy of peace made sense, because harmony facilitated the fur trade. However, when French boats expanded downriver into Louisiana around the turn of the century, they found a country of cash crops, not fur trade, and the growth of cash crops requires something the fur trade does not: land. When the Louisiana colony, then located on the low mouth of the river, struggled through disease and crop-killing fog in its early years, French eyes turned towards the lush bluffs of the Natchez, located high above the river and referred to in an early report of the country by De Sauvole de La Villantray, Louisiana's second governor, as "very different, for it is perfectly good and agreeable."[10] By 1732, the Natchez were no more and that perfectly good and agreeable land belonged to the French.

[10] Sauvole to Pontchartrain?, 4 August 1701, in *Mississippi Provincial Archives 1701-1729 French Dominion Vol. II*, ed. Dunbar Rowland and Albert Godfrey Sanders (Jackson: Press of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1929), 16.

CHAPTER II

THE FOX WARS

The French were relative latecomers to North America, at least in terms of establishing a substantial population on the continent. The ill-fated quest for a western route to Asia in the mid-sixteenth century led French explorers to present-day Canada, where over the course of a century they established New France, a vast fur-trading empire consisting of sparsely-populated mercantile settlements scattered around the Great Lakes that were dependent upon amicable relations with local Indians. The French submitted a token effort into developing their settlements as more than just remote pelt-trading outposts, resulting in the founding of Quebec City by Samuel de Champlain in 1608 and its coronation as the capital of New France in 1663. Still, the population of Quebec City, New France's largest settlement, hovered around 2,000 people as late as 1690.[11] The fur trade, not colonization, remained France's foremost and most profitable operation in North America, and that is why letters came all the way from Versailles stressing a policy of peace with Indians who were willing to have it.[12] Peace begat stability in the region, and stability in the region begat profitable trade.

When the French moved south and west from Canada into the Great Lakes region, however, they did not enter a peaceful world. It was a splintered world; a world full of refugees fleeing the powerful, English-aligned Iroquois from the east. For decades, the imperialistic Iroquois Confederacy had been encroaching westward, fragmenting every tribe in its path. "Never again in North America would Indians fight each other on this

[11] Gwenael Cartier, "City of Quebec 1608-2008: 400 Years of Censuses," *Canadian Social Trends* 11 (2008): 64.
[12] King Louis XIV to De Muy, 30 June 1707, *Vol. III*, 51.

scale or with this ferocity," White wrote of the bloodshed that stained the Upper Country in the mid-seventeenth century.[13] The French quickly allied themselves with a host of Algonquian tribes pushed to lands along the western Great Lakes by the horrors of the Iroquois warfare. Sandwiched in present-day Michigan, Illinois and Wisconsin by two enemies, the Iroquois to the east and the enigmatic and unencumbered Sioux to the west, these refugee tribes – primarily the Ottawa, Chippewa and Huron – looked to the French for protection, and the French usually provided it because the tribes were profitable trade partners, and, if united, they formed a formidable buffer between French operations in the west and Iroquois and English encroaches from the east. Then, in 1701, Louis-Hector de Callieres, the governor of New France, negotiated a peace treaty in Montreal, known as the Grand Settlement, between France's western Great Lakes allies and the Iroquois. The French anticipated that the equilibrium brought about by the monumental truce would effectively end a half-century of Indian warfare and that "both the fur trade and New France would prosper."[14]

They were right; peace took hold of the Upper Country and the fur trade prospered in the years that immediately followed. Phillipe de Rigaud Vaudreuil, who became governor of New France two years after the Grand Settlement was signed, facilitated the peace by championing an "anti-imperialistic" policy in the Great Lakes region.[15] He espoused a hands-off approach to dealing with local Indians, promoting goodwill among travelers, free trade and open waterways, which, of course, resulted in

[13] Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region,1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 1.
[14] R. David Edmunds and Joseph L. Peyser, *The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993): 3.
[15] Louise Phelps Kellogg, Ph.D., "The Fox Indians During the French Regime," *Wisconsin Historical Society*: 156.

healthy quantities of peltry arriving at markets in Quebec City and Montreal. His motives might have been profit, but Vaudreuil's policy of stepping back and leaving the Indians to their own devices succeeded in creating a sense of *Pax New France* at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In her article "The Fox Indians During the French Regime," Louise Phelps Kellogg wrote of this tranquil time: "The Upper Country was pacified, all sat quiet upon their mats, and smoked the calumet."[16]

It was a fragile peace, however, and a peace that was mended several times by the desperate mediation of Vaudreuil. The Iroquois' failed promise to return prisoners from previous wars created much antagonism, and the Iroquois and Algonquins "murdered each other at an alarming frequency" while hunting beaver pelts in the same territory. White contended that open war would have erupted if not for the "repeated personal intervention" of Vaudreuil, who "covered the dead hunters and obtained compensation for Algonquin attacks."[17]

Then there were the Fox. The Fox Indians – along with other tribes, including the Sauk and Kickapoo – represented a different group occupying the Great Lakes region at the beginning of the eighteenth century. They represented the Indians that had always been there, or at least had been there longer than the refugee tribes that poured into the region in the seventeenth century. The Fox, also known as the Mesquakie, originated around the St. Lawrence River Valley, migrated west to the lower peninsula of present-day Michigan and were then pushed even further west to the eastern shores of present-day Wisconsin in the mid-seventeenth by the encroaching Chippewa, who were fleeing

[16] Kellogg, 156.
[17] White, 151.

the encroaching Iroquois.[18] The Fox were pushed so far west that they were forced to invade Sioux hunting grounds and, eventually, they were surrounded on all sides by people who did not like them. Because of their precarious location and constant need to defend themselves, the Fox developed a war-like reputation, prone to killing French traders in the woods simply because "they disliked beards" and described by historians as "a cruel nation," possessing a "habitual warlike resolve" and a "fierce barbaric impulse."[19]

Despite their animosity towards the French, and whether or not it stemmed from French facial hair or French inclinations to trade with the hated Sioux, the Fox were invited to Montreal in 1701 and Miskousouath, a Fox chief, signed the Grand Settlement.[20] The inclusion of the Fox in France's enormous Indian alliance benefitted the French because it secured another trade partner and helped stabilize the region, and it benefitted the Fox because it provided French protection from enemies of the Fox, of which there many. The inclusion of the Fox, however, also further intensified the already-volatile situation in the region by irking other tribes in the alliance, many of whom considered the Fox "irreconcilable foes."[21] Undaunted, the French "persisted in their efforts to join these peoples 'together in feelings of peace and union,' hoping to avoid taking sides in a dispute among peoples they considered allies."[22]

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[18] Edmunds and Peyser, 9.
[19] For Fox hatred of French beards, see Kellogg, 147 … for "fierce barbaric impulse," also see Kellogg, 302 … for other unflattering Fox descriptions, see Brett Rushforth, "Slavery, the Fox Wars and the Limits of Alliance," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 63 (2006): 55 … Rushforth cites Mesaiger to du Tisne, 15 October, 1742, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 16, and Dale Miquelon, *New France*, *1701-1744: "A Supplement to Europe*" (Toronto, Ontario, 1987), 46.
[20] Edmunds and Peyser, 60.
[21] Rushforth, "Slavery, the Fox Wars and the Limits of Alliance," 58.
[22] Rushforth, "Slavery, the Fox Wars and the Limits of Alliance," 59.

With the founding of Detroit in 1701, the same year the Grand Settlement was enacted, the French continued to push their luck in recklessly attempting to make friends out of blood enemies. Detroit was the brainchild of Antoine de Lamothe Cadillac, a minor aristocrat from a poor family of southern France who migrated to North America around 1683 and in 1694 became commander of the French post at Michilimackinac, located at the northern tip of the lower peninsula of present-day Michigan. Cadillac, of whom it was written: "no one ever accused [him] … of underestimating his own abilities,"[23] became annoyed with France's non-intervention policy concerning Indians and proposed the construction of a fort at Detroit. Once he took command of the fort, he planned to relocate several of France's Algonquin allies to the Detroit region, forming an Indian Babylon, of sorts. Such a force of French-aligned Indians, Cadillac argued, "would both preclude British influence and serve as a base for future campaigns against the Iroquois."[24] It would also centralize the fur trade, and make it easier for the French to regulate. "The post of Detroit is indisputably the most suitable as regards the security of the trade … " Cadillac wrote to Vaudreuil in 1702. "It is a very different matter when savages come and trade under the bastion of a fort. There they take care to make no venture and offer no insult because they know well that they would be compelled to conduct themselves properly."[25] France would make a fortune, and so would Cadillac.

Despite objections from Jesuit missionaries in the area, Cadillac used his connections with Jerome Phelypeaux de Pontchartrain, the French minister of the marine, to obtain permission to establish Detroit in July of 1701. Within months, Cadillac

[23] Edmunds and Peyser, 55.
[24] Edmunds and Peyser, 56.
[25] Cadillac to Vaudreuil, 25 September 1702, *Michigan Pioneers and Historical Collections*, 144.

convinced large contingents of Ottawa and Huron to build villages near the walls of Detroit. In 1702, Miami and Chippewa villages "added to the burgeoning Indian population."[26] The early years of Cadillac's social experiment were good. Trade was prosperous. Schools and windmills were built. A blacksmith settled at the fort. The population of the settlement blossomed. Cadillac even nicknamed his post "The Paris of America;" however, beneath Detroit's luster was a brimming tin keg of age-old Indian rivalries and grudges that the French either could not see or refused to acknowledge.[27] A clash between the Ottawa and a joint Huron and Miami coalition in 1706 shattered Detroit's five-year honeymoon phase, and revealed Cadillac's loosening grip on control over the Indians he brought there. "The savages make great complaints against M. la Motte [Cadillac]," Francois Clairambault d'Aigremont wrote in a 1708 inspection of Detroit. "This man has much influence among them, but little management."[28] The Ottowa and Huron/Miami dustup, though, was just a warm-up round. Indian affairs at Detroit did not really get interesting until the Fox showed up in 1710.

Despite a formal invitation from Cadillac, the Fox were holdouts for many years, and for this reason: they did not like anyone who lived at Detroit. Following the Grand Settlement of 1701, the Fox were contractually allied with the French and many of the Indian tribes that settled near Cadillac's "Paris of America;" however, reality was a different story. The Fox's relationship with the French was constantly undermined by

[26] Edmunds and Peyser, 57.
[27] Edmunds and Peyser, 59.
[28] Summary of an Inspection of the posts of Detroit and Michilimackinac, by D'Aigremont, 14 November 1708, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 253. Accessed August 7, 2012. http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whc/.

French trade flirtations with the reviled Sioux, and the Fox's relationship with all the other Algonquin peoples that lived outside the walls of Detroit was constantly undermined by years of ancient feuding.[29]

Yet, by 1710, many of the Fox's neighbors had migrated to Detroit, leaving the Fox isolated and without trade partners.[30] The holdout was over. That year, two villages of Fox travelled from Wisconsin to southern Michigan, only to find that Cadillac, the man who invited them there, had gone south to be the governor of Louisiana. Perhaps feeling betrayed, or perhaps always intending to do menace, the Fox acted out upon their arrival at Detroit. They stole French livestock, started quarrels with neighboring tribes, openly talked about trading with the English and "did all of this with an arrogance and ready violence that alarmed all the nations."[31]

The unruliness of the Fox became such an issue that Vaudreuil summoned Fox leaders to Montreal and advised them to move back to Wisconsin. "I learnt today … that you think yourselves masters of that place [Detroit] … and you have brought nothing but disorder, and have shed the blood of my children there," Vaudreuil said, in a stern rebuking of the Fox in 1711. "My opinion is that you would do better to go back to your old village, where the bones of your father are."[32] It did not work, and, in 1712, an Ottawa chief named Saguima took matters into his own hands. Saguima convinced Cadillac's interim successor, Jacques-Charles Renaud Dubuisson, that the Fox were plotting a revolt against the French, then gathered a force of Ottawa, Huron,

[29] Edmunds and Peyser, 60.
[30] Kellogg, 159.
[31] White, 154.
[32] Words of the Marquis de Vaudreuil to the Savages who came down from the Upper Country, 1711, *Michigan Pioneers and Historical Collections*, 505-506.

Potowatomis, Illinois and Miamis (the same tribe the Ottawa had warred against five years earlier) to attack the Fox. According to R. David Edmunds and Joseph L. Peyser in their book *The Fox Wars: The Mesquakie Challenge to New France*, the French would have preferred if Saguima had merely forced the Fox – who were profitable trade partners – to return to Wisconsin, but the Huron, in particular, seemed hell-bent on exterminating the brash Mesquakie for good.[33] Upon being besieged by the Algonquin coalition, the outnumbered Fox pleaded for French intervention, but Dubuisson, who believed Saguima's Fox uprising yarn, provided none. In fact, the French aided Saguima's forces in the battle with Fox. Incensed by this perceived betrayal by the French, the Fox chief Pemoussa shouted to the French:

> What does this mean, my Father? Thou didst invite us to come dwell near three; … and yet thou declares war against us … and yet thou are joining our enemies to eat us. But know that the Renard is immortal; and that if in defending myself I shed the blood of Frenchmen, my father cannot reproach me.[34]

The Fox withstood the siege for 19 days, and then escaped on a rainy night. They did not get far, however, before Saguima's forces caught up with them and, after four more days of intense fighting, beat the Fox into submission. Fox prisoners were divvied up between the allies and, as promised, the Huron "did not spare a single one of theirs."[35]

White wrote of the 1712 massacre: "The victims would not forget their betrayal."[36] A majority of the Fox still dwelled in Wisconsin, and that majority was committed to revenge. In a letter to Pontchartrain, Joseph Marest, a Jesuit missionary in the area, wrote that "The Fox nation is not destroyed," and pointed out that the Fox and

[33] Edmunds and Peyser, 68.
[34] Kellogg, 161.
[35] Kellogg, 162.
[36] White, 158.

allies such as the Kickapoo and Mascouten still accounted for nearly 500 warriors dwelling around Green Bay. Marest then warned that " … if these all unite, as is natural, they may yet excite terror … they would indeed be truly formidable, because so many of them are boatmen. The French … will always be in danger; for the Foxes, Kickapoos and Mascoutins are found everywhere, and they are a people without pity and without reason."[37]

Marest was right. In the following years, the Fox dispersed into the woods and caused mayhem in the Upper Country, recklessly murdering French traders and waging a guerilla war on the Detroit tribes involved in Saguima's coalition. The fear generated by the Fox's reign of terror strangled the fur trade in the Great Lakes region, a map of which can be seen in Figure 1. It was a scenario from a fairy tale: everyone in the Upper Country was afraid to go into the woods on their own.

Figure 1. Map of the Upper Country, New France, 1730

[37] Extract from a letter of Father Marest to Governor de Vaudreuil, 21 June 1712, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 289.

In 1713, Vaudreuil wrote that the local Indians were staying close to Detroit for "fear of having their heads broken" if they ventured far away. French traders, meanwhile, were "dying of hunger in their cabins, not daring to leave … the merchants will have a gloomy confirmation of this, this year, on seeing how little peltry has come down to Michilimackinac."[38]

Marest begged Pontchartrain to send help to the embattled region. "If this country ever needs M. Louvigny, it is now," he wrote in a 1712 correspondence to the minister.[39] However, it took four years – four years during which the Fox "infested the trade routes" and caused "havoc to French commerce in the west," – before Louis de La Porte de Louvigny, a French military officer in the region was finally commissioned to lead an expedition into Wisconsin to silence the unrest.[40] In the summer of 1716, Louvigny, who was commanding an army comprised of about 800 French soldiers and allied Indians, pushed north from Green Bay and laid siege to a fortified Fox village built, and built well, one year earlier to defend the Fox against a specific military operation: the siege. French cannonballs proved ineffective against the village's sturdy oak walls, and when the French attempted to dig trenches around the fort in which to plant mines, the Fox poured fire down on them.[41] Still, after four days of siege, the Fox raised a white flag and attempted a route of diplomacy. It worked. To the dismay of the bloodthirsty allied Indians at the siege who were hoping to gleefully terminate more of their long-time foes, Louvigny granted peace to the Fox, pending a number of terms, including the payment of reparations to the French and their allies in the form of peltry and prisoners. The most

[38] Vaudreuil and Begon to the Minister, 5 November 1713, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 298.
[39] Father Marest to Governor de Vaudreuil, 21 June 1712, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 289
[40] Edmunds and Peyser, 76.
[41] Edmunds and Peyser, 83.

important term of the surrender, however, was that the Fox, simply, agreed to be peaceful going forward.[42]

It is realistic to think that Louvigny never had intentions to eliminate the Fox. One year earlier, he had delivered a report to the French courts that warned against the use of military force against western Indians.[43] When he laid siege to the village, he met resistance from a well-prepared Fox contingent, but his force nearly doubled that of the Fox, and he had time on his side. Eventually, the French would have worn down the Fox. Louvigny's mission was a mission of peace from the outset, because the French believed peace and stability in the region would return the fur trade to its previously profitable ways. Edmunds and Peyser wrote of Louvigny's expedition: "what had begun ostensibly as a military campaign had deteriorated in a commercial venture."[44] White referred to it as "a peace mission disguised as an army."[45] Louvigny, himself, did not deny the loot he procured while on the, supposed, military mission. "The result of these Voyages has been the establishment of peace among all the Nations with whom the French trade," Louvigny boasted in a letter to Louis Alexandre de Bourbon, count de Toulouse " … and an Extraordinary abundance of rich and valuable peltries, of which we have never seen so great a quantity in Canada."[46] Whatever his intentions, Louvigny returned home a hero. He had subdued the Fox while simultaneously forcing them to hand over canoe-loads of peltry. He had also reignited the fur trade in the Upper Country. The *Coureur des bois* no longer feared for their scalps, and the waterways of the lower Great Lakes were, once

[42] Vaudreuil to the Council of Marine, 14 October 1716, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 343.
[43] White, 161.
[44] Edmunds and Peyser, 85.
[45] White, 161.
[46] Extract from letter of Louvigny to Louis Alexandre de Bourbon, count de Toulouse, 1 October 1717, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 348-349.

again, open for business. Yet, despite the praise heaped upon the band of French heroes at their triumphant return to Montreal, Louvigny left behind a dangerous situation brewing in the west. The French-allied Indians who participated in the siege walked away feeling cheated. Their bloodlust had not been satisfied.

The Fox were a loyal people. In 1715, when the French and several Detroit tribes attacked two of their allies, the Mascouten and the Kickapoo, Pemoussa made the risky decision to leave his village vulnerable by leading a large party of Fox warriors to their friends' aid. So it was that, despite their seemingly genuine attempts to adhere to Louvigny's terms of surrender in the years following 1716, the Fox were eventually pulled back into warfare by their unwavering allegiance to their allies. In 1718, open warfare broke out on the border of Illinois country between the Illinois and the Fox's old friends, the Mascouten and the Kickapoo. The Fox, at first, tried to stay out of the conflict, and Ouchala, a respected Fox chief, even attempted to mediate between the warring tribes. The Illinois, however, "refused to differentiate" between the Mascouten, the Kickapoo and the Fox and, by 1719, several Fox hunters had been murdered in the woods by Illinois war parties.[47] Not even Vaudreuil could blame the Fox for going on the offensive at that point: "The Renards were less in the wrong than the Illinois for the war they have had together … Besides, it is not Surprising that, after having been attacked four successive times without making an reprisals, [the Fox] should have been aroused the Fifth time they were attacked," he wrote in a letter in 1723. Vaudreuil, however, added in the letter: "It is of the utmost Importance to prevent the first movements of [the Fox] from going too far, and to guarantee the upper country from a War which would

[47] Edmunds and Peyser, 93.

result in a general Conflagration."[48] Vaudreuil's warning of an Upper Country conflagration, though, might have come too late.

The war between the Fox and the Illinois escalated in the years that followed. Fox war parties moved south and struck back at the Illinois. The Illinois responded by catching the Fox war parties before they made it back to Wisconsin, routing them and later torturing the prisoners they had previously spared. Ouchala, a traditional advocate of peace, then went on the warpath, leading a large army of Fox warriors into Illinois country and chasing a village of Illinois to Starved Rock, a "towering precipice" that overlooked the Illinois River. Because Starved Rock was deemed "impregnable," Ouchala and his warriors waited out the besieged Illinois until hunger set in and the Illinois sued for peace.[49] Ouchala, wisely, granted that peace. Other, more volatile, Fox chiefs, however, were not as wise. In 1720, Fox warriors from the village of a younger, less-wise chief named Elcevas murdered a Chippewa Indian, which sparked on-again, off-again warfare between the Fox and Chippewa over the next several years. Edmunds and Peyser wrote of the highly-explosive situation in the Upper Country in the early 1720s: "The prospects of a widening Indian war in the western Great Lakes did not bode well for the fur trade."[50]

One of the growing reasons such a war did not bode well for the fur trade was because it cut off the French from a powerful and tantalizing potential trade partner: the Sioux. The Sioux lived to the west of the Fox, the Illinois and the Chippewa, and, to the French, they represented an untapped, and possibly lucrative, resource in the fur trade. In

[48] Vaudreuil to French Minister, 2 October, 1723, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 430.
[49] Edmunds and Peyser, 96.
[50] Edmunds and Peyser, 99.

fact, the French desired to build a fort in Sioux country. In a 1724 letter to the commandant Boisbriant, Vaudreuil wrote: "You are not ignorant of the fact that The Establishment in the syoux country, which the Court has greatly at Heart, will be … advantageous to the all the settlements along the Mississipy."[51] There was a problem, however, and that was getting to Sioux country. In order to get there, French traders had to negotiate their way through an orgy of Indian fighting, a battleground that included incensed Fox warriors, a group that had never had qualms with killing French traders, incensed or not. "But, as one cannot conveniently go there except through the country of the renards, and as that way is closed because of the war that is now raging," Vaudreuil continued in his letter. "It is necessary to Begin at once to reconcile those two nations."[52]

By "those two nations," Vaudreuil was referring to the Fox and the Illinois. The war between the Fox and the Illinois was more potent than the war between the Fox and the Chippewa, and for one reason: The Illinois still held Fox prisoners as slaves, and the Fox wanted those prisoners back. The Fox appealed to the French many times for help in retrieving their kinsmen who had become slaves at the hands of the Illinois. A French officer, Constant Marchand de Lignery, wrote: "When peace was made in 1716, [the Fox] sent the Illinois back their prisoners while the Illinois did not return theirs, as had been agreed upon in the treaty. Thus … I consider that it is necessary, if we wish to secure this peace between them, to commence by accomplishing that."[53] Even Vaudreuil knew of the Fox slaves held by the Illinois, and he seemed concerned about it. In another letter to Boisbriant, Vaudreuil wrote: "I have Been Informed that the Illinois had not yet given

[51] Vaudreuil to commandant Boisbriant, 20 May 1724, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 441.
[52] Vaudreuil to the commandant Boisbriant, 20 May, 1724, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 441.
[53] Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slaveries in New France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012): 213.

any satisfaction to the renards with regard to their prisoners … I think you feel with me that it is Important to induce that tribe to send back in good faith the prisoners of the others."[54]

The ironic twist, of course, was that Vaudreuil, himself, owned Fox slaves. As Brett Rushforth astutely points out in his article, "Slavery, the Fox Wars and the Limits of Alliance, "to avoid difficult questions, Governor Vaudreuil never mentioned to his French superiors that his household, like scores of others in New France, was served by Fox slaves who had been captured in the very attacks he claimed to oppose."[55] The French began collecting Fox slaves following the 1712 massacre, and the Detroit tribes continued to raid Fox villages and provide the French with Fox slaves in the years that followed, possibly as a conscious strategy to drive a wedge between the two sides. If so, the conscious strategy worked. No matter how desperately the French wanted peace with the Fox so that the fur trade could prosper in the Upper Country, such a peace was never truly palpable while so many Fox remained enslaved by the French. Rushforth refers to the French possession of Fox slaves as the "the most significant issue perpetuating the Fox Wars" in the 1720s, noting that every documented complaint made by the Fox beginning in 1718 concerned the release of Fox slaves from French homes.[56] When no such release occurred, the always-unstable relationship between the French and the Fox disintegrated, permanently. In a 1727 correspondence to the courts, Charles de la Boische, marquis de Beauharnois, the governor-general of New France following

[54] Vaudreuil to the commandant Boisbriant, 20 May, 1724, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 442.
[55] Rushforth, "Slavery, the Fox Wars and the Limits of Alliance," 54.
[56] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance*, 206.

Vaudreuil's death in 1725, wrote, simply, of the grim situation: "The Renards have said that they would no longer suffer any French among them."[57]

By 1728, the French had outlined a policy of genocide to be implemented on the Fox. Talks of peace were no more. "His Majesty is persuaded of the necessity of destroying that Nation [the Fox]," a chilling letter from Versailles instructed Beauharnois. " … It cannot keep quiet, and it will cause, so long as it exists, both trouble and disorder in the Upper country."[58] Lignery commanded the first expedition into Wisconsin in the summer of 1728, and, behind an imposing force of nearly 1,700 French soldiers and allied Indians, victory seemed imminent. It, however, was not. The mission was a calamity. The French intended to surprise the Fox in their villages and register an all-out, definitive victory. Keeping an army of 1,700 people a secret, however, was tricky, and the Fox eventually caught wind of the advancing marauders. Although some warriors wanted to stay and defend their homeland, the severely-outnumbered Fox, wisely, broke camp and withdrew even further west towards the Mississippi River. When Lignery and his troops reached the Fox villages, they found them deserted, except for an older Fox woman and her granddaughter, whom they questioned, and a stubborn Fox warrior, whom they tortured.[59] Lignery then ordered four of the Fox villages and all of their surrounding cornfields to be burned, turned his army around and went home. In a report to Beauharnois, Lignery touted his mission as "advantageous to the glory of the King and the welfare of both Colonies, inasmuch as one-half those people will die of

[57] Beauharnois and Dupuy to the Minister, 25 October, 1727, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 476.
[58] Memoir from the king to the governor and intendant of New France, 14 May, 1728, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 21.
[59] Edmunds and Peyser, 115.

hunger."[60] He spent most of the same report, however, bemoaning the condition of his canoes, lamenting the mutinous attitude of the *Coureur des bois* attached to his army and pleading to Beauharnois for "protection" from "the minister," all of which indicated Lignery understood that the expedition, at its essence, was a failure.[61] The Fox had escaped.

The Fox returned to find their homes burned and their crops destroyed; however, the French had retreated from Wisconsin and "the Mesquakies had survived."[62] That, in itself, was a victory. The triumph, though, was short-lived, as all triumphs were for the Fox in the final years of the wars that bore their name. When Beauharnois considered granting peace to the Fox in 1729, "allied Indians pressed their agenda, attacking Fox settlements, killing hundreds …" The rate at which the attacks came was "stunning."[63] Enemies of the Fox bore down on all sides. The French made contact with such western tribes as the Sioux and the Iowa and convinced them not to harbor the Fox. There was no escape. Soon, even the Fox's most reliable allies, the Kickapoo and the Mascouten, joined the side of the French. The Winnebago, probably sensing the end was near, betrayed the Fox, as well.

The Fox's lone salvation, ironically, was the Iroquois, the imperialistic, pro-English tribe that had instigated the Fox's migration to Wisconsin in the first place. The Seneca, the western-most nation of the Iroquois confederacy, lived along the St. Lawrence River Valley, which was a long and arduous journey from Wisconsin. Still, the

[60] Lignery to Beauharnois, 30 August, 1728, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 31.
[61] Lignery to Beauharnois, 30 August, 1728, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 34.
[62] Edmunds and Peyser, 118.
[63] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance*, 216.

Fox had no other choice. They were being slowly annihilated in the Upper Country. So, in June of 1730, nearly 300 Fox warriors and 600 Fox women and children abandoned their villages and headed east. The Fox had barely made it around the tip of Lake Michigan when they were engaged by the Illinois in early-August near the St. Joseph River. During the initial battle, a joint force of Kickapoo and Mascouten joined in on the side of the Illinois. Incensed, "The Renards cried out to the [Kickapoo] and the [Mascouten] that they would make their supper off them."[64] Possibly motivated by the sight of their former allies-turned-enemies, the Fox beat back their attackers long enough to construct a fort, there, in the prairie of northern Illinois; an ideal location for one, final stand.

In the days that followed, new and old Fox enemies from all over the Upper Country converged on the St. Joseph River to participate in the siege of the Fox's helpless prairie fort. Robert Groston de St. Ange, the French commander of Fort de Chartres in southern Illinois, rounded up French troops and Creole traders and headed north. Nicolas-Antoine Coulon de Villiers, the French commander of Fort St. Joseph, rallied a force of Sac, Potawatomi and Miami Indians and marched to the fort. In early September, even a band of Huron, that age-old blood enemy of the Fox, arrived bearing a dispatch from Beauharnois that forbade any negotiated settlements with the Fox. It was official: "no quarter would be given."[65] The French had outlined a policy of genocide to be implemented on the Fox, and genocide it would be.

[64] Commandant at Detroit (Deschaillons) to Beauharnois, 22 August, 1730, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 101.
[65] Edmunds and Peyser, 145.

The Fox's exodus had failed. A Seneca rescue party was not coming. The Mesquakie were outnumbered and besieged on all sides by enemies, huddled in a dank fort on a lonely prairie far from the hardwood forests of their homeland in southern Wisconsin. Yet, they persisted. They persisted long enough, at least, to escape during a fierce thunderstorm on the night of September 8. However, "the very conditions that facilitated their escape also precipitated their capture."[66] The rain and wind slowed the Fox, and it dampened their musket powder. When the French and allied Indians caught up with the Fox on the open grasslands, the ensuing fight was violent and lopsided. The battered and exhausted Fox simply had no defense left to muster. In all, nearly 200 Fox warriors were killed, along with nearly 300 Fox women and children. Only about 450 Fox were spared, and most of them were taken as prisoners by allied Indians who participated in the massacre. In a triumphant letter to the French minister, Beauharnois wrote:

> The Renards, in Conjunction with the [Mascouten] and the [Kickapoo], had waged open war on us and our Savage allies for many years; they Surprised our detachments, carried off our Voyageurs, frustrated all our plans and Harassed us Even in our settlements … Attempts had been made on several occasions to destroy them; But lack of Concert, the Spirit of self-interest, and the bad Management of those who at various times were Entrusted with that undertaking, always caused it to miscarry. Finally an event has occurred that brought about their disunion and the destruction of the renards.[67]

Following the massacre of 1730, the Fox would never again pose a major threat to French operations in the New World.

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[66] Edmunds and Peyser, 150.
[67] Beauharnois and Hocquart to the French Minister, 2 November, 1730, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 109.

Something interesting happened while the French had the Fox pinned down with a constant barrage of attacks from 1728 to 1730: A French fort was established in Sioux country. In June of 1728, around the same time Lignery embarked on his mission to attack the Fox, a French officer named Rene Boucher, Sieur de la Perriere (who later played a large role in turning the Kickapoo and Mascouten against the Fox) led a small troop of men out of Montreal, across Lake Huron and Lake Michigan, through Fox-occupied Wisconsin and into the unknown wilds of the west. There, on Lake Petin, an abnormally wide section of the Mississippi River in southeastern Minnesota, Perriere and his men paid homage to their governor by constructing Fort Beauharnois in a matter of just four days. The completion of the fort was met with great rejoicing: "It was on this occasion that the wine of the Sioux was made to flow," Father Guignas, a French missionary who accompanied Perriere on his mission, gleefully wrote in a letter to Beauharnois. Then, probably drunkenly, the French set off fireworks, which caused the terrified Sioux, who were also probably drunk, to stop rejoicing, tremble and plead for the French to stop making the stars fall from the sky. The entire ordeal, as described by Father Guignas, was humorously discombobulated.[68] Just months later, another humorously discombobulated event occurred: all of the Sioux left. They gathered up their families and their dwellings and moved away from the area surrounding Fort Beauharnois. Many French officials, who had never dealt with Plains Indians before and, therefore, knew nothing of the great buffalo hunts that occurred in the spring, were rightfully alarmed. "Shortly after the arrival of the French those Savages started on their hunt as they are in the habit of doing for their Subsistence," Beauharnois wrote calmingly to a clearly-concerned French minister, before adding: " … the Importance of

[68] Father Guignas to Beauharnois, 28 May 1728, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 27.

maintaining that Establishment [Fort Beauharnois] seems to me to be indispensably necessary."[69]

Fort Beauharnois was "indispensably necessary," as Beauharnois himself put it, because of the trade it facilitated. Fort Beauharnois was a fort only by name. In reality, it was a trading post, and it represented France's first major foray into the lucrative commercial opportunities the massive Sioux tribe represented. For years, the French had designs to tap into that great western resource, but, for years, they had been stifled by the Fox. In order to get to Sioux country, French traders had to pass through Fox country, and that was something not many of them were willing to do. However, with the Fox neutralized by a rapid wave of attacks from the French and their allies in the waning years of the 1720s, Wisconsin, suddenly, was not so intimidating and trade with "one of the most powerful western tribes, dwelling in one of the richest fur countries in the continent" was on.[70]

The story of the erection of Fort Beauharnois is important because it is indicative of what drove the French to exterminate the Fox: trade. New France's "economic life rested upon the fur trade," and it was the fur trade, above all else, that dictated how the French dealt with Indians in the Upper Country at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century. The Fox were detrimental to the fur trade. In even stronger diction, the Fox "paralyzed the fur trade."[71] They brashly scalped French traders. They incessantly warred with neighboring tribes, which effectively distracted

[69] Beauharnois and Hocquart to the French Minister, 25 October 1729, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 77.
[70] Louise Phelps Kellogg, "Fort Beauharnois," *Minnesota History Magazine* 8 (2003): 232.
[71] Edmunds and Peyser, 77.

those neighboring tribes from trading with the French. Their mere presence prevented substantial economic contact with the peltry-rich Sioux to the west. All of this precipitated the Fox's demise. When Beauharnois was instructed to implement a war of extermination upon the Fox in 1728, it was not a show of support for French-allied tribes that despised the Fox, it was not to gain territory in Wisconsin and it was not avenge the murder of French traders around the western Great Lakes; it was to protect and advance the fur trade interests of New France and, thus, the interests of New France, in general. It was no coincidence that Lignery's expedition against the Fox and Perriere's trade mission into Sioux territory occurred, almost, simultaneously. The French were making their intentions clear. They would quell the Fox threat and then, immediately, continue bartering beaver pelts with the more powerful Indian tribes beyond.

Although no one involved could have predicted it, the construction of Fort Beauharnois and, more generally, the Fox Wars were taking place at the end of an era, however. The French fur trade in North America had reached its zenith and, by the late 1730s and early 1740s, was entering into a state of decline. Evidence of the decline was vague, but, nonetheless, compelling. Two years after its construction in 1728, Fort Beauharnois folded. By 1738, French officials were writing to Beauharnois, demanding answers. "The falling off in the Beaver trade," Beauharnois pleaded to a French official in a letter from October of 1738, was due to the low price of beaver skins. Beauharnois then informed the official that he had ordered all French traders to raise the price of their beaver skins. "This," he boasted, "has contributed not a little to increase this year's

Receipts."[72] It was a quick fix, though – a reactionary one – and, eventually, it only made matters worse. White wrote of the decaying situation in the Upper Country:

> By 1745 there were serious shortages of trade goods in the West … Some goods reached the upper country, but [French] traders demanded far more than the customary prices for them … Some Indians reacted to the changes in exchange rates by refusing to pay for goods advanced them for their hunts; others began to attack and plunder French trade canoes.[73]

The French soon lost many of their trade allies to the English and the Dutch, and, by the end of the French and Indian War, the significance of the fur trade had significantly dropped throughout New France.[74] The "economic life" of the colony no longer rested on beaver peltry. "In 1755," White wrote, "one French strategist admitted that the fur trade of the Great Lakes and the Ohio Valley was not worth 1 percent of the expense that it had cost the Crown."[75] Nothing illustrates that point, or the direction New France was headed, better than the Treaty of Paris, which ended the French and Indian War in 1763. In that treaty, France ceded all of Canada – thousands of miles of some of the richest fur country in the world – to England in exchange for Guadeloupe, Martinique and several other tiny islands in the Caribbean Sea. In terms of territory, the cession made little sense; however, Guadeloupe and Martinique possessed something Canada did not: rich, fertile soil, and the lucrative cash crops that grew from that soil.

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[72] Beauharnois to the French Minister, 20 October 1738, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 298-299.
[73] White, 199-200.
[74] Jean Lunn, "The Illegal Fur Trade Out of New France, 1713-60," *Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association* 18 (1939): 72, 75
[75] White, 127.

CHAPTER III

THE NATCHEZ WARS

When the French entered Louisiana near the end of the seventeenth century, they were entering an entirely new world. The French had settled, originally, in a land of commerce, alliances and beaver peltry. They were now entering a land of soil.[76] In a 1704 letter, Ponchartrain wrote to Jean Baptiste le Moyne, Sieur De Bienville, one of the early French explorers in the region: "It is very important that you apply yourself carefully to the cultivation of the land." Pontchartrain then added an interesting aside. "Tobacco will probably grow very well there and will be of the quality of that of Virginia," He wrote. "On these [tobacco] plantations follow as far as you can the method of the English colonies about which you can obtain information."[77]

Pontchartrain's emphasis on the significance of land deviated from traditional French policy in the New World. In the Upper Country, letters often came from France ordering officials to cultivate relationships with local Indians.[78] In Louisiana, those letters ordered officials to cultivate the Earth. However, it was Pontchartrain's latter assertion about *stealing* English tobacco methods that implied a truly major shift in French dogma. For more than a century, the French, latecomers to North America, had contented themselves to lurk in the shadowy rivers and hardwood forests surrounding the Great Lakes, isolated from much of the truly imperial action taking place on the continent. By

[76] In a comical 1706 letter to the French council, Sieur Hubert wrote that "The soil is of surprising fertility in all Louisiana," but "the colonists of the present time will never be satisfied with this infallible resource, accustomed as they are to the trade with the Indians the easy profit from which supports them." … Hubert to the Council, 1706, *Vol. II*, 232.
[77] Pontchartrain to Bienville, 30 January 1704, *Vol. III*, 17.
[78] See footnotes 10 and 113.

the early-eighteenth century, though, France had emerged as England's principal North American rival, and with the fur trade slowly declining, new French policy began to take shape. The new policy strayed from the profit-oriented, sparsely-populated, male-dominated forts, trading posts and mercantile settlements that trademarked France's early years in North America to an actual attempt to *settle* North America with inhabitants and challenge England, outright, for possession of the continent.

Possession of the continent was dependent on colonists, and attracting colonists to Louisiana was dependent on land from which those colonists could make a living. Some of the most fertile land in all of Louisiana was inhabited by the Natchez Indians. Nearly all early accounts of the Natchez indicate that they were a displaced people; a refugee tribe unlike any other along the lower Mississippi River. Per their own creation myth, the Natchez originated from a "beautiful region of the Southwest," and because they bore a strong resemblance to the Aztecs – sun-worshipping, human-sacrificing mound builders – most historians have deduced that this "beautiful region of the Southwest" was Mexico.[79] Intertribal warfare forced the Natchez north to the Rocky Mountains and then east to present-day Mississippi, where, around the turn of the 13th century, they settled on bluffs overlooking the eastern bank of the longest river in North America. From that ideally-elevated location, the Natchez and their ancestors prospered into a powerful, expansive culture, militarily and agriculturally dominant among the Mississippian mound-building tribes in that region for many centuries.

When the Spanish Conquistador Hernando De Soto crossed the lower Mississippi River in the mid-sixteenth century, his encounter with the Natchez was short-lived and

[79] Woods, 24.

violent, and it ended with De Soto's men fleeing for their lives. De Soto held many chiefs for ransom during his rampage throughout the Southeast, often luring them into traps by claiming to be the son of the Sun. When he demanded parley, however, with the cacique of Quigualtam, a tribe that many historians believe to be ancestors of the Natchez, he received a surprisingly impertinent response:

> As to what you say of your being the son of the Sun, if you will cause him to dry up the great river [the Mississippi], I will believe you; As to the rest of it, it is not my custom to visit any one … if you desire to see me, come where I am, if for peace, I will receive you with special good will; if for war, I will await you in my town; but neither for you, nor for any other man, will I set back one foot.

It was enough to intimidate the ruthless Conquistador, as he and his men promptly vacated the area. De Soto died soon after departing; however, his men, then led by Luis Moscoso de Alvarado, continued travelling in a southwesterly direction, before looping around and heading back through Quigualtam territory. It was a grave mistake. The Spaniards' boats were attacked by large canoes of Quigualtam warriors. The Indians were able to overturn some of the Spanish crafts and several Spaniards "sank like stones" due to the weight of their armor.[80]

The encounter with De Soto's men, despite its outcome *and* brevity, might have played a role in unleashing an epidemic that decimated the population of the Natchez and several other Mississippian tribes over the next century and a half. By the time the French arrived in the region in the late seventeenth century, the Natchez were in their twilight. The last of the great Mississippian mound-building cultures had been reduced to a modest, but proud group of about 4,000 people inhabiting nine small villages atop the

[80] James F. Barnett Jr., *The Natchez Indians: A History to 1735* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007): 6-10

same bluffs their ancestors had settled nearly 500 years earlier … bluffs that would soon spell the end for the Natchez.

Much of what is known about the Natchez at the dawn of the eighteenth century comes from the writings of Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz, a Dutch-born, French-raised historian and naturalist who lived among the Natchez from 1720-1728. Le Page du Pratz was a seasoned traveller, even before he arrived in Louisiana in 1718. When he was in his early twenties, he explored the Great Plains along the Missouri River with his friend Claude-Charles du Tisne and interacted with a variety of "Naturals," as Le Page du Pratz called Indians.

Le Page du Pratz translated this prior experience with Indians into eight peaceful years among the Natchez. He seemed to fall in love with the tribe, befriending the chief, the Great Sun, and his brother, the Tattooed Serpent, and writing of the Natchez: "Their manners were more civilized, their manner of thinking more just and full of sentiment, their customs more reasonable, and their ceremonies more natural and serious – distinguishing this nation from all others. It was easy to recognize them as more refined and polite."[81]

Le Page du Pratz's descriptions of the Natchez – from their physical appearance ("extremely well-made … their legs seem as if they were sculpted in a mould; they are muscular, and their calves are firm."[82]) to their sense of justice ("They have no police among them except reason, because in following exactly the law of nature they have no

[81] Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz, *L'Histoire de la Louisiane*, trans. Gordon Sayre (http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~gsayre/LPDP.html), 308.
[82] Le Page du Pratz, 308.

contentions, and thus have no need for judges."[83]) – are somewhat compromised by the overly idyllic, sometimes Utopian portrait he paints. However, his writings offer a rare glimpse into Natchez society and cannot be overlooked. According to Le Page du Pratz, the Natchez were a male-dominated people. Even the youngest male was placed ahead of the oldest female on the pecking order, meaning, at mealtimes, "a two-year old boy is served before his mother."[84] The preeminent male of the tribe, the Great Sun, ruled with a rare, despotic authority that could:

> … be compared only to that of the first Ottoman emperors. He is, like them, absolute master of the lives and estates of his subjects. He disposes of them according to his pleasure; his will is the only law … When he orders a man who has merited it to be put to death, the unhappy condemned individual neither begs, nor makes intercession for his life, nor seeks to escape. The order of the sovereign is executed on the spot and no one objects.[85]

Yet, females played a uniquely-important role in Natchez society because they, alone, transferred nobility. There were two classes among the Natchez: nobility (divided into Suns, Nobles and Honored Men) and Stinkards, or commoners. Le Page du Pratz pointed out, rightfully so, that Stinkards did not like to be called Stinkards, "a name which offends them, and which no one dares to pronounce before them, for it would put them in very bad humor."[86] Because all the nobility were descendants of the Sun and, thus, related, the Natchez caste system was fluid, as the nobility *had* to intermarry with the Stinkards. Males enjoyed the privilege of nobility "only individually and during their lifetime."[87] The children that male Suns had with Stinkards were docked a rank to Nobles, and the male children that Nobles had with Stinkards were reduced even further

[83] Le Page du Pratz, 314.
[84] Le Page du Pratz, 385.
[85] Le Page du Pratz, 352-353.
[86] Le Page du Pratz, 393-394.
[87] Le Page du Pratz, 395.

to Honored Men. This rule, however, did not apply to women. Nobility was maintained from female Suns to their children. Therefore, the oldest male son of the female Sun ascended the throne to become the worshipped Great Sun.[88]

Despite portraying the Natchez as the ideal "Noble Savages" throughout much of his writing, there was one aspect of Natchez society that Le Page du Pratz depicted only as savage: human sacrifice. Upon the death of the Great Sun's brother, the Tattooed Serpent, in 1725, "the favorite wife of the deceased, a second wife, whom he kept in another village, to visit when his favorite wife was pregnant, his chancellor, his doctor, his head servant, his pipe bearer, and some old women" were all ritualistically strangled at the burial.[89] Infanticide also took place at Natchez burials, as mothers sacrificed their babies in hopes of having honors or, perhaps, a class promotion conferred to them: "Death was always by strangling with a hempen cord. Victims were hooded, seated on a mat and garroted from behind."[90] Le Page du Pratz did not condemn the Natchez tradition of human sacrifice on the grounds of barbarism, though. He condemned human sacrifice because it was so popular and widespread following the death of a Sun that it slowly annihilated the population of the Natchez. When the Great Sun spoke of committing suicide following the death of his beloved little brother, Le Page du Pratz worried that "the death of the two Suns, who were the first of their nation, would take with them a large part of the people."[91] Le Page du Pratz later summarized: "This custom is fatal to this great Nation, since it has greatly contributed to its destruction, as one has already

[88] Le Page du Pratz, 396.
[89] Le Page du Pratz, 36.
[90] Samuel Stanley, "The End of the Natchez Indians," *History Today* 28 (1978): 617.
[91] Le Page du Pratz, 27.

been able to see."[92] It is possible that widespread human sacrifice, not a European-borne epidemic, was to blame for the Natchez's weakened condition upon the arrival of the French at the turn of the eighteenth century.

Le Page du Pratz departed from the Natchez in 1728, four years before the extermination of the tribe. However, before he left, he witnessed a foreboding event. One evening, he watched a radiant sunset from his courtyard, saying: "It would be very difficult to describe all of the beauties that these different colorations brought to the eyes. But all of it together was the most beautiful sight of this type that I had ever seen in my life." Immediately, though, two Indian neighbors came to his house and expressed fear over the sunset. According to the Natchez, the vibrant redness of the sky meant that it was angry. While Le Page du Pratz tried to downplay the situation by explaining the science of the sunset, there was no escaping the looming violence that was set to erupt in Natchez Country a few years later:

> … this was a phenomenon that announced something sinister for Louisianans. And though the massacre of the French establishment at the hands of the Natchez would not come until almost four years later, most of those who escaped it, are still persuaded that this was a warning of that disaster.[93]

The founder of Louisiana and its first governor, Pierre le Moyne, Sieur D'Iberville, was born in Canada in 1661, the third of twelve sons, and he became a popular military hero in the region while only in his mid-twenties. He and his own genealogical squadron of eleven brothers harassed the English throughout their careers, first at Hudson Bay and then while commanding a frigate along the New England coast.

[92] Le Page du Pratz, 27.
[93] Le Page du Pratz, 223.

Because of his rising star (especially in enterprises against the English), D'Iberville was viewed as the model candidate to counter English advances in the lower Mississippi River basin around the turn of the century. He led three preliminary expeditions into the region and, in 1699, founded Louisiana by establishing Fort Maurepas, the first permanent European settlement on the Gulf Coast, near present-day Biloxi, Mississippi. After relinquishing governorship of the colony to De Sauvole, D'Iberville turned his eyes to English possessions in the Caribbean, looting St. Kitts and capturing Nevis before dying of yellow fever while in Havana in in 1706.

While D'Iberville was instrumental in the founding of Louisiana, it was his third-youngest brother, De Bienville, who played a larger role in the history of Louisiana and, more specifically, a larger role in the destruction of the Natchez. De Bienville served under D'Iberville in a naval campaign against the English in the Hudson Bay area around 1697, and then followed his widely-acclaimed brother to Louisiana, where he gained a reputation for his ability to negotiate with, gain the trust of and, if necessary, make war upon Indians in the region.[94] In a 1713 letter to Pontchartrain, Duclos, then the commissary general of Louisiana, lauded Bienville's ability to win over the natives:

> he would show them great friendship, regale them and very often succeeded by this means with the assistance of the of the Indian language which he speaks perfectly, for these Indian chiefs delighted to see a French chief caress them and have them eat with him … the thing that has also contributed most to make him respected and liked by the Indians has been the care that he has taken never to

[94] I use "widely-acclaimed" as a relative term, as D'Iberville was popular among the French but despised by the English for allegedly incorporating ruthless battle tactics. In his book The History of Canada: Canada Under French Rule, William Kingsford seems to legitimize these allegations, saying: "he was characterized by his ruthless indifference to human suffering, and the merciless destruction of his adversaries … he acted as if he looked upon the destruction of an enemy as almost a religious duty."

> break his word to them, to protect the smallest and the feeblest nations like the strongest.[95]

Upon leaving Louisiana in 1701, D'Iberville left De Bienville as second-in-command to De Sauvole. When De Sauvole died, unexpectedly, from an epidemic that plagued the young colony later that year, however, De Bienville, by default, began his first of five stints as the governor of Louisiana. Despite his popularity among the local Indians and his many diplomatic and military successes in the lower Mississippi River basin, De Bienville appeared insecure in the letters he wrote. In nearly all of his correspondences with Pontchartrain, De Bienville reserved a paragraph or two, usually towards the end, to list his accomplishments, bemoan his wretched health in the colony, beg for more supplies, plead for a raise and, sometimes, ask plainly to be awarded the Cross of St. Louis. He penned a letter to Pontchartrain in 1711, saying:

> I have been here for 13 years; I have spent my youth here; I have worn out my health here and I have not, my lord, certainly made any profit here … if you had any kindness for me my lord, I should hope that you would be so good as to do me the favor of increasing my salary or of granting me a commission of captain … or of lieutenant of a vessel with the Cross of St. Louis.[96]

This paranoia was founded, though, as the crown seemed to possess an innate distrust of De Bienville. To the crown, De Bienvile was the ideal *interim* governor of Louisiana (hence the five, oftentimes short-lived, governorships), the quintessential second-in-command / advisor archetype who could oversee the colony and maintain amicable relations with the Indians until a less-qualified puppet governor could be installed. It is plausible that this distrust stemmed from serious charges levied against De Bienville around 1708 that, essentially, amounted to extortion (De Bienville described the allegations as "taking lavishly from the King's warehouse and having the goods sold to

[95] Duclos to Pontchartrain, 25 October 1713, *Vol. III*, 126-127.
[96] Bienville to Pontchartrain, 27 October 1711, *Vol. III*, 168-169.

the inhabitants at exorbitant prices").[97] De Bienville, however, surmised that Pontchartrain, an aristocrat, simply did not like his late brother, D'Iberville, a glorified pirate, and, as such, refused to advance the careers of De Bienville or his brothers. By 1717, Pontchartrain had resigned his position and De Bienville took the opportunity to publish this conspiracy theory concerning his stagnant career in a letter to the regency council:

> My lord de Pontchartrain offended with the late Mr. D'Iberville, for I know not what reason, had resolved to make his wrath descend upon me as if I could have answered for the causes for displeasure that Mr. D'Iberville could have given him. In this idea he had determined not to promote me at all or any of my family.

Then, in patented De Bienville form, he shrewdly asked for a raise:

> I hope that the council in the intention that it has to render justice to everybody will be so good as to pay attention to the fact that I am very poorly compensated for my services.[98]

De Bienville's most prominent antagonist in Louisiana was Cadillac, who made a name for himself at Detroit before replacing a beleaguered De Bienville, then facing charges of extortion, as governor of Louisiana in 1710. It was the second, and not the last, time De Bienville was replaced as governor by a newcomer to the colony. Sensing, correctly, that De Bienville would not welcome the usurper Cadillac to Louisiana with open arms, Pontchartrain levied a stern warning to De Bienville. "He [the King] desires that you live on good terms with this governor," Pontchartrain wrote in a letter.[99] It appeared that De Bienville tried, in good faith, to coexist with Cadillac, but the two quarreled often. One quarrel, documented in a letter from Cadillac to Pontchartrain,

[97] Bienville to Pontchartrain, 25 February 1708, *Vol. III*, 119.
[98] Bienville to the Regency Council, 10 May 1717, *Vol. III*, 219.
[99] Pontchartrain to Bienville, 13 May 1710, *Vol. III*, 142.

resulted in Cadillac putting De Bienville under house arrest following this blistering exchange:

> Mr. De Lamothe: You are an impertinent fellow and I order you to keep silence.
> Mr. De Bienville: I care very little and I am very little embarrassed that you should order me to keep silence.
> Mr. De Lamothe: Go away under arrest immediately.
> Mr. De Bienville: Yes, under arrest I shall not go.[100]

Despite De Bienville's stupendously confusing final statement in which he appeared to, simultaneously, agree and disagree to be put under arrest, Cadillac's order was carried out and De Bienville was escorted to his house, which, according to a sardonic De Bienville, was "so much the better. That will refresh me if I am there long for we are now in the hot season."[101]

The house arrest incident, however, was minor in comparison to the dispute that took place over one year later, when Cadillac, allegedly without informing De Bienville, left the colony and travelled north by canoe to examine a silver mine discovered in Illinois country. On his journey to and from Illinois country, Cadillac seemed to insult every Indian tribe with which he came into contact: "On the journey that Mr. De Lamothe has just made to the Illinois he quarreled as he went up with all the nations that are along this river … All the nations are talking about it with very great scorn to the shame of the French to the extent of threatening to kill some of them," De Bienville wrote in a scathing, accusatory letter to Pontchartrain in 1716.[102] In a similar letter written from De Bienville to another French superior just weeks later, De Bienville made it clear that of

[100] Cadillac to Pontchartrain, 16 May 1714, *Vol. III*, 178.
[101] Cadillac to Pontchartrain, 16 May 1714, *Vol. III*, 178.
[102] Bienville to Pontchartrain, 2 January 1716, *Vol. III*, 194.

all the tribes Cadillac affronted on his voyage, perhaps the one he affronted the most was the Natchez.[103]

The first interactions between the French and the Natchez were positive ones. During Robert Cavalier de La Salle's famed mission down the Mississippi River in 1682, he and his party encountered the Natchez and exchanged a calumet of peace with them. In 1700, D'Iberville, De Bienville and another party of explorers visited the Natchez and were given fresh fish by a group of Stinkards on the bank of the river before being greeted by the Tattooed Serpent, escorted to the Grand Village and shown boundless hospitality.[104] Father Paul du Ru, the party's Black Robe, wrote of their halcyon stay in the Grand Village: "We are living with them as with brothers … I should prefer to be alone at night in their midst than on Rue St. Jacques in Paris at nine o'clock in the evening."[105]

The early leaders of Louisiana were under strict orders from Louis XIV to seek peace with Indians. In a letter to Cadillac, Louis XIV wrote that De Bienville should "apply himself carefully to managing all these Indians, to maintain peace among them and to conciliate them in their quarrels which they have with each other, in order to put himself in control of their commerce and to prevent the English from coming and trading among them."[106] As Canadians, D'Iberville and De Bienville understood the importance of peaceful Indians to sustain a trade-based colony, and their diplomatic voyage to the

[103] Bienville to Raudot, 20 January 1716, *Vol. III*, 198.
[104] Woods, 28.
[105] Paul du Ru, *Journal of Paul du Ru: (February 1 to May 8, 1700) Missionary Priest to Louisiana*, trans. Ruth Butler (Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 1997): 34.
[106] King Louis XIV to De Muy, 30 June 1707, *Vol. III*, 51.

Natchez in 1700 was successful, at least in the short term, in generating an ally. However, after that initial contact, from 1700 to about 1708, the Natchez are hardly mentioned in the French history of Louisiana.

One must understand the geopolitical theater of that era to understand why the Natchez reemerged. Ironically, a war that was fought mostly in Europe played a large role. The War of Spanish Succession, which lasted from 1701-1713, was the result of a French Bourbon, Phillipe d'Anjou, the grandson of French king Louis XIV, ascending to the Spanish throne left vacant by an heirless Carlos II. The "Grand Alliance" of England, the Netherlands and Austria, sensing that a Spanish-French coalition would upset "the balance of power in Europe," challenged the ascension, and the 12-year conflict was ignited.[107] It did not go well for Spain. The Treaty of Utrecht, which ended the war in 1713, divided Spain's European empire amongst a throng of its chief rivals, and it also "weakened Spain's position in the Southeast [of North America]."[108] During the limited North American theater of the war, an English officer named James Moore led a Sherman-esque march through northern Florida, burning everything in his path, including the town of St. Augustine. Moore did not sack Spanish Florida for England, but the damage he did – destroying important Spanish missions among the Apalachee Indians and forcing Spanish colonists to completely abandon the province – was palpable.[109] The War of Spanish Succession is important because it marked the end of Spain's reign as a colonial power. Spain retained territory in North America – primarily debilitated, burnt-

[107] David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009): 118.
[108] Weber, 118.
[109] Weber, 118.

out Florida and other territories off to the west – but it would never again be a major player on the continent.

Spain's loss was France's gain. "As England expanded at Spain's expense during the war, so too, by increasing its presence on the gulf, did its French ally," writes David J. Weber in his book, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*.[110] France, admittedly, ceded territory to England in the Treaty of Utrecht, most significantly Newfoundland and Acadia; however, it gained so much more by watching Spain, the original European colonizer of North America, fade into obscurity. Suddenly, by 1713, it was France versus England for possession of North America, and France had a lot of catching up to do in terms of populating that continent with settlers.

To that end, a population boom occurred in New France around 1716, three years after the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht. The population of New France, as a whole, increased by just 6,533 people (12,431-18,964) in the 22 years between 1692 and 1714. In the 23 years between 1716 and 1749, however, its population increased steeply by 22,170 people (20,531-42,701). Even more telling is the increase in married women that came to New France following the War of Spanish Succession, an indication that more families were coming with more permanent intentions. In the 26 years between 1688-1714, the number of married French women in New France increased by just 1,190 (1,741-2,931). In the 23 years between 1714-1737, however, the number of married French women in New France increased by 3,873 (2,931-6,804).[111] With the influx of settlers arriving in New France, and the fur trade suffering from mortal wounds, a new

[110] Weber, 118.
[111] "Statistics Canada," accessed August 31, 2012, http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/98-187-x/4151280-eng.htm

entity became desirable: land, and preferably fertile land that a hard-working French family could make its own and, from it, produce profitable cash crops to sell at the market. In all of continental New France, the colony with some of the most bountiful land was Louisiana.

The location of that bountiful land, however, was not readily apparent. Most settlers in the early-eighteenth century arrived in Louisiana by boat and became disenchanted by the ruinous conditions on the coast. Pierre D'Artaguette, the colony's commissary general, wrote to Pontchartrain in 1708, saying: "There is nothing so sad as the as the situation of this poor colony. Every day we discover plots that are being formed to desert among the sailors and the soldiers."[112] Colonists languished in steamy, swampy conditions. Soldiers wore buckskins instead of uniforms. The colony's warehouses sat barren. All of this, according to D'Artaguette, gave "the Indians a miserable idea" of the French.[113] Tivas de Gourville, a French officer in the Louisiana, opined that the colonists' sexual dalliances with the local Indians stunted the development of the colony. In a 1712 letter to Pontchartrain, he wrote: "the hunters and the backwoodsmen who are of a strong and vigorous age and temperament and who like the sex … are wanderers among the Indian nations and satisfy their passions with the daughters of these Indians, which retards the growth of this colony."[114] Cadillac, meanwhile, blamed refugee Canadians in Louisiana, citing their natural inclination towards vice and laziness: "According to the proverb 'Bad country, bad people' one can say that they are a heap of the dregs of Canada, jailbirds without subordination for religion and for government," Cadillac wrote

[112] D'Artaguette to Pontchartrain, 18 August 1708, *Vol. II*, 33.
[113] D'Artaguette to Pontchartrain, 20 June, 1710, *Vol. II*, 56.
[114] Tivas de Gourville to Pontchartrain, June, 1712, *Vol. II,* 69.

in a 1713 letter to Pontchartrain, bemoaning the condition of the colony of which he had recently become governor.[115] Everyone, it seems, had far-ranging opinions on the root of Louisiana's poor state during the first 20 years of its existence; however, everyone agreed it was, indeed, a poor state. Colonists received rations of flour, but not meat. Disease was rampant. Louisiana was, according to Cadillac, "a monster."[116]

In Louisiana, colonists complained about the lack of resources from France, the violent squalls (which were, presumably, hurricanes) and the dearth of animals with which to plow. But, mostly, colonists complained about the poor quality of the land. The soil was marshy, and even in areas where colonists were able to grow wheat, the wheat was usually wiped out by heavy fog. D'Artaguette described the situation in a 1710 letter to Pontchartrain: "Some fogs came up that made [the wheat] completely wither away in such a way that it will be all that one can do to gather six [bushels] where there was prospect of getting more than one hundred." In that same letter, D'Artaguette said that colonists were convinced that it was impossible to grow wheat as far south as Louisiana, "and they have asked me for concessions at the Natchez, an Indian village sixty leagues from the settlement of Biloxi."[117] While it was not the first mention of the Natchez, or the first allusion to the desirability of Natchez lands, it *was* the first insinuation of a need to act on the desirability of Natchez lands. With Louisiana in shambles, reeling from the effects of a dreadful location that was conducive to disease and hostile to farming or producing any goods with which to trade the local Indians, colonists were growing restless. Even D'Artaguette, who devoted most of the content in his letters to the idea of

[115] Lamothe Cadillac to Pontchartrain, 26 October, 1713, *Vol. II*, 166.
[116] Lamothe Cadillac, Minutes of the Council, 1 July, 1716, *Vol. II*, 219.
[117] D'Artaguette to Pontchartrain, 20 June, 1710, *Vol. II*, 59.

improving – not running from – France's lot at the mouth of the Mississippi River, seemed intrigued by the idea of testing French fortunes at the Natchez: "As far as transportation is concerned it will always be very easy," he wrote to Pontchartrain, in a transparent attempt to convince himself. "It is necessary only to descend the Mississippi."[118] Although it was only mentioned in passing in 1710, the colonists' request for concessions at the Natchez foreshadowed France's next move. It was only a matter of time before the French went north to the bluffs.

While private land concessions were not immediately granted at the Natchez, a French trading post was built near the Grand Village three years later. The establishment of the trading post, which was actually nothing more than a small shop and a warehouse, coincided with the arrival of Cadillac in Louisiana. Cadillac possessed no tangible experience in the lower Mississippi River basin, but he had swindled Indians in Canada for nearly 30 years, and he was hand-picked by Pontchartrain to govern Louisiana and transform the depleted, miserable afterthought into a thriving, profitable colony.

One of Cadillac's original designs for Louisiana was exploiting mines along the Mississippi River.[119] In 1714, just one year after arriving in Louisiana, he travelled upriver to inspect one of these mines, and the voyage – *not* the inspection of the mine – impacted the fortunes of the colony forever. On his way north, Cadillac passed by all the Indian tribes along the river without exchanging gifts or smoking the calumet. This was not well-received, so Cadillac promised that he would perform the ritualistic pleasantries expected of him on his return trip. On his way south, however, Cadillac passed by all the

[118] D'Artaguette to Pontchartrain, 20 June, 1710, *Vol. II*, 59.
[119] Barnett, 58.

Indian tribes along the river without exchanging gifts or smoking the calumet. This was even less well-received. Or, as De Bienville eloquently conveyed it to Pontchartrain in a letter: "That made a very bad impression."[120]

The specifics of the calumet ceremony varied among Indian tribes; however, the ceremony almost uniformly featured a long-stemmed pipe that members of different groups smoked to signify the establishment of a "fictive kinship relationship."[121] It was an extremely important ritual to many tribes along the Mississippi River. In fact, according to Ian W. Brown, "Few material items in historic times have had such singular cultural significance as the calumet."[122] Thus, in his book *The Natchez Indians: A History to 1735*, James Barnett ponders how, and why, Cadillac could have allowed this offense to occur: "Given [Cadillac's] long experience with Indians in the Great Lakes area, it is hard to imagine why he would have behaved so imprudently."[123] The imprudent behavior, however, might have been intentional – a deliberate attempt by Cadillac to incite the Natchez into an absolute, tribal-decimating war from which there was no escape.

Because of their remote location to the north, the incensed Natchez would not have caused significant alarm in Mobile, which sat near the mouth of the Mississippi River. However, a French trading post existed miles from the Grand Village, and that trading post was vital in keeping the Natchez, in good commercial standing with the French and bad commercial standing with the English. So, when the two Frenchmen who

[120] Bienville to Pontchartrain, 2 January 1716, *Vol. III*, 194.
[121] Donald J. Blakeslee, "The Origin and Spread of the Calumet Ceremony," *American Antiquity* 46 (1981): 759.
[122] Ian W. Brown, "The Calumet Ceremony in the Southeast and Its Archaeological Manifestations," *American Antiquity* 54 (1989): 311.
[123] Barnett, 62.

operated the trading post at the Natchez, Marc-Antoine de La Loire des Ursins and Louis-Auguste de La Loire Flaucort, narrowly escaped ambush and fled to Mobile with news that the Natchez had looted the trading post and murdered four French *Coureur des bois* in 1716, Cadillac dispatched De Bienville to silence the unrest and protect the trading post. Then, once those defensive, retributive theatrics were done, De Bienville had orders to go on the offensive and establish an even larger French presence in the region by erecting a fort, Fort Rosalie. Before he left, a reluctant De Bienville penned a cryptic letter to one of his superiors in France:

> These Natchez … have always intended to kill Frenchmen since the time that [Cadillac] passed by their county … and refused to accept the calumet of peace that they wished to sing to him … [Cadillac] on this occasion wished to save a little merchandise that will perhaps cost us very dearly. The Natchez have pillaged merchandise to the value of eight to ten thousand livres … there is ground for inferring that this nation has not done a thing of this sort without having clearly foreseen that they would quarrel with us in such a way that they could not hope for any pardon without a good satisfaction. This makes me believe that we shall be obliged to make war on them.[124]

In April of 1716, De Bienville and an army of 34 soldiers set out north towards the Natchez. It was a laughable number of men, especially considering two-thirds of them, according to De Bienville, were "ill, and without provisions," and they were about to square off against a bristling tribe of about 800 warriors.[125] The garrison at Mobile consisted of 150 soldiers, and De Bienville hoped he would, at least, be able to command 80 of them on such an important mission. However, Cadillac, the man who had brazenly instigated the affair, granted him only 34.[126]

[124] Bienville to Raudot, 20 January 1716, *Vol. III,* 198.
[125] Bienville to Cadillac, 23 June 1716, *Vol. III*, 213.
[126] Barnett, 66.

Undaunted, De Bienville used cunning in the place of numbers. He could not attack with 34 men. He might as well have removed his own scalp and presented it to the Natchez. Instead, he and his men hunkered down on an island near the west bank of the Mississippi River and sent word to the Grand Village that they wished to meet with the chiefs. When eight Natchez chiefs arrived – among them, the Great Sun and the Tattooed Serpent – De Bienville and his men forcibly apprehended them as hostages. Using the chiefs as leverage, De Bienville laid out his demands, and watched as they were all carried out. Two of the three Indians who had murdered the *Coureur des bois* were beheaded (the third Indian could not be found, so his brother was executed instead), all of the merchandise and livestock that had been pillaged from the trading post was returned and, in what might have been De Bienville's finest achievement as a human, the Natchez began building Fort Rosalie *for* the French.[127] Days later, De Bienville and his men also secretly executed The Bearded and Alahoflechia, two of the eight hostage chiefs considered to be leaders of the pro-English faction in the tribe and thought to have ordered the murders of the *Coureur des bois*.[128]

It was a stunning victory for a man who, simply, was not supposed to succeed. De Bienville was a thorn in Cadillac's side, and it is not difficult to imagine Cadillac sending De Bienville to the Natchez with 34 men hoping he would, for lack of a more sophisticated term, die. In a letter to Ponchartrain, Duclos wondered why else Cadillac would order such a lopsided expedition: "[De Bienville] ought at that time to have been given the number of men and of Indians that he needed to succeed … or he ought not to have been sent; otherwise it is to order him to do a thing and at the same time refuse him

[127] Bienville to Cadillac, 23 June 1716, *Vol. III*, 213.
[128] Barnett, 71.

the means of executing it. It is consequently a useless enterprise and useless expenditures."[129] Yet, despite his inadequate force, De Bienville had not only eliminated two main components of the pro-English faction in the tribe and acquired means to construct Fort Rosalie, he had established peace. Peace was "a very necessary matter," according to Duclos, because it allowed Fort Rosalie, the next logical step in France's slow encroachment on the fertile Natchez bluffs, to be built, and it enabled open travel and trade on the Mississippi River again. Cadillac understood that peace with the Natchez, at least at that time, was ideal. However, because De Bienville had delivered that peace, Cadillac, in vintage Cadillac form, would not admit it. "[Cadillac] sees as clearly as anyone the soundness," Duclos wrote in a letter to Pontchartrain. "… But the fact that Mr. De Bienville [who is] perfectly acquainted with the manner of governing the Indians is of an opinion is enough for him to not share it."[130]

De Bienville's victory in the First Natchez War – as the hostage situation on the small island in the Mississippi River generously became known – was the final blow to Cadillac's incessantly-disgruntled governorship. Cadillac's plans to renovate Louisiana into a well-populated, profitable colony seemed to be constantly curtailed by his quarrelsome rivalry with De Bienville, and in 1716, he was "recalled."[131] Cadillac's financiers went down with him. Pontchartrain, who it was rumored only lasted as long as he did on the French court because of his "ability to entertain the king with amusing gossip,"[132] resigned a year earlier following King Louis XIV's death in 1715, and Antoine Crozat, the king's financial secretary who held the Louisiana monopoly,

[129] Duclos to Ponchartrain, 7 June 1716, *Vol. III*, 204.
[130] Duclos to Ponchartrain, 7 June 1716, *Vol. III*, 211.
[131] Barnett, 76.
[132] Ponchartrain's biographical sketch, footnote, *Vol. II*, 21.

relinquished control of his monopoly to John Law's Company of the West in 1717. This chain of events, according to Barnett, set "in motion France's last enthusiastic push to colonize the Lower Mississippi Valley."[133]

Law changed everything for the Natchez. Cadillac recognized the need to exploit the Natchez's land in order to transform the Louisiana colony, but he was under-qualified and ill-prepared to do so. Law was neither. A radical Scottish banker, Law fell into favor in the French court following the king's death, and he used his considerable financial sway to gain control of the commercial monopoly of Canada and Louisiana in 1717. Behind Law's financing, French settlers began pouring into Louisiana with the intent to finally *colonize* – not just trade furs – at a rate that challenged England's possession of the American south. Law's Company of the West – which was renamed the Company of the Indies in 1718 – adopted the English model of implementing an aggressive advertising campaign to entice settlers to North America, and, according to Barnett, the company hyped Louisiana as "an agricultural El Dorado where, among other things, Indians would be clamoring to farm silkworms in the native mulberry trees."[134] Once these bright-eyed entrepreneurs reached Mobile or New Orleans, which was founded in 1718 and became the capital of Louisiana in 1722, it is not difficult to imagine where they were told this "agricultural El Dorado" existed: upriver at the Natchez bluffs.

Le Page du Pratz was one such bright-eyed entrepreneur. Le Page du Pratz, whose detailed accounts are increasingly important from this point forward, reached Fort Rosalie in 1720 bearing two large concessions from New Orleans. The location of New

[133] Barnett, 76.
[134] Barnett, 76.

Orleans in relation to Fort Rosalie and the Natchez bluffs can be seen below in Figure 2. The Dutchman's arrival was indicative of the wave of French settlers that invaded Natchez lands and unsettled French and Natchez relations over the bloody decade that ensued. The frequency at which the settlers came and the proximity at which they settled from the Natchez greatly contributed to the outbreaks of the Second and Third Natchez Wars.

The Second Natchez War ignited when a band of Natchez attacked a Frenchman named M. de Guenot in 1722. Guenot was the overseer of the St. Catherine concession – one of the largest French farms in the area – and he was unpopular amongst the Natchez of the White Apple village (a decidedly pro-English village) for, allegedly, putting "an Honored Man of [that] village in chains even before there was any quarrel between the

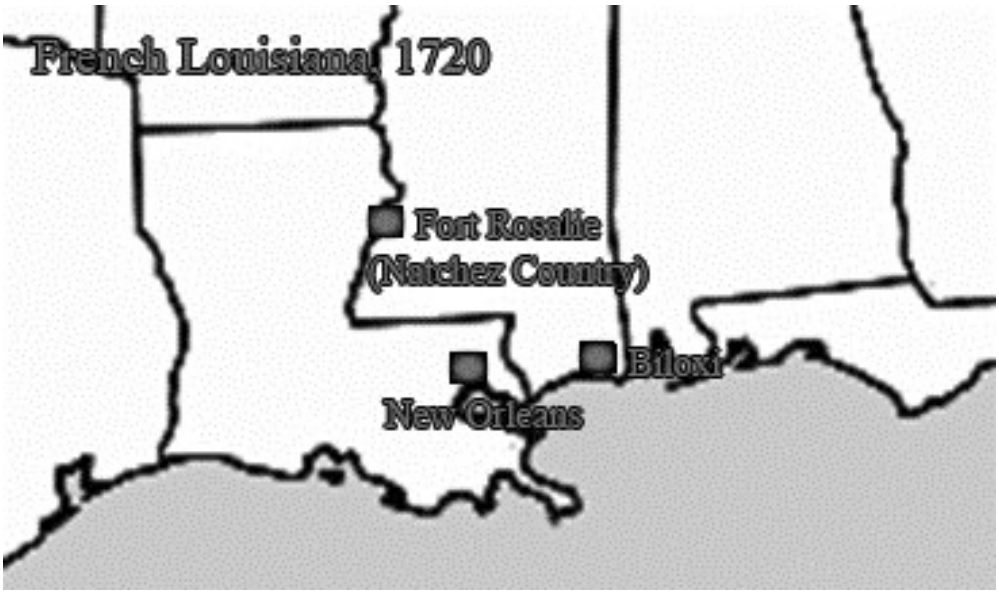

Figure 2. Map of French Louisiana, 1720

French and the Indians."[135] The Natchez responded by shooting at Guenot, slaughtering some livestock at the St. Catherine concession and, generally, creating a nuisance.

In New Orleans, word of the meager uprising was met with a level of anger that seemed to outweigh the circumstances, as if the French were looking for a reason to remove the Natchez. De Bienville noted that it was important to preserve "a very abundant crop of tobacco, rice and other provisions" at the Natchez by gathering "together a number of Frenchmen and Indians from our small nations to go and exact vengeance for these insults and to destroy the trouble-makers."[136] Sieur Fleuriau, the young, passionate attorney-general of Louisiana, fumed that "these barbarians are not won by presents at all. They must have examples that will make them tremble and exterminate as many of them as possible … it is now only a question of considering whether it can be done."[137] The answer to Fleuriau's question was that it could not be done, at least not then.

De Bienville fell sick with a near-fatal fever one month after the uprising, writing that he was on the "brink of death" and noting that a priest was brought in to administer him the last sacrament.[138] Because of the sickness, and a general lack of provisions in the colony at that time, De Bienville never set foot at the Natchez during the Second Natchez War. The hero of the Second Natchez War was the Tattooed Serpent, who diffused the volatile situation by serving as a liaison between the St. Catherine concession and the White Apple village and, eventually, negotiating a peace.[139] In the end, the Second

[135] De Bienville in the Minutes of the Superior Council of Louisiana, 3 August 1723, *Vol. III*, 360.
[136] De Bienville in the Minutes of the Superior Council of Louisiana, 3 August 1723, *Vol. III*, 361.
[137] Fleuriau in the Minutes of the Superior Council of Louisiana, 6 August 1723, *Vol. III*, 365.
[138] De Bienville in the Minutes of the Superior Council of Louisiana, 10 October 1723, *Vol. III*, 368-69.
[139] Barnett, 87.

Natchez War was so minor that it ended with Sieur Payton, one of De Bienville's lieutenants, sailing up from New Orleans and demanding reimbursement from the Natchez in the forms of chickens. Eager to maintain peace with the French, the Natchez gathered "a certain number of fowls" and delivered them to Payton, who, in turn, sailed them back to New Orleans.[140]

The Third Natchez War, like the Second Natchez War, was born of vague circumstances. Le Page du Pratz insisted that the French strike on the Natchez in the fall of 1723 was unprovoked, but that seems unlikely. Jean-Francois Benjamin de Dumont, a French officer in Louisiana, wrote that the Third Natchez War started when a rogue band of Natchez, perhaps still bristling from the events of 1722, slaughtered more livestock at the St. Catherine concession.[141] Whatever the cause, De Bienville, by then fully recovered from his illness, went on the offensive. De la Chaise, the colony's commissary general, wrote that in late September of 1723, De Bienville "left New Orleans … to go to the Natchez for the war against the Indians. He gathered together as many Canadians and Indians from the country round about as he could."[142]

The Third Natchez War, unlike the Second Natchez War, brought substantial action, but it was almost completely one-sided. The events of 1723 were more of a massacre than a war, as De Bienville, behind a force that Le Page du Pratz estimated at 700 men, swept through the White Apple village district, burning houses, scalping males and abducting – read, enslaving – women that were fit to work.[143] Barnett called it a

[140] Barnett, 89.
[141] Barnett, 90.
[142] De la Chaise to the Director of the Company of the Indies, 27 May 1724, *Vol.II*, 374.
[143] Barnett, 91.

"scorched-earth campaign."[144] De Bienville, who was apparently blinded by rage over the killing of some cows and goats, even threatened to attack the pro-French Grand Village, but, again, the Tattooed Serpent played the role of mediator and talked the commander down. When the smoke, literally, cleared, the French marauders had wiped out the Grigra settlement, which was located near the White Apple village, and forced the execution of Old Hair, the chief of the White Apple Village. The remaining fugitive Indians from the White Apple and Jenzenaque villages fled "to inaccessible country," and the French did not pursue them.[145] In January of 1724, the French Council of War ended the Third Natchez War by granting peace to the Natchez, saying: "The Council of War has judged it necessary for the safety of the French to grant peace to these Indians, so much the more because there is reason to fear that these fugitives may make raids upon the remote plantations and upon the Frenchmen who ascend or descend the river …"[146]

The Second and Third Natchez Wars were triggered by seemingly menial affronts such as the unprovoked shackling of a White Apple chief and the slaughter of farm animals at the St. Catherine concession, but the overlying cause of both conflicts was proximity. Ever since early reports described the Natchez as a North American Eden, the French had designs on the lush bluffs nestled along the Mississippi River. By 1720, French settlers – spurred by the aggressive marketing campaign of John Law's Company of the Indies – had begun their encroachment, and at an alarming rate. The French had interacted with Indians for nearly two centuries in North America, but their interactions were almost always limited to the arena of trade. At the Natchez, interactions were

[144] Barnett, 92.
[145] De Bienville and Pailloux, Minutes of the Council of War, *Vol. III*, 385.
[146] De Bienville and Pailloux, Minutes of the Council of War, *Vol. III*, 386.

residential. The French built large plantations at the Natchez to take advantage of the agricultural opportunities in the area, and the proximity at which they built the plantations to Natchez villages – as well as the degree at which they intermingled, in both business and pleasure, with their Indian neighbors – was unprecedented. Due to their remote location, far to the north of the port at New Orleans, French settlers near Fort Rosalie maintained a somewhat unhealthy reliance on the Natchez for supplies, and, according to Le Page du Pratz, French men often carried on illicit relationships with Natchez women. Le Page du Pratz wrote: "In the space of sixteen years that I resided in Louisiana, I remarked, that the war, and even the bare disputes we have had with [the Natchez], never had any other origin, but our too familiar intercourse with them."[147] Because of this "too familiar intercourse," the once-congenial relationship between the French and the Natchez, as evidenced by the Second and Third Natchez Wars, soured over the third decade of the eighteenth century.

Two events served to sour the relationship even further: the construction of a tobacco factory at the Natchez and the death of the Tattooed Serpent, both of which occurred in 1725. The French wanted to cultivate tobacco at the Natchez at a rate comparable to the English in Virginia and the Carolinas, but they encountered numerous problems. The primary problems were storing the tobacco and transporting the tobacco back to New Orleans.[148] "To ward off all of these disadvantages," a committee wrote to the directors of the Company of the Indies in November of 1724. "The Committee has found only one expedient which is that of establishing a tobacco factory at the Natchez, of having a part of it put it on rolls and of having another part pressed after having had it

[147] Le Page du Pratz, 96.
[148] Memoir on Tobacco at Natchez, October 1724, *Vol. II*, 396.

stemmed and having put a flavor in it."[149] The company-owned factory was completed in the spring of 1725, and it revolutionized the way tobacco was produced at the Natchez, making it easier, and more cost-efficient, for settlers to grow the lucrative crop. That, in turn, made the Natchez a more attractive location for entrepreneurs and concessionaires looking to make a profit, even at the expense of the local Indians. According to Barnett, the French population at the Natchez doubled from 200 people to 400 people from 1726 to 1729, and the number of African slaves increased to 286 during that same time span.[150]

The Tattooed Serpent died in the summer of 1725. His death came at an inopportune time, as both the French and the Natchez would have benefited from his mediation during the French population boom that occurred in the years following the construction of the tobacco factory. Barnett wrote of the Tattooed Serpent: "[he] was considered to be the tribe's 'war chief,' but all of his documented activities were in the role of peacemaker. At every conflict between the Natchez and the French, he was front and center, negotiating to restore friendship between his people and the foreigners who occupied his country."[151] Yet, before his death, as settlers poured into Natchez country to profit from its tobacco-inducing soil, even the Tattooed Serpent, that reliable old advocate of all things French in the lower Mississippi River valley, seemed jaded, and leery of what the future held for the two very-different nations that now occupied the Natchez bluffs. In a compelling, and cryptic, soliloquy to Le Page du Pratz a year before his death, the Tattooed Serpent said:

[149] Committee of Louisiana to [the Directors of the Company], 8 November 1724, *Vol. II*, 398.
[150] Barnett, 99.
[151] Barnett, 96.

> Why did the French come into our country? We did not go to seek them: they asked for land of us, because their country was too little for all the men that were in it. We told them they might take land where they pleased, there was enough for them and for us; that it was good the same sun should enlighten us both and that we would walk as friends in the same path; and that we would give them our provisions, assist them to build and to labour in their fields. We have done so; is not this true? What occasion then had we for Frenchmen? Before they came, did we not live better than we do … in fine, before the arrival of the French, we lived like men who could be satisfied with what they have; whereas at this day we are like slaves.[152]

Five years later, the Natchez, who the Tattooed Serpent called slaves to the French, finally broke free.

The Natchez Revolt erupted in 1729, a time when the Natchez colony "was on the verge of prosperity."[153]Trouble originated from a toxic combination of poor French leadership at Fort Rosalie and bottled Natchez anger, still fermenting six years after De Bienville's fiery romp through the bluffs.

With the French tobacco industry thriving in the fall of 1729, the ranking officer at Fort Rosalie, Commandant Chepart, decided he wanted a stake in the profit that everyone around him was enjoying. Unfortunately for all involved except him, Chepart's desired location for erecting his plantation was the White Apple Village, home to the same sect of decidedly pro-English Natchez that De Bienville had torched six years earlier. Upon summoning the White Apple Sun to Fort Rosalie, Chepart put forth his demands that the White Apple Natchez depart their ancestral home of hundreds of years so that he could build a tobacco plantation there. Le Page Du Pratz wrote that "The Commandant doubtless imagined himself to be speaking to a slave whom one commands

[152] Le Page du Pratz, 41.
[153] Barnett, 101.

in an absolute tone. But he ignored the fact that the Naturals of Louisiana are such enemies of slavery that they would prefer death."[154]

The White Apple Sun took Chepart's provocative demands back to his village and used them to rally his people. According to Le Page Du Pratz, who was in New Orleans at the time of the revolt and probably based his writings on hearsay, one of the White Apple elders said at an assembly: "We have for a long time been aware that the neighborliness of the French does us more harm than good … What are we waiting for? Do we want to let the French multiply until we are no longer in a position to oppose their efforts?"[155]

On November 28, 1729, with their courage fortified by the inadequate garrison at Fort Rosalie – Barnett estimated it at 30 men, most of whom lived among the Natchez and not at the fort – and the knowledge that De Bienville was no longer in Louisiana[156], the Natchez executed a deftly-synchronized attack on the French living amongst them. Natchez warriors stormed Fort Rosalie, as well as the plantations Fort Rosalie was supposed to protect. Very few were spared. French men, women and children were hacked to pieces by people who, just the day before, had been their neighbors, and maybe even their friends. French men were "scalped and beheaded,"[157] their bodies left "to the dogs, the buzzards, and other carnivorous birds."[158] Le Page Du Pratz refused, simply, to describe the events of that day, saying: "I draw the curtain across the other parts of this

[154] Le Page Du Pratz, 233.
[155] Le Page Du Pratz, 238-239.
[156] De Bienville returned to France in August of 1725, less than two years after he marched against the Natchez.
[157] Barnett, 105.
[158] Father Le Petit to Father D'Avaugour, 12 July 1730, in *The Early Jesuit Missions in North America, Volumes 1-2*, translated by William Ingraham Kip (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846): 288.

scene; for what one is about to see is simply too horrific." In all, nearly 200 French were slain during the massacre. A handful escaped. Two men, a carter and a tailor, were spared by the Natchez. The tailor was forced to fit the Natchez in their new French clothes, and the carter was forced to use his team of oxen to clear the French houses of furniture and belongings before the jubilant Indians set the houses ablaze in celebration. According to Barnett, "blood vengeance for the 1716 and 1723 executions had finally been discharged – with interest."[159]

The revelry of the Natchez, however, did not last long. To proactively quell the very real fear of a coordinated Indian uprising that permeated the colony following the massacre, Louisiana's governor, Etienne de Perier, sent a joint force of French and Choctaw Indians to the bluffs to engage the Natchez in January of 1730. The Choctaw got there first and killed nearly 100 Natchez, before the surviving Natchez fell back into a pair of forts that were constructed in preparation for the inevitable counterstrike.[160] The siege was on.

The Natchez, though, withstood the French and Choctaw siege, enduring hunger and cannon fire for nearly a month. Then, on the night of February 26, the remaining Natchez – estimated at about 200 men, women and children – made a break for it, slipping out of the two forts and absconding into the surrounding wilderness without being detected. Confounded by the moonlight exodus, Le Page du Pratz wrote: "Thinking

[159] Barnett, 105.
[160] Barnett, 114.

about this escape, I cannot see how it was possible … Frankly, I will say that I know nothing; I simply know from what I have been told that they became invisible."[161]

The escape spelled trouble for the French and their allies in the region. A large band of uprooted and angry Natchez now roamed the area, seeking to do menace. In one instance, a group of Natchez ambushed and killed 19 Frenchmen who were attempting to rebuild the burnt-out Fort Rosalie. In another instance, six Natchez passed themselves off as Choctaws, entered the newly-renovated Fort Rosalie and slew five Frenchmen before being subdued. Finally, after a Natchez woman was abducted by a group of French-allied Tunica Indians, taken to New Orleans and killed "inch by inch" in the square frame, the Natchez attacked the Tunicas and very nearly wiped them out.[162] On the Natchez implementing a guerilla – almost terroristic – campaign of warfare throughout the bluffs, Le Page du Pratz wrote: "Hey, what is an enemy not capable of when in desperation, chased from his land and not knowing where to go!"[163]

In January of 1731, Perier, himself, led an expedition against the Natchez, chasing the rogue tribe far to the northwest of the bluffs, along a small tributary called the Black River. The Natchez, again, found protection in a makeshift fort, and after several days of siege, nearly 500 of them – primarily women and children – surrendered.[164] Perier touted his mission as a total victory, but, in reality, several Natchez warriors had, to borrow Le Page du Pratz's phrase, gone invisible and escaped the fort during a driving rainstorm one night. These warriors and their families dispersed themselves among the few friendly

[161] Le Page du Pratz, 292.
[162] Le Page du Pratz, 298-300.
[163] Le Page du Pratz, 299.
[164] Barnett, 125 … Perier's estimation of 500 prisoners was probably somewhat high.

tribes left in the region, many finding solace with the pro-English Chickasaws, who were then warring against the French. The Natchez who surrendered to Perier at the fort were jailed in New Orleans, before being shipped off to Santo Domingo to work as slaves.

Fittingly, the end of the Natchez involved De Bienville. The famous French-Canadian barnyard animal avenger was summoned back to Louisiana in 1733, two years after the French crown regained control of the colony from the Company of the Indies. De Bienville arrived in Louisiana with orders to battle the Chickasaws, who had become one of the most feared fighting forces in the region, and in doing so he also battled what remained of the Natchez.[165] "After the Chickasaw Wars," Barnett wrote, "few Natchez Indians remained in the Lower Mississippi Valley."[166]

The question must be asked: why the Natchez? The answer starts with France's burgeoning rivalry with England. France and England had long been rivals, but it was not until the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, when Spain's power in North America was neutralized, that it became, essentially, a head-to-head showdown for the continent. The stakes were suddenly raised between the long-time foes. That heightened rivalry is evidenced by a sense of English paranoia permeating through French correspondences coming out of Louisiana in the early 1700s. "The English of Carolina are sparing nothing to attract all our Indian allies to them," Bienville wrote desperately to Pontchartrain in a 1708 letter, before describing in detail the infiltration of Louisiana by English agents bent

[165] Barnett, 131 … It was not actually De Bienville who was doing the battling; in fact, it was usually Choctaw mercenaries.
[166] Barnett, 132.

on subversive meddling among France's allied Indians.[167] In another letter from 1708, De Bienville, through a Mr. Robert, requested that black slaves from French-held Caribbean islands be sent to Louisiana because "The English colonists of Carolina and Pennsylvania derive great benefit from the service of the negroes and that it is by means of them that they cultivate their lands and that they make large and rich plantations there."[168] The paranoia continued into the 1720s. In 1721, the French built a large warehouse near Choctaw villages to streamline trade with that tribe because it was feared English traders were beginning to make contact.[169] Then, in 1725, the French constructed a tobacco factory in Natchez country, and numerous concessions were granted to French colonists near the tobacco factory. As Barnett pointed out, these concessions were also English-inspired: "they mostly focused their energies on tobacco and were under pressure to produce a product comparable to the tobacco coming from Virginia, which the French public seemed to prefer."[170]

So it was that the floundering Louisiana colony, in an attempt to thwart English monopolization of the cash crop market in the south, expanded north to the bluffs of Natchez country. The Natchez bluffs were known throughout the region for their fertility, and they were written about extensively by French travelers during the era. In 1726, on the cusp of the population boom at the Natchez, a French priest traveling down the Mississippi River named Father Raphael wrote of the bluffs: "The good quality of the land and the ease of clearing it together with the purity of the air are already attracting and will in the future attract many settlers to it who will be in a position to make prompt

[167] Bienville to Pontchartrain, 12 October 1708, *Vol. II*, 39.
[168] Robert to Pontchartrain, 26 November 1708, *Vol. II*, 45.
[169] Minutes of the Council of Commerce of Louisiana, 5 March 1721, *Vol. III*, 303.
[170] Barnett, 99.

returns to the Company …"[171] Father Raphael was right. The good quality of the land, and the prospect of cultivating lucrative cash crops such as tobacco, cotton and indigo from that land, enticed French settlers to Natchez country. There was a problem, however. The Natchez already lived on the land, had lived on the land for hundreds of years and were currently farming the best it had to offer.

That conundrum created a scenario that was fairly unique to the history of New France: French settlers living among Indians, with intentions to farm on a large scale. For years, French settlers had lived around Indians in the Upper Country. "They had been bred up together like Children," an English agent observed.[172] White noted that the French and Indians in the Upper Country had, for the most part, "established a world of common meaning."[173] However, it was a world that revolved around trade. French settlers in the Great Lakes region traded with Indians for a living, and vice versa. If the French needed game or fish, they traded with neighboring Indians. If neighboring Indians needed muskets, they traded with the French. This trade-based alliance made it so that the French did not have to ferociously exploit the Indians' natural resources, and it kept relations amiable. White wrote of the situation: "The French failure to farm extensively outside of the Illinois country had been a cause of chronic complaint for French colonial officials, but the limits of their fields meant they did not threaten neighboring Indians."[174]

That was not the case at the Natchez, where French plantations and a tobacco factory *did* threaten the neighboring Indians. Even worse, the plantations were farmed by

[171] Father Raphael to the Abbe Raguet, 28 December 1726, *Vol. II*, 527.
[172] White, 316.
[173] White, 341.
[174] White, 342.

French settlers with no connection to the Indians upon whom they were imposing. In the Upper Country, the French and Indians depended on each other for trade goods: food, furs, weapons, etc. Because of this reliance, the two sides learned about each other and, in some instances, came to respect each other. The French learned the importance of smoking the calumet and exchanging gifts with Indians, and, according to an English officer in the Upper Country, they "adopted the very Principles and Ideas of the Indians and differ from them only a Little in color."[175] This reliance did not exist at the Natchez and, therefore, neither did the respect. Some trade went on between the French and the Natchez, but, for the most part, the French survived and made a living off the crops that they grew. The Natchez were just *there*. In the way.

In no way was the French settlers' lack of respect for Natchez culture more evident than in situations concerning the calumet. Barnett described the calumet ceremony as "a way for two strangers to establish a fictive kinship as a basis for further negotiations." However, Duclos indicated that the calumet was even more serious than that. In a 1716 letter to Pontchartrain, Duclos wrote: "Calumets are a sign of peace and it is custom among the Indians not to refuse them from any nation except those upon which they absolutely wish to make war."[176] Therefore, when Cadillac refused the Natchez calumet on his voyage up the Mississippi River in 1714, it was an act of war and forever altered the relationship between the Natchez and French. De Bienville, Duclos and others in Louisiana wrote off Cadillac's refusal as a blunder; however, perhaps it was a message instead. Cadillac was new to Louisiana, but he was not new to North America. He had spent several years interacting with Indians around Detroit. He understood the

[175] White, 316.
[176] Duclos to Pontchartrain, 7 June 1716, *Vol. III*, 208.

significance of the calumet. By refusing it, perhaps Cadillac was communicating to the Natchez that, unlike in the Upper Country, the French would not clamor to maintain peace with them. The French did not need peace with the Natchez to facilitate an all-important fur trade in Louisiana. The French *needed* the land on which the Natchez lived, and it is very possible Cadillac was inciting the Natchez to war to obtain that very land.

The answer to the question "why the Natchez?" ends with land. Land was at the heart of the Natchez annihilation. French settlers had lived in close proximity with Indians before; however, the proximity at which French settlers lived to Indians at the Natchez was different. In the Upper Country, French and Indians were trade partners. In Louisiana, and especially at the Natchez, French and Indians were land rivals. The French were invading Natchez land, and the Natchez were hindering French opportunities to grow tobacco comparable to the English tobacco coming out of Virginia. Woods described the situation:

> When the land became the private property of individuals, as it did at the Natchez post, when the company decided to exploit its tobacco plantation, the Indians were squeezed out. On realizing that the French no longer intended to share the land, but rather, to take it all, and that tribe now faced removal, the Natchez struck back violently.[177]

Unfortunately for the Natchez, the French struck back even *more* violently.

[177] Woods, 108.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The most significant link between the Fox Wars and the Natchez Wars was Antoine de Lamothe Cadillac. The pragmatic, conniving Frenchman was a major player in both affairs, and his actions embodied France's situational policies in the New World.

Detroit, Cadillac's Upper Country brainchild, was, according to a letter to Pontchartrain, established as a means of "holding the Iroquois in check; and of maintaining our Allies in their duty," making it " … much easier to Frenchify the latter and to preach the Gospel to them, on account of the proximity of the French and the number of Missionaries who will be there."[178] "Frenchify" is the key word in the letter. Aside, of course, from it not being a legitimate word, "Frenchify" suggested no malice. It was not Cadillac's intentions to gather together all of the western Great Lakes tribes at Detroit so that it would be easier to systematically destroy them. It was Cadillac's goal to "Frenchify" the western Great Lakes tribes. "Frenchify" also suggested no desire to turn all of the Indians at Detroit into French citizens. Most likely, "Frenchify" suggested a desire to make those Indians French allies, or, more specifically, strengthen the alliances that were already in place through Christian conversion and sheer immediacy. The tribes invited to live near Detroit were already friends of the French, but Detroit allowed Cadillac to more strongly regulate their activities, and it allowed missionaries – those dual agents of salvation *and* manipulation – to promote alliance and a pro-French agenda amongst their followers.

[178] Extract from a letter written apparently to Count de Pontchartrain, then intendant of finance in France, circa 1686, *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, 127.

In the Upper Country, alliances were worth more than land, and Cadillac knew that. A strong alliance system allowed the French to keep peace with neighboring Indians and among neighboring Indians, and peace was the driving force behind the all-important fur trade in the region. "It is certain that you have nothing so important in the present state of affairs as the maintenance of peace with the Iroquois and other Indian nations," Pontchartrain wrote to Vaudreuil in a 1706 correspondence, illustrating the crown's desire for harmony in the Great Lakes region.[179] Vaudreuil responded to Pontchartrain: "I am persuaded, My Lord … that the tranquility of this Colony depends on the peace with these Indians."[180] According to Rushforth, the French crown even began to subsidize the fur trade – "essentially paying traders to sell at a loss" – in order to procure Indian alliances.[181]

To that end, Cadillac developed a "mastery of Indian diplomacy," according to White, and he displayed that mastery quite often.[182] In 1695, when he was still the commander at Michilimackinac, Cadillac convened with a Huron chief called the Baron, who was trying to convince Cadillac to halt war parties sent against his tribe by Cadillac because the Huron had been flirting, commercially, with the English and the Iroquois. The Baron attempted to bribe Cadillac with gifts, primarily beaver pelts. "Cadillac, appearing in an Indian council, followed Algonquin forms and, knowing what acceptance of the gift signified, refused it … He rejected an Indian device through his own use of

[179] Letter of Count de Pontchartrain to Governor de Vaudreuil, 9 June 1706, *Wisconsin Historical Collections,*228.
[180] Part of a letter from Governor de Vaudreuil to Count de Pontchartrain, 4 November 1706, *Wisconsin Historical Collections,* 240.
[181] Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance*, 142.
[182] White, 56.

Algonquin-Iroquoian diplomatic forms."[183] Cadillac also used his familiarity with Indian culture and ceremonies to convince large numbers of tribes to migrate to the area around Detroit in the early 1700s. In a 1703 letter, Marest, who was tasked by Cadillac to recruit Indians to Detroit, regretfully reported that the Huron "would never go to Detroit; such was their final resolution." However, in a footnote found at the conclusion of the letter, Cadillac, himself, added that a group of about 30 Huron had recently agreed to live at Detroit and that if he "be left to act according to the customs of the Savages – that is, through presents and collars – he will bring them all to Detroit."[184] Then, after gathering a variety of Indians at his "Paris of America," Cadillac delicately preserved the alliance between the French and the Ottawa by wryly applying Algonquin cultural logic in the judicial matter of an Ottawa chief, Le Pesant, whose band had murdered five Miami chiefs in 1706 and, in doing so, nearly caused all of Detroit to erupt in violence.[185]

Cadillac was not a man of buckskins, living among the Indians of the Upper Country. He was no *Coureur des bois*. He was a cunning politician. However, he was a cunning politician who understood the customs of the Indians of western New France, and he used that understanding to advance the interests of his country. France wanted peace with and among the Indians of the Great Lakes, because such a peace generated fur trade profit. So, Cadillac smoked calumets, exchanged gifts and negotiated shrewd peace treaties to preserve the alliance and keep the fur trade afoot. In the Upper Country, Cadillac was a man of peace, and, in being so, he embodied the accepted New World personality of all French colonists: men and women who embraced Indian customs,

[183] White, 55.
[184] Extracts from letter of Father Joseph Marest to Cadillac, 12 May 1703, *Wisconsin Historical Collections,* 218.
[185] White, 87.

traded with Indians and, in a sense, became *like* Indians. In this framework, the Fox Wars are understood and somewhat justified: the French existed in the New World through peaceful relations and trade with local Indians, and when an Indian tribe such as the Fox threatened that existence, the French had no other choice but to eliminate them.

However, France's New World narrative altered course in Louisiana, and, perhaps, that is why less is written about the Natchez Wars. Cadillac, again, personified France's situational policies, only this time around the Gulf of Mexico. In the Upper Country, Cadillac was a man of peace. In Louisiana, he was a warmonger. Just three years after leaving Detroit and one year after arriving in Louisiana, Cadillac made his fateful voyage up the Mississippi River to inspect silver mines in Illinois. During that voyage, he famously "quarreled … with all the nations that are along this river," and, more specifically, refused to exchange gifts and smoke the calumet with the Natchez.[186] The relationship between the French and the Natchez never fully mended following Cadillac's slight. De Bienville, Duclos and other French officials in Louisiana scorned Cadillac for his actions on the Mississippi River. "That made a very bad impression," De Bienville wrote to Pontchartrain, noting that several Frenchmen would probably die because of Cadillac's, supposed, ignorance of Indian customs.[187] However, in reality, Cadillac was far from ignorant of Indian customs, and his actions had a purpose.

Like the French needed peace to facilitate the fur trade in the Upper Country, they needed farmland to facilitate the cash crop market in Louisiana. As it was, some of the best farmland in the colony could be found at the Natchez bluffs. It was "the best ground

[186] Bienville to Pontchartrain, 2 January 1716, *Vol. IIi*, 194.
[187] Bienville to Pontchartrain, 2 January 1716, *Vol. IIi*, 194.

that one could ever see," Cadillac wrote to Pontchartrain in a 1713 letter.[188] However, Cadillac could not simply destroy the Natchez and take their land. At a time when the French and English were desperately vying for Indian allies in the southeast, such an audacious and unwarranted attack would not have been popular, and it might have spooked such powerful tribes as the Choctaw and the Chickasaw into uniting in an Indian uprising against the French, something the outnumbered citizens of Louisiana constantly feared.[189] There was a way to legitimately engage the Natchez, though, and that was by vengeance. Indians understood revenge. In fact, according to Duclos, Indians worshipped revenge. "It is the custom among the Indians to destroy an entire nation when anyone of that nation has killed even one man of another," Duclos wrote in a letter to Pontchartrain in 1716. " … It will be noticed that Indians are acquainted with no other virtue than vengeance … That is their entire religion."[190] In that sense, the shrewd Cadillac was still observing the customs of the local Indians. Cadillac incited – bated, even – the Natchez to murder Frenchmen, and when the Natchez obliged, the French used those murders to justify launching a decades-long, tribal-annihilating series of wars against them – all in the name of vengeance, the religion of the Indians.

The Natchez Wars and Fox Wars were similar in that they were long, convoluted exterminations of a people. One conflict, however, fit nicely into France's accepted New

[188] Lamothe Cadillac to Pontchartrain, 26 October 1713, *Vol. II*, 164.
[189] For a source on France and England vying for Indian allies in the south, see: Bienville to Pontchartrain, 12 October 1708, *Vol. II*, 39 … one of the best, yet most subtle, examples of the residents of New Orleans fearing an Indian conspiracy against them came in a 1730 letter from Ory to Perier. In the letter, Ory scolded Perier for inviting the Choctaw to New Orleans to bestow them with gifts for fighting against the Natchez because, in doing so, he had taught them "the passages by the lakes and by the rear to come to New Orleans," exposed to them the city's poor defenses and made them acquainted with the poorly-defended plantations miles away from the city: Ory to Perier, 1 November 1730, in *Mississippi Provincial Archives 1729-1748 French Dominion Vol. IV*, ed. Dunbar Rowland, Albert Godfrey Sanders and Patricia Kay Galloway (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984): 46.
[190] Duclos to Pontchartrain, 7 June 1716, *Vol. III*, 210.

World narrative; the other did not. The French fought the Fox to restore peace to the Upper Country and protect the lucrative fur trade, France's primary source of revenue in North America and that which Claud Michel Begon, the Intendant of Canada from 1712-1726, referred to as "our principal dependence."[191] The Natchez Wars, though, had nothing to do with the fur trade and everything to do with land. One would be hard-pressed to find a straight-forward admission from Cadillac, De Bienville, Perier and the like that campaigns mounted against the Natchez were driven by a desire to control their fertile lands. They preferred to use words such as "punish" and "protect" when justifying conflicts with the Natchez.[192] However, Philibert Ory, the comptroller of finances in Paris, later admitted in a 1730 letter to Perier:

> The affair that occurred at the Natchez may also be attributed to the order that was given them by the officer who was in command there to abandon the lands that they possessed and to withdraw elsewhere. If it was decided that their proximity was prejudicial to our settlements, it was necessary to go about it in quite a different manner, and we ought to have understood how to lead them to do what was wished of them by gentleness and by methods of conciliation.[193]

That was easy for Ory to say. He was living comfortably in Paris, overseeing the finances of a Louisiana colony that, following the Natchez massacre, was producing tobacco at a high rate and selling the tobacco in France for a profitable, fixed rate.[194] Frenchmen such as Antoine de Lamothe Cadillac, however, understood the geopolitical factors occurring in the early 1700s that were changing the way France operated in the New World. Playing the role of Indian mediator to protect the sacred fur trade had long been a part of France's New World personality. However, the fur trade did not always dictate French

[191] Memorial written by the Intendant of Canada, 20 September 1713, *Wisconsin Historical Collections,* 295.
[192] Minutes of the Superior Council of Louisiana, 16 May 1723, *Vol. III*, 365-366.
[193] Ory to Perier, 1 November 1730, *Vol. IV*, 47.
[194] King to Bienville and Salmon, 2 February 1732, *Vol. III*, 570-571.

policy. By 1713, France was battling England for outright possession of North America, and that meant beating England at its own game: acquiring land, cultivating that land and producing a profit from that land. Because of this shift, France practiced situational Indian policies during the Fox Wars and the Natchez Wars, and Cadillac, although he is portrayed as a pompous villain in many primary and secondary accounts of the era, simply embodied those situational policies. In the Upper Country, he strove for peace. In Louisiana, he incited war.

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