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A settlement of great consequence: the development of the Natchez District, 1763-1860

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A SETTLEMENT OF GREAT CONSEQUENCE:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATCHEZ DISTRICT,
1763 - 1860

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of History

by
Lee Davis Smith
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Abstract

This study examines the events, conditions, and circumstances that influenced the development of the Natchez District of West Florida from its acquisition by Great Britain in 1763 until the eve of the Civil War. The strong relationship between West Florida and the “original thirteen” colonies created a dynamic area of Revolutionary and antebellum era growth in West Florida, and particularly in the Natchez District.

Eighteenth century westward migration of seaboard colonists exerted pressure on native Americans. At the same time, the British troops remaining in America following the French and Indian War applied social and economic pressure to colonists. Colonial officials recognized the need to disperse the population in order to ease tensions while still keeping colonists close enough to prevent them from feeling truly independent of England. West Florida provided a safety valve to mitigate these pressures.

The exceptional quality of the land and climate in the Natchez District attracted settlers who created a successful agricultural economy based on a slave labor system. When the focus shifted to cotton after 1790, the plantation system built around previous tobacco culture was already in place. Beginning about 1795, cotton production drove the economy of the Natchez District and encouraged the expansion of an elite planter class at least as affluent and progressive as those in more established colonies farther north.

Until approximately 1830 Protestantism vied with the civil religion of land, slaves, and cotton for primacy in the Natchez District. After that, evangelicals and the wealthy moved closer to agreement on issues of slavery and wealth. Evangelicals, the planter elite, and slaves approached religion in their own ways, both secular and traditional, and adhered to systems of worship that corresponded to their own particular needs.

By the eve of the Civil War the combination of these factors created a dynamic agricultural area with a cosmopolitan feel, yet firmly entrenched in the Bible Belt.

Introduction

Studies of colonial America frequently focus on the thirteen colonies located on the eastern seaboard of the North American continent. More recent scholarship has discovered an appreciation for areas outside the North American continent; the interaction between the mainland colonies, the Caribbean, and the Atlantic World have recently become topics newly relevant in the rapidly evolving age of the global economy.¹ The influence of Indian groups with regard to settlement viability, trade, and European political goals also represents a growing theme of interest in historical scholarship; Karen Ordahl Kupperman's *Indians & English: Facing Off in Early America* provides a comprehensive look at this relationship.² Works on colonial slaves and women, two areas particularly difficult to document, continue to appear.³ However, the settlement of colonies outside the "original thirteen," such as the British colonies of East and West Florida, and particularly the region of West Florida called the Natchez District, frequently remain at the fringe of colonial study, just as the territory occupied a physical space on the fringe of the North American continent.⁴ Although physically separated from the northern colonies by vast expanses of Turnerian wilderness and from the Caribbean islands by the Gulf of Mexico, from the acquisition of West Florida by the British in 1763 the area experienced many of the same political and social forces as the older colonies, and played an important part in the creation of the American Republic and, eventually, the distinctive nature of the American South. In his 1976 book, *Tories, Dons, and Rebels: The American Revolution in British West Florida*, J. Barton Starr noted the paucity of work on the history of west Florida until the 1940s. Starr's

¹ One of the newer sources is T.H. Breen, *Colonial America in an Atlantic World: A Story of Creative Interaction* (New York: Pearson-Longman, 2004).

² Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Indians & English: Facing Off in Early America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000.)

³ For example, see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).

⁴ One recent exception is Paul E. Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

book, in addition to works by Robin Fabel, Robert Rea, and Cecil Johnson, represent studies of various aspects of West Florida history.⁵ However, more recent publications regarding the synthesis of political, cultural, economic, social, and religious factors in the early Natchez District are scarce, and the subject merits additional study. This study examines the development of the Natchez District from its acquisition by England in 1763 until the antebellum period, and focuses upon the political, geographic, economic, social, and religious factors that transformed it from a sparsely settled frontier into an important region in the cotton South.

Perhaps one of the greatest errors that occurs from the Natchez District's exclusion from colonial study is the failure to acknowledge its connection to the American Revolution. The forces of republicanism, liberty, and freedom that contributed to the split between England and her American colonies certainly flourished in the Natchez District, but British efforts to maintain loyalty and to circumvent revolution literally helped to create this focal point of the antebellum cotton South. Through land-granting policies that included allotments based on military rank to a royal mandamus system that resulted in individual grants of thousands of acres each, British officials hoped to curry and maintain favor with loyal subjects. The granting of lands far from the seat of American conflict had additional effects as well: the practice eased population pressure on colonists and local Indian groups, answered requests for fresh land, and provided an escape route for loyalists and others wishing to flee the brewing conflict. The establishment and growth of the Natchez District evolved directly from some of the same conflicts that influenced the Revolutionary War.

Many factors drove the colonization of North America in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. European nations, particularly Spain, France, and Great Britain, constantly

⁵ J. Barton Starr, *Tories, Dons, and Rebels: The American Revolution in British West Florida* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1976), v-vi.

struggled for political, economic, and military superiority in an imperialistic search for newly explored lands, gold, and prestige. Spain staked her claim in the Caribbean and the southeastern edge of the continent, as well as parts of Mexico and the west coast; France took some Caribbean islands as well, and coastwise lands along the Gulf of Mexico extending north a short distance along the Mississippi River; the Dutch also procured West Indian islands and established their presence in the northeastern part of the North American continent. However, although they suffered occasional setbacks such as the disappearance of the Roanoke colony, Great Britain experienced the highest level of success among the European colonizers with her efforts along the east coast of North America in terms of stability, prosperity, and longevity.⁶

In a world where the three major powers, Spain, France, and England, vied for superiority, wars among the three assured a constant checkerboard effect on the map of North America. As these nations waged, won, and lost wars, treaties changed the borders of most countries' acquisitions. At the same time, the more successful seaboard colonies expanded westward, exerting pressure on native Indian groups and causing conflict between colonists and Indians and within the colonies themselves. These two factors, political redistribution and population pressure, played integral parts in the development and expansion of colonial North America.

Greed also provided a major motivation for colonization. First the quest for trade routes, then gold, and finally mercantilism pushed European countries and colonists to explore and expand settlement. Once settlers gained a firm grip on their own subsistence, and especially after population pressure began to encourage westward migration and the search for more fertile land not worn out by overcultivation, they began to dream of owning part of the seemingly

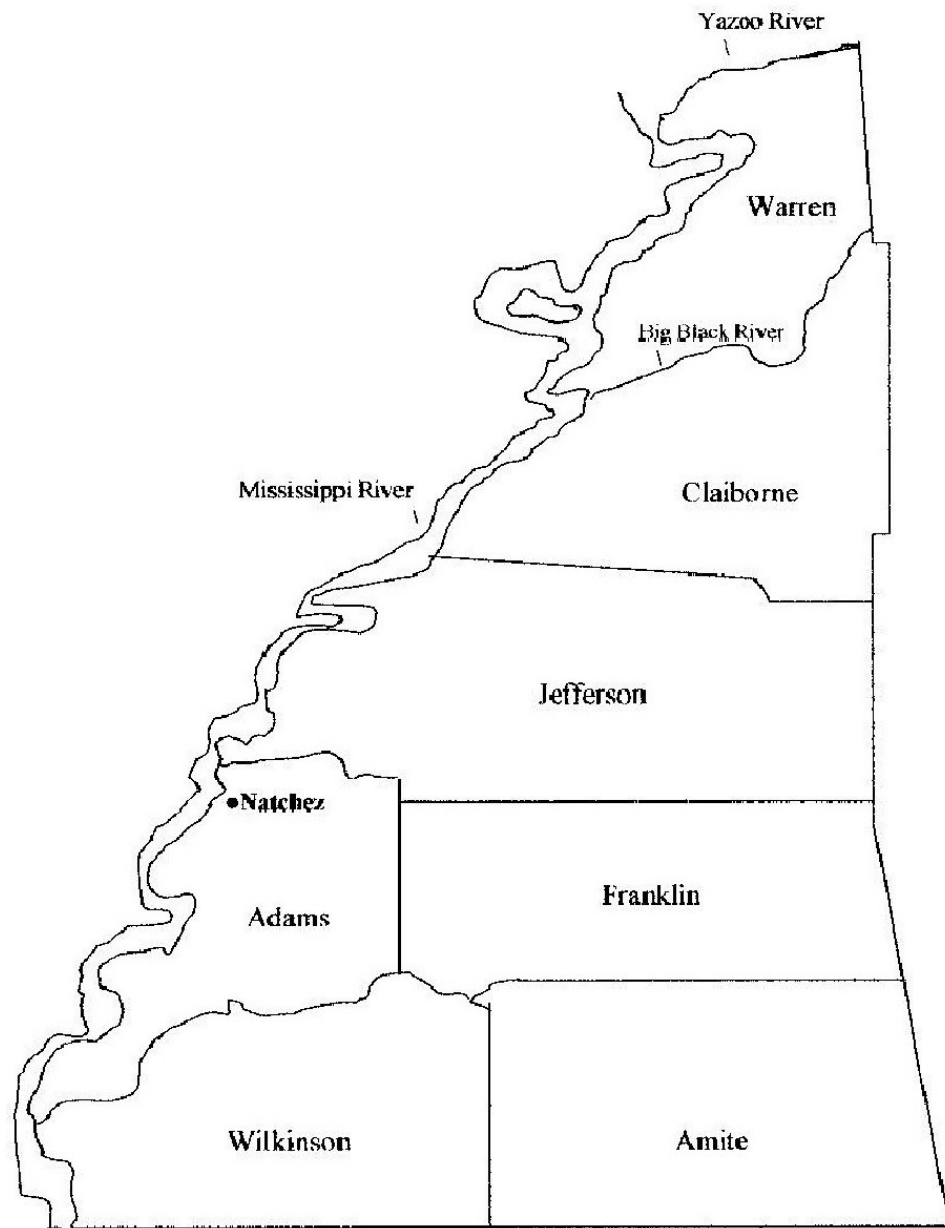
⁶ Robin F.A. Fabel, *The Economy of British West Florida, 1763-1783* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988), 2-3.

endless countryside. In the emerging concept of republicanism, land meant self-sufficiency, and if one could acquire enough, money and power.

In the middle of the eighteenth century the forces of territorial redistribution, political conflict, population, and greed coalesced to create another colony in British North America. The 1763 Treaty of Paris ended the Seven Years War and transferred a strip of land along the Gulf coast from Spain to England. At the westernmost edge of that territory, along the eastern bank of the Mississippi River, lay an area comprised of the present-day Mississippi counties of Adams, Wilkinson, Jefferson, and Claiborne.⁷ This area, known as the Natchez District, played an important and often unacknowledged role in the Revolutionary War, early Republic, and antebellum periods. (See Map 1)

Many of the same events and forces at work in the northeastern colonies made their mark in the Natchez District. The areas around Mobile and Pensacola, also part of West Florida, had been settled earlier by the Spanish, but the soil and water conditions made farming difficult. Although Mobile and Pensacola remained centers of trade and government, once explorers discovered the fertile land in the Natchez District, settlement efforts began to move to the area. Concerted advertising efforts by British officials directed potential settlers to the land along the Mississippi, and land grants and incentives intended to reward former British soldiers and sailors for their loyalty in the Seven Years War assured a steady stream of immigrants from England and from the more northern North American colonies.

⁷ Opinions vary as to the exact size of the Natchez District. Lewis Cecil Gray uses the four counties shown above in *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860, Vol. II* (New York: Peter Smith, 1941), 897. Charles S. Sydnor includes Warren, Franklin, and Amite counties in *A Gentleman of the Old Natchez Region, Benjamin L.C. Wailes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1938), inside front cover. Michael Wayne extends the area to include the Louisiana parishes of Madison, Tensas, and Concordia in *The Reshaping of Plantation Society: The Natchez District, 1860-1880* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), frontispiece. Inclusion of the Louisiana parishes makes sense for the later period when Mississippi planters in search of additional land began to establish plantations across the river. However, in 1763 the western bank of the Mississippi River belonged to Spain and was not included in the British acquisition of West Florida. This study does not consider the parishes on the west bank of the Mississippi River, and concentrates on the counties lining the east bank.



Map 1

The Natchez District

Source: Adapted from Charles S. Sydnor, *A Gentleman of the Old Natchez Region, Benjamin L.C. Wailes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1938), inside front cover.

British officials also used this attractive new territory to mitigate the rapidly developing spirit of independence beginning to emerge in the original thirteen colonies. Records show efforts to “divide and conquer” by spreading the restive population over a larger area, while keeping settlements close enough to centers of British influence to prevent them from becoming truly independent. The successful removal of many British subjects – particularly former military men who magnified the effect of the controversial standing army – far from the site of rapidly developing revolution both diluted the chance of conflict and provided a haven for loyalists or those who simply wanted to escape political tension.

Indian wars, particularly Pontiac’s Rebellion, strongly influenced the establishment of British guidelines regarding exploration, site selection, and land granting in the new territory. Surveyors and new settlers followed admonitions to respect Indian land possessions fairly closely, and for good reason. The 1729-30 Natchez Wars between the French and the small local Natchez Indian group resulted in the destruction of both the French and the Indian settlements, causing the area to remain virtually uninhabited until the 1763 British effort began. European nations also constantly vied for the friendship of local Indian groups for political reasons. As long as France, Spain, and England continued to exist elbow-to-elbow in North America, the added military strength that came from friendly Indian relations remained an important weapon in the colonial arsenal of the European powers.

Favorable trade relations with local Indians formed the most important part of any colonial power’s strategy to maintain peace and military alliances. Indians also provided a critical component in the economic goals of the English in West Florida; the fur trade represented the earliest efforts at economic success in the area, and Indians provided most of the furs. Trade protocol occupied a central place in Indian-English relations; Pontiac’s War resulted

in large part from Indians' conception that their English trading partners were not dealing with them fairly or respectfully. Therefore, while comparatively few Indian groups populated the Natchez District, British efforts to appease then continued.⁸

Land fertility and the influx of experienced farmers from the northeastern colonies quickly created a prosperous settlement in the Natchez District. In this agricultural society, access to large amounts of arable land resulted in the establishment of tobacco farms that formed the framework of the future plantation economy. Surely the immigrants from Virginia and Maryland that settled in the Natchez District brought their expertise to bear upon the fragments of tobacco culture left by the French, and the buildup of a slave labor force necessary to work the tobacco crops later resulted in a ready-made source of manpower when cotton culture gained precedence over tobacco in the closing decade of the eighteenth century. Much like older colonies in the upper South, the Natchez District centered its prosperity on agricultural potential; most wealth resided in land and slaves, not the types of capital investment common in New England and other more northern colonies. This characteristic would, of course, prove an influential factor in events of the late nineteenth century.

The slave trade exerted considerable influence in the Natchez District. Westward expansion also meant southward expansion, and many slaves migrated to the South with their masters, either as part of an established workforce or as a potential source of income. By 1820, slaves outnumbered whites by a margin of five percent.⁹ At least one permanent slave market, called Fork of the Road, operated in Natchez. Slaveowners also bought and sold slaves among

⁸ William Dunbar's 1806 commentary on the Indians of Louisiana noted that the only Indians on the east side of the Mississippi River were about 60 Houmas "about 25 leagues above New Orleans." No other groups lived in that part of West Florida, according to Dunbar, other than occasional "parties of wandering Choctaws." William Dunbar, *Life, Letters, and Papers of William Dunbar of Elgin, Morayshire, Scotland, and Natchez, Mississippi, Pioneer Scientist of the Southern United States*, Eron Rowland, editor (Jackson: Press of the Mississippi Historical Society, 1930), 209.

⁹ Gray, *Volume II*, 897.

themselves, often using them as collateral for loans or as a means of exchange in the purchase of land and other property.¹⁰ One account describes slaves on the streets of Natchez selling themselves in order to exercise some level of control in the maintenance of their family group and the selection of a master and potential home.¹¹ The slave population surged during the Spanish period due to that country's involvement in the Atlantic slave trade.¹² By the eve of the Civil War, slaves represented 77.6% of the Natchez District population.¹³ Although circumscribed by bondage, many slaves in the Natchez District enjoyed a greater level of autonomy and interaction with white society than slaves in other areas of the South; the higher rate of absentee ownership meant many planters kept more slaves at their town homes and suburban villas. The Natchez District also contained a number of free men of color who owned slaves. William Johnson, a prosperous free black Natchez businessman, owned slaves who apprenticed in his barber shop and other businesses; one operated one of Johnson's shops almost single-handedly.¹⁴

According to historian Randy Sparks, the Natchez District never conformed to Frederick Jackson Turner's image of the frontier. From the beginning of British settlement the area always consisted of large landowners involved in international trade, first with furs, then tobacco, and finally the successful cotton market that evolved just before the turn of the eighteenth century.¹⁵

Therefore, the exceptional prosperity of the area created a large cadre of planter elite. The less

¹⁰ For an example of slaves as loan collateral, see William Dunbar's letter to Colonel Morhouse dated March 22, 1806 in Dunbar, 333-334. For an example of slaves as a medium of exchange, see James McMullin's advertisement for land for sale "for cash, cotton, or Negroes" in *Green's Impartial Observer*, January 24, 1801, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana..

¹¹ David J. Libby, *Slavery and Frontier Mississippi, 1720-1835* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 60.

¹² Libby, 33.

¹³ Chapter Two examines this issue. See Table 3 for demographic breakdown of the Natchez District.

¹⁴ See William T. Johnson and *Family Papers*, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana and *The Barber of Natchez*, edited by Edwin Adams Davis and William Ransom Hogan (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1954) for details of Johnson's businesses and the roles his slaves played.

¹⁵ Randy J. Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks: Evangelicalism in Mississippi, 1773-1876* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 7.

prosperous happily aspired to the same degree of wealth, as comments from an array of sources prove.¹⁶ Along with the acquisition of wealth came the desire for luxury goods and sophisticated diversions, and the Natchez District rose to the challenge quite well. Planters not only erected elegant (and sometimes ostentatious) homes on their plantations and in Natchez town, they filled those homes with fine furniture and accessories, dressed in fashionable clothes, and ordered smart carriages to transport them in comfort and style.¹⁷ They established schools, hospitals, intellectual societies, and attended musical and theatrical performances.¹⁸ While Frederick Law Olmstead decried the presence of nouveau rich in the District, others disagreed, and the wealthy worked hard to maintain their social status.¹⁹ Planter William Dunbar's order for a carriage included the instructions to avoid anything "gaudy or superfluous," and he decided against having his family's coat of arms painted on the vehicle, opting for the less ostentatious cipher "WD." Arguably one of the wealthiest men in the Natchez District, Dunbar enjoyed such financial success that the loss by fire of 70,000 pounds of clean cotton and all his buildings and equipment – a total value of approximately \$20,000.00 – apparently caused little concern.²⁰ A respected scientist, Dunbar became a member of the American Philosophical Society and the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture, and a frequent correspondent and advisor to Thomas Jefferson. Lively correspondence between Jefferson and Dunbar reveals the latter's involvement in exploration of the Louisiana Purchase; Dunbar frequently assisted Jefferson in

¹⁶ See William Dunbar's letter to Thomas Jefferson dated May 13, 1804 in Dunbar, 128-129.

¹⁷ See William Dunbar's order for two carriages, one for himself and one for Stephen Minor, in Dunbar, 337-338. Account records as well as ship manifests show the importation of luxury goods directly to Natchez from Europe. For account records, see John Bisland and Family *Papers*, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. For an example of a ship manifest, see the partial reproduction in Mack Swearingen, "Luxury at Natchez in 1801: A Ship's Manifest from the McDonogh Papers," in *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (May, 1937), 188-190.

¹⁸ Randy J. Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 67-69. Established in 1818, the Elizabeth Female Academy in Washington was the first secondary school in the United States to educate women.

¹⁹ Wayne, 13.

²⁰ William Dunbar to John Vaughan, December 15, 1806 and William Dunbar to Pearce and Crawford, December 15, 1806 in Dunbar, 351.

the collection of maps, meteorological, and geographic data for the area.²¹ Far from representing a frontier backwater, the Natchez District rapidly developed into a dynamic area of financial and cultural interest at a very early time.

The American takeover of the Natchez District in 1797 resulted in an influx of less prosperous farmers who vied with established planters for land and resources.²² By the 1830s prices for slaves and land had risen to their highest point and began to stabilize.²³ The plain folk who arrived three decades before had achieved more wealth, but also brought republican and evangelical sensibilities that often conflicted with the dominant civil religion of land, slaves, and cotton. The ideologies that informed these disputes changed the relationships within Natchez society in several important ways. Evangelicals who streamed to the area after 1797 constantly attempted to change the focus of District society from the love of wealth to the love of God, confronting the mantra of cotton, land, and slaves at every opportunity, and in almost every detail. Although observers during the period between 1763 and the early 1800s remarked about the dearth of Christian religious participation, by the 1830s the Natchez District reached a turning point in the struggle between evangelicalism and the religion of plantation affluence. Encouraged by evangelical fervor, the now generally more prosperous society began to join churches at an increased rate, as did more of the planter elite, and members of sects began to move toward participation in the larger denominations. In the Natchez District this meant Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist churches enjoyed increases in membership.²⁴

²¹ Jefferson recommended Dunbar for membership in the American Philosophical Society and frequently transmitted copies of his papers to the Society for review and dissemination. Numerous letters exist between Jefferson and Dunbar related to the gathering of information on Louisiana. See Dunbar, 11 for membership in the American Philosophical Society and 130-135 for examples of letters regarding exploration.

²² Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 31.

²³ Wayne, 11.

²⁴ Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 3.

At the same time laymen moved toward the church, the social and financial gap between the ministry and the flock began to narrow. In much the same way as other southern divines modified their philosophy and behavior in order to operate successfully within the bounds of the dominant plantation society, so did Natchez District ministers become less opposed to affluence and social position.²⁵ According to L. Brooks Holifield, by 1860 the median wealth of Natchez ministers was \$11,000.00, surpassed by only three other southern cities and none of the northern cities he examined.²⁶

African-Americans, always open to opportunities to exercise some level of autonomy, participated freely in Natchez District worship. Church records indicate that as early as 1817 Natchez churches counted both black and white, slave and free as members of their congregations; other sources note biracial worship as early as the last few years of the eighteenth century. Because of the egalitarian principles of evangelical Protestantism, most white churchgoers welcomed African-Americans as spiritual, if not social, equals.²⁷ However, slaves also reformulated traditional evangelical worship patterns to fit their own needs, worshiping the “white” way while in Sunday meeting, and in their own form of “slave religion” in the quarters. While evidence of the “invisible institution” always remains elusive, given the nature of plantation society, the high percentage of slave population, and the presence of abundant

²⁵ Rhys Isaac and Christine Heyrman have both examined the struggle for authority between the elite and the clergy. For a description of the merging of church and home in Virginia, see Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), particularly Chapter 4. For the assimilation of evangelicals into the milieu of the dominant planter culture, see Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), especially Chapter 5.

²⁶ L. Brooks Holifield, “The Penurious Preacher? Nineteenth-Century Clerical Wealth: North and South” in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Spring, 1990, Volume LVIII, 17-36.

²⁷ Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 88. Sparks notes the use of the terms “brother” and “sister” as methods of address “in biracial churches carried special significance and indicated a changed status.”

evangelical influence, it is reasonable to assume that slaves in the Natchez District participated in their own forms of worship uniquely suited to their needs and understanding.²⁸

As possession of the Natchez District passed from France to England, to Spain, and ultimately to America within the span of less than forty years, the area retained most of its English personality, despite its proximity to predominately French New Orleans and other nearby areas of French and Spanish settlement. Essentially presented with a blank canvas in 1763, English settlers prospered so well that Spanish officials preferred to maintain the status quo upon their acquisition of the territory of West Florida in 1783; by retaining “English” administrators, encouraging the expansion of agriculture, particularly the culture of tobacco, and exhibiting religious toleration toward Protestants, Spain allowed their new possession to remain English, at least superficially. American possession in 1797 occurred after the Natchez District had made the successful and lucrative shift to cotton culture. Economically strong and culturally confident, after the turn of the eighteenth century inhabitants of the Natchez District forged ahead to create one of the most prosperous agricultural regions in the United States.

The development of the Natchez District followed many of the same patterns as other British colonies, but the region enjoyed several advantages not shared by her sisters to the north. By directing migrating settlers to this unusually bountiful and fertile area on the most important water highway on the continent – and indeed one of the most valuable in the world – British officials encountered profound opportunities that industrious and innovative immigrants exploited to their distinct advantage. The growth that began from a virtual wilderness in 1763 evolved to create one of the most prosperous areas in the new nation by 1860, a status that would require additional industry and innovation in the following decade.

²⁸ See Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) for a study of slaves’ appropriation and modification of traditional Christian worship practices to suit their own needs.

Chapter One

The People and the Crown

They considered themselves Englishmen. The people who settled the colonies of North America in the sixteenth century and who reinforced and expanded the colonial presence during the Great Migration of the seventeenth century were primarily British in origin. Although many colonists expressed discontent with the actions of Parliament and the monarchy, by the eve of the American Revolution virtually all who left a written record still spoke of themselves as British subjects; indeed, arguments against the various Parliamentary acts which led to the American Revolution were based upon colonists' rights as British citizens. As late as July of 1775, three months following the initiation of armed hostilities at Lexington, the Continental Congress characterized its members as "fellow-subjects" of other members of the British empire.¹ This connection with England, so treasured by inhabitants of the Atlantic colonies as part of their identity, produced far-reaching consequences for the pursuit of independence, and eventually for the settlement of sovereign territories as distant as the southern edge of the North American continent. Initially settled by the French, ceded to the English, subsequently captured by the Spanish, and finally included as a territory of the new United States, the area of West Florida known as the Natchez District owed its success to the influx of primarily British-origin settlers in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

The Treaty of Paris, signed February 10, 1763, ended the Seven Years War between France and England. The agreement between the two nations resulted in the cession of Canada,

¹ " 'Resolved to Dye Free-men Rather than Live Slaves:' Declaration of the Causes and Necessities of Taking up Arms (July 6, 1775)" in Jack P. Greene, editor, *Colonies to Nation, 1763-1789: A Documentary History of the American Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 257, 256, 258-259. See "No Legislature Has a Right to Make Itself Arbitrary: James Otis, 'The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved' (1764)" and "The Official Colonial Protest: The Declaration of the Stamp Act Congress (October 19, 1765)" in Greene, *Colonies to Nation* for additional examples of expressions of British citizenship.

East Florida, West Florida, and Grenada to England, placing her in possession of an unbroken stretch of territory reaching from Canada to the shores of the Gulf of Mexico.² English colonies in North America obtained an additional degree of security by the acquisition of these territorial buffer zones, simultaneously enhancing both the size, safety, and potential productivity of England's empire.

The treaty not only resulted in the ceding of vast amounts of territory to the British, it created conditions that resulted in an increased English presence in the colonies in the form of military officers and enlisted men. Some decommissioned soldiers, no doubt, remained in the colonies after the end of the war because they liked what they saw and desired to take advantage of the opportunities that had previously drawn so many Englishmen to America. However, many soldiers remained in the colonies at the direction of the British military command as a protective security force. British insistence upon maintaining a standing army proved to be a major impetus for colonial rebellion, as colonists were called upon to fund and house the soldiers providing protection.³ However, the irony of this situation was not lost on American colonists. Why, with new areas of British possession on both the northern and the southern edges of settlement, would the colonies require more protection than they did before the French and Indian War began?

This conundrum eventually provided the impetus for two waves of immigration from the Atlantic colonies to the new British province of West Florida. First, royal proclamations subsequent to the Treaty of Paris provided opportunities for former British soldiers who had served in the French and Indian War to obtain land grants in the new territory. Later, when the conflict between England and the American colonies began to roil, partly as a result of English military presence, the crown revived its program of land granting in order to "protect and

² *Treaty of Paris, 1763*. The Avalon Project at Yale Law School. Available from: <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/paris763.htm>, accessed March 14, 2004.

³ "Indirect Taxation: The Quartering Act (May 15, 1765)" in Greene, 43-44.

reward” colonial loyalists.⁴ This initiative also provided the added benefit of dispersing the colonial population to some extent, hopefully calming the tensions between patriots and loyalists and stanching the spread of dissent.

The Proclamation of October 7, 1763 laid out plans for the government and maintenance of the new territories gained by the Treaty of Paris by fixing boundaries, establishing Indian policy, providing for the formation of governments, and creating a land distribution system. The document presented a blueprint for the development of West Florida. The Proclamation also solved two major problems. By offering additional territory for colonial expansion, the document 1) promoted westward migration and 2) eased colonials’ demands for more land. The Proclamation simultaneously addressed the potential tensions and conflicts between settlers and Indian groups this movement might cause by definitively articulating a settlement policy respectful of Indian land rights.

The Proclamation Line established by the Proclamation of 1763 generated considerable controversy in the seaboard colonies. The very issues that prompted creation of the Proclamation Line – westward migration and pressure on Indians – also resulted in colonial discontent. Settlers had moved steadily farther west and competition for land resulted not only in disputes between colonists and Indians, but between colonists and colonial governments. As early as 1760, Indian groups unified in a concerted effort to resist white expansion in western Pennsylvania. This initiative culminated in the summer of 1763 with Pontiac’s Rebellion, merely months prior to the issuance of the Proclamation. With cooperation from other interior

⁴ Lord Dartmouth to West Florida Governor Peter Chester, July 5, 1775, quoted in Cecil Johnson, *British West Florida, 1763-1783* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), 144-145

native American groups under his direction, Ottawa chief Pontiac succeeded in capturing every British post west of Pittsburgh.⁵

While British and American colonial soldiers finally succeeded in stopping Pontiac's Rebellion, tension and discontent remained in western settlements. Settlers in Pennsylvania expressed their support of a group of Paxton and Donegal, Pennsylvania men who had murdered several Conestoga Indians; their petition to the Pennsylvania Assembly clearly stated that they believed the Assembly provided more protection for friendly Indians than it did for Pennsylvania colonists.⁶ Regulator movements in South and North Carolina in 1767 and 1769, respectively, stemmed from disputes over westward movement. In South Carolina, earlier Indian wars had created a lawless backcountry; western settlers petitioned Charleston authorities for help in establishing law and order. In North Carolina, discontent arose not from a lack of government, but from discontent with ostensibly corrupt officials and underrepresentation.⁷ The Proclamation of 1763 presented British officials with an opportunity to alleviate, although not avoid, some of the tension already developing in 1763 as a result of population pressure in the seaboard colonies.

In order to contain western migration from the seaboard colonies, the Proclamation prohibited settlement west of the crest of the Appalachian Mountains. However, the Proclamation Line did not extend all the way to the Gulf of Mexico, rather it skirted the western boundary of Georgia. For the purposes of West Florida, the Mississippi River became the westernmost migration boundary. (Map 2) In order to control expansion in the new

⁵ For a comprehensive study of Pontiac's Rebellion, see Gregory Evans Dowd, *War Under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations, and the British Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

⁶ Greene, 94-97. Green describes the circumstances surrounding the Paxton affair. "The Declaration of the Injured Frontier Inhabitants (February, 1764)" expressed western Pennsylvanians' grievances regarding Indian management.

⁷ Greene, 98-107. South Carolina's statement to the South Carolina Assembly was entitled "Remonstrance of the Back Country" and was written by Anglican clergyman Charles Woodmason. "The Petition of Anson County" expressed North Carolinians' concerns with their Assembly.



Map 2
Territorial Division of North America after the Treaty of Paris, 1763
and The Proclamation Line of 1763

Source: Adapted from John M. Murrin, Paul E. Johnson, James M. McPherson, Gary Gerstle, Emily S. Rosenberg, and Norman L. Rosenberg, *Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People*. Available from: http://www.wadsworth.com/history_d/templates/student_resources/0534264638_murrin/maps/swfs/mur5_1.html, accessed May 31, 2004.

territories of East and West Florida, special wording included in the Proclamation prohibited settlers' purchasing land directly from Indians.⁸ British officials had no intention of repeating Pontiac's War in the southern provinces.

Other considerations of the Proclamation included water transportation routes and military surveillance advantages.⁹ The new colony of West Florida was bounded by the Chattahoochee and Apalachicola rivers on the east, the Gulf of Mexico on the south, lakes Pontchartrain and Maurepas and the Mississippi River on the west, and by the thirty-first parallel on the north. The Proclamation states, "extensive and valuable acquisitions in America" promised to accrue "great benefits and advantages" to the "commerce, manufacture, and navigation" of British subjects; access to the Mississippi River provided a valuable water highway for points along the river and, hopefully, for the use of their own new settlers' convenience in getting goods to market.¹⁰ In 1764 British officials, noting that the original boundaries did not include the exceptionally fertile and militarily important land near Natchez, extended the northernmost line from the thirty-first parallel to the confluence of the Mississippi and Yazoo rivers, effectively doubling the size of West Florida.¹¹ This border change allowed the inclusion of potential farmland situated along several navigable tributaries that emptied within a short distance directly into the Mississippi. The area included the Natchez District, bordered on the west by the Mississippi River, on the north by the confluence of the Yazoo River with the Mississippi, and on the south by the thirty-first parallel. The eastern boundary of the district generally followed a straight north-south line from the northern boundary at the Yazoo to

⁸ *The Royal Proclamation – October 7, 1763*. The Avalon Project at Yale Law School. Available from: <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/proc1763.htm>, accessed March 7, 2004. See Appendix A.

⁹ *The Royal Proclamation*.

¹⁰ *The Royal Proclamation*.

¹¹ Cecil Johnson, *British West Florida, 1763-1783* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), 6.

“a certain point above Mobile.”¹² Although the French abandoned Fort Rosalie at Natchez by 1732, the Spanish occupied territory on the western side of the Mississippi.¹³ The heights along the river, especially those near Natchez, afforded key military lookout points for observation of the Spanish on the other side.

The most important aspects of this land acquisition, however, concerned 1) colonial settlement expansion and 2) Indian relations; the British plan for West Florida solved both problems at once. With northern colonies experiencing overcrowding and land scarcity, colonists began to move westward and southward, exerting pressure on Indian hunting grounds. This movement had caused conflict in the Atlantic colonies, and the British were well aware of the abandonment of Fort Rosalie and the majority of the area near the river due to the Natchez Wars of 1729-30.

During the French occupation of the Natchez region in the 1720s, Natchez Indians and French tobacco planters coexisted so well that familiarity between the two groups caused problems. Disease and encroaching settlement diminished the Natchez Indian population to approximately 1,750 by the mid-1720s. Beginning in 1722, a personal dispute between Indian men and a French sergeant escalated into a series of raids between the French and Natchez in the area. Despite periodic truces, hostilities erupted again when the new Fort Rosalie commandant ordered the Natchez chief to remove his settlement to nearby White Apple village so that the French could pursue more tobacco culture. In response, the Natchez asked to borrow guns for a hunting match, and on the morning of November 28, 1729 turned on the French at Fort Rosalie, killing 237 people and capturing 350 others. The French settlement at Natchez never recovered,

¹² J.F.H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State, with Biographical Notices of Eminent Citizens, Volume 1* (Jackson: Power and Barksdale, 1880, reprinted Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1964), 113-114.

¹³ Claiborne, 92n. The Treaty of Paris left Spain in possession of land west of the Mississippi River.

and attacks by a combined force of Choctaw Indians and French troops from Louisiana thinned the Natchez Indian presence to negligible size by 1730.¹⁴

Therefore, the experiences of Pontiac's Rebellion in the North and the Natchez Wars in the South made conciliation of the local native groups one of the major goals in Britain's settlement efforts. The British government encouraged colonial expansion to less well-populated areas than those in the northeast and emphasized respect for Indian land holdings, thereby enhancing amicable British-Indian relations. This strategy not only took population pressure from native lands between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River, it also provided a buffer zone between the Spanish authorities in Louisiana and the towns of Pensacola and Mobile, which were important areas in Indian affairs, while simultaneously opening additional settlement territory for migration-minded seaboard colonists.¹⁵

The promotion of British settlement took several forms. The Proclamation of October 7, 1763 conferred authority upon the colonial governors of the newly acquired colonies to make land grants. The authorities particularly took aim at "such reduced officers as have served in North America during the late war, and to such private soldiers as have been or shall be disbanded in America, and are actually residing there." Grants were subject to annual quit-rents and improvement requirements, with acreage allotted according to the former rank of the soldier: five thousand acres for a field officer, three thousand acres to a captain, two thousand acres to a subaltern or staff officer, two hundred acres to a non-commission officer, and fifty acres for a

¹⁴ Daniel H. Usner, Jr., *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 66-76.

¹⁵ Johnson, *British West Florida*, 221.

private.¹⁶ Grantees could also obtain land in the territory by royal mandamus, and some of the largest tracts were acquired in this way.¹⁷

Beginning November 14, 1763 the Lords of Trade advertised for potential West Florida settlers in the London Gazette, but the earliest grants were located in or near Pensacola and Mobile rather than the Natchez area.¹⁸ These areas did not prove particularly conducive to farming, due to the sandy condition of the soil.¹⁹ However, once British officials and others began to visit the western part of the province and report on its favorable attributes, the Natchez region attracted more attention from land-hungry settlers. Touring the area in 1768, acting Governor Monfort Browne noted the fertility of the soil, the lush indigenous fruit trees and plants, and the abundant fish.²⁰ In 1770 Captain Philip Pittman, an engineer in the 15th Regiment attached to the province of West Florida, published *The Present State of the European Settlements on the Mississippi*, which further piqued the interest of those Atlantic colonists who sought land opportunities. Pittman's book was the first English-language publication to describe the region; it also provided more updated information than the primarily French-language sources in use at the time. The Captain described the Natchez area as "the finest and most fertile part of West Florida," and while this narrative only filled three pages of his book, his vivid

¹⁶ *The Royal Proclamation*.

¹⁷ Johnson, *British West Florida*, 117. Also see Robert V. Haynes, *The Natchez District and the American Revolution* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1976), 11 and Walter Lowrie, *Early Settlers of Mississippi as Taken from Land Claims on the Mississippi Territory* (Easley: Southern Historical Press, Inc., 1986), particularly the Ogden mandamus on page 547.

¹⁸ Clinton N. Howard, *The British Development of West Florida, 1763-1769* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1947), 9 for advertisement in *London Gazette*. For early Pensacola and Mobile area grants see "Analysis of Land Grants," 50-101.

¹⁹ "From Lieut. Maclellan to the Governor" in Dunbar Rowland, editor, *Mississippi Provincial Archives, 1763-1766* (Nashville: Press of Brandon Printing Company, 1911), 268-269. Lieutenant Maclellan, stationed in New Orleans, advised Mississippi Provincial Governor George Johnstone that plans to entice settlers from New Orleans to Pensacola and Mobile would be futile because of "the sterility of the land" in those areas.

²⁰ Haynes, 7. Haynes quotes Monfort Browne's letter of July 6, 1768 to Lord Hillsborough.

description of the lush surroundings and the quality of tobacco produced during the French period evidently attracted attention from potential settlers.²¹

Between 1770 and 1774 the Natchez area began to experience a significant growth spurt in response to these highly favorable endorsements. A map drawn in 1771 by Elias Durnford, Surveyor General, shows less than fifty named plots in the area between the thirty-first parallel and the confluence of the Yazoo and Mississippi rivers.²² In 1774 William Wilton, Surveyor and Engineer for Peter Chester, Governor of British West Florida, produced a map showing two hundred forty-six grants within the same geographic area as Durnford's map, an increase of over four hundred percent. These plots ranged in size from fifty to 25,650 acres, for an estimated total grant area totaling at least 375,025 acres. This number is conservative, however, since the acreage for some grants cannot be determined due to the condition of the map.²³

This explosion in land acquisition came from several sources, and the disposition of the grants produced varying results. The crown and the provincial governor made grants to both individuals and companies. Without doubt, speculators obtained much of the land, never intending to personally migrate and settle in the area. Settlement efforts ranged from the immensely successful to the disastrous, grant size proving a poor indicator of the potential success or failure of a plan. While sources do not reveal any obvious "bubble" type schemes, physical suffering, financial loss, and ultimate settlement failure often resulted from miscommunication, mistakes in timing, and sometimes ineptitude or downright fraud.

²¹ Philip Pittman, *The Present State of European Settlements on the Mississippi*, John Franklin McDermott, editor (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1977). Facsimile reprint of the original, published 1770. Biographical notes on Pittman and information regarding previous publications can be found on XIX of the editor's introduction. Pittman's chapter on Natchez appears on pages 37-39 of the text.

²² Elias Durnford, *Plan of the river Mississippi from the river Yazous to the river Ibberville in West Florida, 1771*. Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

²³ William Wilton, *A Manuscript Map of British Land Grants Along the Mississippi River, 1774*. Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

The Company of Military Adventurers presents one of the best examples of a good plan gone wrong. This group of New England veterans of the French and Indian War, most of them from Connecticut, met for the first time on June 15, 1763. That summer the Company sent one of its members, General Phineas Lyman, to London to negotiate for grants in West Florida, months before the Proclamation of October 7, 1763. General Lyman remained in London for more than eight years, petitioning the crown for grants to the Company and to himself. He finally returned to Connecticut, personal land grant in hand, and assured the Company that he had “obtained at length of the Crown, a grant of a considerable tract of land, bounded west on the River Mississippi, north on the River Yasow, between the latitude 32 and 34.” However, he presented no written proof of the Company grant.²⁴

Believing they possessed a valid mandamus, the Company sent a four-person survey party comprised of Israel Putnam, Roger Enos, Thaddeus Lyman, and Rufus Putnam to select and claim a suitable location. On January 10, 1773 the explorers embarked on their expedition in their sloop, aptly named the *Mississippi*. The journey down the Atlantic coast, into the Gulf of Mexico, and up the Mississippi River to select their chosen site lasted several months, but on July 7, 1773 the Putnam survey party presented their petition to the Council in Pensacola, requesting a grant of nineteen townships of approximately 20,000 acres each situated along the Big Black River. Israel Putnam recorded that the land “wants nothing but inhabitants and cultivation, to become one of the finest countries in the world.”²⁵ The Provincial Council office advised them that written verification of the royal grant had not yet been received, but on July 12, 1773 agreed to reserve the requested nineteen townships for the Company for a period of two

²⁴ Israel Putnam and Rufus Putnam, *The Two Putnams: Israel and Rufus in the Havana Expedition, 1762 and in the Mississippi River Exploration, 1772-73 with some account of The Company of Military Adventurers*, Albert C. Bates, editor (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1931), 10, 18.

²⁵Putnam, 39.

years, pending confirmation of the mandamus from the crown. Considering the matter resolved, the survey group began their trip back to Connecticut and began to make plans for the move south.²⁶

On December 9, 1773 thirty prospective settlers associated with the Company of Military Adventurers embarked for their new home near Natchez. Another group left Connecticut in the spring of 1774, and yet another from Massachusetts in the summer of 1774. Unfortunately, when this contingent of over one hundred settlers arrived in Pensacola, they found that the government had ordered the granting of lands to cease on October 6, 1773 and that the land office was closed.²⁷ Rufus Putnam's journal of the West Florida undertaking concludes, "Those who emigrated in 1774 arrived generally too late in the season to expect health in such a change of climate, soon fell sick, many died, and the Revolutionary War breaking out in 1775 put an end to the business of further prosecuting the settlement." Putnam may have exaggerated the extent of the failure to some degree, as he clearly laments his personal loss of time and money in the endeavor.²⁸ A 1798 attempt to verify the reservation of the nineteen townships elicited the reply that the only recorded grant belonged to Phineas Lyman in the amount of 20,000 acres; no others had been officially recorded.²⁹ Surely, many of the Company of Military Adventurers settlers remained and obtained land grants at a later date, but the identities of those settlers remains undetermined. Putnam certainly spoke too soon because subsequent events prove that the Revolutionary War encouraged – rather than restricted – settlement.

²⁶ Rufus Putnam, "Journal (the Shorter Journal)" in *The Two Putnams*, 130, 258. The Wilton map clearly shows nineteen townships laid out on the Mississippi River, slightly south of its confluence with the Yazoo. The plots are marked, "From number store Reserved for the Military Adventurers." Governor Chester agreed to hold the chosen tracts for a period of two years; there is no indication that the royal mandamus was ever issued for this reserved land.

²⁷ Haynes, 17 and Putnam, 261. Haynes states one hundred four settlers arrived in Pensacola, with another three hundred scheduled to depart from New England soon.

²⁸ Putnam, 262.

²⁹ Putnam, 46.

Not all groups proved as unlucky as the Company of Military Adventurers; some efforts proved highly successful. On May 13, 1767 King George III granted over 25,000 acres of land in West Florida to Captain Amos Ogden, a former British naval officer. In April of 1772 Captain Ogden recorded a deed to this property and immediately sold 19,000 acres on the west side of the Homochitto River to Congregational minister Samuel Swayze and his brother Richard Swayze of Black River, New Jersey. The West Florida Provincial Council recognized the grant in October, 1772 and included the usual stipulation that the land be settled with white Protestants at the rate of one person per hundred acres within a period of three years or be forfeited in its entirety. The patent also included the standard clauses requiring an annual half-penny per acre quit-rent, a royal reservation of mineral rights, and the cultivation of hemp or flax at the rate of one acre per thousand acres owned if the land was so suited.³⁰ Ogden and the Swayze brothers launched an expedition to locate their grant in late 1772, and on April 19, 1773 a party of seventy-five people led by Reverend Samuel Swayze arrived at Pensacola, where the Provincial Council recorded their presence and their intention to bring more settlers at a later date. The August 9, 1773 edition of the *New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury* reported that the group had begun their settlement on the Homochitto River approximately one month earlier.³¹

In July, 1770 a group of ninety-seven settlers arrived at Natchez from Pennsylvania and Virginia. The contingent included farmers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and sufficient equipment to build a sawmill and a gristmill.³² The Wilton map shows a large area “Reserved for the Virginians.” However, in 1773 the provincial government ceased the granting of lands, the same

³⁰ Frances Preston Mills, *The History of the Descendants of the Jersey Settlers of Adams County, Mississippi, Volume II* (Jackson: Society of the Descendants of the Jersey Settlers of Adams County, Mississippi, 1981), 46-48, 50. Wilton’s 1774 map shows the entire Ogden patent and does not indicate which part belonged to the Swayzes. The Ogden and Swayze story is often related in histories of the Natchez area; see Haynes, 15, regarding the success of the colonizing effort.

³¹ Mills, 54, 57.

³² Haynes, 13.

order that undermined the company of Military Adventurers effort. For the next few years settlement in the Natchez area remained slow until the approach of the Revolutionary War, when a new – and even larger – surge in immigration began.

The aforementioned Proclamation Line disputes over colonial assemblies' inability to protect colonists against Indian attacks contributed significantly to the advent of the Revolutionary War. In addition, these conflicts, as in the case of colonists' petition to the North Carolina Assembly in 1767, resulted in part from class conflict between new immigrants and those who represented the established elite.³³ According to Gordon S. Wood, "Crown and colonists blamed each other for placing the wrong sorts of people – men without real wealth, esteem, and virtue – into offices of public trust. In an important sense the Revolution was fought over just this issue – over differing interpretations of who in America were the proper social leaders who ought naturally to accede to positions of public authority."³⁴ The hierarchical structure of society in the eighteenth century, with its adherence to systems of deference and patronage relationships, began to experience schisms as disputes arose over who was most qualified to govern.

The relationship between boundary disputes, class distinction, deference, and the right to govern illustrates only one of the intricacies of the origins of the Revolutionary War. In addition to the uproar caused by the political nature of the Quartering Act, British military presence in the colonies also caused social pressure as colonists felt in danger "of having their morals debauched" and economic strain as soldiers sometimes competed for jobs.³⁵ The combination of

³³ Greene, 94.

³⁴ Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 87.

³⁵ For the American take on the British military presence in Boston, see "A Journal of the Times (September 28, 1768-August 1, 1769)" in Greene, 158-163 (quote on page 161). The Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770 stemmed from a conflict between a British soldier and a Boston citizen at Gray's rope walk. For a narrative account of the events leading to the Massacre, see A.J. Langguth, *Patriots: The Men Who Started the American Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 130-141.

these factors made West Florida a valuable safety valve for the diffusion of tensions created by overcrowding, land scarcity, and growing safety concerns that existed in the older colonies. At the same time, the acquisition of land helped to fulfill the republican dream of independence through property ownership.³⁶

In his July 5, 1775 letter to West Florida governor Peter Chester, Lord Dartmouth explained that revolutionary feelings in the northern colonies had encouraged the crown to “protect and reward those persons who remained loyal.” The king immediately suspended the order forbidding land grants, relaxed the restrictions stated in the grants, and exempted quit-rents for a period of ten years. The provincial government commenced granting land at a faster rate than that of the early 1770s; regular and family grants were issued, as were bounties that ranged in size depending upon the prominence of the grantee and how much he had suffered in support of the king.³⁷ Designation of the area as a haven for loyalists caused the population to swell; doubtless more than a few settlers possessed minimal political preference and simply wanted to escape the turmoil of the rapidly escalating revolution, and some simply saw the opportunity to acquire more land.³⁸ In order to accommodate the needs of the rapidly developing community, provincial officials created several new measures. In February, 1776 Governor Chester ordered that a surveyor lay out the town of Natchez. In November, 1776 a deputy was appointed in Natchez to handle affidavits instead of sending them to Pensacola for processing. In 1777 four Natchez representatives were elected to the assembly, indicating the growing political

³⁶ For a description of the importance of property in concepts of republicanism and freedom, see Wood, 179-181.

³⁷ Johnson, *British West Florida*, 144-145.

³⁸ Claiborne, 115. Claiborne confirms the sudden population shift to the area due to the Revolutionary War, as well as the presence of both loyalists and families who preferred to stay neutral.

importance of the area. In that same year, anxious to maintain growth and prosperity in the province, the British government earmarked £1,000 for aid to loyalists.³⁹

The 1783 Spanish takeover of West Florida created more opportunities for growth. Additional land grants were obtained easily and inexpensively.⁴⁰ Spanish officials, anxious to keep their stable and increasingly prosperous populace, made a number of concessions to the inhabitants. The initiative included the appointment of “English,” as the Spanish called them, settlers to administrative posts, exemption from taxation and military service, and religious toleration of Protestants. The government also agreed to purchase all tobacco crops – by far the largest cash crop in the district by the time – at prices higher than market level. Both white and slave populations exploded as planters rushed to make as much from Spanish tobacco sales as possible. These slave-worked tobacco plantations provided the foundation for the future establishment of the cotton economy and resulting economic prosperity of the Natchez District.⁴¹

Table 1 shows the colonial population of the five largest settlement areas on the banks of the lower Mississippi River in the year 1785. When compared to the population figures for Natchez in the Year 1726 (Table 2), three years prior to the Natchez Wars, the figures present a striking example of the effect of British settlement efforts. Habitants signify settlers who could acquire land, Slaves includes both Indian and black bondsmen for life, and Others consists of contract laborers and soldiers. This settlement of two hundred fifty-nine inhabitants suffered almost total destruction in the Natchez Wars of 1729-30 and did not recover until British settlement efforts commenced in the 1760s. Therefore, the total 1785 Natchez population of 1,559 shown in Table 1 represents a remarkable increase from the virtually uninhabited condition

³⁹ Johnson, *British West Florida*, 145-146, 22.

⁴⁰ Claiborne, 140.

⁴¹ John Hebron Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest: Mississippi, 1770-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 3-4.

of the area at British occupation in 1763. By the mid-1780s the Natchez area constituted one of the three “core” areas of West Florida settlement, with Baton Rouge and the Manchac coast representing an additional “core” and the area above Mobile on the banks of the Alabama and Tombigbee rivers representing the third. Clearly, only the First German Coast in southeastern

Table 1
The Colonial Population in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1785

District	Whites	Free People of Color	Slaves	Total
First German Coast	561	69	1,273	1,903
Natchez	1,121	0	438	1,559
Pointe Coupee	482	4	1,035	1,521
Acadian Coast (both banks)	912	18	402	1,332
Second German Coast (both banks)	714	5	581	1,300

Adapted from Daniel H. Usner, Jr. *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 114. “Table 3. The Colonial Population in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1785.”

Table 2
Population of Natchez, 1726

Location	Habitants	Slaves	Others	Total
Natchez	105	74	80	259

Adapted from Daniel H. Usner, Jr. *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 48. “Table 2. The Colonial Population in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1726.”

Louisiana surpassed the Natchez area in total population, with white and slave contingents almost completely reversed.⁴² This information indicates that the settlers who migrated from the northeast owned relatively few slaves, a demographic destined for significant change within the next decade.

In 1797 the Treaty of San Lorenzo, also known as Pinckney’s Treaty, settled border and navigation disputes between the United States and Spain that had persisted since the 1783 Treaty of Paris. Fixing the southernmost boundary of the United States at the thirty-first parallel,

⁴² Usner, 113.

Pinckney's Treaty confirmed that the entire Natchez District fell into American territory, and conferred full navigation rights of the Mississippi River upon United States citizens.⁴³ These events further enhanced the potential of the already dynamic Natchez District's natural and human resources, and prepared the area for the accelerated growth that followed in the early nineteenth century.

The Proclamation of October 7, 1763 made English intentions regarding Indian land rights abundantly clear; provisions pertaining to Indian protection commanded more of the Proclamation than did provisions regarding white settlement. Valuing the safety of colonists and the friendly relationship enjoyed between England and "the several nations or tribes of Indians with whom we are connected, and who live under our protection." The Proclamation prohibited molestation of any Indian groups occupying land within English territory if such land had not been purchased from them. The Proclamation further prohibited colonial governors from making land grants outside their own territories, forbade colonists from settling on Indian lands without express royal consent, and required any settlers residing on such lands to vacate immediately. Colonists could not purchase land directly from Indians, and the military forces in the area received instructions to remove all fugitives from justice from any Indian lands to which they had fled. As a final effort to assure the local Indian groups of England's good intentions and protection, the treaty reserved all lands not included in the new provinces of Quebec, East, and West Florida or the Hudson's Bay Company, as well as "all the lands and territories lying to the westward of the sources of the rivers which fall into the sea from the west and northwest as

⁴³ "Article II" and "Article IV" of the *Treaty of Friendship, Limits, and Navigation Between Spain and The United States: October 27, 1795*. The Avalon Project at the Yale Law School. Available from: <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/spain/sp1795.htm>, accessed March 8, 2004.

aforesaid” for “the use of the said Indians.”⁴⁴ The crown could not state its intention to preserve good Indian relations more clearly.

British motivation for this conciliatory approach derived more from political considerations than humanitarian goals. Certainly, protection of colonists’ safety figured prominently in the crown’s promises to native groups, and British administrators believed that fixing boundaries to divide settlers from Indian hunting and sacred grounds would keep colonial expansion from moving so far west that an autonomous economy would develop. As early as May, 1763, Lord Egremont, Secretary of State for the Southern Department, wrote in “Hints relative to the Division and Government of the conquered and newly acquired Countries of America:”

It might also be necessary to fix upon some line for a western boundary to our ancient provinces beyond which our people should not at present be permitted to settle hence as their numbers increased they would immigrate to Nova Scotia or to the provinces on the southern frontier where they would be useful to their other country instead of planting themselves in the heart of America out of the reach of governments and where from the great difficulty of procuring European commodities they would be compelled to commence manufactories to the infinite prejudice of Britain.⁴⁵

Political considerations also extended to domestic relations with Indian groups as well as efforts to maintain a position of strength over France and Spain. Little evidence exists to suggest that English officials felt any sense of brotherhood or harbored desires to interact with native Americans on a social level beyond that which served their own economic and military purposes. However, the agreement to accept boundaries and to treat with local Indians respectfully

⁴⁴ *The Royal Proclamation.*

⁴⁵ Lord Egremont quoted in Louis DeVorse, Jr., *The Indian Boundary in the Southern Colonies, 1763-1775* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 28. DeVorse indicates that this paper may actually have been written by Henry Ellis, governor of Georgia. DeVorse also quotes another anonymous author who stated in 1730, “the people born there [America] are too apt to imbibe notions of independency of their mother kingdom.” DeVorse states these notions “often arose in those areas farthest removed from the harbors and navigable streams of the seaboard.” Originals of both the Egremont and the anonymous papers reside in the Colonial Office Records, America and West Indies, British Public Records Office, London.

remained important for two reasons. First, amenable relations with the local groups prevented warfare against British subjects and fostered favorable trade relations, particularly in the valuable fur trade. Second, because of the constant competition among France, Spain, and England for North American territory, each of these powers sought to obtain the friendship of local Indian groups as sources of additional manpower, military strength, and security against the others. The nation that kept the Indians on its side maintained a political edge that translated into political and territorial security.

European powers may have believed that Indian threats against them derived mainly from discontent over land encroachment. Loss of Indian land to colonial settlement certainly provided one source of irritation to Indian groups in all parts of the colonies. However, conflicts with colonists emerged for several other reasons as well. Insufficient demonstrations of respect, inadequate gifts, and the fear of domination and enslavement all generated tensions between Indians and Europeans that required resolution.⁴⁶

Pontiac's War in the Great Lakes region resulted in large part from colonial administrators' insufficient appreciation of the significance of trade and gift-giving to Indian culture, and provides a trenchant example of the need for clear communication between British officials and native inhabitants. The conflict, which arose in May of 1763, clearly influenced the strong pro-Indian wording of the Proclamation of 1763. Traditionally, good trade relations provided opportunities to amass goods that could be given away, thereby forging bonds among Indian groups. This practice created systems of indebtedness, enhanced social prestige, and provided valuable resources in times of hardship. Among Indians, trade and gift-giving represented social as well as economic transactions, effectively replacing the prestige of wealth

⁴⁶ Dowd, *War Under Heaven*, 86-89.

with the prestige of authority.⁴⁷ British officials certainly understood the importance of gift-giving in dealing with the Indians, as well as the element of respect attached to gift exchanges. However, what they apparently failed to recognize was the nature of the relationship. Indians saw the exchanges as transactions between honored equals; British negotiators saw their gifts as payments to inferiors who neglected to acknowledge the value of the British “benefits” they had received. The diminution of funds allocated for gifts, along with other instances of perceived mistreatment and disrespect, led to the outbreak of Pontiac’s War in May, 1763.⁴⁸ By wording the Proclamation of October 7, 1763 in a manner favorable to Indians, the British government hoped to create boundaries that would help to minimize conflict.

British officials and various Indian nations held congresses; one of the largest occurred in the spring of 1765 and included representatives of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations. At the session on April 1, “Tomatly Mingo of Ceneacha great Medal Chief in the District of the Six Villages” spoke first, and revealed several significant facts in the course of his speech which verify the nature of Indian-English relations. First, he stated that the English provided “the necessary supplies of what we cannot make and yet cannot subsist without.” He then “supposed as you come to supply all our wants, you have brought guns, clothing, and other necessaries: and that English representatives “took care that they came not in want for anything. I therefore hope the English powder will flourish in the land and enable us to supply our wives and children with all necessaries.” Tomatly Mingo’s subsequent comments pointedly state that he and his people previously allied themselves with the French, but since they now had been “abandoned... and left... to the English” they expected to be supplied “by proper presents and also by furnishing a plentiful trade.” The congress began on March 26, 1765 and ended on April 4, 1765 with the

⁴⁷ Dowd, *War Under Heaven*, 10-11.

⁴⁸ Dowd, *War Under Heaven*, 70-73, 78.

signing of a treaty between the British government and the Choctaw and Chickasaw.⁴⁹ Relations between English and Indian inhabitants of the province of West Florida, as elsewhere, revolved around several key components. Indians had become dependent upon British trade goods for their livelihood, they considered themselves part of the British colonial milieu, and they expected to receive the supplies they needed freely and plentifully. Mingo's comments also show that Indian groups appreciated the ongoing international tug-of-war in which France, England, and Spain were participating regarding the desirable borderlands.

This understanding of their value to competing European nations both empowered Indian groups and placed them in precarious positions with regard to other Indian nations. At the beginning of England's entry into the southeast, both France and Spain waged a propaganda campaign to instill fear in Indians that the British desired their total extermination.⁵⁰ In the early 1770s the "Small Tribes" transferred their political and economic allegiance to Spain in an effort to strengthen their trade relations and diminish the incidence of enslavement. However, at the onset of the Revolutionary War the larger nations east of the Mississippi River attempted to avoid participation on behalf of their Spanish allies, who supported the rebellious colonies. Disagreements over the conflict led to renewed tensions among the Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Upper Creeks; eventually these groups resorted to distancing themselves from the war whenever possible, while still reminding both the Spanish and English that political loyalty depended upon strength of trade relationships.⁵¹ At all times, southeastern Indians illustrated their desire to participate in and influence the outcome of the circumstances they could by exploiting their economic and political power.

⁴⁹ "Chactaw Congress" in Rowland, *Mississippi Provincial Archives*, 237. Minutes of the entire congress, including the treaty, may be found on pages 215-255.

⁵⁰ DeVorse, 27.

⁵¹ Usner, 107, 142-143.

After the British gained possession of the territory, tensions in the Natchez District never erupted with the same vehemence as those that resulted in Pontiac's War, although incidents of banditry did occur as expressions of Indian protest. In this area, however, Indians' retribution for insufficient gifts or trade abuses, personal affronts, intimidation, and efforts to make a point with colonial officials were usually expressed in terms of livestock and supply thefts.⁵² Although West Florida records indicate trouble with some Indian groups in the eastern parts of the province near Pensacola and Mobile, the "Small Tribes" – the Biloxi, Houma, Atakapa, Bayougoula, Tunica, Opelousa, Pascagoula, and Quapaw – inhabited the eastern bank of the lower Mississippi River between the Yazoo and Iberville rivers and put up little resistance to white settlement in the area.⁵³ Relatively small in number, these populations had remained fairly stable over time, never approaching the levels of decline due to disease so common in other areas of North America. In fact, larger nations in West Florida such as the Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Creeks experienced a regeneration in their population that became evident as early as 1790.⁵⁴

British officials and prospective settlers adhered quite stringently to the royal requirement to respect Indian property. In his February 9, 1765 letter to Engineer Robinson, Mississippi Provincial Governor George Johnstone verified that the Indian groups in the area were "inconsiderable," but counseled the engineer to proceed with respect, "as the friendship of the Indians is to be conciliated by every means in our power, so you will use every endeavor to obtain permission from those who may claim a right to the land, before you begin any work." He further indicated that presents had been sent in anticipation of the work and that a Captain

⁵² Usner, 127-128.

⁵³ See "Governor Johnstone's Report to Mr. Conway, Pensacola, June 23, 1766" in Rowland, *Mississippi Provincial Archives*, 511-516 for depredations of the Creek Indians in the area. Regarding the "Small Tribes," see DeVorse, 22-23, 217.

⁵⁴ Edward Countryman, "Indians, the Colonial Order, and the Social Significance of the American Revolution: in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 53, No. 2 (April, 1996), 347.

Campbell had already “prepared their minds.”⁵⁵ In 1778 English officials in charge of resurveying the Natchez District took extensive measures to satisfy local Indians. The land of the district had been purchased from them by the crown in 1763. The 1778 survey indicated that a favorite Indian ball ground on the bank of the Yazoo River would fall within the boundaries of the English holding. After negotiations with Governor Chester, the survey was redone so that the contested land remained in Indian hands.⁵⁶

The Indian population in the Natchez District coexisted relatively harmoniously with the settlers who flocked to the area after 1763. Respect for territorial rights and the willingness to trade resulted in relationships that added to the economic and political stability of the district in the following decades. Indian inhabitants, British and Spanish administrators, and colonial settlers confronted one another determined to pursue their own agendas, and in this way contributed to the early development of this area.

Westward movement presented challenges for all the participants during the second half of the eighteenth century. Colonial governments, faced with increasing population density in the seaboard colonies but still anxious to contain settlement areas in order to maintain political control, struggled to find workable solutions to their problems. International power struggles between England, France, and Spain added another dimension to the tensions of colonization, requiring military occupation and diligent attention to encroachment by rival nations, sometimes resulting in conflicts with the very subjects their tried to protect. Constantly shifting boundary lines caused confusion and frustration for both administrators and subjects. Colonial officials balanced desired outcomes against potential resistance from both their own subjects and their “red children.” Administrators constantly juggled the wants and needs of colonists, the crown,

⁵⁵ “From Governor Johnstone to Engineer Robertson, February 9, 1765” in Rowland, *Mississippi Provincial Archives*, 282.

⁵⁶ Claiborne, 113-114.

outsiders, and themselves while attempting to make forward progress in the colonization of North America.

Colonists hungered for opportunity, and the ideology of republicanism necessitated access to adequate land upon which to settle and farm, as the landscape had become crowded in the older colonies. Some wealthier or more well-connected citizens dabbled in land speculation. At the same time, rumblings between colonists and the crown exposed areas of conflict that could be eased somewhat by dispersing the population over a wider – but not too wide – colonial dominion. Conflict between European powers created a succession of treaties which changed boundary lines and engaged colonists in a game of international hopscotch. American colonists needed space, both physical and psychological.

Indians frequently occupy the fringes of analyses of westward movement. Often considered either warlike aggressors or passive victims, these groups frequently do not receive credit for their agency and the long-term results of their actions in shaping the character of certain areas. The indigenous groups knew the conditions in which they lived. They knew what they wanted, needed, and the importance of working with, instead of against, the white “fathers” who came to settle on their land. They willingly negotiated the sale of their land and carefully monitored its boundaries. Although not as highly developed as those of Europeans, native groups possessed concepts of political structures that they used in dealing with their occupiers. They demanded the British, French, and Spanish government officials play by their rules of trade and gift exchange. They exacted revenge when they felt they had not received the appropriate degree of respect. Although the cultural misunderstandings that existed between Indians and Europeans caused problems at times, the general agreement to adhere to Indian ideas of appropriate behavior controlled political and trade negotiations. In the case of the Natchez

District, the agreeable nature of the “Small Tribes” that occupied the area made conditions more harmonious, effectively avoiding large-scale conflict and destruction and eventually contributing to the overall economic prosperity of the area in the following years.

The 1763 Treaty of Paris and the subsequent Proclamation of October 7, 1763 created profound changes for British officials, colonists, and Indians in the Natchez District. Through a combination of salesmanship, negotiation, and sometimes outright coercion, British administrators opened up a new colonial settlement area and in less than twenty years grew it from a place almost uninhabited by Englishmen to a thriving settlement that began to boom in only a few years. By the closing decade of the eighteenth century another important population group – African slaves – entered the equation in increasing numbers and created significant changes in the economic, political, and cultural structure of the area. These four groups, government officials, free settlers, Indians, and slaves, worked together – sometimes willingly, sometimes under duress – to form a distinctive society and culture. With its abundant natural resources and a pre-eminent location on the most important waterway on the continent, the Natchez District only needed the human element to propel it into the position of economic, social, and political prominence it would achieve in the antebellum South.

Chapter Two

The Land and the Economy

“The land of the Mississippi and the healthfulness of the climate are so perfectly inviting,” wrote the anonymous *New York Gazette* correspondent in 1773, “that in a very few years I hope to see in part of West Florida the most opulent settlement of any in North America.”¹ Ten years later William Dunbar corresponded with a friend regarding the division of West Florida between Spain and the United States, “As Natchez is considerably above latitude thirty-one degrees, we believe here [near Baton Rouge] it must soon become a settlement of great consequence.”² In 1773 the Natchez District boasted few settlers, but infinite promise. By 1783 changes in agriculture, trade, and settlement patterns began to organize around the unique characteristics of the area and the influence of European presence. By the end of the eighteenth century this embryonic economic system, created from the land and the resourcefulness and ambition of inhabitants and their governments, was poised to become one of the pre-eminent jewels of the late eighteenth-century Republic.

Even before British officials and other visitors traveled to the Natchez District, they knew their efforts in the region would result in commercial success. Historically, the French had proven notoriously inept in planting lucrative settlements, and Spanish efforts in the Floridas had produced little profit. The British, however, took direct aim at economic gain, marshalling energy not only from settlers’ subsistence needs, but for economic prosperity as well. Their long

¹ *New York Gazette*, May 24, 1773. Quoted in Fabel, 169.

² “Letter from William Dunbar to a friend, June, 1783,” quoted in B.L.C. Wailes, *Report on the Agriculture and Geology of Mississippi, Embracing a Sketch of the Social and Natural History of the State* (Published by order of the Legislature: E. Barksdale, State Printer, 1854), 75-76.

experience in producing profit by focusing upon economic development instead of social or military domination created the confidence that this colony would succeed.³

British motivation for profit notwithstanding, the Natchez District possessed considerable natural resources which almost guaranteed financial success for those individuals with the wherewithal to exploit them. Physically, the land bordering the Mississippi River near Natchez consisted of loess soil, an extremely fertile, fine alluvial sedimentary deposit which extended eastward along the Homochitto, Big Black, and Yazoo Rivers.⁴ In addition to these tributaries, St. Catherine's, Buffalo, Sandy, and Second Creeks also flowed into the Mississippi. Rufus Putnam noted that good farmland started between two and fifteen miles from the Mississippi River and extended west for up to forty miles.⁵ The availability of rich soil combined with the presence of plentiful navigable waterways to create a landscape well suited for the pursuit of agriculture and the easy transportation of marketable goods.

Natural resources abounded. The fertile land produced oak, cypress, pine, sugar maple, pecan, walnut, persimmon, cherry, and crab apple trees. Various berry and grape vines grew unchecked. "Useful and ornamental" plants such as peppermint, wild indigo, and aster provided herbal remedies. Fur-bearing animals such as opossum, raccoon, and mink supplied warm clothing and trade goods; deer and rabbit provided both fur and food sources, and various fowl also supplied nutrition. The rivers, creeks, and streams provided crawfish, crabs, and fish of many kinds.⁶ On May 3, 1773 Rufus Putnam recorded that he caught three catfish, one of which

³ Claiborne, 90. Claiborne comments that the French "exhibited a surprising inaptitude for establishing colonies" in Louisiana. The aforementioned state of Fort Rosalie and sparse settlement even during the peak of French possession bear out Claiborne's assertion. See Fabel, 2-4, 42, for Spanish failure in the Floridas and British economic methods and motivations.

⁴ Wailes, 213.

⁵ Putnam, 182.

⁶ Wailes, 318-322, 327-329, and 332-340.

weighed about forty-five or fifty pounds and was “fine in taste.”⁷ The explorer also reported seeing bears, killing them occasionally, and receiving gifts of bear and deer meat from an Indian sachem.⁸ The rich natural resources of the Natchez District virtually guaranteed settlers plentiful food, clothing, and shelter.

In his 1770 publication, *The Present State of European Settlements on the Mississippi*, Captain Philip Pittman described Natchez and the adjacent area as “the finest and most fertile part of West Florida,” primarily due to its position on the river and its soil condition.⁹ While most early settlement patterns organized around Pensacola and Mobile, the sandy soil conditions and brackish water in those areas left much to be desired from an agricultural standpoint. Many settlers attracted to the Natchez District in the 1770s were substantial farmers and planters from Virginia, Maryland, and New England, and knew how to make good use of the rich land. Their expertise in tobacco farming helped them take advantage of the remnants of the tobacco culture started earlier by the French.¹⁰ The fertility of the soil and the wealth of other natural resources caused some concerned British officials to fear that the new inhabitants might become lazy, as they would not need to work as hard to make a profit as they had in the Atlantic colonies.¹¹

Other commentators attested to the ease with which settlers could achieve financial prosperity in the Natchez District. Bernard Romans arrived in America from England in 1757 and went to Florida as early as 1760. Hired as an assistant to the Surveyor General of the Southern District in 1769, Romans had previously served the British government as deputy surveyor for Georgia. His skills in botany, cartography, surveying, art, and writing, as well as

⁷ Putnam, 187. One can only imagine how much Putnam might have enjoyed a catfish of more reasonable size.

⁸ Putnam, 189, 194-195, 205.

⁹ Pittman, 37.

¹⁰ Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860, Vol. I*, (Washington: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1933), 126.

¹¹ Usner, 120. Usner quotes the *English Provincial Records III*, 96, and *VI*, 39-40.

his penchant for exploration, earned accolades. As a landowner in Georgia and in the Floridas, Romans pursued his passion for exploration in earnest; in 1775 he published *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida*. The book provided explicit instructions for moving to the area and gave estimates of how much settlers with varied amounts of capital could expect to profit from their first year of farming. His commentary also described the significant difference between the ease of settlement near the Mississippi River as opposed to planting in East Florida or other parts of West Florida. According to Romans, settlers moving to East Florida or any areas other than the Natchez District of West Florida should come prepared with one year's provisions in addition to what they needed for the trip. However, he stated that settlement on the Mississippi River required only the provisions required for the trip itself, due to the abundance of the land and the easy availability of foodstuffs in the area. Romans estimated that an appropriately outfitted man with a wife, four children, two house slaves, and a stake of \$2,500.00 could pay for his journey, establish a farm, and make \$520.00 profit in the first year; the same man with a \$400.00 investment could make \$185.00 profit the first year.¹²

An anonymous letter dated August 16, 1807 from a Natchez farmer to his brother in the North provides a first-hand account of the area's potential. The writer reported that he expected his twenty prime hands to work one hundred fifty acres of land. "That force," he wrote, "at the most reduced calculation will clear us \$6,000. I assure you that many planters in this country with an inferior force make from \$8,000 to \$10,000, so from this allowance you can see I have far within the pale of common calculation." Acknowledging that his brother may think his story might sound too good to be true, the writer asked him to come visit, "as I am confident that you

¹² Bernard Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida*, Rembert W. Patrick, editor (New York: Bernard Romans, 1775; facsimile reproduction Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1962), 190-202.

would never stay another year on that poor soil you now till.”¹³ This anonymous letter-writer spoke the truth. In 1799 unimproved bottom land along the Mississippi River south of Natchez sold for \$.50 per acre; improved land sold for as little as \$2.00 to as much as \$10.00 per acre. As early as 1819, Natchez District farmland enjoyed such a reputation for fertility that uncleared land sold for up to \$20.00 per acre and well-improved plantation property commanded as much as \$100.00 per acre. Natchez District plantations constituted some of the most highly coveted property of any plantation region of the period.¹⁴

Understanding the growth of the Natchez District from an economic perspective requires examination of the factors which, when exerted upon these unusually promising natural resources, created the impressive prosperity of the area during the antebellum period. The land provided the foundation. Settlement brought the entrepreneurs. Labor, trade, and production represented the trinity that helped create the exceptionally productive and innovative economic system in the Natchez District, making it a hub of commerce and culture in the antebellum South.

The effect of the positive publicity of the early 1770s appears evident in the rapid development of the Natchez District. In 1772 approximately seventy-eight families populated the District, all of whom lived in dispersed settlement areas, mostly along the tributaries that flowed into the Mississippi River. In 1776, Natchez town consisted of only ten log cabins and two frame houses, all situated under the bluff.¹⁵ By 1785 the population of the Natchez area included 1,121 whites and 438 slaves, for a total of 1,559; in three years the total had grown to

¹³ Anonymous, *Letter, 1807*. Miscellaneous file, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

¹⁴ Gray, *Volume II*, 642-643.

¹⁵ Wailes, 61-62.

2,679, for an increase of 71.8 percent.¹⁶ Fifteen years later, the population of Adams, Claiborne, Jefferson, and Wilkinson counties, contiguous counties located along the Mississippi River, and all part of the Natchez District, totaled 4,660, distributed almost equally between white and black inhabitants. In 1810 the population total for these four counties had grown to 22,173, with slaves outnumbering whites by approximately 10.3 percent. Population and racial demographics continued to change between the years 1800 and 1860. (Table 3)

Table 3

Total Population of Adams, Claiborne, Jefferson, and Wilkinson Counties, 1800-1860

Year	White		Slave		Free Black		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	% Increase
1800	2,403	51.6%	2,257	48.4%	Not available		4,660	---
1810	10,542	47.5%	11,631	52.5%	Not available		22,173	375.8%
1820	13,936	40.3%	20,436	59.1%	207	.6%	34,579	55.6%
1830	14,256	30.9%	31,668	68.6%	241	.5%	46,165	33.5%
1840	13,809	23.7%	44,034	75.5%	491	.8%	58,355	26.4%
1850	13,655	21.5%	49,598	77.9%	396	.6%	63,649	9.1%
1860	14,684	21.9%	52,116	77.6%	326	.5%	67,126	5.5%

Sources: 1800 and 1810: Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860, Volume I* (New York: Peter Smith, 1941), 897. 1820 through 1860, *University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center United States Historical Census Data Browser*. Online, 1998. University of Virginia. Available from: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/>. Accessed March 17, 2004.

These demographic changes did not occur in a vacuum. The growth of agriculture and the growth of population in the Natchez District enjoyed a symbiotic relationship that also drew support from technological developments, political events, and trade demands. The codependency of agricultural success and population growth, particularly the increase in the number of slave inhabitants, presents a chronological problem of which component to present first.

¹⁶ Gray, *Volume II*, 897. Gray repeats Wailes' 1772 estimate of seventy-eight families and gives the 1785 population as 1,550. Calculations of the percentage increase in population are based upon the total number of inhabitants Gray cites for 1785 and Usner's figures for 1788, which varies from Gray's by nine people. The breakdown of the 1785 population comes from Usner, 114.

The phenomenal increase in population of the four southernmost counties bordering the Mississippi River in the Natchez District reflects several dynamics. First, the two major waves of immigration examined in Chapter One contributed numerous English and American colonial settlers to the area. An examination of the late eighteenth-century population figures shown in Table 1, as well as commentaries such as that of Bernard Romans in 1775, indicate that a small number of slaves traveled to the District with their masters in the early settlement years. Demographic calculations through 1800 indicate a rapidly growing slave population, but one which remained less than or equal to the number of whites in the area under consideration. This growth reflects the additional labor force added in order to support the increase in tobacco culture resulting from Spanish incentives. However, by 1810 the percentage of white and black inhabitants began to shift. By that time, changes in agriculture promoted by the discontinuation of the tobacco subsidy and the subsequent transition to cotton culture created a demand for more and more slaves as the Natchez District strove to maximize the potential of the land.

Gray notes another population surge between the years 1830 and 1840.¹⁷ This growth did not represent an unusually large increase in the total population; it did, however, signal a continuing increase in slave population and the shrinking of the number of whites in the area. The decrease in whites was small – only four hundred forty-seven – and could represent westward migration to parts as near as the Louisiana parishes across the river or as far away as California; more study is needed to determine the cause of the dip in white population that began between 1830 and 1840. However, while four hundred forty-seven whites left the area between 1830 and 1840, 12,366 slaves entered the population. In the following ten-year period one hundred fifty-four whites left and 5,564 slaves joined the census rolls. No doubt part of the

¹⁷ Gray, *Volume II*, 900. Gray states substantial increases occurred in the “older counties near Natchez,” as well as near the Yazoo and Big Black rivers in the northern part of the District.

additional slave population represented natural increase, but most of the newly counted slaves must have come from outside the Natchez District, imported in order to satisfy the demand for laborers created by the cotton boom.

Plantation records from earlier in the nineteenth century confirm that slaves came from numerous other states or territories, particularly after 1810 when the slave population began to swell in earnest. Records of the prosperous Natchez planter John Bisland indicate that he purchased at least sixty-five slaves between March 10, 1801 and April 13, 1811. For those whose origins can be determined, most of the thirty-two purchased prior to 1809 came from Mississippi; only six were purchased from outside the territory. Most of the slaves purchased from 1809 to 1811 can be traced back to Tennessee or Kentucky, and three came from New Orleans. Since one of the country's largest slave markets was located in New Orleans, the possibility exists that the three slaves purchased from there may have also come from farther north or from the Caribbean. Twelve slaves whose ages appear were young boys between the ages of ten and fourteen, ideally suited to work in Bisland's mercantile store or to perform tasks on his plantation until they grew big enough to work as field hands; five are listed simply as "boy." Twelve young men between the ages of sixteen and twenty, including five designated only as "African Negro fellows," were probably purchased as field hands. Only two solitary females, ages eighteen and twenty-nine, appear on the list. This contingent also includes two nuclear families and six groups of women with small children under the age of ten. Bisland's tax receipt for the year 1811 shows he was taxed on ownership of seventy-six slaves. Bisland may have purchased the eleven missing slaves between April 21, 1808 and April 4, 1809, as bills of sale were not located for that period.¹⁸ John Bisland's record of slave acquisitions mirrors

¹⁸ John Bisland, *Family Papers*. Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

census records regarding the growth of the slave population beginning around the second decade of the nineteenth century, and the origins of those slaves.

During the early period, most slave sales occurred at the landing under the hill in Natchez; when the plantation system began to grow in earnest in the 1790s the venue for slave sales shifted to the Forks of the Road Market on the Natchez Trace in the northeast part of town. By the second decade of the 1800s demand for slaves grew so high that sales were held at Forks of the Road, the landing, the steps of the Mansion House Hotel, and other places, making Natchez one of the largest slave markets in the South.¹⁹ One of the largest interstate trading concerns, Franklin and Armfield of Virginia, operated slave pens in Natchez as well as New Orleans and Alexandria, Virginia, and maintained boats to ship slaves between markets.²⁰

The impetus to increase the slave population in the early period emerged from several factors. Settlers moving to the area could receive fifty acres headright for each slave they brought to the territory, so many brought extra slaves in order to obtain extra land.²¹ While Bernard Romans' previously mentioned accounting did not mention this fifty acre headright advantage, he suggested buying extra slaves in the North and selling them in Mississippi as a means of defraying expenses; this method of slave sale may explain John Bisland's purchase of mostly Mississippi slaves during the earlier period while the white population was still expanding rapidly. Romans estimated approximately 50% profit on each slave sold, which attests to the demand for labor in the area. He also discouraged the use of white indentured servants, since they could qualify to purchase land of their own and likely would not be content

¹⁹ D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 46, 196-197.

²⁰ Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 47.

²¹ Fabel, 23.

to work out the term of their indenture.²² Later, as white immigration began to slow, slaves were increasingly purchased from outside the territory.

As if anticipating the phenomenal growth and importance of the slave population in West Florida, in 1766 the Council enacted *An Act for the Regulation and Government of Slaves*, a document consisting of thirty-four articles governing the movement, discipline, and care of slaves. (See Appendix B) The act addressed penalties for various slave infractions, such as a punishment of twenty lashes for traveling more than two miles from a home town or plantation without a pass or “ticket.” The act also stated owners’ responsibilities to provide adequate food and clothing, as well as protective clauses such as the prohibition against the sale of liquor to slaves. In addition to slave behavior, the act required required free “Negroes, mulattos, and mustees,” as well as “free Indians in amity with the British government” and any slave manumitted after the act went into effect to carry certificates proving their free status.²³

The outbreak of the Revolutionary War further contributed to the growth of the West Florida slave population. West Indian planters, limited in the amount of land they could obtain in the islands, devoted almost all of their acreage to production of their export crops, thereby forcing them to forego farming of subsistence crops and requiring the purchase of provisions from the mainland colonies. With the interruption of some imports due to the war, many West Indian planters moved to West Florida in order to preserve their investments, which included slaves. The Saint Domingue revolution at the end of the eighteenth century also resulted in the movement of West Indian planters and their workforce to the mainland.

²² Romans, 192-194.

²³ *An Act for the Regulation and Government of Negroes and Slaves, September 24, 1766*. Records of the States of the United States (Early State Records), Film 554: West Florida. David Library of the American Revolution, Washington Crossing, Pennsylvania.

In the mid-1760s a slave purchased in West Florida cost approximately \$100.00; by 1776, the price of a slave near the Mississippi River had risen to approximately \$200.00. Given the prosperity of the Natchez District, during the early period even the less well-heeled of new settlers could afford a slave or two.²⁴ However, plantation records of Natchez District planter John Bisland indicate that the price of a male slave in his early teens averaged around \$500.00 by the first decade of the 1800s.²⁵ As the push for more agricultural production increased, the value of labor increased along with the value of land.

Note the number of free black inhabitants shown in Table 3; these people must also be considered when analyzing the growth of the Natchez District, and Natchez town in particular. Of all the free people of color living in Mississippi in 1830, almost half resided in the Natchez District.²⁶ In the period between 1820 and 1860, approximately thirty to sixty percent of the Natchez District's free people of color lived in Natchez town.²⁷ This cohort, not exclusively relegated to plantation labor, provided a class of workers that contributed to the economies of urban areas in many ways.

Of the 201 free people of color living in Natchez town in 1860, all but one of the women for whom an occupation was given made their living as either washerwomen or dressmakers. Among the men were seven draymen, six barbers, three carpenters, three laborers, three servants, one baker, and one gardener.²⁸ While all represented menial or service-oriented occupations, many of these jobs required a high degree of skill and talent. Even the term "servant" can be misleading; Nelson Fitzhugh, who listed his occupation as "servant" on the 1860 census, was

²⁴ Fabel, 33, 44-47.

²⁵ John Bisland *Family Papers*.

²⁶ Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 136. Calculations are based upon Berlin's figures for the free Negro population in Mississippi and the statistics shown in Table 3.

²⁷ Ronald L.F. Davis, *The Black Experience in Natchez, 1720-1880: A Special History Study* (Eastern National: 1999), 46, 36. Davis cites a number between sixty-nine and eighty-one "in the twenty years preceding 1840," with a population of 205 in 1840, 213 in 1850, and 208 in 1860.

²⁸ Davis, *The Black Experience in Natchez*, 47-48.

actually a grocery store clerk who parlayed his earnings into an estate including slaves and real estate valued at approximately \$12,000.00.²⁹

William Johnson was arguably the best known and most well documented free person of color to reside in the Natchez District. Manumitted as a boy by his white father, Johnson owned a home and barbershops in downtown Natchez and “under the hill,” a bath house, rental property, farmland, slaves, and frequently made loans to many white Natchez citizens.³⁰ Until his death in 1851 William Johnson occupied a place of privilege shared by a few other affluent free people of color, such as Robert Smith. Smith owned and operated a taxi business and livery stable in Natchez and built an impressive brick home overlooking the Mississippi River.³¹

Robert McCary, another successful Natchez barber, received his freedom, several parcels of land, a house, cash, and slaves at his white cabinetmaker father’s death.³² While not all free people of color achieved Johnson’s, Smith’s, and McCary’s level of affluence, the presence of this highly skilled class of entrepreneurs, intimately engaged in the commerce of the Natchez District and frequently in the lives of white citizens, ties their contributions to the growth of the area.

Earliest efforts at economic profit in British West Florida centered around the fur trade, with the central posts at Mobile and Pensacola enjoying a brisk business shipping furs to England as early as 1764. However, records for the Natchez District prove elusive, possibly because furs taken in the area were sold to the French and Spanish who paid higher prices than

²⁹ Davis, *The Black Experience in Natchez*, 54-55, 48.

³⁰ William T. Johnson and Family *Papers*, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

³¹ Robert Smith, *Will probated June, 1858*. Adams County Chancery Court, City of Natchez, Mississippi. Smith’s home still stands on the bluff in Natchez town.

³² James McCary, *Will filed October 24, 1806*. Adams County Chancery Court, City of Natchez, Mississippi. For Bob McCary’s occupation, see Davis, *The Black Experience in Natchez*, 56.

the English and shipped their skins from the port of New Orleans, outside British jurisdiction.³³ A skin trade developed between Natchez and Manchac in 1773, and these goods may have gone either to New Orleans or Mobile.³⁴ The West Florida fur trade represents an extensive and intricate relationship among Indians, trading companies, individual traders, and the governments of Britain, Spain, and France. As the initial endeavor of the British period, and one which represents initial contact between settlers and native groups, the fur trade deserves a brief examination.

In the Natchez District the local “Small Tribes,” as well as Choctaws, Creeks, and Chickasaws, exchanged deerskins for trade goods, with British trading companies scrambling to keep local Indians in merchandise and Indians escalating their hunting practices to finance their demands for coveted trade items.³⁵ The Indian-English fur trade became commercialized in the late 1700s and expanded throughout the entire English period.³⁶ In addition to the Indian fur trade, individuals sometimes bartered skins with local merchants. The fragmentary account records of Newman and Hanchelle, Natchez merchants, note a deposit to a peltry account for Serah Truly. Truly brought three deerskins “in the hair” to Newman and Hanchelle on February 3, 1776 and received an account credit of \$2.40, enough to purchase five quarts of rum or approximately seven yards of osnaburg fabric.³⁷

The larger fur trade suffered from a number of drawbacks, however. As previously described, tension between Indian groups and British traders balanced upon the twin components

³³ Fabel, 5.

³⁴ John Fitzpatrick, “Letter to Luke Collins, October 7, 1773” in *The Merchant of Manchac: The Letterbooks of John Fitzpatrick, 1768-1790*, Margaret Fisher Dalrymple, editor (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 160.

³⁵ Usner, 284-285.

³⁶ Usner, 278,268.

³⁷ Newman and Hanchelle, *Account Book*, entry dated February 3, 1776. Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Only four pages of this account book survive, but the entry indicates that the merchants maintained a running peltry account for Truly.

of adequate respect and adequate trade goods. Skins appeared on the “enumerated list” attached to the Sugar Act, circumscribing legal trade. British regulations regarding the licensing of fur traders further offended Indians, and the onset of the Revolutionary War made transport of skins from the loyal southern territories difficult. In 1780 the Spanish captured Mobile, British center of the West Florida fur trade, effectively severing from the network one of the few remaining legal trading posts.³⁸ The fur trade continued somewhat abated in the latter part of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries but agricultural changes soon commanded more attention from profit-minded settlers in the Natchez District.

By far the most promising opportunity for economic profit in the Natchez District focused on agricultural pursuits. Abundant fertile land and a long growing season enabled farmers and planters to sift through a succession of marketable crops until they settled on the one that would transform the economy and culture of the area. While the fur trade continued in a diminished form for many years, tobacco farming created the initial agricultural opportunity for economic success, and ultimately provided the springboard for the area’s entry into the worldwide cotton economy. As early as the 1720s the Company of the Indies promoted tobacco culture; in 1719 M. deMontplaisir came to the Natchez District with thirty laborers to plant tobacco.³⁹ Tobacco culture surged during the English period, and in the 1760s Natchez and Pointe Coupee produced the greatest part of the crop; by 1785, British West Florida’s farms yielded approximately 900,000 pounds of marketable tobacco.⁴⁰ The area became known for its widely diversified and self-sufficient farming community, and the tobacco produced in the

³⁸ Fabel, 20, 50, 59-60.

³⁹ Usner, 41 and Gray, *Volume I*, 69-70.

⁴⁰ Gray, *Volume I*, 71-72. Fabel agrees that the first “appreciable” amount of tobacco was grown in the Natchez District, 119.

Natchez District rivaled that of Virginia.⁴¹ According to William Dunbar in 1783, “The soil of Natchez is particularly favorable for tobacco, and there are overseers there who will almost engage to produce you between two and three hogsheads to the hand, besides provisions.”⁴² The Natchez District soil was fresh and rich, and tobacco seemed a promising crop that could assure financial prosperity.

With the Spanish takeover of 1783 and the initiation of the lucrative tobacco subsidy, tobacco culture grew at an even faster rate, and slave ownership increased accordingly. When the Spanish government withdrew the tobacco subsidy in 1790, however, farmers and planters searched for a substitute crop. Indigo seemed promising at first, with processed indigo sometimes selling for as much as a dollar a pound, but processing was complicated, messy, and the smell of an indigo processing facility precluded its existence anywhere near habitational areas. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall suggests that the toxins produced by indigo processing may have been responsible for higher death rates in young men of indigo producing areas.⁴³ According to Fabel, calculation of Natchez District indigo production proves problematic. He indicates, however, that the region grew indigo in “small but significant quantities” that probably shipped out of the port of New Orleans.⁴⁴ Indigo never achieved the status that tobacco previously acquired in the Natchez District.

Prior to the end of the eighteenth century, cotton was grown as an ornamental shrub or for home use only; West Florida produced only 5,551 pounds of cotton in 1769 and 20,457 pounds in 1770.⁴⁵ Romans commented in 1775 that cotton was not yet raised in sufficient

⁴¹ Gray, *Volume II*, 897 for nature of the District’s farming community. See Fabel, 118, for opinions of Natchez tobacco.

⁴² Wailes, 132.

⁴³ Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 301.

⁴⁴ See Romans, 134-139, for indigo cultivation and processing; see Fabel, 114-115, for production in West Florida.

⁴⁵ Fabel, 123.

amounts for export, but that the crop showed promise for the future.⁴⁶ The culture of cotton had always been circumscribed more by the shortage of available labor than from other factors; by the simple measure of discontinuing the tobacco subsidy, the Spanish government thrust the Natchez District headlong into the lucrative cotton market.

By 1796 the “Natchez country” produced over three thousand bales of cotton for export at two hundred fifty pounds each, for a total of 750,000 pounds.⁴⁷ By 1800 virtually all slave-worked tobacco plantations turned to growing cotton, and other events that occurred in the last decades of the eighteenth century conspired to push the Natchez District deeper into cotton production.⁴⁸ The 1791 Saint Domingue slave revolt effectively closed one of the world’s best cotton sources, directing attention to alternative markets.⁴⁹ The invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney in 1793 certainly influenced the productivity of the industry, but Natchez mechanics and inventors also modified and improved Whitney’s machine in ways that produced longer fibers, resulting in higher prices for Natchez cotton until similar changes occurred elsewhere.⁵⁰ John McBride of Washington, Mississippi, a town near Natchez, represents one enterprising inventor who expanded the market for his improved cotton gin to other areas of the South, as well. In 1808 John Rollins of Natchez approached Charles Louis Boucher De Grand Pre’, Governor for the Fort and Jurisdiction of Baton Rouge, on behalf of McBride for permission to market his invention in that area. McBride’s machine promised to transform cotton “in the seed”

⁴⁶ Romans, 139-140.

⁴⁷ Gray, *Volume II*, 687.

⁴⁸ Moore, 4-5.

⁴⁹ David Geggus, “The British Government and the Saint Domingue Slave Revolt, 1791-1793” in *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 96, No. 379 (April, 1981), 295-296. Saint Domingue, best know as a sugar island, also produced high quality cotton that commanded a twenty-five percent higher price per pound than Jamaican cotton.

⁵⁰ Gray, *Volume II*, 704.

into carded and spun cotton “by one continuous process... into an even thread.”⁵¹ By 1808, the Natchez District’s plantations relied almost exclusively on cotton production as their cash crop.⁵²

Other factors also contributed to the efficiency and profitability of the cotton marketing system. Ocean freight rates were based upon cargo space, not weight.⁵³ Therefore, smaller and heavier cotton bales could be shipped less expensively than bags or loosely packed bales. The introduction of the cotton press not only increased the speed of cotton packaging, but increased the weight of the bales as well. In 1790 an average cotton bale produced in the Southeast weighed approximately two hundred pounds. Improved packing methods steadily increased bale weights, so that by 1835 an average bale of cotton produced in the Gulf states weighed between four hundred and four hundred fifty pounds, and a well-equipped plantation could pack between forty and fifty bales per day, potentially 22,500 pounds per plantation per day. Inspection laws instituted in Mississippi in 1803 discouraged planters from incorporating rocks, seed, sand, and other contaminants in their bales.⁵⁴ These laws not only discouraged fraud, they also further enhanced the quality of Mississippi cotton. By the 1829-30 season, national cotton exports totaled 362,969 bales, 179,094 originating from Louisiana and Mississippi.⁵⁵ According to *DeBow’s Review*, Mississippi surpassed Louisiana in cotton production at this time.⁵⁶ If Mississippi produced only half, or 89,547 bales, of the 1829-30 Louisiana and Mississippi crop, the total weight of export cotton grown in the state that year would have been 26,864,100 pounds, based on an average bale weight at the time of approximately three hundred pounds.

⁵¹ Charles Louis Boucher De Grand Pre’, *Letter, 1808*. Endorsement of new cotton gin, signed by Governor Grand Pre’. Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

⁵² Gray, *Volume II*, 897.

⁵³ Gray, *Volume II*, 706.

⁵⁴ Gray, *Volume II*, 705-706.

⁵⁵ Gray, *Volume II*, 898.

⁵⁶ *DeBow’s Review*, No. 2, February, 1846, 309.

A review of account books and bills of sale for several Natchez District planters helps to illustrate the lucrative nature of cotton production in the nineteenth century, as well as the fluctuation of prices. Bills of sale found in the papers of John Bisland indicate that he received 22¢ per pound of seed cotton in 1802 and 14½¢ per pound in 1809. Planter John Minor's ledgers reveal that he sold four hundred forty-nine bales from his 1818 crop, valued at \$35,755.64, three hundred thirty-five bales, valued at \$20,824.38, from his 1819 crop, and six hundred seventy-six bales, valued at \$44,605.96, from his 1821 crop.⁵⁷ Alexander K. Farrar received as much as 16¢ per pound for cotton in the mid-1830s. Correspondence dated September 15, 1846 from Farrar's cotton broker, Buckner & Stanton, indicated that "prices have been irregular, ranging from 8 to 10 cents, principally at 9 cents."⁵⁸ A most impressive sales receipt for four hundred thirteen bales sold in April of 1849 shows a severe downturn in prices by that time. Farrar received only \$13,818.91 before expenses for the 187,375 pounds of cotton shown on the receipt, a gross price of only 7 3/8¢ per pound.⁵⁹

Only land availability and labor requirements seem to have limited the production potential of Natchez District plantations. By the early nineteenth century the per acre yield of valley land was approximately 1,500 pounds of seed cotton; upland farms produced approximately 1,000 pounds to the acre. Field hands could cultivate approximately twice as much land as they could harvest, so planting was limited to the numbers of acres of cotton that could be picked, not planted, in a season. Each plantation hand could pick approximately fifty to sixty pounds of seed cotton per day or from five to eight hundred pounds per season.⁶⁰ Harvests

⁵⁷ John Minor, *Family Papers, Account Book 1815-1823*. Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

⁵⁸ Buckner & Stanton *Annual Circular dated September 15, 1846* in Alexander K. Farrar *Papers, 1804-1865*. Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

⁵⁹ Farrar *Papers, 1804-1865*.

⁶⁰ Moore, 9.

like Alexander Farrar's 187,375 pounds in 1840 would have required a labor force of approximately two hundred seventy-five to three hundred hands who were also responsible for producing the subsistence crops – primarily corn – necessary for plantation livestock and human consumption.

As technological advances increased and land ownership began to stabilize in the 1830s and 1840s, a picture of the antebellum Cotton Kingdom began to emerge. Plantations ranging in size from 1,000 to 1,500 acres and employing approximately seventy-five to one hundred field hands functioned most profitably. Operations of this size could adequately manage the amount of personnel, livestock, and equipment required to utilize all at optimum capacity.⁶¹ Planters such as Alexander Farrar and John Minor, among many others, owned and operated more than one plantation in order to efficiently reap the largest economic benefits from their investments.

The influx of people and money into the Natchez District as a result of the tobacco boom and subsequently the rise of cotton to economic prominence affected the complexion of the area in many diverse ways. Prosperity contributed to the development of a unique landscape of town houses and urban institutions, plantations and country work regimens. As the population and its economic clout increased, so did the intricacy and sophistication of the culture it supported.

By the late eighteenth century, impressive homes began to appear in the District. Some, such as Concord, circa 1795, Sargossa, circa 1800, and the House on Ellicott Hill, circa 1798-1801, reflect the Caribbean influence of the West Indian planters who arrived at the end of the century. Contemporary reports compare early nineteenth-century Natchez to towns in the Caribbean; in 1810 Fortescue Cuming wrote, "I was much struck with the similarity of Natchez to many of the smaller West Indian towns, particularly St. John's Antigua, though not near so large as it. The houses all with balconies and piazzas." This style of architecture was well-

⁶¹ Moore, 17.

suited to the climate of the Deep South, so similar to that of the Islands. Federal style buildings followed in the first decade of the 1800s, and at the same time the planter's house style, distinctive for its wide porches, emerged."⁶²

In the 1830s the Greek Revival style appeared as the most popular, and ultimately the most recognizable, form of architecture in the Natchez area. During this time, several changes occurred in the agricultural sphere that influenced the living arrangements of Natchez District planters. Planters began to seek more land across the Mississippi River in Louisiana or in other nearby states, establishing far-flung plantation holdings. However, many wished to remain in or near Natchez, creating a class of urban-dwelling absentee planters who reflected their privileged status in the homes they chose to build.⁶³ These great houses, recognizable by their massive size and multi-columned facades, occupy a central place in the iconography of the Natchez District; these "suburban villas" and all the furnishings and accoutrements they contained were built with cotton money. The architectural pursuits of Natchez District elites, as much as their success in the cotton economy, attested to their bold self-confidence.

Travelers to early nineteenth-century Natchez would recognize Captain Philip Pittman's 1770 description of the landing and the ascent to Natchez town:

The road to it is very bad, on account of a steep high ground which is at a small distance from the landing place, very difficult to ascend, and almost impracticable for carriages; a small distance from this high land is a hill, on the summit of which stands the fort, and the road becomes much better, ascending with a gradual slope. The trouble of going up is recompensed by the sight of a most delightful country of great extent, the prospect of which is beautifully varied...⁶⁴

Indeed, John Latrobe recorded this similar description of his entry into Natchez from the landing, although he seems to have been somewhat distracted from the sights:

⁶² Randolph Delehanty and Van Jones Martin, *Classic Natchez* (Savannah: Martin-St. Martin Publishing Company, 1996), 20-24. The authors quote Fortescue Cumings' book, *Sketches of a Tour to the Western Country, 1810*.

⁶³ Delehanty and Martin, 26.

⁶⁴ Pittman, 37.

We then got into a carryall and were dragged up the steep ascent to the upper town, where we took up our quarters at the Mississippi Hotel, and furnished an admirable supper to the mosquitoes who but for our arrival must have gone supperless to bed.⁶⁵

Natchez town functioned at the center of the Natchez District, providing a dock where first pelts, then tobacco and indigo, and finally cotton could be shipped out and the luxury goods important to a burgeoning urban area could arrive. By the late eighteenth century, Natchez boasted four mercantile establishments, including Hanchelle & Newman, who sold rum, oil, salt, hats, knives, pewter basins, fabrics, agricultural hand tools, and miscellaneous other items.⁶⁶ In 1802 and 1803, planter and merchant John Bisland imported stocking, shawls, silk handkerchiefs, blankets, tea, sugar, soap, coffee, shoes, sewing notions, and hundreds of yards of linen, chintz, cotton, cashmere, and other fabrics for sale to local patrons.⁶⁷ By 1840 a college, hospital, volunteer fire department and firehouse, courthouse, lighthouse, theater, Presbyterian Church, steamship company, two daily newspapers, several hotels, three banks, and three railroad companies had been established in Natchez town.⁶⁸ “Buildings are going up in every part of the city,” a *Mississippi Free Trader* correspondent gushed in 1835, “carpenters and joiners, painters, etc. have more work than they can accomplish [and] are realizing fortunes.”⁶⁹ Cotton wealth had begun to filter down to the non-planting population who would create the infrastructure of Natchez District and Natchez town society.

The English soldiers who took possession of the Natchez District in 1763 found Fort Rosalie, near Natchez town, abandoned and overgrown. Few Indians and even fewer Europeans

⁶⁵ John H.B. Latrobe, November 13, 1834. Quoted in Delehanty and Martin, *Classic Natchez*, 28.

⁶⁶ Wailes, 62. Wailes incorrectly spells the name “Hanchelle” as “Hanchet.” See Newman and Hanchelle *Account Book* for the types of goods offered for sale.

⁶⁷ John Bisland *Family Papers*.

⁶⁸ Delehanty and Martin, 22-28. For newspapers, see University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center. For hotels, see James C. Campbell, *Letter to Isaac G. Peck, September 3, 1836* in Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

⁶⁹ *Mississippi Free Trader*, November 27, 1835. Quoted in Delehanty and Martin, 28.

made their homes in the area. Over the course of approximately forty years, immigration, trade, and changes in agricultural patterns forced the landscape to yield its bounty. Initially, colonial entrepreneurs relied upon natural resources such as animal furs, and to some degree timber and naval stores, as the focal point of their economic schemes. Agricultural systems developed first around governmental encouragement to grow tobacco, forming the basis of a plantation economy from its demand for rich land and slave labor. Although tobacco and indigo failed to survive as permanent crops, cotton culture quickly stepped in, perfectly suited to fill the void left when the bottom dropped out of the tobacco market.

The dynamic agricultural society that developed in the Natchez District demanded a constant infusion of land and slaves as the worldwide demand for cotton and the local demand for affluence escalated. By 1810 over half the population of the four primary counties of the Natchez District consisted of enslaved African-Americans; by 1840 the percentage of slaves in the population had grown to over seventy-five percent. The region soon became locked in a culture of cotton, land, slaves, and wealth. In the boom times of the 1830s and 1840s, the wealthy and those who aspired to wealth began to purchase land at greater distances from the District; those who could afford them – and there were many – built suburban villas in and near the town of Natchez, thus assuring them the prosperity of plantation owners while guaranteeing them urban-dwellers' convenience and access to markets and culture. As the Mississippi River flowed past the landing under the hill, boats took local products away and, at least as early as 1801, brought luxury goods in from all over the world.⁷⁰ Given the evidence of the imposing edifices erected at this time, a picture begins to emerge of a rapidly evolving, cosmopolitan

⁷⁰ Swearingen, 188-190. The manifest, summarized by Swearingen, lists numerous luxury goods such as brandy, claret, kid gloves, and almonds, all arriving at the port in Natchez from France.

culture that coalesced very early and exploded as the middle of the nineteenth century approached.

By 1850 the Natchez District, and Natchez town in particular, had become a fully-developed urban center. Goods, services, and entertainment of all kinds were available to most members of society, including free people of color and even some slaves. A bustling economic center had grown by the river bank, supported by the agricultural dynasties carved out of the wilderness. Born of nature's exceptional gifts and the sweat of many brows, this transformation resulted in a culture both unique and indicative of the antebellum South.

Chapter Three

Society and Religion

General Wilkinson's letter to Captain Guion gave an illuminating account of the town at the center of the Natchez District. "At Natchez, you will find yourself in an extensive, opulent, and polished community agitated by a variety of political interests and opinions," he wrote in 1797; in the short period since the British takeover in 1763 the District had grown into a thriving community.¹ Before the turn of the eighteenth century, Natchez and the surrounding area clearly had begun to assume a cosmopolitan personality created by the combination of the desire for prosperity, successful commerce, and British cultural influence. The will to create a prosperous, dynamic community worthy of the rapidly developing planter elite soon resulted in an area boasting schools, theatrical and musical performances, intellectual societies, and a wide array of retail services. This race into commercial prosperity also produced critics who feared that the pursuit of mammon and worldly pleasures would end in moral destruction; for a large part of the nineteenth century the forces of ideology constantly waged a struggle for primacy in Natchez District society.

Not everyone who lived in the District could claim to be a member of the planter elite, of course. Slaves outnumbered free people; some whites struggled to make a living. "This is one of the most dissipated countries in the world," James Campbell wrote from Natchez in 1836, but one in which "a young man of merit is certain to rise, for everyone will take him by the hand and assist him."² But while white and free black citizens could aspire to prosperity, and quite a few achieved it, many had to remain content without the trappings of financial success. Negotiating the meaning of life in the Natchez District required walking a fine line between expectations and

¹ "General Wilkinson's instructions to Captain Guion, May 20, 1797" is reproduced in Claiborne, 179-180.

² "James C. Campbell to Isaac G. Peck."

reality. In a community so focused on material gain, but still open to new settlers and wedded to the importance of a slave economy, comparisons and contrasts between social stations appeared constantly, and the questions those comparisons raised begged for answers.

In his influential essay, "Religion as a Cultural System," Clifford Geertz defined religion as:

A system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.³

Geertz also stated that a religion serves to help a culture reconcile its world-view, or the way the community perceives things should be, and its ethos, or the way things really are. When humans reach the limit of their ability to understand the chaotic nature of the world they inhabit, religion steps in to help make order from that chaos.⁴ The symbols that a culture adopts transmit information to participants, creating moods and motivations that affirm something about the nature of life within the community. The ritualistic use of meaningful symbols works to perpetuate and expand a given culture's understanding of what is important in their society.

Easily recognizable symbols of the Natchez District's religion of plantation affluence developed as soon as prosperity arrived. The previously noted tobacco and cotton booms provided the foundation for the society General Wilkinson described to Captain Guion. Cotton, slaves, wealth, and fine homes formed the center of Natchez District iconography and, while not everyone had access to these items, certainly all knew what they represented, and many aspired to acquire them. Within this larger group existed smaller cultural groups, sometimes with their own particular set of symbols that were either unnoticed, unacknowledged, or unaccepted by the

³ Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, M. Banton, editor (London: Tavistock, 1966), 4.

⁴ Geertz, 14-15.

larger society. In the case of evangelical Christians, the symbols of evangelical Protestantism supported a worldview in distinct opposition to that of the dominant culture of conspicuous consumption. In the case of slaves, these symbols and the moods and motivations they elicited helped them to reconcile the chaos of their own lives. Over time, each community that made up Natchez District society found its own method of reconciling ethos and worldview. Whether prosperous planter, middling farmer or mechanic, or slave, particular efforts to reconcile ethos and worldview coexisted under the umbrella of commonly understood social and evangelical religions, while still managing to develop unique understandings for smaller cultural groups.

Although some of the early inhabitants of the Natchez District adhered to strong Protestant religious practices, the period between 1763 and the early nineteenth century focused more on the pursuit of wealth than on God. A brief description of Christian religious influences in the Natchez District prior to and at the beginning of British settlement helps to explain the lack of a firmly-rooted system of denominational worship in the early period. As the population again surged with the American acquisition of the District and the added push of the cotton boom in the 1790s, Christian denominational religion began to appear in earnest and participation grew slowly over the next few decades. However, Christianity, specifically evangelical Protestantism, began to exert substantial influence only after conflicts between pious church men and women and those who followed the religion of wealth arrived on more common philosophical ground. Until that change occurred in the 1830s, the dominant religion of the Natchez District remained the religion of land, cotton, and slaves.

As late as 1726 a Catholic missionary post and parsonage existed in Natchez, and in 1728 the Capuchins operated a post there. However, the Catholic presence in the Natchez District faded away with the demise of the French settlement in 1729-30, and in 1733 Bienville noted

that the poor state of religious life in the District resulted from a lack of priests, inadequate funding, and constant bickering between Jesuits and Capuchins.⁵ Populated by only fifty soldiers at the fort at Natchez, a few widely dispersed settlers in the countryside, and a few nomadic Indian groups, in 1763 the Natchez District offered few prospects for conversion or organized worship.

British efforts to populate West Florida included religious components, but in the Natchez District no promotion of religious ideals. The 1763 Treaty of Paris extended religious toleration to Catholics, although later negotiations resulted in the exclusion of Catholic priests from the area. Governor Peter Chester offered free transportation to the area for willing Protestant settlers, and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts furnished Anglican priests to Mobile and Pensacola, with funds for their support provided by the British government.⁶ These measures reflect concerns for increasing and maintaining the populations surrounding the centers of commerce and government in Mobile and Pensacola, however, rather than the virtually uninhabited Natchez District. Any efforts at the establishment of a religious presence in the region remained solely in the hands of individual settlers.

With Spanish occupation came a shift back to Catholicism as the official state church, although Governor Gayoso, eager to maintain population levels, economic benefit, and social harmony in his purview, which included the Natchez District, instituted a policy of religious toleration toward Protestants, as long as worship remained a private affair. He did, however, attempt to convert uncommitted members of the community to Catholicism by installing a succession of Irish priests, hoping that English-speaking pastors might succeed in attracting more attention from the primarily British population of the area. The first Irish Catholic priest in

⁵ Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 6, 14, 19.

⁶ Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 20.

Natchez, father William Savage, established the first Catholic church there in 1791. His successor, Father Francis Lennan, came approximately two years later and proved somewhat hostile to Protestants. Father Lennan's rather difficult personality created additional conflict in a community where most of the leaders were English or Scottish Protestants, wealthy, and well-educated. Most local Catholics were Irish and the dominant class considered them less refined.⁷ Roman Catholicism in the Natchez District continued to exist, but at a level circumscribed by class conflict.

As previously stated, in 1772 Congregational minister Samuel Swayze led one of the earliest settlement groups to arrive in the Natchez District. Most of Swayze's Jersey Settlement community consisted of congregants from his Black River, New Jersey church, and he shepherded his flock until his death in 1784. Although Spanish officials generally turned a blind eye and deaf ear to private Protestant worship, some officials preferred to follow the letter of the law; when Reverend Swayze conducted Congregational services in a local clearing, he preferred to keep his Bible hidden in a hollow tree when not in use.⁸

The Swayze group established the first Protestant congregation in the territory. In the case of the Jersey Settlement, the congregation went without an ordained minister from Reverend Swayze's death in 1784 until the first years of the nineteenth century; in 1800 a committee which included original Jersey Settlers Caleb and Richard King sent letters to influential District citizens in an attempt to establish a "settled ministry of the Gospel throughout the territory."⁹

With the American takeover of the District in 1797 came a new wave of immigrants, many small

⁷ Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 20-22.

⁸ This story is repeated in almost every account of early Mississippi religion. For examples see Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 20, and *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 7; Claiborne, 107; John G. Jones *A Concise History of the Introduction of Protestantism into Mississippi and the Southwest* (St. Louis: Pinckard, 1866), 15; and Mills, 156.

⁹ Letter to John Bisland from Caleb King, Richard King, David Ferguson, David Latimore, John Henderson, and James Barr dated December 29, 1800. John Bisland *Family Papers*.

farmers unable to compete with the established planter elite for social or economic dominance. These less influential members of society supported an evangelical Protestant form of worship that confronted the religion of plantations, cotton, and slaves head-on.

Although other denominations followed the Swayze congregation in the following years, few established and built churches until after the turn of the century. In 1780 Richard Curtis became the first Baptist minister to enter the territory. Curtis enjoyed a short stay, as his refusal to control his zeal attracted the attention of Spanish authorities, who threatened to incarcerate him in Mexico; he opted for a return to his native North Carolina instead. In 1800 William Berry began to organize congregations in the Natchez District, resulting in the creation of a Baptist Association in 1806. The earliest Episcopal priest in the District, Reverend Adam Cloud, suffered much the same fate as Richard Curtis, also choosing to leave the territory rather than face a charge of heresy. However, he returned in 1816 and by 1820 organized a church in Church Hill. Although James Hall received an appointment to minister in the Natchez District in 1800, the first Presbyterian church established in Mississippi was organized by Reverend Joseph Bullon, who had come to north Mississippi in 1799 to minister to the Indians and subsequently settled near Natchez, pastoring the substantial Scotch Irish contingent in the area. Methodists entered the Natchez District after its transfer from Spain to the United States and, as such, faced none of the threats that bothered Curtis and Cloud. Tobias Gibson accepted charge of the Natchez circuit in 1799 and therefore became the first Methodist minister to work in the area; he established the first Methodist church in the territory in Washington, about six miles from Natchez. In 1803 Lorenzo Dow bartered his watch for a plot of land in Kingston, the first ground deeded for a Protestant church in Mississippi.¹⁰

¹⁰ Henry G. Hawkins, *Beginnings of Churches and Christian Work in Mississippi*. J.B. Cain Archives of Mississippi Methodism. Available from: <http://library.millsaps.edu/library/Archives/NewMeth/BEGINNINGSTXT.HTM>.

The dearth of organized worship in the early English period did not mean that no Christian religious sentiment existed among planters. A sprinkling of religious references appears in the records, notably those of John Bisland.¹¹ However, the main preoccupation of the Natchez District remained the acquisition of material wealth and the pursuit of vice, not the saving of souls. In 1803, evangelical Methodist Lorenzo Dow, noting the scarcity of religious sentiment in both the prosperous and refined society “above the hill” and the rough-and-tumble district “under the hill” in Natchez, lamented that “there were not three Christians in the town, either white or black.”¹² Another Methodist, Laurner Blackman, wrote that the “old settlers” were “so rich that they are above religion and religion is above them.”¹³ In his May 14, 1804 letter to Thomas Jefferson, Natchez scientist and planter William Dunbar complained of his difficulty in finding suitable scientists for an expedition of the Red and Arkansas rivers. All the local prospects suitable to the task were “already distracted with... making fortunes at all hazards.” Even the lawyers and doctors who “have devoted themselves to the study of science,” he observed, had done so “just so far as it may be subservient to this all devouring passion of gain.”¹⁴ As late as 1814 John H. Schermerhorn and Samuel J Mills stated in their book about religion and morals in the West, “The state of society in this territory is truly deplorable. Most of the emigrants to this country came here for the purpose of amassing wealth, and that object seems to have absorbed their souls.”¹⁵

Accessed March 13, 2004. See also Jones, 100, and Mills, 156, 159. Mills also shows Tobias Gibson as pastor of the Kingston Methodist Church from 1800-1804.

¹¹ Bisland’s papers contain a receipt for the purchase of a Bible, a note concerning preaching at Salem Church, a letter regarding the hiring of a preacher, and an invitation to help establish a church in the region. John Bisland *Family Papers*.

¹² Lorenzo Dow quoted in Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 31.

¹³ Laurner Blackman quoted in Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 39.

¹⁴ William Dunbar to Thomas Jefferson, May 14, 1804 in Dunbar, 129.

¹⁵ John H. Schermerhorn and Samuel J. Mills *A Correct View of that Part of the United States Which Lies West of the Allegany Mountains, with Regard to Religion and Morals* (Hartford: Peter B. Gleason, 1814). Quoted in Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 28.

The condition of Natchez District society, and that of Natchez town in particular, at the beginning of the nineteenth century provided ample proof of these commentators' allegations that the District worshiped mammon. One scholar observed that the quality of life with regard to material comfort began to increase around 1795 when cotton exports began to flow out of Natchez.¹⁶ The construction of a number of large homes and plantations prior to that time, as well as the appearance of town homes in Natchez, indicates that prosperity probably arrived with the tobacco boom of the 1780s. In 1784 Juan St. Germain built Richmond, in 1788 Pierre Surget established Cherry Grove, and in 1790 William Dunbar, by order of Spanish Governor Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, laid out the town of Natchez. That same year the governor began granting and selling Natchez town lots.¹⁷ Men with the financial wherewithal to erect such impressive structures probably satisfied their taste for ambience in other ways, as well; the increased outflow of cotton surely supported the influx of luxury goods. The papers of Natchez merchant John Bisland show that he imported thousands of yards of European fabrics, linens, and laces, along with items such as silk handkerchiefs, stockings, sugar, and soap.¹⁸ A bill of lading dated September 19, 1801 for goods purchased in Bordeaux, France and shipped directly to Walter Burling in Natchez included wine (720 casks of claret, 2,400 bottles of Medoc, and 15 pipes of brandy), large quantities of fabric, 70 dozen men's silk stockings, 312 dozen kid gloves, 96 reams of "faint blue" paper, various kinds of wallpaper, and 9,544 pieces of French-milled soap.¹⁹ The quantity of luxury goods indicates that even in a four-county district with a total

¹⁶ Sydnor, 9.

¹⁷ Delehanty and Martin, 18. The authors also note the construction of the first brick home in Natchez sometime after 1792 and before 1798, 64.

¹⁸ John Bisland *Family Papers*. This particular account is dated 1802, but the records include many others, as well.

¹⁹ Swearingen, 188-190. Swearingen's article includes only a partial list of the goods shipped from France via Baltimore to Natchez.

population of less than five thousand, half of those slaves and most concentrated near Natchez town, a considerable market existed for the finer things of life.

In addition to merchants' accounts, newspapers provide an indication of the level of sophistication achieved in the Natchez District in the first years of the nineteenth century. As early as 1801 *Green's Impartial Observer* carried advertisements for not only luxury goods, but saddlery, boarding schools, and dancing schools (with a special night session for gentlemen).²⁰ A society willing to support a dance master probably considered the ability to dance well a requisite component of refined behavior. Within the first decade of the 1800s, Natchez newspapers (themselves an indicator of local progress) advertised rental property, land for sale, numerous schools for young men and ladies, groceries, physicians' offices, medical supply and drug stores, hotels, taverns, and "houses of entertainment."²¹

The Natchez District's well-to-do citizens also participated in other endeavors that attest to the creation of General Wilkinson's "extensive, opulent, and polished community." In 1808 John Bisland contributed \$200.00 for the construction of public buildings in Natchez.²² A boatmen's and pauper's hospital was established in 1805 and operated for seventeen years without outside assistance.²³ Founded in 1803, the Mississippi Society for the Acquirement and Dissemination of Useful Knowledge names some of the brightest and best-educated local leaders as members, and the Natchez Debating Club met in the City Hall during the territorial period.²⁴ Specific examples of individual intellectual achievement include not only William Dunbar, but

²⁰ *Green's Impartial Observer*, January 24, 1801 and February 24, 1801. Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

²¹ See the *Mississippi Herald*, September 28, 1802; the *Mississippi Herald and Natchez Repository*, July 18, 1803; the *Mississippi Herald and Natchez Gazette*, July 20, 1804 and July 8, 1807; the *Natchez Gazette*, April 28, 1808; and the *Weekly Chronicle*, November 15, 1810. Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

²² John Bisland *Family Papers*.

²³ Leland D. Baldwin, *The Keelboat Age on Western Waters* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1941), 90.

²⁴ James, 231-232.

Dr. Rush Nutt, who developed the “Petit Gulf” strain of cotton, scholar B.L.C. Wailes, and Samuel S. Boyd, whose library contained 8,000 books published in twelve languages.²⁵ In addition to privately owned boarding and day schools, the establishment of Jefferson College in 1803 provided the first institute of higher learning, and in 1818 the Elizabeth Female Academy became the first secondary school in the United States to educate women.²⁶

As participation in evangelical Protestant denominations slowly increased in the first decades of the nineteenth century, church members became more vocal regarding the excesses of the local elite, which became more evident with every passing year. The diary of an anonymous governess living near Natchez in the mid-1830s conveys a sense of the sumptuous surroundings and available pastimes of a young woman on the periphery of southern high society. Describing a stay at The Forest plantation she wrote, “Everything is in the most elegant style: table, furniture, attendants, all complete. I can fancy myself in England visiting at some of those beautiful seats we read of. Walked in Mrs. H’s lovely garden. Flower beds, shady arbors, retired seats, dark avenues.” The governess, apparently having arrived from Pittsburgh some time in 1834, displayed no small measure of refinement on her own account; she played piano, guitar, sang, and raised birds in her free time away from her employer’s children. However, her mention of ball invitations, the purchase of lottery tickets, trips to the theatre, and shopping excursions into Natchez attest to the variety of worldly diversions available to District inhabitants.²⁷ From the pursuit of wealth itself to displays in construction, apparel and furnishings, and even to pastimes such as dancing, visiting, and theatre attendance, evangelicals frowned upon anything that threatened to steal time, energy, and attention from the godly

²⁵ Wayne, 12.

²⁶ Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 34, 67-69.

²⁷ Anonymous *Diary, 1835-1837*. Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

responsibilities of evangelical Protestantism. Indeed, the love of wealth became the culprit for all worldly behavior, as the acquisition of wealth and the things it could buy encouraged the pursuit of pleasure.

Evangelicals also believed that wealth and its results created divisions based upon social stature, which followed society's rules, instead of piety, which resulted from adherence to God's laws.²⁸ The three major denominations – Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists – all expressed fears relating to wealth even in their own churches, which manifested in several ways. Pious Methodists feared that the pew system might undermine their mission because payment for pews might escalate into demands for more refinement and show. Baptists and Presbyterians expressed little concern with the pew system, but thought that physical and material displays of affluence such as church organs, choirs, and fashionable congregations would promote worldliness among congregants. Presbyterians also found church boards morally troublesome because of their obsession with money.²⁹ However, given the ostensibly egalitarian nature of evangelical Protestantism, this last example may say as much about fears that boards might create a hierarchical church structure as it does about fears of worldliness.

In 1818 a religious periodical published its definition of the word “evangelical”:

This term designates a particular class of sentiments, and system of doctrines derived from the holy scriptures... Of this system, the principal articles are: 1. The total depravity of man. 2. The necessity of regeneration by the Holy spirit. 3. Justification by faith alone. 4. The necessity of holiness as a qualification for happiness.³⁰

²⁸ Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 97, 101-102.

²⁹ Loveland, 95-97. For a description of how churches in other parts of the country viewed the show of wealth and policies such as the pew system, see Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 350-352.

³⁰ *Virginia Evangelical and Literary Magazine*, January, 1818, 2. Quoted in Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*, 1.

Clearly, the goals and beliefs of evangelicals contrasted strongly with the priorities of most affluent Natchez District inhabitants. In many ways, the evangelical movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries represented a class challenge to dominant gentry culture in the South.³¹ The egalitarian nature of evangelicalism centered on the conversion experience and a communal relationship with likeminded worshipers that eliminated the need for a highly organized and hierarchical church structure. Evangelical ministers, particularly Baptists and Methodists, subsisted on meager church allowances, dressed poorly in outdated clothing, and often had little formal schooling. This physical and intellectual contrast only magnified the differences between evangelicals and the dominant culture of ambition, display, and worldliness, while challenging the accepted social order. In their constant assaults on the pursuit of money and pleasure, by their inclusion and encouragement of slaves in worship, and by their adherence to an alternative vision of what constituted appropriate priorities, evangelicals offered a religion in stark contrast to the Natchez District's religion of affluence.

Although a minister named Mr. Smith received \$1,000.00 salary for preaching at Natchez in 1817, John Bisland discouraged Scot William Steele when the latter inquired about a teaching and preaching position for a friend's son.³² Describing conditions in the Natchez District, Bisland wrote, "Men of first rate talents and intelligence fail of success, while inferior prosper. In this country, every person has imbibed so strong a principle of independence that the common

³¹ Examples of recent scholarship on this topic include Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, and Randy Sparks, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks*. In *The Transformation of Virginia*, Rhys Isaac devotes a chapter to the relationship between the church and the home, and notes some of the same modifications of both gentry and evangelical behavior as Heyrman and Sparks. For evangelical conversion experiences, see Rodger M. Payne, *The Self and the Sacred: Conversion and Autobiography in Early American Protestantism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998).

³² On the subject of ministerial salaries, see Heyrman, *Southern Cross*. Jones' *Concise History* contains a description of Methodist minister Thomas Griffin's struggle with the religious significance of fashion. On the way to the tailor to have a new suit made, Jones says, "the devil gave him up on the subject of dress" when he opted for the old-fashioned round-breasted cut, which "would indicate to all beholders his Church relations." Jones, 175.

ploughman will show indifference to any man who may seem to claim superior respect.”³³ This statement illustrates not only the difficulty a man of the cloth might have in the District; it reveals the element of escalated class conflict prevalent in the years following the Revolutionary War. “I remember I have not long since been looked upon as a poor incredulous spirit not capable of comprehending what an income amounting to millions was,” the anonymous Natchez governess wrote, “and my friends were nearly angry at my apparently unconvinced understanding.”³⁴ A wide rift existed between the dominant culture of wealthy, sometimes highly educated, and powerful planter elite and the evangelicals who tried to change the common understandings of priorities and class structure of the Natchez District in the early period.

In the 1830s evangelicals made some headway in their efforts to mold a more traditionally pious populace in the District, enough that one religious publication hoped that “Mississippi will not much longer deposit her religion in cotton bales.”³⁵ However, although evangelicals experienced success in spreading their message to a broader range of social classes, the dominant planter culture began to affect evangelicals, as well. While “a public profession of Christianity” may well have represented “an avowal of our separation from the world,” as one religious commentator wrote, in order to gain favor and make real progress in the Natchez District, ministers found themselves conforming more frequently to exactly the same cultural molds they were trying to destroy.³⁶

³³ Bisland notes that Mr. Smith brought Mr. Acree with him. Acree kept a school in Natchez and taught sixty scholars at a tuition rate of \$13.00 per quarter. For local sentiments regarding the feeling of egalitarianism, see John Bisland’s August 30, 1817 letter to William Steele. John Bisland *Family Papers*.

³⁴ Anonymous *Diary, 1835-1837*.

³⁵ *Tennessee Baptist*, May, 1835. Quoted in Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 106.

³⁶ *Religious Herald*, May 5, 1837. Quoted in Loveland, 93.

Perhaps one of the most compelling reasons ministers began to change their behavior in the 1830s related to the constant increase in cotton prices.³⁷ As ministers – and many other hirelings – frequently received their compensation in the form of cotton gin receipts, evangelical ministers were well-advised to support the plantation system, not criticize it. Disputes between citizens and ministers over clerical salaries were not a new phenomenon; Mississippi ministers realized, as did their fellow clerics in other areas of the South, that in order to attract and keep parishioners, one must not offend them. In the Natchez District some evangelical ministers made excellent use of this revelation; some even married into wealthy families and became affluent slaveowners. Ministers’ practice of courting planters’ daughters became so prevalent that others noticed and commented upon it.³⁸ Congregations apparently began to shed their disgust with worldliness and overt displays of wealth; the Presbyterian Church in Natchez cost \$16,000 to build in 1828, and the Methodist minister lived in a parsonage donated by the owner of Rosalie plantation.³⁹ Vague wording on the part of church policymakers left admonitions to resist sinful amusements much to the interpretation of the individual Christian.⁴⁰

The issue of slavery presented the other major area of controversy between evangelicals and the dominant Natchez District culture. Early evangelicals, particularly Methodists, abhorred slavery, but by the time evangelical Methodists arrived in the District their stance on that institution had softened considerably.⁴¹ English cleric Thomas Coke tried to promote evangelical antislavery ideas in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Sent by John Wesley

³⁷ Jones, 112-114. Jones’ excerpt from the Steward’s book of the Mississippi Conference dated August 12, 1809 shows that the stewards received gin receipts from their parishioners and endorsed them over to ministers, who used the receipts as paper currency. Jones also notes a custom that contributed to the diminished financial capacity of ministers, “that of charging the preachers for the value of all the presents they received in the way of handkerchiefs, hosiery, and other wearing apparel or traveling equipage.”

³⁸ Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 63.

³⁹ Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 113.

⁴⁰ Loveland, 99.

⁴¹ Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 75.

to organize Methodists in America, Coke caused such an uproar with his views that he received threats of bodily harm while making a tour of Virginia. However, the 1784 Methodist Conference, dominated by Europeans and Northerners, succeeded in instituting a rule requiring Methodists to free their slaves or face expulsion from the Church. Only six months later the Methodist Conference suspended the rule upon tremendous pressure from congregants, including many who were not planters.⁴² Similar efforts on the part of the Baptist General Committee resulted in failure in their 1785 and 1790 meetings.⁴³ According to Sylvia Frey, “evangelical Protestantism did not become the dominant religion until after the churches abandoned their support for antislavery.”⁴⁴ With their retreat from an antislavery platform, southern evangelicals began to align more closely with the more affluent sectors in society, although slavery continued to occupy a central position in church operations and the political influences of religious thought.

A turning point in evangelical focus began to occur around 1830. The cotton boom, increased immigration to the area, new agreement between the planter elite and evangelicals over the issue of slavery, and the effects of the Great Revival all conspired to guarantee the Natchez District a place in the rapidly developing Bible Belt. One historian says that accommodation over slavery made the Great Revival “possible and made it possible too for slaveholders, including the privileged classes of society, to embrace at last the evangelical churches.”⁴⁵

Therefore, the issue confronting Natchez District society became how to fit the Christianity of bondsmen and bondswomen into the framework of a slave society, rather than the abolition of slavery itself. Changes over time in the structure and scope of how slaves were allowed to worship reflected the philosophies and pressures at work on their owners, and

⁴² Frey, Sylvia R., *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 245-246.

⁴³ Frey, 247-249.

⁴⁴ Frey, 243.

⁴⁵ Frey, 250.

slaveowners began to take even more seriously the church's role as an element of social control. Poindexter's Code, instituted in Mississippi in 1822, governed the religious rights of slaves. When first enacted the law guaranteed slaves' right to Christian worship, but required that a white minister conduct the services. Four years later, upon pressure by evangelicals, legislators amended the law to allow black preachers, but the code still contained a stipulation that at least two white members attend services, effectively maintaining a degree of white oversight in black religious activities.⁴⁶ Churches attempted to protect their enslaved members from mistreatment by their owners by disciplining them for their transgressions, but according to Donald Mathews, "the standards applied in such disciplinary action were always those of the masters."⁴⁷

After 1831 fears promoted by Nat Turner's revolt forced evangelicals to accept a more narrow circumscribing of black religious freedom and an even closer alignment with the planter elite. Regardless of the egalitarian foundation of evangelical Protestantism, evangelicals "had no intention of carrying the doctrine of equality of all believers so far as to threaten the domination of white men throughout southern society."⁴⁸

Black involvement in religious worship began early in the Natchez District. The first black preacher on record in Mississippi began his ministry in 1798. Joseph Willis, a free man of color and a licensed Baptist minister, preached in the Natchez area. In 1799, a black couple joined six others to establish a Methodist church.⁴⁹ Integrated church services and membership rolls were not unusual. Records of the Presbyterian Church in Natchez show the admission of communion to "Isaac – a colored man" in 1824, and in that same year records for the church

⁴⁶ Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 90-91.

⁴⁷ Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 247. Sylvia Frey supports Mathews' statement. "The disciplinary power of the church," she writes, "was often used to reinforce plantation discipline," 275. For a lengthier description of this issue, see pages 274-276.

⁴⁸ Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 55.

⁴⁹ Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 79,86.

show his baptism and that of his three children. The record book reveals many baptisms and admissions to communion for black congregants, and the number may be higher than the record shows. While the notations “colored,” “col’d,” or “col’d servant of,” appear next to many names, some references are obviously omitted. One glaring example is the case of Robert McCary, Jr. Although a free man of color, the entry for McCary’s 1857 communion at the Presbyterian Church in Natchez makes no reference to his racial status. Catherine Fitzhugh is shown as “free colored” in her 1855 record of communion, but the entry for her marriage to Robert McCary, Jr. on January 24, 1856 does not refer to the racial status of either.⁵⁰ However, the communion and baptism of “colored” Natchezians, both slave and free, appear frequently in the record, and more probably attended worship services without actually joining the church. Independent black churches began to appear in the first decades of the nineteenth century, and this phenomenon continued until Denmark Vesey’s conspiracy and Nat Turner’s rebellion cast a shadow upon all-black worship.⁵¹

At the same time, and despite the danger of the practice, slaves carved out their own times and places for worship outside what their owners allowed. In the Natchez District, as elsewhere in the South, slaveowners tried to control the time, place, and message of slave worship, and slaves created their own “invisible institution,” practicing their own modified version of Christianity, often in secret.⁵² One historian has observed, “Whatever the planter might have believed, his ability to mold the values and define the aspirations of most of his

⁵⁰ *Presbyterian Records, Church Membership 1816-1904, Vol. 8* includes communion and marriage records; *Vol. 5, Book 1* contains baptismal records from 1816 to 1883. Lemuel P. Conner *Papers*, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Proof of Robert McCary, Sr.’s manumission may be found in the will of James McCary.

⁵¹ Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 78-80.

⁵² Albert Raboteau’s *Slave Religion* is one of the most comprehensive works on the subject of the “invisible institution.” See also Frey, Chapters 8 and 9.

slaves was quite limited.”⁵³ The evangelical beliefs of slaves may have originated in the white evangelical camp meetings and worship services, but slaves soon modified them in order to accommodate their own particular needs.

While evangelical Protestants expressed genuine concern for the eternal souls of their enslaved brethren, sometimes white preachers’ messages failed to provide a completely satisfying worship experience for them. The use of the church as an element of social control often meant that preachers’ sermons to black congregations consisted primarily of “slaves obey your masters” rhetoric. By interpreting Old and New Testament stories, hymns, and worship styles in ways that applied specifically to their own life experiences, slaves created an alternative form of Christianity that helped, as Geertz would say, reconcile their ethos and worldview. Therefore, the term “invisible institution” refers not only to the secretive practice of slave religion, but also to the veiled meanings of its symbols.

One profound example of slaves’ reinterpretation concerns their understanding of the stories of the Israelites. While white Christians equated their experience of freedom and prosperity in America with the Israelites’ escape to the land of milk and honey, slaves saw the promise that an escape from slavery would resemble the Israelites’ escape from Pharaoh. As Raboteau notes, “white Christians saw themselves as a New Israel; slaves identified themselves with the old.”⁵⁴

Slaves also modified other similar worship practices in order to fit their own understanding and use. Hymn-singing in organized services translated into spirituals in the quarters and fields; slaves often used spirituals such as “Steal Away to Jesus” to transmit information about clandestine prayer meetings or escape. Spirituals also included the indigenous

⁵³ Wayne, 20.

⁵⁴ Raboteau, 251.

African patterns of call and response, hand-clapping, and other rhythmic actions that resonated with slaves in a familiar way.⁵⁵ Slave preachers focused on Old Testament stories that told of justice for the oppressed and punishment for the oppressors. By appropriating and modifying white forms of evangelical Protestant worship to suit their own needs and purposes, slaves created a unique and meaningful form of evangelical Protestantism entirely separate from that of the dominant white culture.

These three separate primary ideologies each support Geertz's definition of a religion, and all three played significant parts in the development of the District and the unique character of southern society. The interaction of these religions, the culturally "mainstream" religion of plantation affluence and the other two based primarily upon evangelical Protestantism and in opposition to the cultural norm of the area, also had grave implications for the South's role in the new American nation. By examining the symbols and rituals of each, a picture emerges of how each functioned to mold antebellum southern ideology.

The exuberant and often ostentatious lifestyle of the planter class and the land and slaves that provided it supplied the symbols that affirmed the dominant worldview of accomplishment, prosperity, and self-determination. Sometimes even the most enlightened men failed to see their true ethos, however. On Tuesday, May 12, 1777 William Dunbar entered the following in his diary:

On Sunday, eight days, two Negroes ran away but were caught & brought back Wednesday after. Condemned then to receive 5000 lashes each at 5 different times and to carry a chain & log fixed to the ankle – poor ignorant devils; for what do they run away? They are well clothed, work easy, and have all kinds of plantation produce at no allowance.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Raboteau, 65.

⁵⁶ Dunbar, 46-47.

Dunbar let the slaves off with “a slighter chastisement than was intended,” but this story illustrates one of the major conflicts between planter worldview and ethos. The concept of paternalism provided one method by which slaveholders reconciled this ideological chaos; another related idea involved the rationalization of slavery as a method of social control.

Evangelicals originally entered this cultural equation based upon several important observations. They believed in the value of the conversion experience and its centrality to piety, but the experience also promoted a concept of egalitarianism. Evangelicals considered all fellow pious men and women as brothers and sisters, all equal in the eyes of God, and therefore in the community of the church; this included slaves. Evangelical Protestants also believed that attention to material goods and worldly pastimes took time and attention from God, and they therefore abhorred the excesses of the planter class and any others who pursued an affluent lifestyle. These two pivotal points, slavery and worldliness, informed much of the cultural conflict between evangelicals and the upper levels of Natchez District society. As previous noted, however, evangelicals had begun to retreat from their antislavery stance before the movement gained a firm hold in Mississippi; it would never have succeeded otherwise. Similarly, the transition that occurred in evangelical Protestantism around 1830 sprung from their toleration, if not embrace, of the symbols of affluent society. According to one historian, evangelical Protestantism represented a countercultural religion “because it shaped an ideal vision of society in opposition to that of the pillared folk and challenged the virtues of hospitality with the ascetic virtues of evangelical faith.”⁵⁷

One of the earliest and most prominent proponents of the biblical defense of slavery was James Smylie, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Natchez. Smylie also had particular insight into this issue: he owned a plantation and slaves. However, as church membership began to

⁵⁷ Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi*, 30.

swell, even affluent ministers began to conform more to the cultural symbols of the planter elite, not only in ideology, but in dress and behavior as well.

Finally, slaves faced the issue of life as it should be versus life as it really was in their own creative ways. Appropriating the symbols of evangelical Protestantism, blending them with indigenous African practices, and shifting their focus from the pursuit of earthly rewards to an eternal life of freedom, slaves created an explanation of why they suffered. They identified with the Israelites as oppressed, yet favored; they modified lessons of obedience into messages of divine retribution for wrong. They used spirituals, slave ministers, participation in clandestine prayer meetings, and church and camp meetings to exercise a level of autonomy not always specifically granted by their owners.

The forces of cotton wealth, slavery, and religious understanding converged as the South moved forward during the antebellum period. As conflicts over slavery continued to warm in the 1850s, Natchez District inhabitants began to sense the strain of a society tight as a bow-string. With evangelical denominations already split into northern and southern factions by the earlier antislavery debates, and planters anxious to maintain their financial dominance built on the foundation of the slave economy, religious understanding of the sectional crisis began to divide along regional lines. Having created an acceptable biblical defense of slavery, pious Southerners subsequently defended their right to maintain the institution. Evangelicals viewed northern abolitionists as political radicals rather than moralists; they also saw the North as corrupt and heretical.⁵⁸ Once framed in this light, southern evangelicals could confront secession from the religious and moral high ground. On this one point, at least, evangelical Protestants and the planter elite in the Natchez District finally agreed.

⁵⁸ Loveland, 257-261.

Conclusion

The creation of a dynamic and prosperous plantation economy from a relatively uninhabited wilderness in a span of less than fifty years required courage, optimism, and a large amount of hard work. The British government offered the initial opportunity, and Spanish officials provided the financial incentive that ultimately guided the growth of the plantation system. However, the men and women who undertook the long journey to the new settlement by the Mississippi River, so far from their homes in the other colonies to the north or in the Caribbean, from England, Scotland, and very often Africa, built the Natchez District.

The natural resources in the region made it attractive and drew interest in settlement; vision, financial incentive, and labor made those settlements successful. The plantation system that grew up along with the vestiges of tobacco culture left by the French exploded with the world's demand for cotton at the end of the eighteenth century, and inhabitants of the Natchez District contributed to the overall success of the cotton economy with their modifications to production machinery and the hybridization of new strains. As the influence of cotton grew exponentially, so grew the prosperity of the Natchez District.

When the region became an American territory in 1797, the Natchez District already showed signs of its earlier success. Planters began to build large homes to affirm their affluence, and many built suburban villas, establishing the absentee landlord presence common in the area. Later, in order to produce more cotton by the most efficient method, planters purchased and operated multiple plantations.

More cotton meant more slaves, and Natchez supported a brisk slave trade. At the dock under the hill, at the Forks of the Road slave market, or at other convenient places, traders plied the human merchandise so essential to the operation of a plantation economy. Slaves came from

as far away as Africa or as close as a neighboring plantation; some slaves attempted to sell themselves in order to preserve a family unit or control their living arrangements or the type of master who owned them. The Natchez District also included a large number of skilled slaves, and the presence of so many planters in homes in or near town meant that slaves who lived and worked in town or at suburban villas led comparatively comfortable lives as domestic or skilled workers rather than as plantation hands.

Plantation affluence emerged as the dominant culture in the Natchez District. Within a short time the area could boast of economic, social, and cultural components that qualified it as a well-developed town serving the needs of its demanding citizens. Banks and slave markets, balls and sporting events, and music and theatre represented only a few of the opportunities open to Natchez inhabitants. Although many prosperous planters sent their children to be educated in the North or in Europe, boarding and day schools proliferated in the District, and institutes of higher learning soon followed. Retail establishments abounded, and while an anonymous governess bemoaned her failed efforts to find just the right piece of black silk, boats at the Natchez dock regularly offloaded cargoes of luxury goods from Europe in sometimes massive quantities. Natchez lacked for nothing in the pursuit of style and grace.

For about the first forty years of settlement, the people of the Natchez District focused almost solely on the acquisition of land, slaves, and affluence. Once acquired, the combination became a force in itself; contemporary commentators from the District as well as outside visitors remarked upon the palatial homes, the elegant society, and the stylish dress and accoutrements of wealthy planters and others. Many of the homes still stand today as a testament to the power of the plantation lifestyle as an icon of the antebellum South. The symbols of cotton wealth became recognizable for everyone in the District -- they drove the economy, society, and culture of the

area, creating a religion of affluence that everyone understood and to which many aspired. In the cotton boom of the early 1800s this religion drew many new devotees, but the rise to social prominence of a new group soon challenged the authority of the planter elite.

Denominational Christianity migrated to the Natchez District with some of the first settlers, but organized worship remained mostly a quiet and private endeavor, especially after the Spanish acquisition of the region in 1783 and the shift of the official religion to Catholicism. However, once America acquired the area and large numbers of less affluent settlers began to arrive, evangelical Protestantism began to challenge the dominant planter culture. From a slow start around the turn of the century, evangelical churches began to expand their membership over the next few decades. Because most groups had already backed away from antislavery ideology by the time evangelical Protestants arrived in the Natchez District, no major confrontations on the subject of slavery occurred between evangelicals and planters. However, the excess of material wealth, conspicuous consumption, and the pursuit of worldly pastimes such as theatre and ball attendance and drinking deeply concerned evangelicals. They continued to participate in mixed-race worship, and many in their congregations were slaves.

In the 1830s a turning point occurred. Rather than confront the planter elite on the basis of their worldly behavior, evangelicals began to embrace it. This change resulted from the large numbers of new inhabitants in the district, as well as planters' realization that evangelicals had abandoned the slavery issue as a cause. In fact, evangelical ministers began to formulate a biblical proslavery ideology based upon the rights and responsibilities of masters and slaves. As planters and the pious began to agree ideologically, the countercultural nature of evangelical Protestantism began to dissipate, and evangelicals began to become, in many cases, as acquisitive as their former foes.

Another countercultural element existed in the Natchez District. Slaves took readily to the messages of evangelical Protestantism and were welcomed into churches as equal in worship and in the eyes of God. However, white forms of Christian worship sometimes failed to provide the answers to questions of morality asked by slaves. While biblical messages and stories appealed to the enslaved, sometimes the interpretations provided by white ministers rang hollow. Ultimately, slaves reshaped evangelical Protestantism in ways that attended to their own needs and confirmed truths about the particular world in which they lived. Although whites often used their churches as elements of social control, enslaved blacks conducted their own services in their own way, and on their own time. This “invisible institution” existed alongside conventional worship patterns, and slaves participated in both. Although they surely saw and understood the symbols of cotton prosperity, slaves created their own countercultural symbols and rituals to affirm the circumstances of their own lives.

The combination of all these elements -- primarily British origins, the relatively recent and certainly familiar settlement experience, the unusually prosperous cotton economy and the cultural system that supported it, and the challenges and modifications to the dominant planter culture -- made the Natchez District a distinctive area in the cotton South. It neither acquired or retained much cultural influence from its French or Spanish periods, although both share responsibility for the tobacco that boosted the region into a plantation economy. Two major areas of potential conflict -- interaction with Indian groups and planter-evangelical disputes over slavery -- remained comparatively quiet, as the Natchez District’s colonization began after both issues were resolved to a significant degree. Although the primary religion in the early period remained the religion of plantation affluence, a religion upon which planters exerted a tenacious grip for many years, inroads and compromises made by evangelical Protestants placed the

District firmly in the Bible Belt. The influence of evangelical Protestantism and the creation of the “invisible institution” of slave religion resulted in a worshipful black presence whose importance in the Bible Belt cannot be overlooked.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Natchez District represented to many the best and the worst of the South. What some saw as genteel society, others regarded as a thin veneer of gilt covering a degraded center. The almost meteoric rise of prosperity and pride in accomplishment that began less than a century before would soon face new ideological, economic, and social challenges, but until that time the Natchez District remained “a settlement of great consequence.”

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Appendix A

The Royal Proclamation - October 7, 1763

By the King a Proclamation

George R.

Whereas we have taken into our royal consideration the extensive and valuable acquisitions in America, secured to our crown by the late definitive Treaty of Peace, concluded in Paris, the 10th day of February last; and being desirous that all our loving subjects, as well of our kingdom as of our colonies in America, may avail themselves with all convenient speed, of the great benefits and advantages which must accrue therefrom to their commerce, manufactures, and navigation, we have thought fit, with the advice of our Privy Council, to issue this our Royal Proclamation, hereby to publish and declare to all our loving subjects, that we have, with the advice of our said Privy Council, granted our letters patent, under our great seal of Great Britain, to erect, within the countries and islands ceded and confirmed to us by the said treaty, four distinct and separate governments, styled and called by the names of Quebec, East Florida, West Florida and Grenada, and limited and bounded as follows, viz.

First -- The government of Quebec bounded on the Labrador coast by the River St. John, and from thence by a line drawn from the head of that river through the Lake St. John, to the south end of the Lake Nipissim; from whence the said line, crossing the River St. Lawrence, and the Lake Champlain, in 45 degrees of north latitude, passes along the high lands which divide the rivers that empty themselves into the said River St. Lawrence from those which fall into the sea; and also along the north coast of the Baye des Chaleurs, and the coast of the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Cape Rosieres, and from thence crossing the mouth of the River St. Lawrence by the west end of the Island of Anticosti, terminates at the aforesaid River of St. John.

Secondly -- The government of East Florida bounded to the westward by the Gulf of Mexico and the Apalachicola River; to the northward by a line drawn from that part of the said river where the Chatahouchee and Flint Rivers meet, to the source of St. Mary's River, and by the course of the said river to the Atlantic Ocean; and to the eastward and southward by the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Florida, including all islands within six leagues of the sea coast.

Thirdly -- The government of West Florida bounded to the southward by the Gulf of Mexico, including all islands within six leagues of the coast, from the River Apalachicola to Lake Pontchartrain; to the westward by the said lake, the Lake Maurepas, and the River Mississippi; to the northward by a line drawn due east from that part of the River Mississippi which lies in 31 degrees north latitude to the River Apalachicola or Chatahouchee; and to the eastward by the said river.

Fourthly -- The government of Grenada, comprehending the island of that name, together with the Grenadines, and the islands of Dominico, St. Vincent's and Tobago. And to the end that the open and free fishery of our subjects may be extended to and carried on upon the coast of Labrador, and the adjacent islands. We have thought fit, with the advice of our said Privy Council to put all that coast, from the River St. John's to Hudson's Straits, together with the Islands of Anticosti and Madelaine, and all other smaller islands lying upon the said coast, under the care and inspection of our Governor of Newfoundland.

We have also, with the advice of our Privy Council, thought fit to annex the islands of St. John's and Cape Breton, or Isle Royale, with the lesser islands adjacent thereto, to our government of Nova Scotia.

We have also, with the advice of our Privy Council aforesaid, annexed to our Province of Georgia all the lands lying between the Rivers Alatamaha and St. Mary's.

And whereas it will greatly contribute to the speedy settling of our said new governments, that our loving subjects should be informed of our paternal care, for the security of the liberties and properties of those who are and shall become inhabitants thereof, we have thought fit to publish and declare, by this our Proclamation, that we have, in the letters patent under our great seal of Great Britain, by which the said governments are constituted, given express power and direction to our Governors of our said colonies respectively, that so soon as the state and the circumstances of the said colonies will admit thereof, they shall, with the advice and consent of the members of our Council, summon and call General Assemblies within the said governments respectively, in such manner and form as is used and directed in those colonies and provinces in America which are under our immediate government; and we have also given power to the said Governors, with the consent of our said Councils, and the representatives of the people, so to be summoned as aforesaid, to make, constitute, and ordain laws, statutes, and ordinances of the people and inhabitants thereof, as near as may be, agreeable to the laws of England, and under such regulations and restrictions as are used in other colonies; and in the mean time, and until such assemblies can be called as aforesaid, all persons inhabiting in, or resorting to, our said colonies, may confide in our royal protection for the enjoyment of the benefit of the laws of our realm of England; for which purpose we have given power under our great seal to the governors of our said colonies respectively, to erect and constitute, with the advice of our said councils and respectively, courts of judicature and public justice within our said colonies, for the hearing and determining all causes, as well criminal as civil, according to law and equity, and, as near as may be, agreeable to the laws of England, with liberty to all persons who may think themselves aggrieved by the sentence of such courts, in all civil cases, to appeal, under the usual limitations and restrictions, to us, in our privy council.

We have also thought fit, with the advice of our Privy Council as aforesaid, to give unto the Governors and Councils of our said three new colonies, upon the continent full power and authority to settle and agree with the inhabitants of our said new colonies or with any other persons who shall resort thereto, for such lands, tenements, and hereditaments, as are now or hereafter shall be in our power to dispose of; and them to grant to any such person or persons upon such terms, and under such moderate quit-rents, services, and acknowledgments, as have been appointed and settled in our other colonies, and under such other conditions as shall appear to us to be necessary and expedient for the advantage of the grantees, and the improvement and settlement of our said colonies.

And whereas, we are desirous, upon all occasions, to testify our royal sense and approbation of the conduct and bravery of the officers and soldiers of our armies, and to reward the same, we do hereby command and empower our Governors of our said three new colonies, and all other our Governors of our several provinces on the continent of North America, to grant without fee or reward, to such reduced officers as have served in North America during the late war, and to such private soldiers as have been or shall be disbanded in America, and are actually residing there, and shall personally apply for the same, the following quantities of lands, subject, at the expiration of ten years, to the same quit-rents as other lands are subject to in the province within which they are granted, as also subject to the same conditions of cultivation and improvement; viz:

To every person having the rank of a field officer -- 5,000 acres.

To every captain -- 3,000 acres.

To every subaltern or staff officer -- 2,000 acres.

To every non-commission officer -- 200 acres.

To every private man -- 50 acres.

We do likewise authorize and require the Governors and Commanders in Chief of all our said colonies upon the continent of North America to grant the like quantities of land, and upon the same conditions, to such reduced officers of our navy of like rank as served on board our ships of war in North America at the times of the reduction of Louisbourg and Quebec in the late war, and who shall personally apply to our respective Governors for such grants.

And whereas it is just and reasonable, and essential to our interest, and the security of our colonies, that the several nations or tribes of Indians with whom we are connected, and who live under our protections, should not be molested or disturbed in the possession of such parts of our dominions and territories as, not having been ceded to or purchased by us, are reserved to them, or any of them, as their hunting grounds. We do therefore, with the advice of our Privy Council, declare it to be our royal will and pleasure, that no Governor or Commander in Chief in any of our colonies of Quebec, East Florida, or West Florida, do presume, upon any pretence whatever, to grant warrants of survey, or pass any patents for lands beyond the bounds of their respective governments, as described in their commissions; as also that no Governor or Commander in Chief in any of our other colonies or plantations in America do presume for the present, and until our further pleasure be known, to grant warrants of survey, or patents for any lands beyond the heads or sources of any of the rivers which fall into the Atlantic Ocean from the west or northwest; or upon any land whatever, which not having been ceded to, or purchased by us, as aforesaid, are reserved to the said Indians, or any of them.

And we do further declare it to be our royal will and pleasure, for the present as aforesaid, to reserve under our sovereignty, protection, and dominion, for the use of the said Indians, all the lands and territories not included within the limits of our said three new

governments, or within the limits of the territory granted to the Hudson's Bay Company, as also all the lands and territories lying to the westward of the sources of the rivers which fall into the sea from the west and northwest as aforesaid.

And we do hereby strictly forbid, on pain of our displeasure, all our loving subjects from making any purchases or settlements whatever, or taking possession of any of the lands above reserved, without our especial leave and license for that purpose first obtained.

And we do further strictly enjoin and require all persons whatever who have either willfully or inadvertently seated themselves upon any lands within the countries above described, or upon any other lands which, not having been ceded to or purchased by us, are still reserved to the said Indians as aforesaid, forthwith to remove themselves from such settlements.

And whereas great frauds and abuses have been committed in purchasing lands of the Indians, to the great prejudice of our interests, and to the great dissatisfaction of the said Indians: in order, therefore, to prevent such irregularities for the future, and to the end that the Indians may be convinced of our justice and determined resolution to remove all reasonable cause of discontent, we do, with the advice of our privy council strictly enjoin and require that no private person do presume to make any purchase from the said Indians within these parts of our colonies where we have thought proper to allow settlement: but that if at any time any of the said Indians should be inclined to dispose of said lands, the same shall be purchased only for us, in our name, at some public meeting or assembly of the said Indians, to be held for that purpose by the Governor or Commander in Chief of our colony respectively within which they shall lie: and in case they shall within the proprietaries, conformable to such directions and instructions as we or they shall think proper to give for that purpose: and we do, by the advice of our Privy Council, declare and enjoin, that the trade with the said Indians shall be free and open to all our subjects

whatever, provided that every person who may incline to trade with the said Indians, do take out a license for carrying on such trade, from the Governor or Commander in Chief of any of our colonies respectively, where such person shall reside, and also give security to observe such regulations as we shall at any time think fit, by ourselves or commissaries, to be appointed for this purpose, to direct and appoint, for the benefit of the said trade:

And we do hereby authorize, enjoin, and require the Governors and Commanders in Chief of all our colonies respectively, as well those under our immediate government as those under the government and direction of proprietaries, to grant such licenses without fee or reward, taking especial care to insert therein a condition, that such license shall be void, and the security forfeited in case the person to whom the same is granted shall refuse or neglect to observe such regulations as we shall think proper to prescribe as aforesaid.

And we do further expressly conjoin and require all officers whatever, as well military as those employed in the management and direction of Indian affairs, within the territories reserved as aforesaid for the use of the said Indians, to seize and apprehend all persons whatever, who standing charged with treason, misprisions of treason, murders, or other felonies or misdemeanors, shall fly from justice and take refuge in the said territory, and to send them under a proper guard to the colony where the crime was committed of which they stand accused, in order to take their trial for the same.

Given at our court at St. James's the 7th day of October 1763 in the third year of our reign. GOD SAVE THE KING.

Sources: The Avalon Project at Yale Law School. Available from <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/proc1763.htm>. Accessed March 7, 2004. Greene, Jack P., editor. *Colonies to Nation, 1763-1789: A Documentary History of the American Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 16-18.

Appendix B

An Act for the Regulation and Government of Negroes and Slaves

December 24, 1766

Whereas experience hath evidenced the expediency of making certain particular regulations, laws, and ordinances for the better government of Negroes in all those countries where customs has prevailed to distinguish their color for the badge of slavery, and whereas in the settling of this province it will be necessary to employ a great many Negroes for the especial order and government whereof be it enacted by the governor, council, and assembly of his majesty's province of West Florida, and it is hereby enacted by the authority of the same that all Negroes, Indians, free Indians in amity with the British government, and Negroes, mulattoes, and mustees who are now free or who shall hereafter be made free in the colony or who shall hereinafter come into this province having a proper certificate of their freedom under the hand and seal of the governor or commander in chief of any of his majesty's colonies or plantations in America, excepted of mulattoes or mustees who are now or who shall hereafter come into this province bring slaves and all their issue and offspring born or to be born after the passing of this act, shall be and are hereby declared to be and remain forever slaves and shall follow the condition of the mother, and shall be deemed and held to be to all intents [illegible] and purposes chattels personal in the hands of their owners provided nevertheless that nothing in this act shall be construed to prevent any person or persons in this province from emancipating his or her slave or slaves upon such person or persons giving sufficient security in the secretary's office of the province in the sum of £100 sterling that such slave or slaves so emancipated shall not at any time become a burthen to the province.

II And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid that no person whatsoever shall permit or suffer any Negro slave under his or her care or management who lives or is employed in Pensacola, Mobile, or any other town in the province to go out of the limits of the said town, except in the company of a white person, without having a ticket or certificate signed by the owner or person having charge of such Negro, which ticket or certificate shall express distinctly the time such Negro shall have leave to be absent. And if any Negro shall be found at the distance of two miles from Pensacola, Mobile, or any other town in the province or at the like distance from any plantation to which the said Negro shall belong without a ticket or being in company with any white person, such Negro shall suffer corporal punishment at the discretion of the owner or employer not exceeding twenty lashes on the bare back.

III That if any person shall presume to give a ticket or certificate to any slave who shall be the property or under the charge of another person without consent of the proprietor or person having charge of such slave, such person shall forfeit the sum of five pounds sterling to be recovered in any court of requests in the province by bill plaint or information.

IV Any slave who shall be found at the distance of two miles from any town or plantation whereto the said slave shall belong without a ticket or being in company with a white person and shall refuse to submit to or undergo the examination of any white person it shall be lawful for such white person or persons to pursue or apprehend and moderately correct such slave, and if such slave shall assault and strike such white person or persons he shall be tried and punished as is hereinafter provided for in this act.

V If any Negro or other slave who shall be employed in the lawful business or service of his master, owner, overseer, or other person having charge of such slave shall be beaten, bruised, maimed or disabled by any person or persons, sufficient provocation not having been given by

the said slave, who shall not have a lawful authority for so doing, every person or persons so offending shall by the sentence of any two of his majesty's justices of the peace for the district where such offence shall be committed be fined for every such offense the sum of ten shillings sterling for the use of the poor over and above four shillings and eight pence sterling for every day such slave shall be incapacitated from working by means of the said beating or bruising so received from such person or persons, which four shillings and eight pence sterling for each days loss of time shall be paid to the master, owner or other person having charge of such Negro. And such justices before whom the slave shall be recovered shall commit the offender or offenders to jail if he, she, or they shall refuse to pay, or who shall not produce goods wherein the said fine and damages may be levied, there to remain until such fine and damages shall be paid.

VI And if any Negro or slave shall offer violence or strike any white person, every Negro or slave upon trial and conviction thereof before two of his majesty's justices of the peace and three freeholders shall suffer such punishment, not extending to life or limb, for the first and second offenses as in their discretion they shall think fit. And for the third offense shall suffer death. But in case any such slave shall grievously wound, maim, or bruise any white person although it be only the first offense, upon due proof and conviction thereof such slave shall suffer death, provided always that such striking, wounding, maiming, or bruising be not by the command of the master, owner, or person having charge of such Negro or other slave in the lawful defense of their owner's person or goods.

VII And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid that if any owner or other person having charge of any slave or slaves shall refuse or neglect to [illegible] such slave or slaves under his or her charge sufficient summer and winter clothing and wholesome food upon complaint and proof thereof being made before any justice of peace of the district where such

slave shall usually be employed, such justice is hereby empowered to make such orders for the relief of such slave or slaves as he in his discretion shall think fit and may set a fine upon any person offending therein in any sum not exceeding forty shillings sterling for each offense to be levied by distress and sale of the offender's goods and reserved for the good of the poor of the district where the offense shall be committed.

VIII And be enacted by the authority aforesaid that if any person or persons shall inveigle, steal, or carry away such Negro, other slave or slaves or shall employ any person or persons to inveigle, steal, or carry away any such Negro or other slave or slaves so as the owner or employer of such slave or slaves shall be deprived of the use and benefit of such Negro or other slave or slaves in running away or departing from his or her master or employer shall be and he and they upon due proof and conviction of any such offense hereby declared to be guilty of felony and suffer death.

IX And if any person or persons shall harbor or conceal any Negro or other slave in any town or upon any plantation or place in this province that shall run away or shall be charged or accused with any criminal matter or thing every person being duly convicted thereof according to the directions of this act shall incur such penalties and such punishments as is herein after specified. That is to say if a white person, he, she, or they shall forfeit the sum of forty shillings sterling for the first day and nine shillings for every other day which such slaves shall be absent from his or her owners to the use of the owner or employer of such Negro or other slave so harbored, concealed, or entertained, to be recovered by warrant under the hand and seal of any two of his majesty's justices of the peace for the district where such slave shall be so harbored, concealed, or entertained. And if any free Negro, mulatto, or mustee shall be convicted of harboring, concealing, or entertaining any slave or slaves in any town or upon any plantation or

in any place in this province who shall have run away, or who shall be charged with any criminal matter, such free Negro, mulatto, or mustee shall forfeit the like sum or sums of money as are by the act imposed on white persons offending therein. And in case such forfeiture cannot be levied or recovered from such free Negro, mulatto, or mustee together with the charge attending the prosecution, the justice shall be empowered, and is hereby directed to order such free Negro, mulatto or mustee to serve the master or owner of such slave or slaves when they shall have so harbored, concealed, or entertained for such moderate time as such magistrate in his discretion shall think will be adequate to the sum or sums of money which should have been levied and recovered.

X It shall and may be lawful for every person in this province to take, apprehend, and secure any runaway or fugitive Negro or other slave or slaves and if the person taking up such slaves knows or can without difficulty be informed to whom such slave or slaves belong, such person shall send the slave so taken to the master or other person having charge of such slave. But if the master or other person as aforesaid cannot be found, then such slave shall be sent to the custody of the provost marshal or any his lawful deputy and the master or other person having the care of such slave shall pay for the taking up such slave whether by a white person or Negro ten shillings sterling and mileage if apprehended at the distance of ten miles and the provost marshal or his lawful deputy aforesaid upon receipt of every fugitive or runaway slave is hereby required to keep such slave in the common gaol of the district until such slave shall be lawfully discharged and shall cause copies of the description of such slave to be distributed in the most public manner, both at Pensacola and Mobile to the intent the owner or other person having charge of such slave may come to the knowledge that such slave is in custody and if such slave shall make his escape through the negligence of the said provost marshal or his deputy as

aforesaid and cannot be taken within three months, the said provost marshal or his deputy as aforesaid shall answer to the owner for the value of such slave or the damages which the owner shall sustain by reason of such escape as the case shall happen.

XI The provost marshal or any his lawful deputy as aforesaid at the charge of the owner or person having the charge of such runaway slave or slaves shall provide sufficient food, drink, clothing, and covering for every slave delivered into his custody and shall cause publication of the description to be made in terms of this act and on failure thereof shall forfeit all such fees as shall be due for such slave or slaves.

XII Be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid that any person taking up any runaway slave and delivering such slave to the owner or to the person having use and charge of such slave, or to the provost marshal or any his lawful deputy, shall be entitled to receive five pence halfpenny sterling per mile for every mile such slave been brought or sent to be computed from the place where such slave was apprehended. And if such slave shall be delivered unto the custody of the provost marshal or any his lawful deputy as aforesaid, the person delivering such slave shall give an account of his name and place of abode and the time and place such slave was apprehended, which account the said provost marshal or his deputy shall enter down in a book to be kept for that purpose and shall give a receipt for any slave delivered into his or their custody. And the said provost marshal or his lawful deputy is fully authorized to demand and receive from the owner or other person having the care and government of such slave or slaves for Negroes committed, from the month of October to the month of March inclusive for finding necessary clothing and covering to be the property of the master, any sum not exceeding forty shillings sterling to be adjudged by two justices of the peace and the provost marshal is not upon any pretense whatever to supply any Negro or slave without an order from the said two justices

and also the several sums following and no other [illegible] fee or recovered on any pretense whatsoever, that is to say for apprehending each slave paid to the person who delivered such slave into custody ten shillings sterling for mileage paid, to the same person five pence halfpenny sterling per mile for a sufficient quantity of provision each day for each slave, six pence sterling for advertising such slave as required by this act. Two shillings and four pence sterling for receiving such slave into custody, two shillings and four pence sterling and for delivering such slave, two shillings and four pence sterling and for poundage or money advanced one shilling and three pence sterling in the pound and the provost marshal or any his deputy as aforesaid may lawfully detain any slave in his custody until the said fees and expenses to be fully paid and discharged.

XIII And if the owner or owners of such fugitive slave or slaves shall not within the space of twelve months from the time of commitment make his or their claim or claims or it shall not otherwise be made known to the provost marshal within the time aforesaid to whom such committed slaves shall belong, it shall be lawful for the provost marshal or his lawful deputy to sell such slave at public [illegible] in Pensacola or Mobile, he the said provost marshal or his deputy first causing public notice to be given at Pensacola and Mobile as aforesaid six weeks before such sale shall be made together with the reason of such sale being made and out of the money arising by such sale to retain to himself such money as shall be due to him for money by him disbursed on receipt of such fugitive slave and for his fees and provisions together with the reasonable charges arising by such sale and the overplus if any there shall be paid into the hands of the public treasurer for the time being in trust. Nevertheless for the use of the owner of such slave provided the same by such owner, be claimed within two years and a day after such sale and in default of such claim within the time aforesaid the said overplus money shall be to the use

of his majesty, his heirs and successors for and towards the support of the government and the contingent charges thereof.

XIV If any keeper of a tavern or punch house or retailer of spirituous liquors within this province shall give, sell, [illegible] or deliver to any slave or slaves any beer, ale, liquor, wine, rum, brandy or other spirituous liquors whatsoever without the leave or consent of the owner or person having charge of such slave or slaves, every person so offending and being thereof convicted before any justice of the peace shall forfeit for the first offense one pound sterling and for the second offense three pounds sterling and shall be bound in a recognizance in the sum of thirty pounds sterling with one or more sureties not to offend in the like manner and to be of good behavior for the space of one year and for the want of such sufficient sureties to be committed to the common gaol without bail or main prize for any space of time not exceeding three months.

XV No slave or slaves in this province shall be allowed to buy or sell any goods, wares or merchandise on their own account or to keep any hogs, cattle, poultry, or stock of any kind in any town of this province and on the pain of confiscation of the one half to the king his heirs and successors for and toward the use of the poor of the district where the offense shall be committed, the other half to the informer or person who shall sue for the same.

XVI Every justice of the peace within his respective district upon his own knowledge or view or upon information received upon oath may either go in person or by warrant or warrants directed to any constable to command to his assistance any number of persons he shall see convenient to disperse any assembly or meeting of slaves which may disturb the peace or endanger the safety of his majesty's subjects in this province and to search all suspected places belonging to free Negroes, mulattoes, mustees or Indians and also any home or huts inhabited by

slaves for arms, ammunition or stolen goods and to apprehend all such mulattoes, mustees, free Negroes and slaves as they shall suspect to be guilty of any crimes or offenses whatsoever and to bring them to speedy trial knowing to the direction of this act.

XVII If any person or persons shall be maimed, wounded, or disabled in pursuing, apprehending, or taking any fugitive or runaway slave or being charged with criminal offense or in doing any other act, matter, or thing in obedience to or on pursuance of the directions of this act, such person or persons shall receive such reward from the general assembly of this province as they shall think reasonable.

XVIII No slave whatever shall be permitted to carry away any firearms without the cleared ground of his owner or person having charge of such Negro under the pain of being whipped not exceeding thirty-nine stripes.

XIX And be it enacted by the authority aforesaid that all errors and offenses that shall be committed by slaves in this province and for which capital punishment shall or may be lawfully inflicted shall be heard, examined, tried and adjudged and finally determined by any two justices assigned to keep the peace, one of which be of the quorum, and any member of freeholders not less than three or more than five in the district where the offense shall have been committed and any justice of the peace upon complaint or information being received by him of any such offense being committed by a slave within his district shall cause the offender to be committed to the common gaol and such justices shall without delay by warrant or under his hand and seal call to his assistance any of the nearest justices of the peace to associate with him and such two justices of the peace upon being and shall likewise by warrant under their hands and seals summon such number of freeholders as before mentioned to assemble and together with the said justice at a certain day and place not exceeding eight days after committing such offender and

the justice and freeholders being so assembled shall cause the slave accused or charged with such capital crimes to be brought before them and shall have the accusations which shall be brought against such slave and his or her defense and shall proceed to the examination of witnesses and other evidence and finally have or not determine the matter brought before them in the most summary and expeditious manner and if the said offenders shall be convicted of any capital crime, the justices are now hereby empowered to give judgment and law and cause execution of their sentence to be done by inflicting of death and at such time as they with the consent of the freeholders shall think fit.

XX Provided always and it is hereby declared that it shall and may be lawful to and for the justices and freeholders upon such trial to mitigate the punishment to be inflicted upon the offender in all and every case where there shall appear any favorable circumstance which may induce them to be of opinion that such punishment may be mitigated.

XXI And if any crime or offense not capital shall be committed by any slave and such slave shall be proved against and tried in manner before directed by any one justice of the peace and any two freeholders of the district where the offense shall be committed and in case any slave shall be convicted before them of any offense not capital the said one justice by and with the consent of the freeholders shall give judgment for the inflicting any corporal punishment not extending to the taking away life or member and shall award and cause execution to be done accordingly provided always that if the said one justice and two freeholders upon examination of any slave charged or accused before them for an offense not capital shall find the same to be a greater offense and may deserve death, the said justice shall with all convenient speed summon and request the assistance of another justice and one or more freeholders not exceeding three which said justice and freeholders only as assembled shall join with the justice and freeholders

first assembled and shall proceed on the trial in the same manner as is before directed in this act for the trial of capital offenses.

XIIX Be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid that as soon as the justice and freeholders shall be assembled in pursuance of the directions of this act before they proceed to trial of any slave or slaves which may be brought before them and charged with any criminal or other matter or thing the said justices shall administer the following oath for each other:

I, AB, do solemnly swear in the presence of almighty God that I will truly and impartially try and adjudge the prisoner or prisoners who shall be brought before me upon his or her trial and honestly and duly on my part [illegible] in execution on this trial an act of the governor, council, and assembly of this province entitled an Act for the Regulation and Government of Negroes and Slaves according to the best of my judgment, so help me God.

And the justices having taken the said oath they shall immediately administer the same to the freeholders and having so done the said justices and freeholders shall proceed to trial of such slave or slaves as shall be brought before them.

XXIII The evidence of any free Indian, mulatto, mustee, or Negro or also of all slaves taken in the most solemn manner without oath shall be allowed and admitted in all manner whatsoever upon the trial of any slave or slaves and the weight of which evidence is hereby left to the serious consideration and conscience of the justices and freeholders.

And be it enacted that the evidence of any free Indian, mulatto, mustee, or Negro shall be admitted and allowed upon the trial of any free Negro, mulatto, mustee, or Indian or Indian in amity with the British government excepted and all crimes and offenses which shall be committed after the passing of this act by any free Negro, Indian, exception before excepted, mulattoes or mustees shall be proceeded in, heard, tried, adjudged, and determined by the

justices and freeholders appointed by this act for the trial of slaves in like manner, order, and form as is directed for the proceedings and trial of crimes and offenses committed by slaves.

XXIV And be it further enacted that if any slave, free Negro, mulatto, mustee, or Indian shall commit any crime or offense whatsoever which by the laws of England now in force or of this province is or has been made felony without benefit of clergy, every such slave, free Negro, mulatto, mustee, or Indian as aforesaid being duly convicted of any such crime or offense according to the directions of this act shall suffer death to be inflicted in such manner as the justices with the consent of the freeholders shall [illegible] and appoint, but if the said justices and freeholders see cause to mitigate the punishment upon account of any favorable circumstances appearing upon the trial of such slave, free Negro, mulatto, mustee or Indian, the said justices and freeholders are hereby empowered to mitigate the punishment accordingly.

Provided always that if any slave, free Negro, mulatto, mustee, or Indian shall willfully and maliciously set fire to any house or houses, plantation or plantations or any goods or commodities whatsoever with an intent to burn or destroy the same or who shall feloniously steal or run away any slave or slaves being the property of another with intent to carry away such slave or slaves out of this province or who shall willfully or maliciously poison or administer any poison or who shall procure any poison to be administered to any free man, woman, servant, or slave, every such slave, free Negro, mulatto, mustee, or Indian, except free Indians in amity with the British Government, shall suffer death as a felon without the benefit of the clergy.

And be it further enacted that the justices or any of them shall have power and are hereby required to summon and compel all persons whatsoever which they may see necessary to appear and give evidence on the trial of any slave, free Negro, mulatto, mustee, or Indian and upon refusal to appear and give evidence and if any master or other person who has the use and

government of any slave shall prevent or hinder such slave from appearing or giving evidence in any matter depending before the justice and freeholders, the said justices are hereby empowered and directed to bind every such person so offending by recognizance with one or more sufficient sureties to appear at the next general quarter session of the peace to answer such their offense and contempt and forfeit of sureties to commit such offender to the common gaol, there to remain without bail or main prize until which they shall find sufficient sureties.

XXV MISSING

XXVI MISSING

XXVII And if any master or other person having charge or government of any slave who shall be accused of any capital crime shall conceal or convey away such slave so that he or she may not be brought to trial, every master or other person upon conviction thereof in any court of record in this province shall forfeit the sum of forty pounds sterling and if any person having charge of any slave who shall be accused of any crime not capital shall conceal any such slave as aforesaid, such master or other person having charge of such slave shall forfeit ten pounds sterling to be recovered in any court of record in this province by bill, plaint, or otherwise.

XXVIII And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid that the provost marshal or his deputy where any capital or other punishment shall be [illegible] to be inflicted as aforesaid shall be obliged and is hereby required at his peril to cause such execution to be done on all and every slave, Negro, mulatto, or free mustee or Indian according to the sentence of the court and the provost marshal or his deputy shall be allowed for every common whipping two shillings and for putting to death twenty shillings sterling and no more upon any pretense whatsoever.

XXIX Be it further enacted that if any constable or other person directed or required to do or perform any matter or thing commanded or enjoined by this act who shall know or [illegible]

informed of any offense committed contrary to this act within his district, precinct, or limits and shall not give information thereof to some justice of the peace and endeavor the conviction of the offender every person so offending and being thereof convicted he shall forfeit of every such offense five pounds sterling and if any justice of the peace, provost marshal, or freeholder shall willfully or willingly omit the performance of his duty in the execution of this act, every such justice of the peace and provost marshal shall forfeit the sum of twenty pounds sterling and every such freeholder shall forfeit the sum of ten pounds sterling to be recovered as is hereafter in this directed and all that grand juries, justices of the peace, constables, and other officers are hereby required to make due and true presentments of such crimes and offenses against this act or shall come to their knowledge.

XXX Be it further enacted that if any slave, free Negro, mulatto, mustee or Indian shall be convicted of having given false information whereby any other slave, free Negro, mulatto, mustee, or Indian may have suffered wrongfully every such false information shall be punished as the justices and freeholders shall in their discretion think fit.

XXXI And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid that if any person whatsoever shall willfully murder his own or any other slave, free Negro, mulatto, mustee, or Indian and be thereof convicted, every such person so offending shall and is hereby shall forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds sterling for the first offense, for the second be deemed guilty of felony without the benefit of clergy and be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid that if any slave or slaves shall hereafter be put to death for any crime or crimes whatsoever, the justices and freeholders before whom the said slave or slaves shall have been convicted shall and are hereby required before they award execution to be done to appraise and value such slave or slaves at such moderate rate as they in their discretion shall see just and reasonable for any slave and shall

certify such aprisement to the receiver general who is authorized to pay the same out of such monies or shall be in his hands inappropriate and if there is not money sufficient in the hands of the receiver general at the time of receiving such certificate, then and in that case the receiver general shall pay the said money to the owner of such slave out of the first monies which shall be in his hands after the receipt of the said certificate.

XXXII MISSING

XXXIII And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid that all fines, penalties, and forfeitures imposed or inflicted by this act and which are not particularly disposed of in the manner of recovering directed, shall if not exceeding the sum of forty shillings sterling be recovered, levied, and retained for by warrant from any one justice of the peace for the district or county where the offense shall be committed and if such fine and penalty or forfeiture shall exceed the sum of forty shillings and not exceed the sum of five pounds sterling, the same shall be recovered in his majesty's court of requests for the district or county where the offense shall be committed and in case such fine, penalty, or forfeiture shall exceed the sum of five pounds sterling the same shall be recovered by action of debt bill plaint or information in any court of record in this province.

XXXIV And be it further enacted that all fines, penalties, and forfeitures which shall be recovered by this act and not particularly disposed of shall be one half to his majesty, his heirs, and successors for and towards the support of the government of this colony and the other half to such person or persons as shall sue for the same.

XXXV And be it further enacted that all of his majesty's share of the fines and penalties and forfeitures which shall be recovered by virtue of this act shall be paid into the hands of the justices in the court before whom the same shall be recovered who shall enter a record of the

payment of the same and such justice or justices shall and are hereby required to transmit a transcript of such record to the receiver general which record is hereby declared to be a charge on the judge and justices respectively to whom such money shall be paid and if the same judge or justices respectively shall neglect or refuse to make such record or send such transcript or refuse to pay the same to the receiver general within thirty days after the said fine, forfeiture, or penalty shall be recovered the receiver general shall and is hereby empowered and required to levy and receive the same by warrant of distress and sale of the goods and chattels of the said judge and justices respectively.

XXXIV (MISNUMBERED) Provided always and it is hereby provided accordingly that no person shall or may be prosecuted as aforesaid for any fine, forfeiture, or penalty empowered by this act unless such prosecution shall be commenced within six months after the offense shall be committed.

Passed the House of Assembly this 24th day of December, 1766.

Source: *An Act for the Regulation and Government of Negroes and Slaves*, December 24, 1766. Records of the States of the United States (Early State Records), Film 554: West Florida. David Library of the American Revolution, Washington Crossing, Pennsylvania.

Vita

Lee Davis Smith was born and raised in Baton Rouge, and received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Louisiana State University. Her lifelong interest in eighteenth-century American society and culture led to her pursuit of a master's degree in American history, with concentration on the influences of class, race, and religion in the history of the American South. She continues her studies in pursuit of a doctorate in history.

Married and the mother of two daughters, Lee makes her home in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.