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Both Native South and Deep South: The Native Transformation of the Gulf South Borderlands 1770–1835

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ABSTRACT

Both Native South and Deep South: The Native Transformation of the Gulf South Borderlands, 1770–1835

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How did the Native South become the Deep South within the span of a single generation? This dissertation argues that these ostensibly separate societies were in fact one and the same for several decades. It significantly revises the history of the origins of antebellum America’s slave-based economy and shows that the emergence of a plantation society in Alabama and Mississippi was in large part a grassroots phenomenon forged by Indians and other native inhabitants as much as by Anglo-American migrants. This native transformation occurred because of a combination of weak European colonial regimes; the rise of cattle, cotton, and chattel slavery in the region; and the increasingly complex ethnic and racial geography of the Gulf South.

Inhabitants of the Gulf South between the American Revolution and Indian removal occupied a racial and social milieu that was not distinctly Indian, African, or European. Nor can it be adequately defined by hybridity. Instead, Gulf southerners constructed something unique. Indians and native non-Indians—white and black—owned ranches and plantations, employed slave labor, and pioneered the infrastructure for cotton production and transportation. Scotsmen and Spaniards married Indians and embraced their matrilineal traditions. Anglo- and Afro-American migrants integrated into an emergent native cotton culture in which racial and cultural identities remained permeable and flexible. Thus, colonial and borderland-style interactions persisted well into the nineteenth century, even as the region grew ever more tightly bound to an expansionist United States. The history of the Gulf South offers a perfect opportunity to bridge the
imagined divide between the colonial and early republic eras. Based on research in multiple archives across five states, my work alters our understanding of the history and people of an American region before the Civil War and reshapes our framework for interpreting the nature of racial and cultural formation over the long course of American history.
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# Table of Contents

**Introduction**  
1

**Chapter 1:**  
Traders, Companies, Indians, and Empires: Constructing Native Gulf Southerners, 1770–1800  
25

**Chapter 2:**  
Founding Families of the Deep South: Networks of Kinship and Economy, 1770–1800  
91

**Chapter 3:**  
Cattle, Cotton, and the Economic and Social Transformation of Indian Country, 1770–1820  
148

**Chapter 4:**  
Both Person and Property: The Transformation of Slavery in Indian Country and West Florida, 1770–1812  
191

**Chapter 5:**  
Native Towns and Southern Towns: The Shifting Relationship between Indian Country and the Coast, 1770–1820  
245

**Chapter 6:**  
Forgotten Indians: Immigrants, Steamboats, and the Transformation of Alabama and Mississippi, 1810–1835  
307

**Conclusion:**  
The Very Short Life of the Old South  
368

**Bibliography:**  
376
INTRODUCTION

The Cornels family lived along a tributary of the Tallapoosa River, in what is today northeastern Alabama, between the 1780s and the 1820s. The family patriarch, Alexander Cornels, was a farmer and a rancher. He had large stocks of cattle, horses, hogs, and sheep. According to an observer, in 1796 he also tended a “nursery of peach trees,” “a field of rye . . . a field of oats,” and “two acres of cotton.” To perform his agricultural labor, Cornels owned “nine [enslaved] negroes under good government.”¹ Alexander Cornels had a wife and children, and his neighbors were the McGive and Sullivan families, whose children intermarried with his own.² In many respects then, Alexander Cornels was as a middling Deep South slaveholder and planter. Cornels, however, also went by the name Oche Haujo. Oche Haujo was an Upper Creek headman in Tuckabatchee, the son of an English man and a Creek woman, an interpreter in the employ of various colonial governments despite his non-literacy, and a deerskin hunter and trader. Oche Haujo dressed in what observers termed “Indian” clothes. He was what Euro-Americans of the period crudely termed a “half breed.” Today we use different terminology, which though less racist, is similarly unsatisfying: “mestizo,” “mixed,” “creole,” “biculural.” Whether as Alexander Cornels or Oche Haujo, he was both an inhabitant and a creator of the American Deep South.

How should we reconcile Cornels with Oche Haujo? Not unlike those who used the term “half breed,” we currently lack a sophisticated way of understanding Cornels

¹ Benjamin Hawkins to Edward Price, March 9, 1797; and Journal of Benjamin Hawkins, December 13, 1796, in C. L. Grant, ed., Letters, Journals and Writings of Benjamin Hawkins (Savannah, Ga., 1980), 95, 16–17.
and many Gulf southerners just like him—natives who between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century retained aspects of Native American culture but who also embraced ostensibly Euro-American economic ideas and practices. But Alexander Cornels would not have seen himself as a man of two different worlds. He lived in one world, albeit one undergoing what hindsight shows us were seismic shifts in terms of regional culture, economy, and demography. Those shifts later produced the antebellum Deep South, though Cornels had no conscious sense he was furthering that eventuality. Oche Haujo was born and raised among Upper Creeks, but he proactively made the choices that led him and his extended family to become one of the thousands of natives who transformed the Native South into the Deep South.

In 1770 most of the North American Southeast remained in Indian hands. For multiple centuries the native peoples residing between the Mississippi, the Flint, and the Tennessee Rivers had largely held European colonizers at bay. Successive regimes from France, Spain, and Great Britain had been either unable or unwilling to conquer them despite the natural avenues the region’s river basins might have provided invaders. The historical reasons for this situation were complex, but in the main, native southerners simply remained too powerful. Though European regimes were huddled along a narrow strip of settlements on both the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, they nonetheless laid grandiose claims to the vast interior. Unlike Britain’s prosperous Atlantic seaboard colonies, however, British West and East Florida boasted no affluent cities like New York or Philadelphia and no bustling plantation societies like Virginia or South Carolina. When Spain gained claim to the Floridas in 1783 after Britain’s defeat in the American Revolution, the Spanish did nothing to improve their new colonies’ situation. Outside of
comparatively wealthy Lower Louisiana, Europeans’ Gulf South was an unhealthy, struggling, straggling, and sorry little place.

By stark contrast, the people who truly possessed the Gulf South—who by the 1770s were predominantly known as Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws—remained prosperous and potent. Several dozen miles inland from the sandy, sterile coastal plain, the Native Gulf South was rich in fertile river basins and loamy low hills. Though Indian peoples occasionally warred against each other and kept only loose alliances, together they comprised powerful forces that had successfully kept European settlement at arm’s length for generations, even as Indians themselves became increasingly and irrevocably entangled in the wider Atlantic economy wrought by European colonization. Indeed, to a great extent the European settlers on the Gulf Coast depended on native southerners—not only for commerce but also for military support and even sustenance.

Only six decades later—within a human lifetime—almost everything had changed. European regimes had evacuated the region, and Indian polities, though consolidated and centralized as never before, were nearing their last days as well. By the 1830s, two things overwhelmingly dominated the Gulf South: the United States and a rapidly expanding, extremely lucrative cotton plantation complex. Neither of these had even existed in 1770. One-time colonial backwaters like Mobile and Natchez, which had once looked toward interior Indian towns for their commerce and livelihoods, had themselves become lively centers of trade and activity, firmly reoriented toward the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic. Indian towns, meanwhile, were largely abandoned, their population mostly dispersed. In 1770, towns like Tuckaubatchee and Coweta had been centers of regional political, social, and economic power. But as with Euro-Americans,
Indians in 1830 instead looked outward for those things. And those Indians were interspersed among and intermixed with swiftly rising new communities being built by a flood of Anglo- and African American invaders who had finally managed to do what no European regime ever could—control the Gulf South.

How did such a momentous change happen? More to the point, how and why did it happen so quickly? On the one hand, most historians of the early national United States have been content to see this transformation as simply the result of overwhelming force. In this narrative, Andrew Jackson and American armies pushed out a feeble Spain, crushed noble but futile Native American resistance, and unleashed a flood of immigrants—black and white—from the American states who quickly set about surveying, clearing, and “settling” the wilderness to make way for cotton fields. Historians of Native America, on the other hand, have predictably done a much better job of casting Indians themselves as protagonists in this drama. They demonstrate that, prior to the nineteenth century, Native South societies were transformed by a prior invasion of Euro-American ideas regarding race, power, property, and profit. When it comes to their analyses of the later invasion of Euro-American people, however, Indian historians craft a narrative very similar to those of their U.S. history counterparts: Indian country was beset on all sides and slowly but surely contracted and shrank as Indian peoples were forced to either sell or surrender larger and larger swaths of territory to an unprecedentedly aggressive colonial power, the United States. In the end, neither historiography devotes much space to the idea that Indians had an important role to play in the construction of the American Deep South.
Native Americans were, in fact, instrumental in the construction of the Deep South. Between the 1770s and the 1830s, Indians became some of the Gulf South’s first cattle ranchers and cotton planters. They became some of the Gulf South’s first and largest slaveholders. They became some of its first slave traders. When Anglo- and African American migrants moved in, they traveled on native paths and roads, and they depended on Indian food and shelter. When they crossed rivers, they relied on Indian ferries. When they sent mail, they used native riders. American migrants did not arrive to find simply an indebted population of hunters and subsistence farmers trying to maintain their traditional way of life (though they certainly found some of this). Rather they encountered dynamic, complex communities that were already in the midst of significantly altering the Gulf South’s culture and environment.

This project argues that native Gulf southerners instigated and facilitated the Native South’s transformation into the Deep South—that this transformation was, at least initially, a grassroots endeavor. Cotton and chattel slavery appeared to expand so suddenly in the 1830s partly because Indians had already introduced them to the region decades earlier, and native peoples partnered with Anglo-Americans in erecting the framework of the Deep South’s cotton and slave economy. American migrants did not begin this project from scratch; the seeds of the Cotton and Slave South were already well sown before the immigrants’ arrival. Scholars of course know that Indians became slaveholders and ranchers. To a limited extent, historians also recognize that Native Americans began growing cotton as well. However, they generally elide these developments as significant contributing factors in the origins of the Deep South, often
portraying them more as idiosyncratic exceptions in a shrinking or vanishing Native South.

While scholars of Native America focus on the end of the deerskin trade, native cultural change, and Anglo-American encroachment, Early Republic and Antebellum historians emphasize waves of migration and the integration of the Southeast into the continental and Atlantic economies—the transformation of the region from imperial periphery into the hub of slavery’s expansion before the Civil War. What is less clear from their respective literatures is that they fundamentally tell the same story. Antebellum historians have recently begun to account for Native Americans’ presence, but Indians still too often appear as background figures. In this literature, Indian decline is largely a subordinate aspect of the central narrative—a sad casualty in the expansion of the plantation complex and American power. Historians of the Native South, in contrast, look outward from Indian country at a world of contracting borders and diminishing options. Anglo-Americans appear primarily as intruders who physically remained on the periphery of Indian country while white cultural and political imperialism relentlessly infiltrated native communities, wreaking havoc on natives’ traditional way of life. Both narratives explicate important truths. Fundamentally, however, each narrative is discrete. They analyze the same region, the same chronology, and even the same people without fully engaging one another.³ As a result, a full account of the Gulf South’s transformation has not been given.

³ Two good examples of this historiographical split are Robbie Ethridge, *Creek Country: The Creek Indians and Their World* (Chapel Hill, 2003); and Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005). Both are excellent works of scholarship that accomplish what their authors set out to do, but nonetheless they do not speak to one another in a satisfying way. Other
The Euro-American presence in the Gulf South outside of the Mississippi Valley is woefully understudied. For better or worse, the Mississippi River Valley remains a stand-in for the Gulf South in the literature. While scholars emphasize the uniqueness of New Orleans and its immediate hinterlands in the North American context, it has paradoxically come to represent the Gulf South as a whole. When historians of the United States consider other parts of the region at all, it is usually within the context of the War of 1812 and Andrew Jackson’s nearly simultaneous victories over the British and a small band of rebellious Creeks in 1814. Even recent studies of the expansion of slavery and examples like Ethridge’s work include Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians* (New York, 1999); Theda Perdue, “Mixed Blood” Indians: Racial Construction in the Early South (Athens, Ga., and London, 2003; and Kathryn E. Holland Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1685–1815* (Lincoln, Neb., and London, 1993). For other examples like Rothman’s book, see the first few chapters of James C. Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (New York, 1992); Christopher Morris, *Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life, Warren County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770–1860* (New York, 1995); David J. Libby, *Slavery and Frontier Mississippi, 1720–1835* (Jackson, Miss., 2004); and John Craig Hammond *Slavery, Freedom, and Expansion in the Early American West* (Charlottesville, Va., and London, 2007).

4 Lower Louisiana, especially New Orleans and its hinterland, are among the most examined colonial spaces in North America. There is a vast historiography pertaining to these locations and their inhabitants over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but very little work on the places and peoples of the Gulf between New Orleans and Savannah. This literature extends back to the so-called Tannenbaum thesis, pertaining to the comparative North American slave societies in Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York, 1947), through literally hundreds of works, all the way to the recently released volumes by Lawrence N. Powell, *The Accidental City: Improvising New Orleans* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012) and Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Mass., 2013).

the origins of the Deep South find little role for Native America in the events they describe. Despite the fact that white and black Americans moved into an Indian country, Indians themselves can appear extraneous in this literature.

The historiography of the Native American Gulf South is far more robust. Thanks to the maturation of ethnohistory and to thoughtful, sophisticated recent research, historians now have a fairly deep understanding of the ways that native Gulf southerners responded and adapted to the challenges they faced, both internally and in the wider Atlantic world. But these studies do little to highlight the native creation of a Deep South centered on chattel slavery and commercial agriculture. The decline of the deerskin trade and the advent of cattle and cotton in Indian country were transformative, as were new

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Civilization of the Southern Frontier (New York, 1995); Mike Bunn and Clay Williams, Battle for the Southern Frontier: The Creek War and the War of 1812 (New York, 2008). Indeed, the Creek War and the War of 1812 are much studied topics in the Gulf South, though a focus only on war provides misleading glimpses of life on the ground in the region during that period.


ideas about property and power. They were also partially the result of interactions with Europeans. However, livestock, slavery, and cotton were not forced on Native Americans. Some rejected them outright, but many others embraced them, profited from them, and therefore tacitly encouraged the upheaval that ranching, planting, and chattel slavery wrought on Indian culture and society. The element of tragedy in the ostensible decline of Native America should not be ignored. But it should not dominate historians’ narratives, lest they fall into language that emphasizes the tragic “fate” of Indian country. Indian removal represented such a sharp break in the continuity of Native American history that it has taken on an air of inevitability in the historiography—becoming a defining endpoint—which has partially obscured the significance of the slavery and plantation society natives were in the midst of constructing before their forced migration to the trans-Mississippi West.

Ethnohistorians, archaeologists, and anthropologists have done exceptional work in recent decades to analyze Indians as actors rather than objects in American history. For Native American historians, the days of portraying Indians as static features of a “natural” landscape are long past. Scholars now understand that from the fall of Mississippian chiefdoms and virgin soil epidemics to southeastern peoples’ ethnogenesis and the Native American discovery of Europe, Indians have an extensive history of re-inventing themselves and their societies that stretches back centuries. Native Americans were instrumental actors in virtually every drama that unfolded in North America from 1492 on. More often than not, they were the military and political powers to be reckoned with on the continent. As a result of the decline of the Mississippian world and the

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8 See, for example, Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*; and Patricia Galloway, *Choctaw Genesis, 1500–1700* (Lincoln, Neb., 1995).
depopulation of the continent due to disease and other factors, they also grew incredibly adept at adapting to changing circumstances and shifting geopolitical realities. Research has shown, for example, that at the time the Spanish, French, and British were all vying for the favor and trade of the Creeks in the early eighteenth century, “the Creek nation” was only decades old. Even then, semi-independent “Creek” towns resisted generalizations that lumped them in with neighboring towns. Kinship and clan affiliations were paramount, and individual and local autonomy was the rule.9

Across the literature, historians of Native America rightly emphasize that Indians remained autonomous actors who creatively met the challenges posed by European colonialism, sometimes even seizing the upper hand. When it comes to the nineteenth century, however, this narrative shifts slightly. For the period after the 1780s, historians instead emphasize Indians’ spiraling trade deficits, and their creative adaptations are re-labeled as transformations that led to the demise of Native America. Anglo-Americans become the innovators in the Deep South, while the Indian removals of the 1830s take on an implicit mantle of inevitability, instead of being viewed as the contingent events they were.10 Scholars of Native America portray Indians’ embrace of coercive authority and

9 As Joshua Piker, among others, alludes, in the early eighteenth century Creeks were often known to Europeans by their town or location names rather than by their wider “national” designation. Histories of early America must account for this overriding community identity. For example the Okfuskees, the Tallapoosies, the Alabamas, and the Uchees all collectively became “Creek” by the end of the century. But before that they had been predominantly identified locally, based on their town of residence. See Piker, Okfuskee, chap. 1.
racial slavery as an exceptional, even tragic ending, rather than as yet one more instance of the kind of change and reinvention that defined Native America from at least the fifteenth century onward. Yes, Indian society was under tension and in upheaval at the end of the eighteenth century. But societal upheaval had already been a continuous reality in Indian country for at least three hundred years prior to that period. When properly placed in this context, the transformation of Indian country in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries no longer appears unprecedented.

On the subject of race, scholars struggle to find an appropriate vocabulary to describe the growing diversity in Indian country between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The arrival of Africans and Europeans in Native American communities and kinship networks significantly complicated the ethnic geography of “Native America.” But historians’ analyses of these changes remain limited by language. For example, their vocabulary—“mestizos,” “mixed-bloods,” “black Seminoles,” “African Creeks,” and “Red-Black Peoples”—is composed mostly of word combinations that do little to explain what it meant to be a Native American of African or European descent. Indian country ceased to be only a country of Indians by the 1800s, but historians are still reliant on outmoded, generalizing terms to describe peoples who rarely conformed to monolithic

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categories and whose identities remain inscrutable at such a historical distance. The result is that even as historical accounts of Native America grow increasingly sophisticated, they are still undermined by the circumscribing language needed to write them. In Native North America historiography, the term *mestizo*, for instance, usually describes a person who was “mixed” white and Indian. But it also implicitly reinforces the demonstrably false idea—conjured up by much more racist terms like *mulatto* and *half breed*—that there was ever, at any point in history, any such thing as a “pure” Indian. Descriptors like “bicultural” or “between Indian and white worlds,” though they attempt to remove allusions to biology, are little better.

Indians were always participants in the transformation of their homelands, even if that participation was not always strictly voluntary. Their widespread adoption of

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12 The very concept that a person or people can be “multiracial,” a term that remains in heavy use today, both inside and outside academia, is flawed in just this way. It implies that there was some mythical moment when “races” were distinct and separate, and that a person can be made up of some fictional mixture of these once-“pure” races. Race is a lived reality in the United States today. However, it remains a biological fiction, and the use of “mixed race” and “multiracial” as descriptors artificially grafts modern notions of identity onto past peoples. See, Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (New York, 2012).

13 Of course, the very term “Indian” is perhaps the most fraught of all. For the debate on language see Theda Perdue, “Race and Culture: Writing the Ethnohistory of the Early South,” *Ethnohistory*, 51 (Fall 2004); and the response to Perdue in Claudio Saunt et al., “Rethinking Race and Culture in the Early South,” *Ethnohistory*, 53 (Spring 2006). See also Perdue, “Mixed Blood” Indians; Margaret Connell Szasz, *Between Indian and White Worlds: The Cultural Broker* (Norman, Okla., 1994); Andrew K. Frank, *Creeks and Southerners: Biculturalism on the Early American Frontier* (Lincoln, Neb., 2005). Scholars have made admirable attempts to highlight the nuances and complexities of shifts in Indian identity during the second half of the eighteenth century. These include Andrew Frank’s *Creeks and Southerners*; Saunt’s *Black, White, and Indian*; Brooks, *Confounding the Color Line*; and Angela Pulley Hudson’s *Creek Paths and Federal Roads: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves and the Making of the American South* (Chapel Hill, 2010). Language remains a basic problem in other ways too. English-speaking scholars refer to Indian men, for example, as “warriors” and white men as “militiamen” or “soldiers,” which reinforces “uncivilized,” primitive stereotypes. See John E. Ferling, *A Wilderness of Miseries: War and Warriors in Early America* (Westport, Conn., 1980).
livestock, private property, profit, and slavery in Indian country is evidence of this fact. Historians must account equally for those native southerners who embraced these things as well as for those who resisted. And those Indians who embraced change did not somehow give up their identity as Indian. At the same time, many new peoples who trickled into Indian country—black and white—appear to have adopted new identities. Calling them “Indians,” however, is problematic because it inadvertently asserts a false racial and ethnic identity for them. If scholars are to effectively integrate the history of Native America into wider American history narratives, they must stop conceptualizing Indians as somehow apart or separate from other peoples and communities on the continent.\(^\text{14}\)

The historical literature continues to struggle in this regard because of the way it divides the Southeast’s peoples into “Indians, Settlers, and Slaves,” as if these represented discrete, unchanging categories. Indians were settlers and slaves. They were also slaveholders and planters. Anglo-Americans often acted and sometimes were “native,” at least in terms of their family affiliations and agricultural practices, even without the benefit of any “Indian” heritage. African Americans could be slaves and town headmen and they occupied every status in between. And no individual or group

\(^{14}\) There are several works that make useful attempts to acknowledge and analyze native peoples contributions to the emergence of the Deep South, but for the most part they are still constrained by inadequate vocabulary. This historiography was initiated largely by Daniel H. Usner Jr. with, among other studies, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill, 1992). Usner’s work, though path breaking and nuanced, was still limited by the “Indians, Settlers, and Slaves” tri-racial paradigm, which fails to reflect the complex evolution of cultural and political identity in the region. Others who follow up on Usner’s work, and who explore that complexity, but who are similarly limited by language, include Frank, *Creeks and Southerners*; Pulley Hudson, *Creek Paths and Federal Roads*; Brooks, *Confounding the Color Line*; and Daniel S. Murphree, *Constructing Floridians: Natives and Europeans in the Colonial Floridas, 1513–1783* (Gainesville, Fla., 2006).
embodied some mythic “biculturalism.” Gulf southerners were not hybrids. Rather, they generated new cultures, new peoples, and new societies. In my attempt to address these language problems, I use a term of my own to describe the region’s people—“native Gulf southerners.”

Who were native Gulf southerners? Certainly they included Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Seminoles. In a broad sense the Gulf South interior was still Indian country in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But the region was infused with a multiplicity of other peoples, languages, and cultural influences. Africans and African Americans were a continuous presence in Indian country for centuries. Most were ex-slaves and their descendants who had escaped slavery, usually from Georgia, the Carolinas, or Louisiana, but often originally from the West Indies or any number of West and Central African kingdoms. Europeans and Euro-Americans—French, Spanish, English, Scottish, and Irish—also made their way to Indian country for a host of reasons. Adoption customs allowed many of these African and European individuals—even those who were enslaved by Indians—to integrate into native communities and establish kinship ties, and their children became natives of the Gulf South. Native Americans were always fundamentally Americans; acculturation was always a dynamic, multi-directional process. Indians were certainly transformed by their engagement with Euro-American cultures and ideas. But the reverse was true as well.


Before the late eighteenth century, however, Indian groups were not, in the Euro-American sense, “nations.” Race, for instance, was not a recognized category among Indian peoples. Identity was based on kinship; in the Native South, someone without kin connections was literally no one. One’s matrilineal clan and group identity was all-important—if an individual’s mother was Creek, for example, he or she was accepted as Creek, regardless of the person’s paternity or skin color. But one could establish familial connections even without a native mother. Native southerners developed notions of fictive kinship as well, and given specific circumstances anyone, including slaves, could be adopted into a family or clan. Though a runaway slave or a resident trader might have appeared to Americans today as “black” or “white,” each could in theory assert an Indian identity and assimilate into native communities. Furthermore, individual towns were autonomous; indeed each person was autonomous. Authority rested in town and village headmen, but this authority was non-coercive, based on persuasion, prestige, and gifting rituals. Obedience could be withdrawn at any time. Headmen could not compel their constituents to follow them, but rather worked to build consensus for their decisions. They owed their position of authority to this ability, to their perceived honor—won through valor in war or hunting prowess—and to their ability to fill their people’s material needs.¹⁷

Native Americans did not compose well-defined “polities” in the eighteenth century, either. Maps that purport to show Indian nations often give the false impression that they possessed large blocks of territory. In reality, Indian towns’ geography was based along meandering river courses. Thus the Lower Creeks, who in broad terms

maintained a political distance from their Upper Creek neighbors, established their towns along the waters of the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers. They maintained political and economic ties with the Upper Creeks—who in turn lived along the Coosa, Tallapoosa, and Alabama Rivers—via the Creek trading path. Choctaw towns existed on the upper reaches of the Pearl, Tombigbee, Big Black, and Yazoo Rivers and their tributaries. The Chickasaws resided farther north, on the headwaters of the Yazoo basin and along the Tennessee River. Towns were the focus and the center of community life. Politics, trade, socializing—all of these were based in individual towns, which were almost always located along rivers.

Rivers were the defining geographical, ecological, economic, and political features of the Gulf South. While the Mississippi River receives the vast majority of historical attention, nine others wind slowly southward into the Gulf of Mexico, including, from west to east, the Pearl, Pascagoula, Tombigbee, Alabama, Escambia, Perdido, Apalachicola, Chattahoochee, and Flint. Several others act as significant tributaries whose headwaters stretch almost to Tennessee, including the Yazoo, the Big Black, the Black Warrior, the Cahaba, the Coosa, and the Tallapoosa. These rivers helped to bracket the Gulf South’s social geography. For example, while the Chickasaw towns were about as close to the Ohio Valley as to the Gulf of Mexico, their presence on streams that ultimately fed into the Gulf (as well as a common kin and cultural heritage with more southerly peoples) resulted in a social and economic orientation that largely

18 Ethridge, *Creek Country*, 14, 26–53; Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*; Carson, *Searching for the Bright Path*, chaps. 1–2;
faced southward. But beyond this, rivers were also crucial for understanding power, sovereignty, and identity in the southeastern borderlands. They separated Indian nations, both from each other and from the European colonies along the coast; they facilitated transportation and communication; and they provided barriers to the westward expansion of the United States. Rivers delineated nations and connected people across the entire region.

The following chapters survey the transformation of the Gulf South between the 1770s and the 1830s both chronologically and thematically. Chapter 1 investigates the social and economic effects resulting from weak colonial regimes and the increasing power of the Atlantic economy in Indian country. Just before and during the American Revolution, many Loyalists abandoned the future United States for the Floridas, seeking to remain under British government or looking for better financial prospects. This group included several trading firms from Charleston and Savannah who had been engaged in the “Indian trade.” One in particular, the Panton & Leslie Co., purchased Creek deerskins in return for a variety of manufactured items that Indians had grown to depend on, including firearms, blankets and other textiles, and a number of metal goods. When Spain gained control of the Florida colonies in the 1780s, Spanish officials made the fateful

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19 This is not to say that the Chickasaws never engaged with those Indian peoples to the north and west of them. Nor is it to discount the importance of the sociocultural similarities between the Chickasaws and the Creeks, which also determined their orientation in the Gulf South world. However, the fact remains that Chickasaws did much of their trading with Natchez and with neighboring Choctaws, and tended to have enmity with the southern plains peoples and the Shawnees (though not generally with the Cherokees). At the end of the eighteenth century, most considered themselves “brethren” with the Choctaws and Creeks. See Ethridge, *From Chicka to Chickasaw*, and Franchimastabe to Stephen Minor, Diary of Stephen Minor’s First Mission to the Choctaws, May 30–June 13, 1791, in Charles A. Weeks, *Paths to a Middle Ground: The Diplomacy of Natchez, Boukouka, Nogales, and San Fernando de las Barrancas, 1791–1795* (Tuscaloosa, 2005), 157.
decision to rely on Panton & Leslie and their competitor companies to maintain Spanish alliances with the Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws. Spain’s general weakness insured that peltry traders and their partners became the most powerful men in the Gulf South and allowed those who lived in the interior to carry on their social and economic exchanges free from any top-down interference from colonial governments. This reality combined with the increasing influx of outsiders into Indian country to catalyze the region’s agricultural and cultural transformation before the dawn of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 2 explores the new kinship and economic networks that resulted from the simultaneous arrival of newcomers and a colonial power vacuum in Indian country. The Gulf South grew more ethnically and culturally diverse in the 1780s and 1790s, and families and kin relationships became increasingly complex and remained interconnected across the region. As Indian country changed into slave country, families of European, Indian, and African descent created new communities and connections that crossed ethnic and political boundaries. By 1800 Indian towns and colonial settlements were no longer separate worlds.

Chapters 3 and 4 analyze how an Indian country—whose peoples were dependent on the peltry trade, subsistence agriculture, and a local exchange economy—transformed into a cattle, cotton, and slave country between the 1770s and the 1820s. In the last decades of the eighteenth century, both the supply of and demand for deerskins dwindled, and native Gulf southerners fell deeper and deeper into debt with the few trading companies that supplied them with manufactured goods. Many Indian country residents adopted new economic pursuits just as new conceptions of private property and profit became pervasive in their communities. Native southerners raised increasingly large
herds of livestock, and many began enslaving African and African American laborers to manage them. By the 1790s, some native southerners began producing cotton, and a few became slave traders and large slaveholders. Whereas Indian country had once provided a place of escape from slavery for people of African descent, as well as a way to obtain social autonomy and mobility, at the turn into the nineteenth century it instead became a place of bondage and capture. Ranching, cotton production, and chattel slavery all expanded rapidly during this period, and with them the lineaments of an emerging Deep South plantation complex as well.

Chapter 5 examines the demographic and economic consequences of these changes. In the 1770s, decaying and dilapidated colonial towns like Mobile and Pensacola languished on the coast, while the true political, social, and cultural heart of the Gulf South was in Indian population centers like Tuckaubatchee and Coweta. Most of the transactions in the peltry trade occurred in Indian towns, as did most treaty negotiations and social and cultural events. Euro-American colonists often depended on Indians’ peltry for their financial wellbeing, and occasionally for their sustenance. Mostly neglected by their imperial metropoles, colonists in West Florida focused more on Indian country, as the site of both their most important trading partner and their greatest threat, and less on their rulers across the Atlantic, leading some to label Euro-American Gulf southerners as “men of no country.” However, as livestock, cotton, and slavery transformed Indian country itself, native Gulf southerners left their towns in droves, dispersing along riverbanks in search of more land for grazing and planting. Indian town life subsequently declined, and Indians themselves shifted their economic orientations toward the coast, where they sent their livestock and produce. The center of Gulf South
political and economic activity subsequently shifted to port towns like Mobile, Pensacola, and Natchez.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, Spain finally abandoned the Gulf Coast, and the United States became the latest and last colonial power to assert its claim to the Gulf South. Chapter 6 recounts the full emergence of the American Deep South between 1810 and 1835 as a joint creation of native Gulf southerners and Anglo- and African American immigrants. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, elite Gulf southerners—both natives and newcomers—grew increasingly wealthy and consolidated their power. Indians and Anglo-Americans partnered to quell remaining resistance to the emerging new order, and the defeat of the Red Stick movement in 1814 ushered in a flood of immigrants from the United States. Though remnants of a Native South persisted in various ways, white Americans ultimately overwhelmed the region with numbers and finished what native Gulf southerners had started. Thousands of white and enslaved black migrants arrived in Indian country in the 1810s and 1820s. But rather than integrate into native communities, as newcomers had always done before, they built new towns and new communities along the Gulf South’s river systems. By the 1830s, white Americans had enough numbers that they no longer needed to partner with Native Americans, and these new southerners set about moving native southerners west of the Mississippi, even as they worked to complete the cotton plantation and slavery complex that would become the foundation of antebellum America’s economy.

Because few Native Americans kept written records of their own during this period, this project necessarily relies on the words of Europeans and Euro-Americans for their descriptions of Gulf South life. Further, Native Americans took no censuses, kept no
estate or land records, and rarely recorded their own economic transactions. Such paucity of written and quantitative data means that this is a study far more about what was possible in the Gulf South, rather than what was necessarily common or probable. It is impossible to know, for example, what percentage of Creeks participated in cotton production with enslaved black labor for profit. But what available sources make clear is that a significant number of them absolutely did so. Thus, while I am nowhere able to conclusively show that all or even most native Gulf southerners became Deep South planters or slaveholders (and certainly, most did not), I am able to demonstrate that enough native Gulf southerners became ranchers, planters, slaveholders, and slave traders that they necessarily bore along with them nearly every person in Indian country on the wave of change unleashed by the emerging slave-based economy. Even those who resisted this sea change influenced—and were influenced by—its shape and direction.

Perhaps the most important sources for this project are the Panton & Leslie Papers. This collection—reproduced on twenty-six reels of microfilm—consists not only of decades of the trading firm Panton & Leslie’s financial ledgers and correspondence but also years of government documents and letters from Spanish and United States officials. The collection also includes private correspondence between colonial governors and their subordinates. It was compiled in the 1970s from archives in Spain, the U.K., and across the U.S. by the Panton & Leslie project—primarily led by William S. Coker—for the University of West Florida in Pensacola, Florida. Other major archival sources include additional Panton & Leslie records housed at the University of Florida and the financial papers and correspondence of the rival peltry firm Turnbull & Joyce Co. housed at Louisiana State University. The published papers and journals of Benjamin Hawkins, the
first United States Indian agent in the Southeast, are also crucial for their descriptions of native Gulf southerners’ homes, estates, and daily lives between the 1790s and the 1810s.

It has been especially difficult to find and document the voices of those who either did not write, could not write, or whose writings have not survived. I have attempted to remain cognizant of the fact that African Americans and Native Americans were perhaps the most important agents in the transformation of the Gulf South, even though I must read them from Euro-American perspectives. I rely greatly on excellent work by ethnohistorians and anthropologists, whose research and conclusions provide me with the tools to understand eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Native American cultures and societies, and to triangulate their motivations and perspectives in the absence of direct evidence.20 Still, the task of ensuring that Indians, African Americans, and some Euro-Americans remain actors in this drama, rather than static set pieces, remains a difficult one, given source limitations.

The Native South became the Deep South between the 1770s and the 1830s. Understanding that this was at least partially the product of indigenous influence and not simply the result of massive Anglo- and African American migration has important implications for how we understand the history of slavery and race in the United States. It demonstrates that the slave-powered plantation complex that emerged in Alabama and Mississippi was not simply the product of the expansion of United States power, nor of the first steps toward an American empire. Native Gulf southerners shared responsibility.

20 Specifically, I have benefited immensely from Ethridge, *Creek Country* and *From Chicaza to Chickasaw*; Saunt, *A New Order of Things*; O’Brien, *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age*; Perdue, “Mixed-Blood” Indians; and Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*.
The incorporation of the southern borderlands into the U.S. cultural, political, and trade economies was a result of local as well as continental phenomena.

This is not to assert that the rise of American hegemony and the erosion of traditional native cultures warrant less scholarly attention—far from it. But until the Indian removals, Indians had options and they made choices, however limited or constrained they became. Many chose to re-invent their way of life—something their ancestors had done many times—and to hold on to their autonomy by becoming cotton planters, slave traders, and ranchers. This did not make them any less “native” than their dissident kin who resented these things. Many Indians lost their independence in the early nineteenth century. But many others did not. Some even thrived. Understanding history from their perspective is important because it shows us that post-colonial Indian history was not necessarily defined by resistance and decline.

Gulf southerners of all ethnicities played an active role in the transformation of the southern frontier into a slave country. The frontier exchange economy and the deerskin trade provided seed capital and infrastructure for the transition to cotton between the 1770s and the 1820s. Creeks, Chickasaws, Choctaws, Africans, and a few Euro-Americans were some of the first agriculturalists to develop the potential and techniques for cotton production in Alabama and Mississippi. Well before the arrival of whites and enslaved blacks from the United States, native Gulf southerners had begun the economic and cultural shifts that initiated the transformation of the Gulf South from a society based on local exchange and the deerskin trade into one increasingly circumscribed by race and geared toward slave-produced commodities. Aspiring American planters were forced to
contend with and integrate into this milieu before they ultimately set about shaping it in their own image.
CHAPTER 1:

TRADERS, COMPANIES, INDIANS, AND EMPIRES: CONSTRUCTING NATIVE GULF SOUTHERNERS, 1770–1800

In late 1780 merchant John Fitzpatrick paid a visit to one of his traders and employees, Nelly Price, along the Big Black River north of Natchez, West Florida. Fitzpatrick operated primarily out of Manchac, a small settlement along a bayou connecting the Mississippi with Lake Maurepas in lower Louisiana. But the relatively small outfit in which he employed Price beginning in 1774 was further north, on the edge of Choctaw country. Fitzpatrick and Price, a free woman of color, sold goods—including rum, gunpowder, firearms, blankets, and other manufactured items—to Choctaws and a scattering of Euro-American settlers and traders in exchange for deerskins and some corn. By the last decades of the eighteenth century, the deerskin trade operated heavily on a system of debt and credit. Fitzpatrick understood that goods had to be advanced to Indian traders in the expectation of turning a profit with the following spring’s deer harvest. As of his 1780 visit to the store that Price ran, however, multiple seasons had passed in which she had failed to show a return on his investment. Price had received pelts over those years but had neglected to send those skins down the Mississippi to Fitzpatrick for export. Fitzpatrick had a strong suspicion that Price was cheating him. His inkling began in 1777, when Fitzpatrick attempted to collect a debt from a trader named Rodgers Ross who informed him that he had already paid it to Price. Ross reported that Price had promised to pass it along to Fitzpatrick, but the merchant never received it.¹

¹ John Fitzpatrick to Donald McPherson, October 11, 1777, in Margaret Fisher Dalrymple, ed., The Merchant of Manchac: The Letterbooks of John Fitzpatrick, 1768–
During Fitzpatrick’s visit in 1780, Price assured him that “She was in Daily Expectation of a large Party of Savages Comeing in with a quantity of Skins,” and that she would soon have his payment. During a tense exchange that followed, Fitzpatrick asked to have a look at Price’s account books so that he could be sure she was not lying to him. When he found that her books were essentially blank, he finally lost his temper:

This put me in such a Violent Passion to see myself so Humbugged by such a Strumpet that I Could not help asking her in a verry abrupt manner what have you done with my propirty[?] She answer’d me in that Ville language which she is such Mistress off Damn your Blood I have fucked them away[!] This I could not bear and therefore Struck her which I am well assured were you or any other man in my Place you would not have put up with it and have done as I did, She Endeavoured to make her Escape but I followed her in a room Where I gave her a Couple of Clouts[,] She then made her Escape into the Field where I did not follow her[.]²

Fitzpatrick’s reaction to Price’s deceit suggests that he held what to modern eyes seemed to be contradictory understandings about her identity. Fitzpatrick justified his physical attack on Price with both racialized and gendered language. In his letter about the incident he referred to her as “an infernal Yellow Bitch” and a “Strumpet.” He further defended himself and demeaned Price by asserting (ironically) that she had a well-known reputation for using coarse language, and that he could never have been expected to

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² John Fitzpatrick to Captain William McIntosh, June 11, 1780, JFL, 347-51.
endure such disrespect from a woman. Yet by the time of their altercation, Price had been Fitzpatrick’s semi-autonomous employee for six years. More important, she ran their joint operation on the Big Black River largely by herself, demonstrating that Fitzpatrick not only saw her as fit to run a trading outfit on her own but also trustworthy enough to handle large transactions for years before he demanded to see her account books. Nor did her skin color or gender prevent Price from turning the tables on him when she later publically accused him of robbing her—infuriating Fitzpatrick even further.

Price’s legal and business dealings would have been largely impossible for her to conduct in much of the late-eighteenth-century Atlantic world. Her relationship with Fitzpatrick would have been unusual (though not unprecedented) even in nearby New Orleans. Yet Fitzpatrick never indicated he felt their relationship was odd. In the Gulf South interior, neither Price’s race nor her skin color appeared to circumscribe her life.

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4 Lower Louisiana, and New Orleans more specifically, often serves as a stand-in for histories of the “Gulf South” in general. In reality, the plantation society—the only significant one in the region during this period—had far more in common with Charleston or Savannah than Natchez or Mobile. Though New Orleans’ race relations were unique, they still exemplified a de facto color hierarchy that did not extend much beyond its immediate hinterlands. See Thomas N. Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: The First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718–1819* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999); Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves: The Spanish Regulation of Slavery in Louisiana, 1763–1803* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999); and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge and London, 1992).
choices. Her status as a woman of color did not necessarily contradict her status as a free Indian trader and store manager. Certainly Fitzpatrick did not see Price as his equal; he probably would not have struck a white man in a similar manner as he did Price (though he very well might have). But nor did their relationship fly in the face of some more formal structured racial hierarchy. Instead, race relations in the region were extremely informal, even flexible.

Nelly Price’s activities after her violent encounter with Fitzpatrick offer further insights into how the Gulf South evolved near the end of the century. Throughout the 1780s, after ending her relationship with Fitzpatrick, she parlayed her peltry trade experience into engagements in new economic activities, though her gender and race seemed to increasingly constrain at least some aspects of her life. By the middle of the decade she was still living on the edge of Choctaw country and had partnered with a planter named Miguel Lopez. Court documents listed her as his “housekeeper,” though she was certainly more than that, since witnesses described her in 1786 as having been in a “partnership” with Lopez for three years and engaged in agriculture. Her legal categorization as housekeeper is therefore suggestive of burgeoning formal racial limitations on her activities. At the same time, she independently continued her trading activities with the Choctaws. She and Lopez were also probably sexual partners. In 1789, after Lopez died, she sued to gain possession of his Natchez town house, which she claimed rightfully passed to her because she had built it on his lot “at her own expense.”

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5 The King versus Michael Lopez, March 6, 1786, in Mae Wilson McBee, ed., The Natchez Court Records, 1767–1805: Abstracts of Early Records (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1953; hereinafter cited as “Natchez Court Records”), 246. The court documents do not specify what Price planted, only that she “cultivates the ground” and had lived with Lopez for three years in 1786.
But she had no documents to that effect, and due to her official status as Lopez’s employee, the court disallowed her claim and sold the house at auction.\textsuperscript{6}

Though Price, Lopez, Fitzpatrick, and thousands of others officially lived in Spanish Louisiana and West Florida, their status as colonial subjects was dubious at best. Spain was weak, and the Gulf South interior, primarily composed of Indian country, was almost completely free from top-down governmental control. This weakness compelled Spanish officials to rely on developing friendly relations with the Southeast’s autonomous Indian groups to secure their own colony. That friendship depended on satisfying Indians’ demand for European manufactured goods. But Spain’s feeble logistical and financial support for its North American administrations meant that officials there could not even meet this relatively meager requirement, forcing them to rely on the Gulf’s established private Indian trading companies.\textsuperscript{7} For all intents and purposes, during the last several decades of the eighteenth century these companies—depended upon by Indian towns and colonial governments alike—controlled the region economically, politically, and socially.

The absence of formal governmental power existed simultaneously with the further integration of the Gulf South into the Atlantic world. Of course, the Atlantic cultural and trade economies had exerted a strong influence on the region for decades,

\textsuperscript{6} It is not clear if Price’s race or gender played a direct role in her losing the town house, but it is a reasonable assumption. Other witnesses testified that Price was indeed in a partnership with Lopez, and she had actually constructed the town house in question at her own expense. Given these facts, her claim seemed stronger than the court allowed. See Nelly Price and others versus the estate of Michael Lopez, August, 1788, \textit{Natchez Court Records}, 177–78.

\textsuperscript{7} For an overview of the vulnerable position of Spain’s Atlantic empire during this period, see David J. Weber, \textit{The Spanish Frontier in North America}, (New Haven, Conn., 1992) 272–75, 282–85.
perhaps a century, before the 1770s. However, during the latter part of the eighteenth century larger numbers of people, goods, cultural practices, and racial, social, and economic ideas infiltrated this world than ever before. The colonial power vacuum, the growing indebtedness of deerskin hunters, and the expanding importance of other commodities like livestock combined with unprecedented cultural and ethnic changes so that, by the 1790s, reference to the area as an “Indian country” became something of a misnomer. By then, Gulf southerners composed a sociocultural mosaic that had become far more complicated than that label allowed for. Even as the Gulf South grew more and more variegated—a southern region unlike any other—its links to the rest of the continent grew stronger. Indians became cattle ranchers and owners of chattel slaves. Euro-Americans became Indian leaders. Private property and profit became ends in and of themselves for Native Americans who once valued the community and consensus of their parents. At the end of the century Gulf southerners, led by private companies, had sown the seeds of a new Deep South society.

The late-eighteenth-century regional power vacuum was filled by peltry trading companies, which also provided the means and the markets for Gulf southerners to acquire the cattle, slaves, and profits they sought. Most notably the Panton & Leslie Co. emerged as the most important economic and political organization in the Gulf South in the 1780s. Headed from Pensacola by William Panton, Panton & Leslie kept the Gulf South provided with trade goods, like the ones sold by Nelly Price, while also allying with powerful Indian leaders, planters, and various Indian country families. By 1792 over

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8 For more on this crucial shift and what it meant for the fundamental transformation for Indian polities, see Saunt, *A New Order of Things.*
half the peltry on London markets was sold by Panton & Leslie. Then as the European demand for deerskins declined, and as Indian country residents turned increasingly toward livestock, cotton, and slavery, Panton & Leslie shifted its operations to service those activities instead. “Indian trading” companies began exporting fewer pelts and more lumber, livestock products, and cotton while importing enslaved Africans and Afro-Caribbeans—who added their own ethnocultural ingredients to the regional mix—along with firearms, blankets, and metal goods. Spanish geopolitical power waned, the fledgling United States was unable to immediately take its place, and the result amounted to the beginnings of a Deep South transformation catalyzed by native Gulf southerners and the private trading companies upon which they depended.

Britain officially departed from the Gulf region after the American Revolution, but many merchants and planters like John Fitzpatrick, who had migrated there during British rule, remained rooted in Spanish territory. Spain, however, was not in a financial position to adequately support or defend its newly reclaimed colony. Officials in Louisiana believed Britain would attempt to regain the Floridas by force, and American designs on westward expansion quickly grew worrisome as well. Without a viable military presence, Spain recognized its regime’s survival depended on friendly relations with the several southeastern Indian groups, and thus on the trade goods those groups demanded. Subsequently, by the end of the century, Indian traders and their associates—

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—both native and non-native—became the de facto powers in the Gulf South interior. The companies, however, had little interest in actively interfering with the region’s sociocultural development. Thus while the physical territory remained under Native American or company control, the growing presence of individual Euro-American traders and people of color—both enslaved and free—subtly began to transform Indian country. Men and women of multiple ethnicities intermarried, traded, and allied with native people. Nelly Price’s relationship with John Fitzpatrick, along with the longer narrative of her life in the Gulf South, presents a vivid and complex picture of a frontier society in flux by the end of the eighteenth century—a place increasingly ill-defined by traditional labels like Indian, European, or African.

Speaking strictly in a de jure political sense, the situation in the Gulf South was much more straightforward. Spain’s alliance with France and the United States during the American Revolution allowed them to formally reclaim their old Florida colonies, which Britain had co-opted two decades earlier at the conclusion of the Seven Years’ War. But Spain’s New World fortunes had changed markedly by the 1780s, and despite possessing New Orleans (along with most of the vast Louisiana territory), the empire found it difficult to extract anything from the Floridas other than some geo-political advantages.\(^\text{11}\) With no prospect for the arrival of large numbers of loyal colonists or troops from Europe, an increasingly potent Britain looming in the Caribbean, and an expansion-minded new nation along the Atlantic seaboard, Spain turned to the Southeast’s Indian

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\(^{11}\) For an excellent contextual overview of Spain’s imperial fortunes during the eighteenth century, see J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830* (New Haven, Conn., 2006).
groups to help defend its last North American toe-hold east of the Mississippi River. In early 1782 Louisiana’s governor wrote that Spain’s continued presence in the Gulf depended “principally on friendship with the Indians[,] which can only be obtained by means of making gifts and by trade which would provide them the necessary equipment for the skin trade.”

West Florida’s governor, Arturo O’Neill, echoed this notion and urgently asked that the Intendant of Havana send trade goods to Pensacola, fearing that the Creeks intended to keep trading with the English at their outpost on the St. John’s River, near the Atlantic. “We shall easily keep [the Creeks’] friendship by means of trade, or the purchase of skins. [But] if this is not put into practice immediately, I foresee that the result may be that they still become our enemies.”

Despite O’Neill’s requests, sufficient trade goods failed to arrive for over a year, presumably because there were none to spare.

The Americans soon recognized for themselves the advantages of monopolizing the Indian trade. Near the end of 1783 they attempted to gather together the majority of Upper and Lower Creek headmen, including Tallasee King and Alexander McGillivray, in Augusta in hopes of funneling their deerskins towards Savannah instead of Pensacola.

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12 Bernardo de Gálvez to the Intendant of Louisiana, March 18, 1782, Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company, (materials collected by the Papers of Panton, Leslie and Co. Project, John C. Pace Library, University of West Florida, 26 microfilm reels) reel 1, frames 728–41; hereinafter cited as Panton and Leslie Papers.
13 Arturo O’Neill to Luis de Uzaga, February 15, 1783, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 1, frame 925–28
14 As far as can be concluded, this appeared to be true. Spain appeared financially unable to provide its North American possessions with much outside assistance, occupied as they were on holding their more valuable Caribbean and Central American possessions. Essentially, the general commandant’s office in Havana let O’Neill know he was on his own in West Florida.
or St. Johns.\textsuperscript{15} In the wake of this American interference, Arturo O’Neill’s pleas for Indian goods finally made an impression on his superior, newly appointed Louisiana governor Estevan Miró. The government in Havana, however, remained inert on the issue. Desperate for a solution, Miró wrote to them that if the Spanish did not establish better trade with the Indians immediately, “the consequences that would follow” if they were instead “attracted to…the Americans[,] would be irreparable.”\textsuperscript{16} Deciding it was easier to ask for forgiveness than permission, Miró took matters into his own hands and licensed several private companies to manage the Indian trade largely free of government restrictions or taxes. Later, defending this action to his superiors, Miró begged them “not to forget…the urgent necessity to befriend the said [Indian] nations within His Majesty’s dominions. There is in this province a total lack of Indian effects [trade goods] and Your Lordship knows that without them it is impossible to maintain their friendship and subordination. All these circumstances have forced me to break the regular rules” in this instance.\textsuperscript{17}

Unfortunately for Miró, the only companies capable of meeting Spain’s trade needs were owned by English and Scottish transplants. Though the British government had ceased to administer East and West Florida, many of the merchants and farmers who had relocated there as Loyalists during the American Revolution decided to remain rather than move a second time. Their loyalties to Spain were thus dubious or nonexistent.\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{15} James Rae to Lyman Hall, September 24, 1783, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 1, frame 1036–37.
\textsuperscript{16} Estevan Miró to Jose de Navarro, September 16, 1785, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 2, frame 653.
\textsuperscript{17} Estevan Miró to Jose de Ezpeleta, August 1, 1784, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 1, frame 1505.
\textsuperscript{18} McMichael, \textit{Atlantic Loyalties}, 1–34.
\end{footnotesize}
Miró personally urged the first merchant-trader, a Feliciana man named James Mather, to “with the greatest haste have two [of his] boats come from London to Pensacola and Mobile, with a cargo entirely composed of merchandise for the Indians.” Mather’s company, Mather & Strother, established its base of operations in Mobile. A second company, Turnbull & Joyce, was also based out of Mobile, while the third, the Panton & Leslie Co., traded out of Pensacola and a smaller coastal settlement on the eastern edge of West Florida called Apalachee. Likely knowing how pressing Spain’s needs were, these companies’ proprietors obtained relatively free rein to operate in the West Florida interior. Miró did not even force them to take the Spanish loyalty oath, remarkable given their assumed British sympathies and underscoring the governor’s desperation. The Spanish government made these concessions for Mather, Turnbull, and Panton hopeful of quickly reaping the benefits of the Indian trade and subsequently gaining the loyalty of the region’s Indian groups, many of which were already entwined in economic relationships with these companies and their owners. Both Miró and Arturo O’Neill knew they could not practically administer the territory outside of their respective seats. They hoped that a tenuous alliance with these former British colonials would allow them at least a measure of indirect control.

Trading companies worked with a number of semi-independent traders, most of whom were of European descent in the early 1770s. These men, who were not strictly “employees,” resided at least part of the year in Indian towns, collecting skins and

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19 Estevan Miró to Jose de Ezpeleta, August 1, 1784, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 1, frame 1505.
20 Jose de Navarro to Arturo O’Neill, December 3, 1786, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 2, frame 1588–89; Jose de Ezpeleta to Valdes, November 1788, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 3, frame 968–72.
distributing goods and credit, before returning to their respective company’s headquarters along the coasts. Skins and goods were moved either by pack train or, less frequently, by river transport.\textsuperscript{21} Initially, Spain granted each company rights to trade with any of the nearby Indian groups technically under Spanish jurisdiction, including the Upper and Lower Creeks, the Choctaws, and the Chickasaws. Within a few years, however, this arrangement aroused discord with Indians and tension between competing outfits. From Mobile, Mather & Strother did their best to court the Creeks, who because of their proximity and larger number of hunters, offered the highest potential return in the short term. In Pensacola, which was even closer for many Creeks, especially in the Lower Towns, Panton & Leslie’s traders frequently had disputes with their Mather & Strother competitors. Mather also attempted to buy the influence of Alexander McGillivray, a powerful leader among the Upper Creeks, which infuriated William Panton (probably because McGillivray was already secretly partnered with Panton by this time).\textsuperscript{22}

In an effort to solve the dispute, Governor Miró divided the Indian trade. “Each company will limit themselves to providing the Indian nations in their area,” he decreed in 1787. “If they do not submit,” he wrote to Mobile’s commandant, “[you] may confiscate any goods that are illegally introduced and deposit them in the King’s warehouse.”\textsuperscript{23} The decree confined Mather to the trade of the Choctaws and Chickasaws


\textsuperscript{23} Estevan Miró to Favrot, February 7, 1787, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 2, frame 1816.
from his base in Mobile and limited Panton to the Creek trade from his more easterly base in Pensacola. Almost immediately, this created new problems. Spanish Indian agent Pedro Juzan later reported that Mather had increased prices for the Choctaws, angering Choctaw headman Franchimastabe. The Choctaws grew so dissatisfied with Mather’s Mobile store that they threatened to travel across Creek country to Georgia to obtain their trade goods, a prospect that officials in St. Augustine and New Orleans feared would lead to a Creek-Choctaw war.

Spain needed the Indian trade to operate smoothly in order to secure their possession of the Gulf Coast. Try as the might to administer the trade according to their own prerogatives, however, in the end the complexities regional economy and politics kept the trade out of their control. By the end of 1787, Estevan Miró’s attempt to manage Indian relations by granting trade monopolies to private companies had made Spanish control of the interior more precarious, not less. The Indians “complain bitterly of [Mather’s] Commerce at Mobile, about which I am informed the residents themselves murmur,” Arturo O’Neill wrote to Miró that year. O’Neill recommended that Panton & Leslie be allowed to trade closer to the Mississippi River once again. Miró never had to act on that recommendation, as it turned out. For unclear reasons, Mather and Strother largely faded from official correspondence after 1787, though at one point O’Neill mentioned in passing that the company was “ruined.” In any event, Panton & Leslie

suddenly found themselves in control of the large majority of the deerskin trade between
Georgia and the Mississippi River.  

Though freed from the problems created by Mather & Strother, Spanish administrators decided their plan to depend on the assistance of a private peltry trading company—the proprietor of which steadfastly refused to take a loyalty Spanish crown—was an ill-advised strategy. Officials evinced a constant suspicion, perhaps emanating from a feeling of powerlessness, that the ostensibly subordinate company was actively undermining them. Lower level administrators complained that Panton & Leslie traders refused to check the many “wandering” Americans who “settled in any Village” with impunity, allegedly to sow discontent among Indians allied with Spain. Neither Panton nor his traders were diligent about passing on intelligence from Indian country, as Spain expected of them. Further, Panton demanded a reduction in the duties he paid to the Spanish government in 1788, professing a need to keep his prices competitive with American trade goods. Miró and O’Neill both suspected Panton was simply using his vital position as leverage to increase his profits. Both also suspected his silent partner, a Creek leader named Alexander McGillivray, of being in league with the British. Nevertheless, Miró felt compelled to grant Panton’s request. As he wrote at the time, keeping the Creeks under at least nominal Spanish control “in order to form a barrier between the United States and these Provinces” was a higher priority than any taxes obtained from deerskins.  

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27 Vicente Folch to Estevan Miró, April 26, 1788, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 3, frame 1754–55.
28 Vicente Folch to Estevan Miró, April 26, 1788, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 3, frame 1754–55; Estevan Miró to Antonio Valdez, July 13, 1788, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 4, frame 148–49.
Spanish colonial administrators also suspected the Choctaws of harboring pro-American sympathies, which was part of their government’s motivation to construct a fort at Nogales, near the present day site of Vicksburg, in 1791. During negotiations for the land on which to build the fort, Spain’s Choctaw agent, Stephen Minor, tried to dissuade the Choctaws from dealing with the Americans. When Choctaw headmen complained that the construction of Nogales wrongly confiscated their land and scared away the few remaining deer, Minor argued that the fort’s intention was in fact to “protect the land of [the King’s] beloved red people” from greedy American settlers. Minor pointed to the United States’ treatment of the Georgia Creeks and the more northerly Cherokees in an attempt to scare the Choctaws, saying “that whenever [the Americans] took possession of a similar place what inevitably followed was the destruction and expulsion of all the red people…in its vicinity.” Even with the new fort at Nogales, however, Spain’s inability to manage Indian affairs and the absence of significant numbers of settlers loyal to their administration made their hold on the Gulf South increasingly precarious.

Due to Spain’s lack of effective sovereignty over the region, as well as the diffuse and fractional nature of native politics, loyalty and formal authority were extremely fluid at the end of the eighteenth century. Rumored and actual filibuster expeditions by

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Americans concerned leaders in Creek country and the Cabildo.\textsuperscript{30} From his estate near the Upper Creek town of Little Tallassee, Alexander McGillivray exchanged letters with Spanish officials finally promising to “prevent as much as possible any Americans from passing thro the Indian Nations,” and he expressed concern that the Natchez commandant had been forced to surrender the fort there “repeatedly” to “a Numerous body of American banditti” who tried to claim the city in the name of the United States. West Florida residents worked against the Spanish government from within the colony as well. In 1785 McGillivray recounted that “matters had arisen to [such a] height that it was found necessary by Government to seize and put into Irons about Seventeen persons of the Most seditious Americans that were inhabitants about the Natchez, and all others banished” from the colony.\textsuperscript{31} Spain surreptitiously provided five thousand pounds of gunpowder and ammunition to McGillivray’s warriors in return for their agreement to attack any Americans settled in Creek territory.\textsuperscript{32} Many Indians did not follow McGillivray’s lead, however, let alone recognize his claim to lead and speak for them. Lower Creek towns, especially, distanced themselves from their Upper Creek counterparts after McGillivray inspired violent retaliations there for American settlers’ incursions.\textsuperscript{33}


\textsuperscript{31} Alexander McGillivray to Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes, December 10, 1785, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 2, frame 783–84. The fact that Natchez was taken repeatedly by a handful of Americans highlights the extreme military weakness of Spain at the time.

\textsuperscript{32} Estevan Miró to Arturo O’Neill, June 20, 1786, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 2, frame 1182–91.

\textsuperscript{33} Alexander McGillivray to Arturo O’Neill, January 1, 1784, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 1, frame 1113–1123.
assured the governor of Georgia that they were still his “friends” and that McGillivray gave “Bad talks” because he was “imployed by the Spanard.”34

By the late 1780s, then, it was difficult to tell who controlled the Gulf South. Spain, the United States, William Panton, Alexander McGillivray, and the many other town headmen all claimed various levels of authority, though few of them ever effectively exercised much of it. Trust was hard to come by, even among ostensible allies. Individuals played fast and loose with their allegiances. Spanish officials provided arms to Creeks and paid McGillivray a salary while simultaneously accusing him of being in the pay of both Britain and the Panton & Leslie Company (and one of these and possibly both were true).35 Vicente Folch, Pensacola’s commandant, also accused him of inciting a small band of Alibamon Indians to attack the Spanish colonial town of Tensaw. McGillivray denied this charge, though he admitted to threatening the residents of Tensaw in the past because “I have found them ungratefull,” defending himself by claiming the residents were “americans in their hearts.”36 McGillivray further accused the Tensaw trader Ben James of pro-American sympathies. This was apparently true; James

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34 The Headmen of the Cussetaws and Buzzard Roost Indians to the Governor of Georgia, May 2, 1786, Unpublished Letters of Timothy Barnard, 1784–1820, Department of Archives and History of the State of Georgia, 61; hereinafter cited as “Letters of Timothy Barnard.”

35 For his part, Alexander McGillivray repeatedly stated his main loyalty was to the Creek Nation, which he adamantly asserted was an independent nation, not part of any colonial possession, and therefore never truly under the jurisdiction of Spain, Britain, or the United States. From the correspondence between McGillivray and the Spanish government, it appears as though officials in New Orleans and Mobile were unwilling to directly challenge McGillivray on this assertion, though they obviously disagreed with him among themselves. Moreover, his assertion of a unified “Creek Nation” was probably premature by at least a decade, let alone his claims to lead it. See, for example, Arturo O’Neill to Esteven Miró, May 21, 1787, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 3, frame 441–43; O’Neill to Miró, June 4, 1788, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 3, frame 1832–35.

Mather had forced James to explain his recent acceptance of a paid position as an Indian agent for Georgia when it clearly conflicted with his loyalty oath to Spain as well as his position as Mather’s trading associate. Spain, the U.S., Panton & Leslie, Indian leaders, and traders all vied for economic and political control in Indian country, and Gulf South residents, both Indian and non-Indian, lived their daily lives in a tangle of ambiguous alliances and enmities. As the eighteenth century drew to a close, this ambiguity permeated cultural, social, and economic relationships throughout the region.

The one thread that held all Gulf southerners together during this period was the deerskin trade. Indians depended on it for manufactured goods and other property; Spain needed it to keep local Indian groups happy; the United States desired it to help further their designs on the region; and traders and other Euro-American residents relied on it for their livelihood and for the stability of their relationships with Indians. The firm in the best position to take advantage of this situation was Panton & Leslie by the end of the 1780s. Spain’s inability to supply the region with trade goods opened the door for Panton and a few other companies. But after the apparent demise of Mather & Strother, William Panton along with his silent partner among the Creeks, Alexander McGillivray, took advantage and expanded their operations into Choctaw and Chickasaw countries. Almost as soon as Spain regained sovereignty over the Floridas, McGillivray and other Creeks leveraged Spain’s military and economic weaknesses against them. Spanish officials grumbled that McGillivray’s Creeks’ demands for goods were increasingly unreasonable. East Florida governor Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes complained that the Indians “repeat

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their visits three, four, and even five times a year, and each time it seems to them that
they ought to be given presents. Such a grave abuse calls for a remedy.\textsuperscript{38} In an effort to
provide that remedy the governors—Louisiana’s Estevan Miró, West Florida’s Arturo
O’Neill, and East Florida’s Zéspedes—even schemed for a way to start their own
company that might supplant Panton, lessen McGillivray’s influence, and assure that the
suppliers of Indian goods were loyal subjects, though the plan never came to fruition.

Spain’s Florida and Louisiana governors also worried about their over-reliance on
wish that I knew through some of our own citizens what goes on in the Indian Nations,”
Arturo O’Neill wrote to Estevan Miró in 1787. “No Spaniard appearing there causes all
the consideration of the Indians to fall on McGillivray alone, who acts under our
protection in everything.”\textsuperscript{39} O’Neill, especially, never trusted the Creek leader nor his
business partner William Panton, both of whom he suspected of at least passively
undermining Spanish rule. “It is always necessary to distrust him [McGillivray] and
Panton, since the latter is governed by his own interests and will therefore try to carry on
his trade where he pays no duties, about which he complains…without cause,” and
because McGillivray “is so British at Heart.”\textsuperscript{40}

Frustratingly for O’Neill, McGillivray and Panton abided by Spanish authority
only when it suited them. “Since a year ago…I have noticed the disinclination of the
trader William Panton and the commissary Alexander McGillivray to concur willingly or

\textsuperscript{38} Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes to Alexander McGillivray, May 22, 1786, Panton and
Leslie Papers, reel 2, frame 1102–14.
\textsuperscript{39} Arturo O’Neill to Estevan Miró, June 16, 1787, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 3, frame
520–22.
\textsuperscript{40} Arturo O’Neill to Estevan Miró, March 26, 1788, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 3,
frame 1591–93.
even to obey orders for the government of our sovereign,” he wrote in 1788. McGillivray “considers himself independent of our government, though employed by it...[and] I understand that he proceeds with almost complete arbitrariness.”

O’Neill admitted that both men had been useful to the government, but he urged that this was solely due to their “bitter opposition to the Americans, which is born of their love for the British nation. I do not know of a single bond of affection whereby these individuals are bound to the Spanish government.” As evidence, O’Neill cited his own spies in Indian country who informed the governor that Panton actively encouraged settlers to sell their livestock and other goods to him at Apalachee—where they were out of the practical reach of Spanish customs officials—and illegally employed runaway slaves in his operations. One spy repeated rumors that McGillivray privately deprecated Spanish officials, harbored runaway slaves that belonged to coastal planters under Spanish protection, and had recently attempted to “enlist what white men he could” from Tensaw to unite with the Creeks against the Spanish regime in anticipation of a British invasion. Even if all these accusations were true, Miró recognized there was little he could do about them. Spain had neither the political will nor military coffers to make its colony any less dependent on the good graces of McGillivray and Panton. While one enjoyed many Creeks’ allegiance, the other controlled Indian country’s economic lifeblood.

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41 Arturo O’Neill to Estevan Miró, June 4, 1788, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 3, frame 1832–35.
42 Arturo O’Neill to Estevan Miró, June 4, 1788, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 3, frame 1832–35.
43 Arturo O’Neill to Estevan Miró, July 28, 1788, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 4, frame 241–43. This last charge, especially, was likely an exaggeration. McGillivray probably did relish a return of the British to the Gulf coast, though his main preoccupation throughout this period remained keeping the incursions of American settlers at bay.
McGillivray and Panton were not the only individuals to take advantage of the relative political confusion ushered in by a weak Spanish regime. In the absence of Mather & Strother, a trader named John Turnbull—the senior proprietor of Turnbull & Joyce, the Gulf South’s third large trading company—emerged in their place among the Chickasaws and the Choctaws. By the 1790s, Turnbull’s rising influence with both groups forced the Spanish to be dependent on him for Indian relations in the western Gulf South, especially as American settlers made efforts to possess land south of the Tennessee River. In 1793 when Spanish Indian agent Manuel Gayoso attempted to negotiate for the construction of a fort at the Chickasaw Bluffs in order to prevent incursions from American settlers, he relied on Turnbull to convince Chickasaw headman Ugulayacave of the wisdom of the idea. With Turnbull acting as interpreter, Ugulayacave hesitantly agreed to the idea, though only after demanding that Turnbull be given sole rights to trade at the location. Gayoso maintained that he could not grant the Chickasaw leader’s request, as the location was in William Panton’s territory. As negotiations continued into 1795, Ugulayacave continued to ask “if Turnbull would be the one who w[ould] have the [trading] post.” Though Gayoso insisted that it was Panton’s by right, he ultimately allowed that “Turnbull would be permitted” to sell goods at the fort. Though Turnbull probably did not receive the exact concession he desired, the fact that negotiations between Spain and the Chickasaws had boiled down (at least in this case), not to policy points or territorial demands, but rather to the interests of rival trading

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44 Gayoso’s Account to Baron de Carondelet of the Nogales Assembly, October 1793, in Weeks, ed., *Paths to a Middle Ground*, 225–27.
45 Gayoso’s Account to Baron de Carondelet of a Meeting with the Chickasaw King, August 1795, in Weeks, ed., *Paths to a Middle Ground*, 240.
outfits, indicates that real power was in the hands of those who controlled the peltry trade.

By the 1780s and 1790s, private trading firms were thus in position to directly influence the political and economic course of the Gulf South, and to do so largely free from exterior control or interference. William Panton exploited these circumstances for his own gain and consolidated his grip on the region. He like McGillivray employed native Gulf southerners to be his eyes, his ears, and his arm in Indian country. Most interior residents, whether directly or indirectly, depended on his company for their livelihoods—for their access to markets and for their required manufactured goods. From Chickasaw and Choctaw countries to Creek towns, and from Mobile to Pensacola, the Gulf South economy ran largely through Panton & Leslie. This would eventually have profound consequences for the future of the region—not just in terms of markets, but in terms of cultural and social transformation as well—as the nineteenth century dawned.

Spain struggled with few reliable Indian informants and with little direct authority outside colonial settlements. Meanwhile, William Panton utilized his growing influence among native groups to keep American-affiliated settlers and traders at bay and to strengthen his company’s trading position. In contrast to what they provided the Spanish, Indians and traders gave Panton regular intelligence about happenings in Indian country, and he communicated regularly with various residents, in addition to the intelligence regularly provided by Alexander McGillivray, who resided in a central location at the confluence of the Tallapoosa and Coosa Rivers.46 In 1787, for example, the Anglo-Creek

46 He was occasionally in contact with the mixed Creek and Anglo Galphin family, for example. See PLC Arturo O’Neill to Estevan Miró, August 15, 1788, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 4, frame 1407–08.
trader John Kelly warned Panton that American traders “have come within 60 miles or a
days ride” of his house near the Upper Creek towns. In recommending that the company
employ some Creek warriors to force them back, he informed Panton that “they sell
goods much lower than it is in our power to do, [and] they have deprived us of most of
the Skins which we expected to get from the Indians this season.”

When Spain struggled to keep Mather & Strother afloat, traders regularly updated Panton and made
clear their aversion to patronizing his trading rival. Most expressed a desire to work only
with Panton & Leslie.

For many Gulf southerners, William Panton was the de facto power in the region,
especially because many of them were in substantial debt to his company. When U.S.
Indian agent Benjamin Hawkins visited Alexander McGillivray’s sister, Sophia, in 1796,
he found her “poor, and dirty in a small hut…. She told me her poverty arose from want
of tools for her labourers.” When asked why she had no tools, she replied it was due to
“some misunderstanding between her and Mr. Panton,” who as a result had recently
refused to sell her what she needed.

Panton took a personal interest in events throughout
his trading territory, and his associates made sure to keep him notified of even small
incidents. In 1798, for instance, a man named Fallon stole a slave from a “Mr. Madill”

47 John Kelly to William Panton, January 23, 1787, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 2,
frame 1768.
48 William Panton to John Leslie, February 22, 1787, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 3,
frame 58–62. John Leslie, Panton’s first partner, lived alternatively in the company’s
base in the Bahamas and in London. The little correspondence from him that survives,
combined with only occasional mentions of him by Panton, seem to indicate he had little
involvement in day-to-day company operations on the ground in North America.
References here to “Panton & Leslie” indicate references to the company specifically,
and not to the two separate men.
49 Diary of Benjamin Hawkins, December 20, 1796, H. Thomas Foster II ed., The
hereinafter cited as Works of Hawkins.
and sold him in the Creek town of Toogaloo. Toogaloo’s local trader, Daniel McGillivray, took pains to keep Panton abreast of the efforts to recover the slave. Gulf southerners also knew better than to interfere with Panton’s property. Daniel McGillivray once sent a Creek man named Cunsadecmathla to Panton with an apology for “atempting taking a way [Panton’s] negroe.” Cunsadecmathla was “afraid you are still angry with him” over the incident, McGillivray wrote to his employer. “He says at that instant he was very Drunk and did not know what he was doing . . . [Cunsadecmathla] was very sorry for what happened [and] he also says he would help you to get your Negroe [back] . . . and hopes youll forgive him for what has happened.”

In another example, Okfuskee trader Cussitawtaskinia traded his skins with the Georgians instead of Panton & Leslie; and after Panton found out, the Creek man so feared the company’s “displeasure” that he pleaded for forgiveness and promised not to do it again.

It seems clear that Panton saw such micromanaging in his trading territory as protecting his bottom line. Conflict and strife in Indian country meant lost revenue for him and his company. Panton wrote to Hillabee town trader Robert Grierson in 1797 after a group of Upper Creeks had stolen some horses from an unspecified white settlement. Even Grierson felt the need to apologize personally to the firm owner. “I recd yours of the [March 13] yesterday, and am sorry that you have reason for such complaint.” Grierson averred he had given “the Indians a sharp reproofs on their arrival for such behavior.” Grierson, however, also wanted to tell Panton that, despite the scolding he had given them, he did not think the Indians were at fault. “But in the interim [I] must

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50 Daniel McGillivray to William Panton, September 13, 1798, Heloise H. Cruzat Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida; hereinafter cited as Cruzat Papers.
51 Daniel McGillivray to William Panton, March 3, 1798, Cruzat Papers, Box 1, Folder 6.
intimate to you that the Indians cannot be thought so much in the fault as those bad white men who advise them to commit such crimes.” Still, Grierson deferred to Panton’s judgment in the end. “I cannot help thinking that those white men deserve [reproach] much more [than the Indians] but, [do with] this as you think proper.”

William Panton did most of his trading through associated individual traders, who then distributed goods via smaller transactions in individual Indian communities. Most of these were at least partly Anglo-Americans who were literate and spoke native languages and English. This was both convenient for Panton, and made it easier for non-literate Indians, who could not place orders with Panton & Leslie in writing, to get the goods they needed. But Panton also seems to have occasionally utilized a few Native Americans as affiliated traders as well. Upper Creek headman Mucklasawopay, for example, appeared to be starting out as a middle-man trader for Panton in 1799. In a letter from that year Mucklasawopay informed Panton that he was going around to “all my people” selling “the powder and ball you were so good as to send me[.] Your last letter to our Daniel [McGillivray] cautions me to take care of it and sele to those that buys from me to the best advantage.” Mucklasawopay maintained his occupation as a hunter as well, however, further reminding Panton that “I shall be in from hunting” in “Febry” and “Sometime in March or april I shall visit you [in Pensacola] with all the skins I can collect,” whether from hunting or trade. Mucklasawopay underscored that the economy of Indian country was shifting. If the region had ever been composed of simple white

52 Robert Grierson to William Panton, April 2, 1797, Greenslade Papers, no folder.
53 Mucklasawopay to William Panton, September 28, 1799, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4. We know Mucklasawopay, also known as The Singer, used Daniel McGillivray (no direct relation to Alexander McGillivray), Panton’s associate, as a ghostwriter for this particular letter because at the end was a note in the same hand, signed by McGillivray, stating: “the above is what the Singer desired me to say to you.”
trader-Indian hunter relationships that binary was growing more complicated on Panton & Leslie’s watch. Indians were still hunters, but they were becoming traders in their own right, taking more direct control of their profits and their financial futures.

The most important Native American agent Panton maintained in Indian country, however, remained Alexander McGillivray. With the help of his Creek followers and Panton’s patronage, McGillivray prospered, both politically and economically, at the expense of the Spanish. McGillivray was the son of a Scottish trader and a Creek woman of the perennially powerful Wind Clan, and he had been educated in Charleston and later moved back to Creek country where he utilized his mother’s clan and kin connections to gain influence among the Upper Creeks. Though at one time in British employ, he also drew a salary (or an honorarium, depending on who one believed) from Spain for the same purpose: managing Creek-European relations. Already by 1783 he was unusual in Creek country in that he owned “a great number of cattle and negroes” at his estate on near Little Tallassee, at a spot known as the Hickory Ground. McGillivray’s own kin may have from his growing wealth. One of his sisters, Sophia, married a peltry trader named Durant, and together they also had “a good herd of cattle and some forty slaves” on the upper Escambia River. In addition to the salary he received from Spain, McGillivray invested in a silent partnership in the Panton & Leslie Co. in exchange for encouraging

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54 McGillivray’s mother’s brother was a powerful headman named Red Shoes, see Arturo O’Neill to Josef de Ezpeleta, October 19, 1783, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 1, frame 1075–77; and Alexander McGillivray to Arturo O’Neill, January 3, 1784, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 1, frame, 1131–37.

55 Arturo O’Neill to Josef de Ezpeleta, October 19, 1783, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 1, frame 1075–77.
the Creeks to trade at Pensacola instead of with the Georgians.\textsuperscript{56} After securing his stake in Panton & Leslie, McGillivray promoted Panton’s company in his capacity as a Creek leader. He wrote to Arturo O’Neill in 1784, claiming that the Creeks no longer wished to obtain their goods in St. Augustine. “It is much more convenient for this upper Nation to have the trade from West Florida,” he wrote. Though McGillivray professed he made the request in a spirit of selflessness and for the good of his “Nation,” he clearly hoped to profit from the change in trading centers. Not only would the switch effectively funnel the entire Creek trade through Panton’s stores, but it allowed McGillivray to bring his own “Quantety of Indian goods” to Mobile, “from whence I could Supply my people by watter carrag preferable to pack Horses.”\textsuperscript{57}

Alexander McGillivray was not simply Panton’s man. Shortly thereafter, he also accepted remuneration from Mather & Strother in exchange for influencing the Choctaws and Chickasaws, his westerly and northerly neighbors, to trade with Mather at Mobile. This infuriated Panton, who demanded McGillivray give up the new investment as a conflict of interest. McGillivray defended himself by arguing that Mather would not intrude on Panton’s Creek trade, but only wished to trade “at Mobile in order to carry on more conveniently the trade with the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations.” Despite the fact that McGillivray had earlier told the Spanish that Pensacola and Apalachee (and Panton’s stores) were the most convenient spots for trade, he later wrote to Panton’s employee Charles McLatchy that “we have found that the trade could not be handled from apalache, the traders of these nations refusing to risk their pack horses in this country. . . .

\textsuperscript{56} Alexander McGillivray to McLatchy, September 18, 1784, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 1, frame 1638.
\textsuperscript{57} Alexander McGillivray to Arturo O’Neill, January 1, 1784, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 1, frame 1113–23.
The same arguments, more or less, offer against carrying on this trade through Pensacola. Panton was also angry over McGillivray’s acceptance of a commission from Spain, though the Creek leader denied that the position came with a salary (which was a lie). For their part, Spanish officials distrusted McGillivray immensely but they needed him. Though the actual extent of his power among the Creeks was ambiguous, especially among the Lower towns, he nonetheless profited from his perceived position and from the commerce the Spanish depended on to maintain amicable Indian relations.

In sum, less than a decade after the Spanish takeover of the Floridas, the majority of regional economic and territorial power lay with a few trading companies and their agents in Indian country. Though the United States continued to eye the region, both America and Spain remained largely on the outside looking to get in. But while Euro-American nation-states were largely cut off from the heart of Creek, Chickasaw, and Choctaw territory—the very object Spain had desired from the beginning—the weakness of Spain’s top-down government control allowed the numbers of unaffiliated Afro- and Euro-American residents to grow. During and after the war for American independence, a large number of refugees, ex-Loyalists, and runaway slaves made their way to Indian country. They arrived in a place unfettered by colonial law enforcement, organized around Native American cultural and social norms, and dominated economically by private trading firms. Largely without kin connections or ties to land, at least at first, many new migrants, like Nelly Price, entered the Indian trade themselves. Most of these men and women were from former British colonies; and though this worried Spain, there was little they could do to stop it. After a few years many of them put down roots in

native communities. New traders frequently married Indian women, had children, and built long-term homes and lives while also building new, complex networks of kin and clients. Many adopted Indian customs, dress, and other cultural practices and became important community figures while also profiting from trade, and their children would eventually emerge as societal leaders.

This phenomenon marked the cultural invention of a new Gulf South, one in which a few trading companies’ influence both anchored and extended the region’s economic development while simultaneously providing the conditions under which the exchange of goods was regulated only by local, native imperatives. Such circumstances inevitably resulted in unregulated social and cultural exchanges as well. The Gulf South’s political circumstances, in which co-dependent but autonomous Indian peoples and private companies held de facto power; a shifting economy, in which deerskins grew less and less viable; and an increasing diversity of immigrants combined to set the stage for a regional transformation in nearly every phase—socially, economically, environmentally, and especially culturally. Weak states, strong autonomous locals, and relatively free and open interactions between a multiplicity of peoples and cultures, native and non-native, formed the foundation on which the region’s transformation would occur. While maps indicated that the Gulf South remained a land of official borders between colonial governments and defined Indian nations, the lines dividing Indian and Euro-American spaces were considerably more permeable near the end of the eighteenth century. The Gulf South borderlands were both porous and absorbent, soaking up new people and commodities that ultimately changed it from the Native South into a more complex Deep South.
Historians have often noted the presence of individuals who in many ways “went native.” After approximately 1770, their presence at treaty negotiations, their value as interpreters and translators, and their prominence in the deerskin trade becomes ubiquitous in the archival record. But their activities and presence represent more than either the vanguard of a new order or “new” Indians. They were both. Their ethnic, social, and ideological influence helped alter the cultural landscape of the Gulf South. After decades of infiltration and intermarriage, for many Gulf residents, monolithic categories like “Creek,” “Scottish,” and “English” became insufficient as finite markers of ethnicity or nationality. Nor was it accurate to conceive of them as people “between worlds,” as though they comprised some strange hybrid. Many of those born to Indian mothers considered themselves Indians. But just how universal that feeling remained through the decades is more difficult to know. It is definitely surrounded by more uncertainty than historians have traditionally interpreted for cultural change and persistence in the Southeast. Increasingly, the region known as Indian country ceased to be simply an Indian space. Instead, these Gulf southerners, along with their children, grandchildren, and extended kin, had become indigenous, even if viewing them as Native Americans fails to encapsulate their identity in the Gulf South in which they lived and died. Resident Indian traders were the front lines in this cultural transition.

The growing influence of Anglo-American, Anglo-Indian, and African American traders in the interior frustrated colonial governments from an early period. After a 1772 screed against what he felt was traders’ outsized and disruptive effect on Native American diplomacy, English traveler David Taitt wrote derisively about the character of these men, describing a chaotic, regulation-free system by which goods spread through
Indian country. “The traders in this Nation excepting a very few are Composed of Deserters, Horse thieves, half breeds and Negroes. They all trade without any Licenses or permits . . . ; these hirelings [in turn] fit out others [to trade for them] which they find Ideling in the Nation so that in some Towns there is three or four Stores where one would be sufficient, all Trade without any Regulations whatsoever and undersell one another to the degree that goods are sold at first cost or rather given away.” Taitt later noted the corrupting effects of alcohol, writing that “unless there is a stop to sending Rum in such large quantities amongst these Indians no man will be safe amongst them for after one trader has made them Drunk he will send them to his neighbor to break his Doors and plunder him.” 59 Taitt’s skewed interpretation of traders’ role in Indian country notwithstanding, those who provided goods like alcohol, firearms, and other items Native Americans could generally not make themselves became integral to daily life. It is not surprising that traders also accumulated a large measure of political power and prestige, along with kinship alliances and connections.

As the importance of friendly relations with Indian groups grew more and more vital for the Spanish and American regimes, so grew the influence and position of the individuals who made those relations possible. Though Florida’s governors futilely searched for ways to undermine Panton & Leslie, they understood they needed the support of individual traders on the ground. Pensacola’s commandant, Vicente Folch, explained to Miró in 1788 that any government-directed peltry company absolutely needed the backing of “some wealthy Englishmen that carry weight with the Indians [and] who are scattered through the Nation.” Folch specifically singled out the traders

59 David Taitt to Stuart, March 16, 1772, Travels in the American Colonies, 524–25.
Alexander Fraser and Benjamin James as men who could help steer the trade economy away from Panton. During Spain’s negotiations with the Choctaws to build a fort and trading post at Nogales in 1791, Indian agent Stephen Minor believed the resident traders were responsible for the headmen’s reluctance to cede the land. “They [the traders] resent having their trade disrupted and…they want the Indians to refuse to cede Nogales because…it could damage their trade, leading me to believe that it is these same traders who encourage the Indians to oppose the cession.” Manuel Gayoso echoed these sentiments when explaining the lack of progress to his superiors. “If [the Choctaws] have demonstrated dissatisfaction with our settlement at Nogales, it is through the counsel of someone who has particular influence on [headman] Franchimastabe in order to avoid damage that might affect his business. This [person] is surely the trader named Turner Brashears, who lives with the mentioned Chief and rewards him with” presents and flattery.

The claim that a trader named Turner Brashears “lived” with Franchimastabe is highly suggestive of why the Choctaw leader wanted to protect the trader’s business. Undoubtedly, Franchimastabe benefited from the relationship in terms of trade goods, which he could distribute to his followers and thereby gain more prestige for himself. As Franchimastabe later explained to Stephen Minor, “he had many objections…and one of them was that in his country he had a number of white people who after many years in this place had provided his warriors and he himself with merchandise.” But

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60 Vicente Folch to Estevan Miró, April 26, 1788, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 3, frame 1754–55.
61 Diary of Stephen Minor’s First Mission to the Choctaws, May 30 to June 13, 1791, in Weeks, Paths to a Middle Ground, 155–56.
62 Manuel Gayoso to Estevan Miró, July 1, 1791, Paths to a Middle Ground, 161.
Franchimastabe also indicated that his insistence on shielding Brashears was a family matter. “He added that ‘these subjects are married to women of my country and they have children with them and seeing them ruined by the Nogales trade is a thing with which I can never agree.’” In this light, it is possible that the separate terms Euro-American outsiders used to refer to these individuals—“Indians” and “traders”—did not accurately reflect reality. In other words, the distinction between the trader and the Indian might not have been so clear-cut for Franchimastabe himself, and thus historians recreate an imagined racial difference that might not have truly existed for Gulf southerners.

Brashears must have had an influential position among the other traders as well because Minor indicated that they all met privately with Brashears before presenting their grievances to the Spanish agent. In an effort to counter Brashears, Minor sent for Benjamin James, “since I am aware of the influence [he] has with the Indians and Whites, because [he is] a man of great talent, wealth, and [has] lived in the [Indian] country twenty years.” Unfortunately for Minor, James’s opinion was “that the Indians would never consent to our Establishment of Nogales while the Traders were not happy.”

According to Stephen Minor, Benjamin James had lived with the Choctaws since 1772, two decades in which he learned to speak their language and to understand shifting Native American politics and culture far better than most Euro-Americans. He also started a family, having at least three Choctaw children. One son he named Ben Jr. and

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63 Diary of Stephen Minor’s Second Mission to the Choctaws, March 13 to April 3, 1792, in Weeks, Paths to a Middle Ground, 173–74.
64 Diary of Stephen Minor’s Second Mission to the Choctaws, March 13 to April 3, 1792, in Weeks, Paths to a Middle Ground, 173–74.
65 Diary of Stephen Minor’s Second Mission to the Choctaws, March 13 to April 3, 1792, in Weeks, Paths to a Middle Ground, 174.
another George.\textsuperscript{66} When America’s Indian agent, Benjamin Hawkins, met James in 1797, he described the man’s three sons as “grown men; one man of some learning; the others capable of handling his [father’s] commercial concerns.”\textsuperscript{67} Benjamin James’s long residence in Indian country was not unusual, however. By the end of the eighteenth century, men similar to James could be found integrated into almost any Indian town.

When Benjamin Hawkins arrived in Creek country in the 1790s, he frequently relied on them as language and cultural interpreters. While he visited the Creek town of “Fusatchee” in 1796, for example, he stayed with a trader named Nicholas White, who despite his Anglo name was “a native of Mersailles” and “resident in this nation thirty years.” At the time of Hawkins’s visit, White had four children with a Creek woman, three of whom were old enough to be married themselves.\textsuperscript{68} Only three miles from White, in “Hochilliwaillies,” lived James Russell, “a native of the United States,” who in 1796 had lived in Creek country for twelve years, was married to a Creek woman, and had one son.\textsuperscript{69}

Creek headman and Panton & Leslie debtor Mucklasawopay indicated that the children of such traders easily integrated into native communities, especially given that many had been married to Indian women and lived in towns still wedded to matrilineal

\textsuperscript{66} William Simpson to the Secretary of War, October 19, 1810, in Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., \textit{The Territorial Papers of the United States, Volume VI: The Territory of Mississippi, 1809–1817} (Washington, D.C., 1930) 123–24. It is very likely that James had more than two children. George and Ben Jr. show up in the documents because they are men and they assumed their fathers’ debts from Virginia after his death. Due to the sparse and scattered records from Indian country, it’s reasonable to assume that many daughters and perhaps other sons disappeared from the evidence, if they were even documented at all.\textsuperscript{67} Extract of a Letter from Benjamin Hawkins to the Secretary of War, July 5, 1797, \textit{Works of Hawkins}, 181.

\textsuperscript{68} Diary of Benjamin Hawkins, December 21, 1796, \textit{Works of Hawkins}, 45.

customs. He wrote to William Panton in 1799 about a deceased trader named “McPherson” and asked if Panton might donate some blankets for the dead man’s children. McPherson had been married to Mucklasawopay’s sister, and because of this their children’s upbringing fell on Mucklasawopay’s shoulders. McPherson’s children “are now mine,” Mucklasawopay wrote to Panton, “they are my sisters children & I hate to see them naked starved with cold & in the ashes.”

U.S. Indian agent Benjamin Hawkins’s letters and diary entries are strewn with references to resident traders—“white men”—and their Creek children. In the village of Epesaugee, for example, he refers to a trader named “McCartney” who owned one hundred cattle by 1798. In the neighboring town of Eufaula he met John Townshend, “an honest Englishman, who has resided many years in the nation, and raised a numerous family” there. A single entry in Hawkins’s diary from December 13, 1796, included mentions of John O’Kelly, a “halfbreed” son of an Irish father and a Creek mother; John Clark, “a Scotchman”; George Smith, “an Englishman”; Daniel McGillivray and Benjamin Crook, Anglo-Americans who lived “eight miles above the fork” of the Coosa and Tallapoosa; Alexander Cornels, an Anglo-Creek trader and Indian leader from Okfuskee; and from outside Eufaula, traders Patrick Donnelly and Kussatah Tuskeinchau, the latter of whom was also an Anglo-Creek and the brother of headman named White.

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70 Mucklasawopay to William Panton, September 28, 1799, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.
71 Hawkins is not consistent when referring to his own racial designation of these people. Most often he calls them “halfbreeds” though he also refers to them as “Indians” at times.
72 Sketch of the Creek Country in 1798 and 1799, Works of Hawkins, 47s–48s; Ibid, 48s.
Lieutenant. The trader in Coweta, one of the largest Lower Creek Towns, was a “Mr. Marshall,” who another U.S. Indian agent later described in 1797 as “very well off in negros and cattle,” in addition to his trading business. Deerskins and manufactured goods remained vital in the region, and resident traders were the economic lifeblood of Indian country. But more than that, they and their families were also integrated and integral to the social life of native communities.

The non-native individuals who rooted themselves in Indian country originally did so for the profit potential, whether via the deerskin economy or for some other trade. Though the deer population was in steep decline, their pelts remained the primary commodity that granted Indians access to much-needed manufactured items, especially firearms and alcohol. After multiple decades of sharing economic interests with their Indian neighbors, however, these non-Indian men and women began to see their political and social interests as intertwined too. Indeed, many of these neighbors were now their kin. Their children, especially, were full members and sometimes leaders of Indian communities. Sometimes this made it difficult to differentiate between economic and social interests, however. When both the United States and Spain expressed an intention to settle land along the Yazoo River in 1791, Spanish agent Manuel Gayoso explained that, once again, it was the traders who led the Choctaws’ opposition. Certainly, their opposition was related to protection of their own trade operations. But they also undoubtedly feared the loss of land and opportunities for their children. Gayoso himself noted, “the position of the traders is for the present most effective, because they find

themselves living in the same Nation mixed and allied with Indian families.”\textsuperscript{75} Gayoso believed he simply saw scheming white men bending the ears of credulous Indians—one race of people unduly influencing another. But these men were far more integrated into town life than Gayoso realized. Even if they themselves were not seen as fully “Choctaw,” Native American matrilineal traditions ensured that their children were definitely understood as such.

Indian leaders like Alexander McGillivray and powerful merchants like William Panton endeavored to keep the Gulf South interior—along with their deerskin monopoly—insulated from the influence of Spanish regulations and American power. But their efforts had the unintended consequence of opening the way for unofficial, grass roots, local changes to sprout. Resident traders and their quickly expanding kin networks represent but one example of the noteworthy ethnic changes affecting Indian country near the end of the eighteenth century. The effects of the decline of the deer population and the growing political power of individual traders and trading companies combined to foster additional and fundamental transformations. Until the 1770s the region had been an overwhelmingly Native American space in ethnic and cultural terms, but during the last two decades of the century the Gulf South became more diverse than ever before.

Traders were not the only ones to make a new life in Indian country. Euro-American farmers, tradespeople, and others ventured new lives there as well. Many of these were the squatters that Alexander McGillivray often complained about. In 1786 he protested to Governor Miró that Americans had settled near the confluence of the Alabama and Tombigbee River, “and from thence they are stretching across to the

\textsuperscript{75} Manuel Gayoso to Estevan Miró, July 1, 1791, in Weeks, \textit{Paths to a Middle Ground}, 168.
Mississippi.” The Creek leader called these settlements “considerable establishments” inhabited by “numbers of families.”

Some, after living in Indian country for years, became interpreters and translators. John St. Germaine grew up in Paris before he immigrated to West Florida to live with the Choctaws, sometime before 1782, where he married a Choctaw woman and had three children. By 1786 he had moved his family back near Natchez where he established two separate plantations and a sawmill. St. Germaine became fluent in the Choctaw language in the interim, and he parlayed this knowledge into a position as “King’s Interpreter of Indian Languages” for the Spanish regime.

The arrival of new people in Indian country produced other challenges. Both Spain and the United States remained impotent in the interior, and the true power in the region, Panton & Leslie, rarely sought to interfere in Indian affairs unless it affected the company’s bottom line. This ambiguous situation generated open questions about jurisdiction and legal procedure, questions that remained indefinite into the next century and allowed local legal culture to evolve more organically. When Natchez trader and slaveholder Nehemiah Anderson died in 1785, at least two of his creditors—Camp Welly and Campbelton—were part Chickasaw and full residents of the Chickasaw nation. Both of them, however, had to appear in Natchez court in order to recover their debts.

Contrastingly, justice for Euro-Americans could be meted out under Native American

77 John St. Germaine surety for Francois James, November 11, 1782, Natchez Court Records, 17; Estate Valuation of John St. Germaine, deceased, May 8, 1786, Natchez Court Records, 33–34; Estate of John St. Germaine vs. Creditors, May 9, 1787, Natchez Court Records, 40–41.
terms as well. When Alexander McGillivray addressed concerns about the conduct of white residents of Indian country to Arturo O’Neill in 1785, he noted that since the recent execution of “Col. Sullivan” as a “public example” the “whole white people in this nation behave remarkably well. . . . Public examples are sometimes necessary particularly in this country,” he concluded. 79 The Creeks apparently executed Sullivan for fomenting factionalism within the Creek nation. 80 McGillivray continued to assert the Creeks’ right to determine justice in the Gulf South, even in cases involving white-on-white crimes. John Catt, for example, “a white man” originally from Tennessee, was executed by Upper Creeks for his alleged role in the murder and robbery of a trader and his family in 1789 somewhere north of Tensaw. In this particular instance Catt was not brought to trial for the crime until eight years later, in 1797. 81 As Sullivan and Catt found out to their misfortune, European descent was not enough to confer immunity from Indian jurisprudence.

When Native American authorities did dispense justice, the loser in a dispute could occasionally appeal their case to a European or American judge in hopes of a more favorable outcome. Plaintiffs sometimes received hearings in Indian country and in colonial courts. A 1795 dispute between two frontier residents, Georgia settler James Stewart and Indian trader Caldwell Eastridge, presents a useful case study. In 1791 Stewart brought his family into Creek country on his way to West Florida, but some unresolved “business” forced him to return to the U.S. on short notice. Eastridge, a local

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80 Given the time frame and the Sullivan’s status as a “Colonel,” the man may have been a British military officer assigned to seek Creek support near the end of the American war of independence.
trader, agreed to house Stewart’s wife and children until he returned. When Stewart did return, however, Eastridge accused him of having stolen two of his horses, a charge Stewart decried as “a malicious and false assertion…but, being in Indian country, [he] could have no recourse to redress” and offered instead to prove he had purchased at least one of the horses while back in Georgia. Even with this certificate retrieved, Eastridge refused to believe Stewart. Eastridge eventually took the law into his own hands, and with “some accomplices” kidnapped Stewart while he crossed the Alabama River, took him back to the Creek town in which Eastridge resided, and confiscated Stewart’s horse and forty dollars in cash. One witness testified that when Stewart had asked Eastridge “upon what authority he was taken” hostage, Eastridge “took out his gun and said ‘This is your authority and for a farthing I’d blow your brains out.’”

Stewart eventually escaped and managed to get Eastridge into court in Spanish Natchez. There Eastridge told his version of events and testified that Alexander McGillivray already granted him a warrant to arrest Stewart, which is why he’d attacked the man when they met on the Alabama River. After taking Stewart to McGillivray, Eastridge testified, the Upper Creek leader fairly “tried and condemned” Stewart “to pay the petitioner for his horses.” In Natchez, though, Stewart “denie[d] Eastridge’s charge, saying he was not tried legally but before” Indians and other Indian country residents—people of “Eastridge’s choosing.” The outcome of the case as tried in Natchez is missing from the records. It eventually came out that another white trader (and Alexander McGillivray’s brother in law), Charles Weatherford, believed Stewart to be innocent. According to Weatherford, Eastridge had wished to simply steal Stewart’s own “fine

82 James Stewart vs. Caldwell Eastridge, January 1795, Natchez Court Records, 287.
horse,” and the trader had likely marked him as a naïve immigrant to be swindled.\textsuperscript{83} Still, with the warrant that Eastridge obtained, McGillivray asserted that whites remained subject to Creek law (or perhaps more accurately, McGillivray’s law). Stewart’s recourse to the Natchez court system, however, demonstrated that Indian law’s jurisdiction—and the reach of Indian authority in general—remained an open question at the end of the eighteenth century.

If Europeans could not escape the Indian law in the Gulf South, the region’s interior occasionally allowed individuals to escape colonial law, at least temporarily. For example, the proximity of disputed territory made policing and debt collection difficult. Temporary residence in Indian towns was a common tactic for those hoping to dodge financial obligations. When Natchez resident Bennet Bellu went “bankrupt,” he abandoned his plot and, along with “five or six other inhabitants, withdr[ew] to the Indian Nation called ‘Chitz,’” probably referring to the Chitimachas.\textsuperscript{84} In 1790 Anthony Hutchins petitioned the Natchez court to immediately summon his debtor, William Gorman, because he learned Gorman was about to “withdraw to the Indian Nation” to escape his fiscal responsibility to Hutchins.\textsuperscript{85} In 1792 officials seized Jacob Phillis’s slave upon his arrival at the Tombigbee settlement for Phillis’s unpaid debts to Natchez resident Maurice Stacpoole. When Phillis departed Natchez months earlier without having paid Stacpoole, he “maliciously represented” that Phillis had “absconded” to Indian country to avoid repayment.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{83} James Stewart vs. Caldwell Eastridge, January 1795, Natchez Court Records, 287. 
\textsuperscript{84} Appraisal of Bennet Bellu Estate, December 21, 1781, Natchez Court Records, 10. 
\textsuperscript{85} Anthony Hutchins vs. William Gorman, November 1790, Natchez Court Records, 182. 
\textsuperscript{86} Jacob Phillis vs. Maurice Stacpoole, October 1792, Natchez Court Records, 185.
Spanish officials’ inability to police—or even efficiently monitor—the wide expanse of Indian country created further problems for their regime. In 1786 Nelly Price’s partner, Natchez planter Miguel Lopez, gave shelter to a man named Tacitus Gaillard, along with his son Isaac and three enslaved “negroes” that Gaillard owned. Lopez’s white laborer later testified that the group had given no other information other than “they came from the Choctaw Nation.” After several days, Lopez’s neighbor, a man named “Armstrong,” apparently learned that Galliard and his men were fugitives, and warned Lopez that the local Commandant was on his way to arrest him as well as his guests. Lopez and Gaillard’s group promptly left his plantation and escaped back into neighboring Choctaw territory. Lopez eventually turned himself in, but not before convincing Choctaw headman Payuma to guide Gaillard through Indian country toward the United States. Given Lopez’s connections among the Choctaws (both he and his partner, Nelly Price, had traded with them for decades), it is likely he could have remained hidden for much longer without much fear of capture by Spanish agents.87

The growing diversity of the Gulf South also affected the way that authorities managed willed property. When Cusseta resident Mountain Leader died in 1799, he left all his property to his daughter. But before she could secure it, Panton & Leslie trader William Simpson made sure that Mountain Leader’s nephew fulfilled the deceased man’s legal obligations to his company.88 Mountain Leader’s daughter received only what was left over after his debts were paid. Even so, it remained ambiguous as to what legal authority Panton & Leslie acted under in this instance: the Creek nation (where Mountain

87 The King vs. Michael Lopez, March to July, 1786, Natchez Court Records, 246.
88 For context on Native American changing conceptions of property during this period, see Ethridge, Creek Country, 175–86; and Saunt, A New Order of Things.
Leader died), the United States (under whose jurisdiction the man had technically lived since 1798), or Spanish Florida (where Panton & Leslie was still based). Still, Mountain Leader’s will offers insight into the new kinds of relationships that connected Gulf Southerners—to property, to the economy, and to each other—at the end of the century.

Just as legal jurisdictions overlapped across borders, so too did trading and kin relationships. When Natchez resident William Carney died in 1797, his will stated a desire to have his property divided between his two nephews. However, neither of Carney’s nephews lived in Natchez. One, William Carney II, lived in Georgia. The other, Arthur Carney, lived in Indian country with his Choctaw wife “Hockey” and his Afro-Choctaw son (and William Carney’s grand-nephew), Jeremiah. William’s nephew Arthur, in other words, was a free man of African descent of the Choctaw nation. When William Carney died, his network of relations thus spanned Spanish America, Native America, and the United States, and included people of European, African, and Choctaw descent.

Such diversity began to transform colonial urban and town centers. Between the 1770s and the 1800s, settlements of whites and natives inched closer and closer to each other. When Spanish Indian agent Stephen Minor embarked on a trip to Choctaw country in 1791, it only took him a few hours on horseback to reach the first Choctaw town from the Euro-American settlement on the Big Black River. The Big Black settlement,

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89 William Simpson to John Forbes, March 1, 1799, Cruzat Papers, Box 1, Folder 7.
90 Will of William Carney, April 10, 1797, Natchez Court Records, 129. Jeremiah Carney was actually baptized in the Mobile Catholic Church in 1795, where his parents are listed as Arthur and Hockey “a Choctaw.” Mobile Baptismal Records, Mobile Archdiocese, Colored Baptisms 1781–1826, Entry for Jeremiah Carney, May 4, 1795 (no page numbers).
however, was over one hundred miles from Natchez. Euro-American Big Black residents were thus “neighbors” with Choctaws to a much greater degree than they were with Natchez residents. In 1798 Benjamin Hawkins described the people of the Lower Creek town of Cusseta as “associate[ing], more than any other Indians, with their white neighbors” in Georgia. “This town with its villages is the largest in the Lower Creeks; the people are and have been friendly to white people, and are fond of visiting them.” Indians ventured in and out of larger colonial centers too. Mississippi Governor Winthrop Sargent often complained to his superiors that some Choctaws’ “frequent visit[s]” to Natchez created a variety of problems. Early in his administration he attempted to prohibit residents from selling liquor “to any Indian, or Indians, at or within three miles of the Town of Natchez.”

Individuals of African descent added to this convergence. As other historians have amply documented, runaway slaves and free people of color were a ubiquitous presence both in colonial centers and in Indian country at the end of the eighteenth century. Nelly

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93 Local Choctaws consistently remained a thorn in Sargent’s side, with their frequent demands for presents in the form of ammunition and firearms, to their illicit trading with Natchez residents. See Winthrop Sargent to Tim Pickering, August 20, 1798; Winthrop Sargent proclamation on Indian Trading, October 18, 1798; Sargent address to Choctaws, October 19, 1798; and others in Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Mississippi Territorial Archives, 1798–1803* (Nashville, 1905) 32, 69, 70, respectively; hereinafter cited as *Miss. Terr. Archives*.
Price, the trader and store operator from Grand Gulf, was possibly a runaway slave, yet her status as a woman of color did not prevent her from occupying a vital role in the local economy, or from becoming well established in both Choctaw and Natchez society. After her fallout with her former partner John Fitzpatrick, she engaged in an agricultural partnership with Natchez planter Miguel Lopez while at the same time continuing to trade goods with nearby Choctaw hunters. She also personally employed white laborers. For instance, she hired an Irishman named Samuel Smith to work on her Grand Gulf plantation for twelve dollars a month in 1785.\textsuperscript{95} When Lopez died in 1788, she successfully outbid another man for Lopez’s Natchez land, though nine months later when she failed to deliver the $335 she had pledged, the court confiscated and sold the property to someone else.\textsuperscript{96}

Despite Price’s diverse economic activities, her race and her gender increasingly circumscribed her life as well as the lives of other Gulf southerners of African descent, both in and out of Indian country. At Price’s hearing, a soldier named Patrick Murphy testified that Lopez frequently beat his Price when they quarreled. Whether Lopez believed this was justifiable because she was a woman or because she had darker skin—

\textsuperscript{95} The King vs. Miguel Lopez, March to July 1786, Natchez Court Records, 246. For more on interactions between white and Indian neighbors, see Christopher Morris, \textit{Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life, Warren County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770–1860} (New York, 1995); Andrew K. Frank, \textit{Creeks and Southerners: Biculturalism on the Early American Frontier} (Lincoln, Neb., and London, 2005); and Daniel S. Murphee, \textit{Constructing Floridians: Natives and Europeans in the Colonial Floridas, 1513–1783} (Gainesville, Fla., 2006).

\textsuperscript{96} Nelly Price vs. The Estate of Miguel Lopez, August, 1788, Natchez Court Records, 177–78.
or perhaps simply because he was a violent person—is unknown, but either her gender, her race, or both likely played some role.\textsuperscript{97}

Though free African American men and even women still retained their autonomy, especially those living in the interior, life for the enslaved grew more difficult. Creek peoples increasingly adopted colonial style racial chattel slavery, for example. Though many Native American slaveholders continued to treat their slaves in more traditional ways—at the least as autonomous people and even occasionally as family members—the elite among them acquired larger numbers of slaves, and the expansion of the market economy beyond peltry ensured the demands for slave labor increased.

Alexander McGillivray’s sister Sophia married a man named Durant, who Benjamin Hawkins once described as part African. Between the two of them, they owned eighty slaves in 1796.\textsuperscript{98} Daily life for the Durants’ slaves still appeared highly irregular to a frustrated Hawkins’ eyes, however. In his opinion, the vast majority of them were “idle” and a “burthen” to the couple. The Indian agent was appalled when one December he encountered a group of “negros…on their way to Mrs. Durant’s to keep Christmas.” When he asked what went on there, they replied that they annually “made a gathering at Mrs. Durant’s or her sister’s [Alexander McGillivray’s other sister, Sehoi] where there lived more of the black people than in any other part of the nation. And there they had a proper frolic and rum drinking and dancing. That the white people and Indians met generally at the same place with them and had the same amusement.”\textsuperscript{99} The expansion of race-based slavery into Indian country did not immediately eliminate traditional Indian

\textsuperscript{97} Nelly Price vs. The Estate of Miguel Lopez, August, 1788, Natchez Court Records, 177–78.
\textsuperscript{98} Diary of Benjamin Hawkins, December 20, 1796, Workes of Hawkins, 43.
\textsuperscript{99} Diary of Benjamin Hawkins, December 25, 1796, Workes of Hawkins, 48–49.
slavery practices, by which slaves were often treated more as fellow community members than as non-autonomous possessions. But black slaves’ increasing numbers and value (as enslaved property) in the marketplace was a harbinger of change.100

Daily life for women in Indian country shifted significantly as well, especially in the 1790s, when the United States introduced southeastern Indian groups to the Plan of Civilization. The peltry economy in some ways had marginalized a generation of women’s traditional contributions to Indian livelihood. Clothing, cooking utensils, and an assortment of other goods—things which Indian women used to produce themselves—could only be obtained with deerskins after the mid-eighteenth century.101 Hunting, however, remained an overwhelmingly masculine pursuit, which meant that women had no control over the materials they needed to fulfill their roles. Moreover, the time-consuming task of cleaning and curing deerskins had primarily fallen to women, but as many hunters went deeper into debt and as the deer population declined, fewer and fewer hunters took the time to clean and cure their peltry in the hopes of a quicker turnaround at the trade store, reducing women’s importance even further. As the decades progressed, men were away from their village or town for much of the year. They also often imbibed much of the revenue from their peltry in the form of rum and taffia, which deprived villages of vital trade goods as well as exacerbated the social ills of alcoholism in native life, greatly impacting community and familial cohesion. Benjamin Hawkins insisted that men give up hunting in favor of helping women in the fields (traditionally a thoroughly feminine activity), and that women learn to spin and weave cotton cloth. Many Indian women eagerly embraced aspects of the Plan of Civilization—while many men eyed it

100 See Snyder, Slavery in Indian Country.
suspiciously—because of the social reforms it advocated and the economic opportunities it appeared to offer.

Hawkins’s journals are filled with encounters with women eager to learn to plant cotton, and then to spin and weave it for homespun clothing. When he visited the Creek town of Etowah, he promoted the Plan of Civilization to Sally Waters, “a halfbreed wife of Col. Waters late of Georgia” and the current wife of the town headman, Ogoscatah.

“They said they would…plant cotton and be prepared for spinning as soon as they could make it, and they hoped they might get some [spinning] wheels and [cotton] cards as soon as they should be ready for them.”

102 The daughter of Anglo-Creek trader and leader Benjamin Steadham made Hawkins proud as well when he found her “at the spinning wheel; she spins well and has, of her own growing and spinning, 6 pounds of web and most [sic] as much filling.”

103 In early 1798 Hawkins wrote that “the women approve much of the plan for introducing the culture of cotton and the spinning wheel. I have had several applications for cotton seed, cards, and wheels.”

104 Indian men, though, were skeptical. When Hawkins told a group of Creek men about his plan to teach spinning and weaving to their wives and daughters, at least one of them laughed in his face. “The objection made to it by the men, is that if the women can clothe themselves, they will be proud and not obedient to their husbands.”

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Despite Indian women’s apparent embrace of the United States’ Plan of Civilization, Anglo-American cultural ideologies surrounding labor, agriculture, and the market took hold frustratingly slow for Hawkins. “I have been surrounded with

103 Diary of Benjamin Hawkins, November 20, 1797, Hawkins Letters, I, 137.
105 Diary of Benjamin Hawkins, January 5, 1797, Hawkins Letters, I, 35.
difficulties in my department,” he wrote from the Upper Creek town of Tuckaubatchee in 1798.

The Indians are a proud and haughty, beging, spoiled, untoward race, being accustomed for several years past to receive presents from Great Britain or Spain sufficient to clothe all the idlers in the nation, they demand anything they want from a white man, and feel themselves insulted when refused. They think they confer a favour on the donor if they accept clothes from him when naked, or provisions when hungry. 106

Hawkins’s complaint demonstrates the growing American perception of Indians as an inferior and unchangeable “race”—one ironically antithetical to the assumption that Native Americans could be Anglicized that was foundational to the Plan of Civilization in the first place. It also evinces Hawkins’s complete misunderstanding of centuries of traditional Indian-European diplomacy conducted largely on Indian terms and defined by gift giving. Hawkins’s perturbation shows that for all the “order” he and others hoped would emerge in the Gulf South, recent changes—new people, new commodities, and growing cultural and ethnic diversity—continued to make it a messy milieu, oscillating between its native-colonial past and its more complex present. These changes did not occur precisely on American, Spanish, or Native American nations’ terms. They were instituted piecemeal by individual Gulf southerners, and partly as a result of the markets provided by their own ingenuity and the powerful presence of Panton & Leslie. 107

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106 Benjamin Hawkins to David Henley, June 5, 1798, Hawkins Letters, I, 197.
107 Despite the fact that his other writings demonstrate he was very aware of the diversity of “Indian” country, Hawkins still chose to group all Gulf southerners he lived among as a single inferior “race.” This way of viewing the residents of the Gulf South interior became a common shibboleth among Anglo-American observers in the following
Benjamin Hawkins and his Plan of Civilization rightly receive attention for their transformational effects on the Gulf South. Still, many of the new ideas and practices he supposedly introduced to the region were at least somewhat familiar to Indian country residents before he arrived in 1796. Hawkins himself noted their presence as early as 1785, after a stay among the Creeks during Georgia-Creek treaty negotiations. “Some of the women have lately learnt to spin, and many of them are very desirous that some method should be fallen on to teach them to raise flax, cotton, and wool.” When Hawkins arrived to begin his mission a decade later, several of the Creeks he met demonstrated that these new activities were ongoing, if sporadic. One woman he met told him she had previously planted cotton and had sold it. Though it had only been enough “as purchased a petticoat,” she assured him “she would gladly make more and learn to spin it, if she had the opportunity.” Hawkins’s subsequent visit to a farm owned by the English trader Richard Bailey and his Wind Clan wife evinced more of the same. The two had five children and five grandchildren. Two of their daughters “spin cotton and the youngest, Elizabeth Fletcher, can read and write and is very industrious.” According to Hawkins, Richard Bailey had lived in Creek country for forty years in 1796, and the family owned sizeable property: 200 cows, 120 horses, 150 pigs, and 7 slaves. Their oldest son had been educated in Philadelphia “and has brought with him into the nation decades, eliding the remarkable diversity of the region in favor of an image that presented it as simply “red, white, and black.” When reading nineteenth century accounts of the region from streams of Anglo-American newcomers, this is important to keep in mind. See Theda Perdue, “Race and Culture: Writing the Ethnohistory of the Early South,” Ethnohistory vol. 51, no. 4 (Fall 2004); Theda Perdue, “Mixed Blood” Indians: Racial Construction in the Early South” (Athens, Ga., and London, 2003).

so much contempt for the Indian mode of life, that he has got himself into discredit with them.”

Neither Spanish colonial authority nor paternalistic American programs were important influences on the daily life of the Bailey family. Nor were they the earliest catalysts for social and cultural change in the region.

As Richard Bailey’s holdings suggest, the most profound change in the Gulf South in the eighteenth century was the widespread emergence of livestock herding. As deer declined, and Native Americans increasingly valued private property and wealth accumulation, cattle and other animals became the most accessible avenues to both property and wealth in the 1770s and 1780s. Cattle were mobile, required little day-to-day management, and given the region’s sparse population and large swaths of open forest, did not require fencing. Most landowners had at least a few, as they provided subsistence as well as extra income. Their hides could also partially replace declining deerskin revenue and they served as a local food source in times of hunger. Cattle provided several products in addition to meat and leather, including tallow for candles and fat for cooking. As early as the 1760s and 1770s, travelers routinely sighted “thousands” of cattle along the region’s waterways from the Mississippi River to the Flint River, and from Tennessee to the Gulf coast.

By 1794 a Spanish official counted over eighteen thousand cattle in the Natchez District alone, which equated to approximately four cows for every person. Large concentrations also existed along the Mobile,

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Tombigbee, and Alabama Rivers.\textsuperscript{112} Herders usually drove their stock to markets in New Orleans, Natchez, Mobile, Pensacola, and St. Augustine, where they were either shipped to the Caribbean or processed and consumed locally.\textsuperscript{113}

Cattle initially represented a threat to traditional ways of life in the Native Southeast. Creek hunters blamed roaming herds from Spanish and American settlements for scattering deer and destroying the ecosystem necessary for hunting them. But in the 1770s, “Indians beg[an] to be fond of cattle,” in the words of East Florida Governor James Grant.\textsuperscript{114} Most Native American ranchers probably began their herds with animals purchased or stolen from Euro-American neighbors. But herd numbers increased rapidly thereafter. By the turn of the century, the majority of Creek men and women in the overwhelming majority of towns owned livestock, providing a vital new commodity for access to the Atlantic market.\textsuperscript{115}

Resident white traders and their Indian families were some of the first to actively raise large herds of cattle and other livestock in Indian country. While visiting the Anglo-Creek trader Alexander Cornels in 1798, Benjamin Hawkins noted he had a “flock of sheep,” while his relative through marriage, trader Zachariah McGive, owned “a stock of hogs, horses, and cattle.” Hawkins also described Richard Bailey’s Creek widow as owning “a fine stock of hogs, cattle and horses.”\textsuperscript{116} The residents of the Creek town of Tuskegee had “some cattle, and a fine stock of hogs, more perhaps than any town of the nation” in 1798. The Indian agent described one individual there, Sam Macnack, as

\textsuperscript{112} Clark and Guice, \textit{Frontiers in Conflict}, 100–105.
\textsuperscript{113} Morris, \textit{Becoming Southern}, 23–26; Ethridge, \textit{Creek Country}.
\textsuperscript{114} Saunt, \textit{A New Order of Things}, 46–50; quoted from p. 49.
\textsuperscript{115} Ethridge, \textit{Creek Country}, 160–74
\textsuperscript{116} Sketch of the Creek Country in 1798 and 1799, \textit{Works of Hawkins}, 30s–31s.
having 180 head of cattle in 1799. Throughout Hawkins’ “Sketch of the Creek Country” notes, most of the towns he described had livestock, with herds ranging from the multiple hundreds owned by the Upper Creek traders like Robert Grierson to the seven owned by Creek woman Auwilaugee.

When historians of the South mention cattle raiding, they often view it as a symptom of the advance of U.S. “civilization” and the transformation of Indian societies. If cattle brought “civilization” to the Gulf South, however, it was Indians and other native Gulf Southerners who fostered it, rather than immigrants from Europe or the United States. Cattle, and to a lesser degree hogs, raised and managed by Indians, introduced sweeping ecological changes to the Gulf South. Livestock foraged in fallow fields, ensuring the forests could not regrow in many cleared areas. Cattle’s tendency to graze in groups on single patches of ground also compacted soils, further preventing regrowth even after the animals moved on. This was especially damaging near rivers and other waterways, where most regrowth would have begun, and such damage could be quite extensive over large expanses of land. Free-ranging cattle could wander up to fifty miles away over the course of a season. In addition to destroying deer habitat, cattle competed for food with native animals such as turkeys and deer. The depletion of these

117 Sketch of the Creek Country in 1798 and 1799, Works of Hawkins, 39s.
118 Sketch of the Creek Country in 1798 and 1799, Works of Hawkins, 41s–43s, 48s, 55s, 66s–67s; BHF Diary of Benjamin Hawkins, December 9, 1796, 29–31; Diary of Benjamin Hawkins, December 18, 1796, Works of Hawkins, 39;
119 This idea stretches from publications such as Thomas D. Clark and John D.W. Guice, Frontiers in Conflict: The Old Southwest, 1795–1830 (Albuquerque, N.M., 1989), 101; Frank L. Owsley, Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands: The Creek War and the Battle of New Orleans, 1812–1813 (Gainesville, Fla., 1981); and Frank Lawrence Owsley and Gene A. Smith, Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800–1821 (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1997); to older publications like Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier in American History (New York, 1920), who included it as part of his procession of “civilization” westward.
resources then subsequently led to a drop in the prey animal population as well. Cattle eventually led to new agriculture and settlement patterns for Gulf South Indians groups as many left their towns and villages in favor of scattered farms diffused along waterways. Indians who raised cattle and other livestock thus helped create the ecological foundation of what would become the Deep South. Individual farmsteads, permanently cleared fields along water routes, and herds of cattle moving on the hoof to growing markets along the coast for eventual export into the Atlantic economy: this was a Deep South in the midst of invention at the hands of native Gulf southerners.

Of course, not all Gulf Southerners embraced such change, and the transformation underway in the Gulf South did not always proceed peacefully. As Indians’ deerskin debts mounted, and as others embraced livestock, slavery, and American “Civilization,” many strove to retain their traditional way of life—often violently. These dissidents frequently resorted to banditry and insurgence, which both initiated and exacerbated tensions between different strata of Gulf South society.

Early resistance manifested itself as violence between young Indian men and encroaching Euro-American settlers. Alexander McGillivray directed at least some of this. After one bout of attacks and reprisals between Upper Creeks and settlers in 1786, trader and rancher Timothy Barnard reported to Georgia’s governor that cooler heads would only prevail if McGillivray softened his hardline stance against white settlers venturing over their side of the “line.” “I believe if proper measures were taken[,] satisfaction might be obtained for what mischief has been done, but Mr. McGillivray it

seems is determined the Oconee land shall not be settled if he can help it."\(^{121}\) But as Indians’ communities began to change from within, younger warriors, especially, who resented both Euro-American encroachment and the development of the livestock economy, expressed their dissatisfaction with their leaders.

Some warriors felt that the rising new order, including the expansion of cattle ranching and cotton production, threatened “to make slaves of them.”\(^{122}\) Many began openly resisting the authority of their headmen. During negotiations with the Spanish for their proposed fort at Nogales in the 1790s, Choctaw headman Franchimastabe cited tension with his young warriors as another reason for his reluctance to allow the fort’s construction. Stephen Minor reported him saying “that he [Franchimastabe] might not have shown until now such repugnance against the establishment of Nogales were it not for the suspicion he had of his young warriors, who often had already threatened him with his life” for repeatedly accommodating incursions of the Spanish government and American settlers.\(^{123}\) Franchimastabe told Minor he believed his warriors “were beginning to accept” the increasing Euro-American presence. A little over a year later, though, the tension remained, as young men acted out their frustrations by harassing soldiers and settlers against the wishes of their headmen. As Manuel Gayoso explained, “in large part the disorder is also the consequence of their being too large a number of [lesser] chiefs who believe that they no longer should obey or even that they are subjects

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\(^{121}\) Timothy Barnard to Edward Telfair, August 22, 1786, *Unpublished Letters of Timothy Barnard, 1784–1820*, Department of Archives and History of the State of Georgia, 61; hereinafter cited as *Letters of Timothy Barnard*.


\(^{123}\) Diary of Stephen Minor’s Second Mission to the Choctaws, March 13 to April 3, 1792, *Paths to a Middle Ground*, 178.
of the principal chief of each group. From this, confusion arises in the nation." Though Gayoso perhaps misunderstood the traditional non-coercive nature of Native American authority, his observation regarding the state of confusion in Indian country was accurate. Warriors’ and lesser headmen’s refusal to accept Franchimastabe’s right to grant land to the Spanish reflected the cracks that had developed between Choctaw villages. The growing importance of personal property and the shifting definitions of authority and other native cultural imperatives left many Indians feeling increasingly marginalized and dissatisfied with their leaders.

Indians, however, were not the only population that created “disorders” in the Gulf South. While scholars have focused primarily on the cleavages created among Indian peoples by economic and social change, dissidence arose among the white and black populations of the region as well, and for similar reasons. While some Euro-Americans grew wealthy via trade, livestock, or other commodities, the changes they wrought created tension with those at the bottom of social hierarchies. Whether immigrants or white creoles, these men and women—not unlike their Indian neighbors—felt marginalized by a rapidly changing society that significantly widened the gap between the wealthy few and the rest of the population.

One such man was John Alston. In 1781, for unclear reasons, Alston abandoned British Natchez with “most of his property, consisting of slaves, cattle and money, leaving his wife and children” destitute, while he and his brother Philip took up new residence “with the nation of Indians called ‘Chits.’” The court labeled John Alston a “fugitive Rebel,” and he soon began employing “public Robbers” who made a habit of

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124 Manuel Gayoso to Baron de Carondelet, December 6, 1793, Paths to a Middle Ground, 215.
stealing goods from the district before “retreat[ing] into Indian Nations” to escape capture. The reasons behind Alston’s actions remain mysterious, though he may have been escaping his debts or some other obligation. The American Revolutionary War was still ongoing, so his label as a “Rebel” is suggestive. However, white West Florida residents remained largely peaceful during the war. If Alston felt hostile towards the British regime, it is unclear why he would have occupied his time robbing private citizens, his former neighbors. Alston’s actions could not have been too unusual, however. His estate’s court-appointed guardian, Alexander McIntosh, complained that none of Alston’s things could be auctioned in Natchez because the people there were too poor, and even “if sold on credit, these people, being without faith, would later abscond to the [Indian] Nation…and never heard from again.” John Alston and his gang continued their criminal activities under the Spanish regime, as well. In 1786 his brother, Philip Alston, and his son-in-law, “Drumgoole,” stole “a negro man named King” who had formerly belonged to John Alston, though since had been confiscated by the government and resold.

White refugees, fugitives, and “rebels” claimed various justifications for their actions. While John Alston might have used the cause of the American rebels in 1781, others used loyalism as their excuse. In the postscript of a letter in 1784, trader and Indian

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125 Appointment of Guardian and Taking of Inventory for the Alston Estate, July to August, 1781, Natchez Court Records, 1–2.
127 Appointment of Guardian and Taking of Inventory for the Alston Estate, July to August, 1781, Natchez Court Records, 1–2.
country planter Timothy Barnard lamented his friend “poor Jones,” who while traveling near the Flint River was robbed and killed “by four Rascals that Call themselves Toreys.” The men followed Jones “to pea Creek [and] took four of his negroes…all his papers, his close [sic] and money.”

128 During the infamous raids and reprisals between Creeks and Georgian settlers during the 1780s, a number of “whites,” mostly traders and their descendants, participated in attacks on Anglo-American settlements. According to Barnard, they often instigated the violence. “By what I can learn, there is a great many White people in the [Indian] Nation that are turned as bad as the Indians, the names of which I have inclosed [sic] to you a list,” he wrote to Georgia’s governor in 1786. “I hope your Honor [will] not disclose who sent you this list, as it might be attended with ill consequences to me.”

Whether these men robbed others because they were poor, desperate, political dissidents, threatened by U.S. encroachment, or something else—transient bands of disaffected, lawless men included both Indians and whites, both of whom struggled to cope with a rapidly transforming Gulf South. Violence was rarely if ever defined by a straight forward red-versus-white paradigm. Both Indians and white men in Indian country created “disorders” and caused “depredations” in the region. Though scholars have been content to see them as fundamentally different, the same forces motivated both: disaffection with the changing status quo.

In addition to fomenting violence on the frontier, Indians and white traders jointly helped to reduce it as well. Spain’s inability to effectively police the interior forced them

129 Timothy Barnard to Edward Telfair, August 22, 1786, *Letters of Timothy Barnard,* 61. The list was not attached to the letter so the names it contained are unknown.
to call upon others to do it for them. In 1788 five Spanish soldiers deserted from the fort at Apalachee. While living on the lam in Indian country, they “injured and robbed” four Indians. An Indian named Acachie captured and turned in one of the soldiers for a reward, and William Panton’s traders—the only organization with enough clout in Indian country to mount a search—turned in another a few months later. Governments often turned to Gulf traders to help them police the region. In 1786 the Spanish government requested traders Alexander Fraser, Benjamin James, and James McIntosh, “residing in the Chickasaw and Choctaw towns,” to help apprehend a gang comprised of former South Carolinian, James Armstrong, his two sons, “a negro,” and several others. These “highway robbers…. have lately robbed many inhabitants of the District of their firearms, clothes, goods, saddles, bridles, horses, etc.” Armstrong, before dying of wounds sustained during his capture, confessed they had hoped to eventually escape into Georgia after taking refuge “in the Nation” for a time. Armstrong’s group of fugitives included a man of African descent. Though he was enslaved, it is possible he willingly participated in the group’s exploits. Such racially mixed groups provide strong evidence that “blackness” was not quite yet the social barrier it eventually became.

Whether one was Indian, settler, or slave, disaffected men on the fringes of society banded together for protection and profit. Benjamin Hawkins, for example, related the story of the murder and robbery of three white men traveling through Creek country on their way to Tensaw in 1789. While camping along a creek, they met an outlaw named John Catt and his wife, “a negro, Bobb, belonging to Stephen Sullivan, an

131 The King vs. James Armstrong, August, 1786, Natchez Court Records, 247; Confession of James Armstrong, August, 1786, Natchez Court Records, 248.
Indian woman of the fish ponds [villages], and an Indian man called the [M]urderer.”

Later in the evening while the travelers were asleep, Bobb “crept up a tree, took the gun” and shot one of the men while “Catt and the Indian rushed in,” killing the other two.

“They then took everything except the clothes on the ded [sic] bodies,” including a young enslaved boy the travelers had with them. Contemporary writers often mentioned the pervasive threat of “Indian” attacks while traveling, and these remained fear-inducing anecdotes for travelers and immigrants in the frontier zones. But those who, for one reason or another, wound up resorting to theft and violence to survive in the transitioning Gulf South did not always comprise neat, self-segregated groups. Some attacks were by groups that did not even include “Indians” at all. When authorities later seized Catt before his execution, the Indian man Hawkins called The Murderer attempted a last ditch effort to aid his partner in crime and tried to fend off his executioners. The Murderer tried to “pursue and murder” those holding Catt before an African American, Bobb, ultimately held The Murderer back.

Historical accounts of Indians who resisted the new order in the Gulf South capture only part of the ethnic and cultural transformations ongoing at the end of the eighteenth century. Disaffected violence cannot so easily be divided into distinct Indian and white versions. Native Americans who resisted the rising new order in the Gulf South were often forced to the social fringes, sometimes by choice, though often not. But on those fringes they met whites and blacks alike attempting to cope with similar problems, leading to interracial partnerships and even friendships alongside the violence. The pine barrens along the coastal plain became infamous for “banditti” in mixed gangs of

European, Native American, and African Americans who often preyed upon travelers there. After the murder of the three such men in 1789, William Panton, Alexander McGillivray, and Benjamin Hawkins pooled their resources to hunt down the perpetrators (for the men who profited from the changes underway in the region all agreed that security in the interior was paramount in order to protect their respective interests).  

For dissidents of all origins, by far the most common illegal activity was horse theft. Horses were invaluable possessions in a region that lacked regular roads and that remained relatively sparsely populated. Horses were currency—a commodity like tobacco, corn, and deerskins, that could be exchanged in lieu of specie. Stolen horses became a cultural currency too. Immigrants and native Gulf southerners fought over them, but also traded them to one another and even stole them together. Horse theft became so common that Georgia officer John Habersham feared it might ultimately derail the Plan of Civilization. “I am much embarrassed with some of the citizens on the frontiers,” he wrote in 1797. “They will buy stolen horses from the Indians and this…is the source of endless mischief, and unless I can check it…will totally frustrate the benevolent plans of the government.” As an example, Habersham cited an Irishman named Timothy Lane, a resident trader in the Upper Creek town of Tuckaubatchee, who sold stolen horses in Savannah. When he was caught, Lane “declar[ed] his intention of returning to Ireland” to escape punishment.

Indian country remained relatively free from either Spanish or American authority, and the Gulf South’s geopolitical situation insulated both petty and more

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sophisticated horse thieves from the law. A Natchez man named Luis Charbonneau was a defendant in multiple cases during the 1780s. Adam Bingaman sued Charbonneau in 1783 for his “mare which he has possession of for some months and which he says he [Charbonneau] says he got [instead] from the Indians.” 135 Similarly, James Willing sued Charbonneau over a horse that “was stolen from him by the Indians and carried by them to the Nation…and is now in the hands of Luis Charbonneau.” 136 Choctaw trader Turner Brashears claimed James Stoddard illegally held a horse that had been stolen from him years earlier while in Choctaw country. 137

Horse theft also involved larger, more sophisticated operations. In 1791 Stephen Minor complained to Choctaw headman Franchimastabe that his people were harboring a notorious gang of thieves.

[I told Franchimastabe] there was a camp of horse thieves on his land near the Big Black, composed of Russell James, Eduardo Lusek, and one named Peake, and that [their accomplices] Abraham Castelman and Tory Edwards lived in the towns of his nation. I told him that these people did nothing but steal horses from the Indians and from the people of Natchez and take them back and forth between the two nations. Besides this, the group…also robbed and pillaged the travelers that were going to America. 138

136 James Willing vs. Luis Charbonneau, unknown date, Natchez Court Records, 1783, 308.
137 Turner Brashears vs. James Stoddard, November 1786, Natchez Court Records, 245.
138 Diary of Stephen Minor’s First Mission to the Choctaws, May 30 to June 13, 1791, Paths to a Middle Ground, 158.
Whereas the practice of stealing horses from colonial settlements for sale in Indian
country—or the reverse—seemed to be the most common tactic, some thieves also traded
in stolen horses entirely within Indian nations as well. These men “steal [Indians’] horses
and go off to another village” to sell their spoils, Manuel Gayoso complained while
blaming these criminals for creating tension between Indian groups and the Spanish
government.139 Various leaders viewed horse thievery as one of the most pressing
problems in the region. William Panton personally attempted to eliminate it from his
trading territory, though even his efforts were in vain. “These Indians will not quite [sic]
stealing and plundering untill [sic] they get to the devil,” a frustrated Daniel McGillivray
wrote to Panton in 1797.140

By the end of the 1790s, horse theft had become a common tactic for disaffected
young Creek warriors who were increasingly unhappy with the transformation of their
communities.141 When Chickasaw headman Wolfs Friend wrote to Panton in 1797, he
indicated that a group of Creeks had just “stole a number of horses [from us] and I am
afraid a War will ensue” between the Creeks and Chickasaws.142 In this case, the
increasing difficulty of obtaining honor through hunting resulted in these men attempting
to do the same through stealing horses from their native neighbors. Horse theft’s
changing meanings thus reflected the transformations underway in Indian country. In
Wolfs Friend’s account, it became a way for young dissidents to maintain traditional
cultural imperatives and to lash out at cultural shifts that seemed to be excluding them.

139 Manuel Gayoso’s Account of the Nogales Assembly, October 1793, Paths to a Middle
140 Daniel McGillivray to William Panton, April 26, 1797, Cruzat Papers, Box 1, Folder
5.
141 Saunt, New Order of Things; Ethridge, Creek Country.
142 Wolfs Friend to William Panton, April 30, 1797, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.
Similarly, horse theft grew more and more linked with the theft of slaves by the end of the eighteenth century.

As the Indian definition of slavery shifted in the last decades of the 1700s, so too did the definition of the slave. Whereas once slaves in the Native South were war captives who might gain community responsibility and even membership, by the 1770s and 1780s Indians developed a proto-racial ideology of their own and began to view slaves more as commodities than potential kin. This definition in many ways mimicked the changing understandings of the horse as an ever more valuable and mobile commodity that could be quickly and profitably sold. As horse thieves covered their tracks by smuggling their spoils through Indian nations, slaves often followed. From the backcountry in 1782, Creek trader Patrick Carr warned the governor of Georgia that he had been “informed by a man Immediately from [St.] Augusteen that there are a party come into this state in order to Carry off Negroes and horses to Pensacola Via the Indian country.”

Stephen Minor pleaded with Franchimastabe for the Choctaws to police the theft of slaves and horses, crimes that involved partnerships between whites and Indians. “There are among you a number of whites whose occupation is no other than to steal blacks and horses…and bring them to your land and, with the help of the Indians, hide them in the forests.” Minor then emphasized a definitional link between horses and enslaved black persons, couched in language he the Choctaws no doubt understood, conflating slaves and horses as equal, life-improving forms of property. The thefts made

143 Patrick Carr to John Martin, December 28, 1782, Letters of Timothy Barnard, 27.
colonial residents “impoverished,” Minor claimed, because “they have no other means to provide bread for their women and children, other than employing blacks and horses.”

The cultural transformation of Indian societies at the end of the eighteenth century created ideological fractures among Indian groups. But Indians were not the only ones affected, and their cultural transformation reverberated across the spectrum of Gulf South society, affecting the lives and choices of blacks and whites as well. Indians, blacks, and whites took advantage of change in order to advance their own interests just as often as they were victims of that change. The infiltration of the market and the absence of top-down control thus had a revolutionary effect. Traditional Native American cultural imperatives—non-coercive authority, community property, hunting, warfare—deteriorated. By the same token, the unregulated addition of Euro-Americans, Africans, and African Americans into the ethno-cultural mix meant that new communities and new cultural traits arose to take their place. In emphasizing the losses sustained by Native American communities, historians obscure this parallel story.

As the frontier exchange economy began to give way to a more market-oriented version during this period, the “Indian, settler, and slave” paradigm broke down. At the end of the century, Gulf southerners rarely fit into such neat categories. Scholars have gotten around this problem by explaining that people like Alexander McGillivray and Nelly Price lived between worlds. But the diversity of the frontier experience more broadly demonstrates that they simply lived in one world, albeit one of expanding

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144 Diary of Stephen Minor’s First Mission to the Choctaws, May 30 to June 13, 1791, *Paths to a Middle Ground*, 158.

145 Though it should be remembered, of course, that in this sense “traditional” did not mean ancient, or even very old. The ethnogenesis of Indian peoples as they appeared in the eighteenth century occurred only a few centuries earlier.
definitions and possibilities. Alexander McGillivray’s life represents the “Creek” experience every bit as much as does a dissident warrior or horse thief. He was not somehow “less Indian” for his embrace of slavery, private property, or capitalism, at least not by definition.

Despite such revolutionary changes, deerskins continued to provide the foundation of the Gulf South world. Trading companies became powerful because of their grip on the peltry economy. Euro-American governments’ weaknesses stemmed from their inability to control the deerskin market. Indians’ deerskin debts wrought violence and crime and fostered the transition to livestock. The many Euro-Americans who took up permanent residence in Native American communities arrived as deerskin traders. But this foundation was faltering.

Just as Panton, McGillivray, and others consolidated their economic and political positions in the 1790s, the Atlantic peltry market—the very engine that made their power possible—sputtered. Though most deerskins now funneled through Panton-affiliated traders down to the Gulf coast, instead of to the Atlantic, Indian hunters harvested fewer and fewer of them with each passing year. After nearly a century of heavy hunting, the Gulf South deer population had declined precipitously. Further, European demand declined as well. In response, as a new century arrived, Indian trading companies and Indian traders diversified as cattle, cotton, and slave labor escalated in importance. Their emergence, and the ethnic and cultural diversity they nurtured, created even greater transformational effects from within Indian country that reverberated well into the nineteenth century.
CHAPTER 2:

FOUNDING FAMILIES OF THE DEEP SOUTH: NETWORKS OF KINSHIP AND ECONOMY, 1770–1800

In 1791 James Stewart resolved to move his family from Georgia to West Florida to begin a new farm and a new life. Rather than travel by water around Florida and through the Gulf of Mexico, Stewart, his wife, and his children set out overland “through the Creek Nation” on their way to the predominantly Euro-American settlements just north of Mobile Bay. Part way through their journey, however, Stewart learned of some unresolved business he needed to attend to back in Georgia. Believing it would not take long, and in the interest of speed, Stewart left his family in the temporary care of a local Gulf southerner and trader named Caldwell Eastridge, who volunteered to shelter his wife and children until Stewart came back. Upon Stewart’s return, Eastridge, a notorious horse thief, accused Stewart of stealing one of his best horses—an accusation that by all accounts appeared to be false. Stewart did his best to convince Eastridge of his innocence. But several months later, after the Stewart family had settled on the Tombigbee River, Eastridge and “some accomplices” —a man named Robert Walton and “a certain [man named] Rollins”—kidnapped and beat Stewart not far from the town of Tensaw. The attackers then robbed Stewart of a “note for $40” and his horse, “which was a fine one.” Stewart subsequently filed a lawsuit in Spanish Natchez.¹

Stewart vs. Eastridge, however, involved dueling jurisdictions. Eastridge actually pled his version of the case in “the Nation,” with Alexander McGillivray presiding. But

an in-depth reading of the Natchez suit’s testimony reveals more than simply a legal
dispute. It shows that diverse Gulf southerners—Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Anglo-
Americans, African Americans, and many people of mixed ancestry—formed an
interconnected web of formal, informal, and familial relationships. This network held the
region together economically and socially while integrating it culturally, linking Mobile
Bay, Natchez, and Pensacola, with the Black Warrior and Tallapoosa Rivers, and with
Creek towns like Tallassee and Coweta.

Stewart’s family, originally from Georgia, eventually settled along the lower
Tombigbee River, becoming closer neighbors with Creek and Choctaw towns than with
Euro-American coastal settlements. According to testimony, Stewart quickly became
friendly with Tuckaubatchee headman Oche Haujo, also known as Alexander Cornels, at
whose Alabama River estate Joiner and Stewart visited and stayed the day before he was
attacked. Cornels owed his position in Creek society to his mother’s Wind Clan heritage,
but no doubt his father’s family’s political and trade connections had also served him
well. Cornels’s father was a successful trader, and his paternal uncle, Joseph Cornels, had
once worked as an interpreter for Alexander McGillivray.²

Another witness’s testimony reported a chance meeting with Eastridge, Rollins,
and Walton, “all armed,” just on their way to seize Stewart. At the time of the encounter
this witness had been on his way to visit his friend, Charles Weatherford, an Anglo trader
and slave owner who was married to Alexander McGillivray’s sister, Sehoy.
(Weatherford’s son, William Weatherford, later became an influential Creek and the

² William S. Coker and Thomas D. Watson, Indian Traders of the Southeastern Spanish
Borderlands: Panton, Leslie & Company and John Forbes & Company, 1783–1847
The witness testified that when he reached Weatherford’s estate, Weatherford asked him “if I had not [just] met the abovementioned [Eastridge, Rollins, and Walton?] . . . I said that I had.” Weatherford then revealed “that Eastridge had accused Stewart of stealing horses from him,” but that “I have been trying to get an Indian to go and give Stewart notice of [Eastridge’s deceit] for I believe Stewart is as clear of stealing horses as you or I.”

Alexander McGillivray—James Stewart’s judge, Caldwell Eastridge’s associate, Charles Weatherford’s brother-in-law, and Alexander Cornels’s fellow Creek headman—later adjudicated the quarrel between Eastridge and Stewart. McGillivray in this case represented the central link in this network, illustrating how these diverse individuals were tied together.

As Indian country changed, families of European, Indian, and African descent created new communities and connections that crossed ethnic and political boundaries. To a significant extent, Indian towns and colonial settlements were no longer separate worlds, no more than Gulf southerners who had Euro-American and Native American parents manifested two separate cultures. For a brief span prior to the American antebellum period, the high level of diversity made the region an arena for cultural invention. Much of this innovation originated in relationships between ostensibly distinct peoples: Scotsmen and Creeks, Spaniards and Choctaws, Africans and Seminoles, and others. But by the early nineteenth century, sustained decades of these relationships had created multiple generations of men and women who failed to fit any one discrete category. In many ways Indian nations remained potent in a cultural and ethnic sense all

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4 James Stewart vs. Caldwell Eastridge, January 1795, *Natchez Court Records*, 287.
the way until their removal at the hands of the U.S. government, despite the growing internal and external pressures. Nevertheless, immigrants and Indians had all changed in creative, fundamental ways. They had all become native Gulf southerners, and they thereby created a complex network of kinship, trade, and community affiliations that integrated the entire region in one large, interconnected system. There remained a distinction between Indian country and the colonial Gulf South, but the two also combined to form a new society—a Native Gulf South that was also a Deep South.

Economic as well as kin relationships tied Gulf southerners together. Take, for instance, a simple note written by a trader named “B. Rawline.” Rawline owed trader John Turnbull $238 in 1798. His short letter to Turnbull stated that he had given the money to Alexander McGillivray with the understanding that McGillivray would pass it on to Turnbull. But, never receiving a receipt, and learning of McGillivray’s death shortly thereafter, Rawline became concerned as to “wheather [Turnbull] had rec’d that sum or not.” Rawline must not have been consistently reachable by letter, however, because he asked that Turnbull reply in writing through their mutual friend, Richard Bailey, “and if McGilvary should not have settled with you I Beeg you may wright so as the Money may be” sent along soon.5 Rawline had clearly not seen Bailey for a while at the time of this note, however, because Richard Bailey had passed away sometime during the previous year. Bailey, an Englishman, had been a trader, farmer, and rancher among the Upper Creeks since at least the 1770s. Around the time of his death he had at least one Creek wife, five grown children, and seven enslaved African American laborers along with two

5 B. Rawline to John Turnbull, July 30, 1798, Turnbull-Allain Family Papers (Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; hereinafter cited as Turnbull Papers) Box 2, Folder 1.
hundred cattle, 120 horses, and 150 hogs. Bailey had also been a close associate of United States Indian agent Benjamin Hawkins, and Rawline’s letter to Turnbull demonstrated that Rawline also knew Hawkins. “[We expect] Col Hawkins to undertake something in consequence of the Genrl McGilvray estate” soon, Rawline wrote, in reference to an ongoing dispute between McGillivray’s kin and creditors over the wealthy Creek’s property.

Rawline in Creek country, McGillivray in Little Tallassie, Turnbull in Mobile and Choctaw country, Bailey in the Upper Creeks, and Hawkins on the Flint River all knew each other and transacted business with one another, though separated by hundreds of miles. They were part of the same interconnected social and economic system. Though we can know little about Rawline personally from his short missive, we know more about Turnbull and Bailey from other sources. Both men were of English descent, had Indian kin, traded peltry, and owned cattle and cotton fields. Both men died at the end of the 1790s. But while Bailey lived out his final days in Creek country, Turnbull died on one of his large plantations outside Baton Rouge, where he had lived with his white wife, Catherine. The Turnbuls and the Baileys were different—John Turnbull appears to have spent most of his time in colonial settlements, while Richard Bailey made his permanent home near the Upper Creek town of Autosee—but they were linked, to each other as well as to hundreds of others across the region.

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7 Charles Norwood to Catherine Turnbull, November 12, 1800, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 4; Charles Norwood to John Turnbull, June 13, 1799, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 3.
John Turnbull did regular business with multiple members of the powerful Colbert family of the Chickasaws, whose progenitor was James Colbert, a trader and soldier, probably Scottish-born, who married three Chickasaw women. Colbert’s children lived as Chickasaws and engaged in an array of activities. William Colbert was a slave trader, though little else is known about him. Levi Colbert eventually became a leader in the anti-Removal faction of the Chickasaws. James Jr., James Colbert’s namesake and oldest son, apprenticed with Panton & Leslie Co. in the 1780s. The elder James’s daughter, Betsy Colbert, became a slaveholder as well and married twice during her life—one in 1797 in a Chickasaw ceremony, and a second time in 1836 in a Mississippi church service. Finally, George Colbert was a headman and slaveholder. He was friendly with Mississippi Territorial Governor William Claiborne as well as Benjamin Hawkins and related by marriage to Alexander McGillivray. Though a Chickasaw, when he built a

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new house in 1790 he constructed it in Euro-American fashion: two stories tall with a front porch, glass windows, and “covered with rough Clapboards well shingled and sealed inside with pine Boards.” George was also a slaveholder who used his connections to call on other masters for aid in managing his human property. In 1809 planter Joseph Coleman asked his white neighbors to help Colbert recover a runaway, calling the Anglo-Chickasaw man “Our Red Friend.”

Like many frontier spaces in general, the southern interior was an exceptionally diverse place. Cross-cultural mixture was readily apparent to the naturalist William Bartram when he journeyed through the region in the 1770s. Though he believed he was entering an Indian wilderness, Bartram’s published travel narratives hint that the landscape and peoples he actually encountered defied his expectations at times. While crossing the Altamaha River in Georgia he noted that the Creek man who rowed him “in a good large boat” was “married to a white woman.” When he later arrived at a trading house on the upper part of the river, he found it “occupied by a white trader, who had for a companion, a very handsome Siminole young woman,” who he called a “beautiful savage.” Scholars are familiar with the couplings between white traders and Indian women. Historians usually portray them as marriages of convenience for both parties.

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9 Quoted in Saunt, New Order, 71.
10 Snyder, Slavery in Indian Country, 211.
White traders acquired better access to deerskins through their wives’ kin connections while Indian women obtained political and economic advantages in the bargain. But Bartram portrayed the man he encountered, who was originally from North Carolina, as the junior partner and genuinely heartsick: “[T]hey were married in the Indian manner . . . [and] he loves her sincerely, as she possesses every perfection in her person to render a man happy . . . and these powerful graces she has so artfully played upon her beguiled and vanquished lover, and unhappy slave.”14 The white individuals who joined Indian kin-groups were not always male, even in the early 1770s. Many women who arrived in Indian country as captives ultimately integrated into the community.15 David Taitt, for instance, traveling through Creek country not long before Bartram, described the running away of a “white woman” who had been a slave in the Lower Creek town of “Pallachocola” (perhaps meaning Patachoche). When she escaped, Taitt wrote, she had “run off with an Indian who [was] not her husband,” implying that she was married to a different Creek man in the village.16

William Bartram’s observations of town life among the Seminoles serve as a reminder that acculturation moved in multiple directions. He described the Alachua Seminoles as “evidently tinctured with Spanish civilization” because he believed “their religious and civil usages manifest a predeliction for the Spanish customs. There are several Christians among them, many of whom wear little silver crucifixes . . . [and] most

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of them speak and understand Spanish.” Bartram likely saw what he wanted to see in the wearing of crucifixes, which of course did not necessarily indicate the Alachuas’ religious affiliations (though many Florida Indians were historically affiliated with remnants of the Spanish mission system). Nevertheless, the Indians’ frequent interactions with Spanish colonials had made enough of an impact that certain “Spanish” elements were clearly visible to Bartram.

Because of the Gulf South’s long-time location between various competing empires, by the 1790s natives throughout Indian country had decades of experience with different European and colonial cultures. Nearly two decades after Bartram’s journey through the Gulf South interior, Spanish Indian agent Stephen Minor dined with a Choctaw headman named Tabuca, “[a] man of much influence and [a] great speaker,” while on a political mission in Choctaw country. After the meal, Tabuca showed off a “small box” of papers to Minor. When the agent examined them, he “found an English patent and another Spanish one, a letter from an English official and another from the Americans to their account from Philadelphia. . . . He also had portraits of George Washington, of his wife, of Governor Penn and various others.” Though Minor claimed that most of the papers “contained nothing more than mere expressions of friendship,” the items highlighted the variety of correspondence and other material that, by the end of the eighteenth century, had been infiltrating Indian communities for decades.

William Bartram, David Taitt, and other travelers frequently noted the ubiquity of white traders who resided in Indian towns and joined Indian kin groups, beginning in the 1760s and 1770s. By the 1790s they were so common that Benjamin Hawkins wrote that nearly every Indian town in the Gulf South had at least one resident trader—men who had lived in Indian country for multiple decades and who had helped bring multiple children and grandchildren into Indian communities. Hawkins labeled their offspring “halfbreeds,” a racial designation that was self-explanatory for many Euro-Americans but that tells historians very little about who these people were. Hawkins rarely missed an opportunity to note the race of those he encountered, whether in his diary or in his letters back to the United States. In a representative quote from 1796, for example, he wrote about his stay at the “habitation of some Indian women . . . three families from Towe. I lodged at the hut of one who was a halfbreed” and had a conversation about Hawkins’s plan to introduce civilization to the “Red people.”\(^\text{19}\) In a 1797 letter Hawkins again depended on the hospitality of some Indian women near the town of Etowah. Along the path “an Indian . . . informed [me] of two women Sarah Waters and Sally Hews, both halfbreeds who spoke English well,” who would take him in for the night.\(^\text{20}\)

The number of people of mixed ancestry Hawkins met among the Creeks alone is too long to cover in detail. A small representative sample includes cattle rancher Sam Macnack, “a half breed” from Tuskogee; “four brothers, George, Thomas, James, [and] Tiltlagee . . . halfbreeds” who lived in Robert Grierson’s neighborhood and who raised cattle and horses together; John O’Kelly, “a halfbreed [whose] father was a trader” in an Upper Creek town on the Coosa River; Leonard McGee, who was “of an excellent

character [and] sp[oke] English well; cotton producer Benjamin Steadham, a “halfbreed”
headman; John Meeley, a one-time accomplice of notorious adventurer William
Augustus Bowles; Charles Hicks, an interpreter for the U.S. Indian agency; and Sam
Moniac, “a very wealthy half breed” and brother-in-law to Alexander McGillivray. 21 The
number of such people grew exponentially at the end of the eighteenth century. A close
analysis of their lives and subsequent families—and what their numbers might imply for
a transforming Gulf South—remains under-represented in the historiography of the
region.

The informal, grassroots nature of Gulf South economic and social life, along
with the lack of any top-down government control via either Spain or the United States,
makes following Gulf southerners’ trail through history (especially with regard to
women) extremely difficult. Without regular census data, estate records, and formal
business relationships, we are left with only fleeting glimpses of families like the
Griersons, the Barnards, the McIntoshes, and the Colberts. They appear and disappear in
letters, diaries, and treaty negotiations, forcing historians to quilt together their lives from
disparate sources with frustratingly large gaps, leaving many questions unanswerable. We
thus know few details about the daily lives of these individuals, especially compared to
what we know of the American migrants who ultimately replaced them in Alabama and
Mississippi. Yet this lack of detail should not detract from the fact that their influence on

21 For Macnack, see “Sketch of the Creek Country,” Works of Hawkins, 39s, 29–30; and
Hawkins Letters, 298. For O’Kelly, see Hawkins Journal, December 13, 1796, Hawkins
Letters, 16–17. For Magee, see Hawkins Journal, February 11, 1797, Hawkins Letters,
46–47. For Steadham, see Hawkins Journal, Hawkins Letters, November 20, 1797, 137.
For Meeley, see Hawkins to James McHenry, October 20, 1799, Hawkins Letters, 262.
For Hicks, see Hawkins Journal, August 31, 1801, Hawkins Letters, 368. For Moniac,
Hawkins to William Eustis, August 27, 1809, Hawkins Letters, 556.
the transformation of the Gulf South is vitally important for understanding precisely how and why the region changed after the turn of the century. Their story marks the transition from Indian country to slave country, though that transition remains comparatively obscured by a sparse documentary record. Who were these Gulf southern families whose surnames appear over and over in the correspondence of travelers, missionaries, and government agents?

The Bailey family provides tantalizing evidence of the Gulf South’s transformation. Richard Bailey was a “native of England,” according to Benjamin Hawkins, and he began his life in North America as a carpenter’s apprentice in Savannah sometime before the mid-1750s. By 1772 he had become an Indian trader among the Creeks. What transpired in the intervening two decades is unknown. English traveler David Taitt mentioned Bailey in his journal that year as a “hireling Trading . . . in the [Upper Creek] Ottesey [Autossee] Town” as a subordinate to a “Mr. Mackay,” the primary trader in the Upper Creek town of Little Tallassie at the time. Bailey had just arrived in Little Tallassie “from Pensacola where he and some others had been to purchase Rum with Skins.” Bailey stayed engaged in the peltry trade for several more decades. He remained a trader for Panton & Leslie until at least 1795, as he still appeared on the company’s balance sheets during that year and was indebted to the company for an unknown amount. But even as he remained a trader, his life in Creek country changed significantly. When Benjamin Hawkins encountered him in 1796, he described Bailey as

23 Journal of David Taitt, February 28, 1772, Travels in the American Colonies, 512.
“a good farmer” with “large fenced in lands, [a] stable, garden, lots for his stock, some thriving [fruit] trees, and a small nursery” for fragile young plants. Hawkins noted that Bailey had “been 40 years in this country,” long enough to acquire several hundred head of livestock and “7 slaves.”\(^{25}\)

Hawkins believed Richard Bailey represented a “civilising” force in Indian country—an Englishman who had brought Anglo culture to the Gulf South interior—but the Indian agent’s actual observations suggest he misjudged the “Indian countryman.” Hawkins was surely aware of Bailey’s peltry trading—an activity that required Bailey to develop intimate knowledge of native life and geography and to cultivate a network of relations—but even putting that fact aside, four decades in the interior had changed Bailey as much as he had changed Creek country. In 1796 Bailey was affiliated with the powerful Wind clan and had at least seven Creek children with a woman Hawkins only ever named as “Mrs. Bailey.” When Hawkins learned that all of Richard Bailey’s stock was “the property of his wife and children,” a clear example of Creek property traditions, he explained it away by reasoning that nearby Creeks were uneasy with “their white neighbours keeping stock among them” so Bailey found it “safe[er]” to say they belonged to his wife. Much to Hawkins’s delight, the Bailey couple’s children seemed primed to spread his “civilization” gospel. “Mr. Bailey’s 2 daughters are married to white men, they both spin cotton and the youngest, Elizabeth Fletcher, can read and write and is very industrious.”\(^{26}\) Mrs. Bailey explained they had “learnt to spin among the white women at


\(^{26}\) Hawkins Journal, December 18, 1796, *Works of Hawkins*, 39. Robbie Eithridge argues that Bailey made the farm his wife’s property in order to avoid Indians from Autossee shooting them when they wandered into their fields. But this still makes Richard the dominant agent in this instance, and his Creek wife the subject. There is, however, no
Tensaw,” a small racially mixed community northeast of Mobile. Hawkins has been widely recognized in his time and in ours for his mission to bring husbandry, homespun, and subsistence farming to the Creeks. Families like the Baileys show that perhaps he received too much credit. Gulf southerners had begun to implement these practices well before he arrived to teach them.

Sometime shortly after Hawkins’s 1796 visit, Richard Bailey died and left his “Otalla” wife a widow. Mrs. Bailey continued to manage the Baileys’ estate on her own, and Hawkins remained impressed with her on his subsequent visits to her farm. He referred to her as “neat, clean, and industrious . . . qualities rarely to be met with in an Indian woman.” She managed her enslaved labor to Hawkins’s satisfaction as well. In addition to the “two black women [she had to] assist her” in her home, she kept multiple other enslaved African Americans employed constantly as well. “She governs her black people and shows much attention to the stock about the plantation,” the Indian agent observed. She also acquired “fifty bee-hives” after Richard’s death and traded the honey with her neighbors.27

The next generation of Baileys highlighted the ongoing transformation in Indian country. Richard Bailey sent his first son, also named Richard, to Philadelphia for his education, and when he returned home, the younger Richard Bailey brought new ideas and a different outlook with him. “He has brought with him into the nation so much contempt for the Indian mode of life, that he has got himself into discredit with them

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“[other Creeks],” Hawkins wrote in 1798. The Baileys’ other children had similar experiences. The junior Richard’s brother, Dixon, “is under the direction of the Quakers in Philadelphia.” Twins James and Daniel Bailey lived their entire lives in Creek country, however, dying during the massacre at Fort Mims in 1813. The three Bailey sisters, who had already married white men by 1796, “promise to do well, they are industrious and can spin.” One of them, Polly, helped her husband Sizemore operate a ferry in eastern Georgia. In other words, as far as the United States was concerned, the Baileys, though surrounded by ostensibly benighted Indians, were the model of a “civilized” family—a model the U.S. government hoped would rapidly spread to their neighbors. Their Quaker-educated sons and their attempts at the “keeping” of “Christmas” even seemed to denote the budding of Christianity in Indian country.

A closer reading of Hawkins’s observations, however, suggests all was not quite as it appeared. Despite the American agent’s impression that Mrs. Bailey had admirably taken over for her husband in terms of slave and farm management, just as likely the widow simply continued to operate the same way she had when her husband had been alive. At the least, the fact that the stock and farm were her “property” before Richard’s death, and that Richard continued to trade peltry until his death, suggested that the Baileys practiced traditional native customs dictating that women managed agriculture while men took responsibility for hunting and trading. Hawkins’s descriptions of the widow’s farm—her slaves, her stock, and her apparent domesticity—certainly demonstrate that change was underway in many pockets of the Gulf South. Yet the Baileys still lived in a community of other Creeks—men and women who were “destitute

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28 Frank, *Creeks and Southerners*, 74–76.
of property,” as Hawkins put it. And the Baileys were clearly engaged with that community. When the Indian agent once dined with Mrs. Bailey, for example, they were joined by “three Indian women,” who Hawkins left unnamed. The Baileys resided in the Upper Creek community of Autossee, not just among, but clearly with other Indians. Perhaps they possessed different ideas and observed unique cultural habits different than their neighbors. Perhaps they even angered many of those neighbors, as Hawkins indicated. But they were certainly not segregated from the wider Autossee community.29

There were other families like the Baileys near Autossee. The Griersons, for example, were the Baileys’ neighbors.30 Robert Grierson had been an Augusta resident (though originally from Scotland) and trader among the Creeks in the 1770s. Over the following decades he acquired “large possessions [in] negros, cattle, and horses,” began planting cotton, purchased a gin and a loom, employed a spinning instructor and other laborers, and engaged in the overseas cotton economy via the Panton & Leslie Co. He also became the progenitor of an extensive Scots-Creek family. Grierson’s wife was a Creek woman named Sinnugee, and in 1796 Benjamin Hawkins listed the couple’s children as “Sandy, Sarah, Walter, David, Liza, and William.”

Sarah Grierson married a man named Stephen Hawkins with whom she had at least two children, Pinkey and Sam, and they owned “300 cattle, 30 horses,” and a large plantation of their employing forty enslaved laborers.31 While Sarah and her husband Stephen pursued agricultural wealth, Sarah’s sister, Liza, married the Lower Creek leader William McIntosh, who continued to raise cattle and trade in deerskins. McIntosh became

one of leading war chiefs of Coweta, and thus appears in the records of most major Gulf South conflicts during the early nineteenth century. He helped command the Creek opposition to the Red Sticks during the Creek War while holding an officer’s commission from Andrew Jackson; led the police force established by the Creek National Council; and later raided Seminole towns for slaves during the First Seminole War.\textsuperscript{32} In the first years of the nineteenth century William and Liza had their own children named Jane, Kate, and Chilly. Like his father, Chilly McIntosh occupied a leadership position in Creek society up to Removal, even as he became a prosperous rancher, planter, and slaveholder in his own right.\textsuperscript{33} We know less about the rest of the Grierson siblings, though Sandy worked at least occasionally as a messenger and runner for the U.S. Indian Agency, helping Benjamin Hawkins communicate with the Upper Creek towns from his establishment on the Flint River. Hawkins paid Sandy cash for these services.\textsuperscript{34}

The Griersons’ activities brought virtually the entire neighborhood into their familial and economic network. At the high point of their agricultural and manufacturing endeavors in 1799, the Griersons owned and operated one cotton gin, five spinning wheels, and a loom while employing ten “spinners”—“two of them [Grierson’s] Indian wife and daughter. The others [were] black girls”—a white weaving instructor from Tensaw, and eleven loom workers, “red, white, and black.” The family’s successes inspired the Lower Creek trader Thomas Marshall to emulate them. Hawkins wrote in 1799 that Marshall, after observing the Griersons’ operation, was in the midst of

\textsuperscript{32} Benjamin W. Griffith, Jr., \textit{McIntosh and Weatherford, Creek Indian Leaders} (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1988); Snyder, \textit{Slavery in Indian Country}, 238–40.
\textsuperscript{34} “List of Expenses of the Creek Agency,” \textit{Works of Hawkins}, 342, 349.
establishing his own “manufactory of mixed people” in Coweta. “He will have ten women red and black” working for him.35

The diverse occupations, relationships, and origins of the Baileys and the Griersons represent examples of a Gulf South interior in transformation. United States Indian agents entered the region expecting to find peoples still intent on “living by the gun,” as a Choctaw headman once put it. Gulf southerners often fulfilled these expectations. Almost as often, however, they starkly challenged them, just as they challenge historians’ interpretation of Indian country today. Robert Grierson established a “large Indian family,” and remained engaged in the peltry trade into the nineteenth century—he still appeared listed as a trader for Panton & Leslie as late as 1807.36 But Robert Grierson and his Creek sons and daughters also became slaveholders, cotton planters, ranchers, and manufacturers. They lived and worked in traditional ways and locations while also pursuing new economic and entrepreneurial activities. The Griersons epitomized the South in transition.

One of Robert Grierson’s oldest acquaintances in the Upper Creek towns was Alexander Cornels, also known as Oche Haujo. Cornels was a Creek headman of Tuckabatchee and the son of an unknown Creek woman and an English trader named George Cornels. Indeed, Alexander came from a family of traders, as his uncle and George’s brother, Joseph Cornels, was an Upper Creek trader as well as an interpreter occasionally employed by Alexander McGillivray.37 When Robert Grierson still spent most of his time living in Augusta during the 1770s, Cornels provided him intelligence

35 Benjamin Hawkins to James McHenry, January 9, 1799, Hawkins Letters, 238.
from Indian country in return for more favorable financial treatment. “Mr. Greerson . . .
threaten[ed] him [Cornels] with the heavy debt which hangs over his head,” David Taitt
wrote in 1772.38 Cornels was in debt to Grierson into the 1790s, and he appeared on
Panton & Leslie’s debt lists in 1795 and in 1807.39 During those decades he took
employment as the primary interpreter for Benjamin Hawkins for “400 dollars per
annum” and quickly became one of Hawkins’s closest allies in Indian country. Hawkins
described Cornels as “one of the Chiefs of the Creek nation” who “retain[ed] his Indian
dress” and resided on a tributary of the Tallapoosa River near the Upper Creek towns of
Okfuskee and Tuckabatchee.40 In addition to having “nine negroes under good
government,” Cornels had stocks of cattle, horses, hogs, and sheep; a peach orchard and a
“nursery of peach trees,” and “two acres of cotton, . . . a field of rye . . . and is about to
sow a field of oats.”

Aside from his “Indian” garb and his secondary Creek moniker, Alexander
Cornels could almost have been mistaken for a middling planter from upcountry South
Carolina or Georgia. He even attempted to manage his family in a patriarchal fashion,
which resulted in clashes with his wife’s kin over his perceived responsibilities to her
clan—providing them with food, for example—and his control over his wife’s and
daughters’ labor—using slaves to work his fields instead the women in his family.41 But
Cornels’s enduring status as a Creek headman illustrates that he was not simply a
facsimile of an American planter. For example, he probably remained illiterate

38 David Taitt to Stuart, March 16, 1772, Travels in the American Colonies, 524–25.
39 “Balance Sheet of 1795,” Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4; Debts of Panton, Leslie,
and Co., 1807, Box 2, Folder 4.
40 Benjamin Hawkins to Edward Price, March 9, 1797, Hawkins Letters, 95; Hawkins
41 Saunt, New Order, 155.
throughout his life, as indicated in a letter he sent to William Panton in 1797, and the way he signed his correspondence with a “mark,”—usually a simple “X”—at the bottom of his messages. In the letter Cornels defended himself from Panton’s allegations that he was acting contrary to the company’s interests. “I have had your Talk read to me by my own white man[,] he was ready to start to Tuskeg[ee] and I stopped him to do this business for me as I have no other to assist me at this time in reading your talks to me.”

Cornels, the same man Hawkins had called a “proper” farmer and a good “governor” of “negros,” also expressed confusion with Anglo-American legal customs: “The Indians do not know what to do in such Cases so we asked our old White man and friend Mr. Burgess besides others that we thought knew white peoples[’] laws.”

Cornels’s language sharply differentiated him from other slaveholders in the United States. His equation of whiteness with literacy and his use of traditionally native terms—for example referring to letters and messages as “talks”—clearly denoted his Creek identity. Of course his non-literacy by itself did not necessarily mark his Native American status. Many middling whites were illiterate as well. But it seems almost paradoxical in Cornels’s case, specifically, due to the fact that he spent a large portion of his life with words and languages. He served as Hawkins’s interpreter in the Upper Creek towns and kept an active correspondence with business associates, political allies, and kin. Cornels also interpreted letters for others. His name appears listed as the interpreter for an 1801

42 Alex Cornels to William Panton, June 2, 1797, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.
missive that Creek headman Efau Haujo (Cornels’s wife’s father) sent to the proprietor of the John Forbes Co.\footnote{Efau Haujo of the Creeks to John Forbes, May 31, 1801, Greenslade Papers, Box 1, unfolded. For Efau Haujo relation see Saunt, \textit{New Order}, 87.}

Alexander Cornels’s estate was surrounded by several similar farms along a section of the Tallapoosa River. All of them boasted orchards, cattle, and horses. Benjamin Hawkins described some of their proprietors as part of Cornels’s extended “family” (though it is unclear what their kin relationship might have been), including the McGive family and the Sullivan family. Both McGives and Sullivans consisted of individuals of mixed Euro-Native descent.\footnote{Description of Alexander Cornels or Oche Haujo, \textit{Works of Hawkins}, 30s–31s.} Alexander’s brother—“the halfbreed” George Cornels, a label that Hawkins gave him to distinguish the younger George from his English father—made “1,000 dollars annually” from a combination of deerskin trading and cattle ranching.\footnote{Hawkins Journal, December 17, 1796, \textit{Hawkins Letters}, 20–21.} Like the Griersons and the Baileys, the Cornels’s extended kin network tended to settle near and among one another. These settlements became some of the first “Deep South” communities.

The well-known McGillivray family mirrored this settlement pattern as well. Alexander McGillivray lived near the Cornels family, at the confluence of the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers and adjacent to the Upper Creek town of Little Tallassie (an area also known as the Hickory Ground), and as headmen, Cornels and McGillivray knew each other quite well. McGillivray’s slaves and many of his relations resided near him at the Hickory Ground. He was born in Creek country sometime around 1750 to a Scottish trader named Lachlan McGillivray and a Wind clan woman named Sehoy, the daughter of a powerful headman named Red Shoes. McGillivray spent the majority of his
childhood among Creeks before his father took him to Charleston in the 1760s where McGillivray received a Euro-style education. He returned to Creek country in 1777 with a commission to work as an agent for British interests in the Upper towns. Benjamin Hawkins claimed McGillivray’s wife was a “half breed woman of the name Mcrae,” but McGillivray himself does not seem to have mentioned her in the extensive correspondence he kept during his life.

Indeed, McGillivray rarely mentioned familial or personal matters in his letters, most of which were to Spanish and American officials, or to the agents and partners of Panton & Leslie Co. This is perhaps part of the reason McGillivray himself remains something of an enigma. Some historians treat him as primarily an opportunist who used his knowledge of both Indian and white “worlds” to expand his property holdings in Creek country and his power in Creek society. Others emphasize his seemingly deep anxiety over “his people’s” land rights and autonomy to suggest his chief concern was the

\[47\] For accounts of McGillivray’s early life, see his entry in American National Biography; John Caughey, McGillivray of the Creeks (Norman, Okla., 1938), 3–57.
\[49\] Saunt, New Order, 76–79; Angela Pulley Hudson, Creek Paths and Federal Roads (Chapel Hill, 2010), 31–33; Frank, Creeks and Southerners, 64–74; Ethridge, Creek Country, 11–12. Claudio Saunt makes the important point that, though McGillivray styled himself as the leader of the Creek Nation, many Creeks rejected his authority and indeed, would not have even agreed that they were a nation. Yet clearly many Creeks followed him willingly and must have agreed with his techniques and decisions. Saunt cites a 1787 incident in which McGillivray “encouraged 500 Creek warriors to fall on American settlements,” almost as if McGillivray had the power to use such warriors as personal weapons or tools. But under Saunt’s own terms, this is clearly not so. Most of those 500 warriors went entirely of their own volition, and must have recognized McGillivray’s claims to authority.
future prosperity and viability of the Creek Nation amid a rapidly changing Gulf South. McGillivray’s own words can be used to support either conclusion, depending on which ones historians cite.

European observers often referred to McGillivray as having “more influence among the Creek Nations than any other person,” in the particular words of Pensacola commandant Arturo O’Neill. But McGillivray’s own words implied not only a certain distance from his Creek brethren but also basic assumptions about their racial differences. For example, in a letter to Charles McLatchy, who ran one of Panton’s trading stores, McGillivray referred to the inherent “nature” of Creeks, noting he was “pleased to know that the goods have arrived in Providence [Bahamas]. Mr. Panton wrote me that he was about to go there to get them. As our Creeks are by nature impatient, most of them . . . wish to turn to the trader [Elijah] Clarke on the Ogeechee River.” Even in cases where McGillivray spoke as a Creek leader, he sometimes appeared to imply his separateness. When he protested against the incursions of Georgia settlers in 1785, he excluded himself even while defending Creek land rights. “The Indians are extremely tenacious of their Hunting Grounds, of which that between the Oconee and Ogeechee [Rivers] form a principal part [emphasis added].” In an earlier missive to Arturo O’Neill assuring him of the loyalty of the Creeks, McGillivray consistently referred to his

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52 Arturo O’Neill to Josef de Ezpeleta, October 19, 1783, Panton and Leslie Papers, Reel 1, frame 1075–77.
53 Alexander McGillivray to Charles McLatchy, September 18, 1784, Panton and Leslie Papers, Reel 1, frame 1638.
54 Alexander McGillivray to William Clark, April 24, 1785, Panton and Leslie Papers, Reel 2, frame 220–22.
people as “the Indians.” At the same time, he frequently referred to them as “my people”; “my warriors”; “our lands”; and “our Nation” in his correspondence, especially with Spanish and United States government officials. Still another difficulty in interpreting McGillivray’s self-perception is that he differentiated himself from Europeans and Euro-Americans as well, for instance when he informed William Panton that he made inquiries of “white people” as to the whereabouts of the Afro-Creek trader Philatouchie.

McGillivray often appeared more interested in his own personal advancement and wealth than in the fortunes of his fellow Creeks. Only after securing a share in Panton & Leslie did McGillivray tell Governor O’Neill that it would be “much more convenient for this upper Nation to have the [Indian] trade from West Florida” instead of Louisiana, Georgia, or East Florida. He then asked if he could import “a quantity of Indian goods” from Mobile instead of St. Augustine. This request was clearly calculated to benefit Panton & Leslie, which had stores in and around Mobile and Pensacola and whose traders could more easily reach the Upper Creek towns from those locations. Still, McGillivray went on to lie that he made the request in a spirit of selflessness. “I had no desire to carrey on a trade [at all] but that I had engaged my Nation in the cause of loyalty and to which they stood steadfast to the last, I consider myself obliged to support them for their fidelity.” McGillivray’s fidelity to Panton & Leslie, however, was far more contingent than even Panton realized. Only a year later, when Panton found out that

55 Alexander McGillivray to Arturo O’Neill, January 1, 1784, Panton and Leslie Papers, Reel 1, frame 1113–1123.
57 Alexander McGillivray to Arturo O’Neill, January 1, 1784, Panton and Leslie Papers, Reel 1, frame 1113–23.
McGillivray had accepted a stake in a rival trading company, Mather & Strother, Panton himself accused McGillivray of dishonesty and disloyalty and demanded he relinquish the new investment. McGillivray defended himself by claiming (seemingly disingenuously) that Mather’s offer had only been a token one and that he had accepted it only for the good of his people and as a way to make ends meet. “I have no family [member that] obliges me to accumulate possessions; for although I have some negroes and a few dependents, since I cannot use wealth in this country and expect never to leave it, all that I want is a decent living.”

Alexander McGillivray had a large kin network, but as with many Gulf South families, the scant documentary record prevents historians from following the McGillivray family tree in a detailed fashion. Five years after McGillivray’s death in 1793, Benjamin Hawkins reported he had left behind “one son and two daughters; the son is in Scotland, with his grandfather [Lachlan], and the daughters with Sam” Moniac, “a very wealthy half breed, their uncle.” Hawkins later reported that McGillivray’s son died in Scotland sometime before 1809. It is unclear what later happened to McGillivray’s two daughters, but the McGillivray family’s matrilineal customs kept them from inheriting Alexander’s significant wealth, at least temporarily. “The General [McGillivray] left behind him a considerable property in negroes, horses, and cattle, little of which went to his children. According to the custom of this nation a man’s children

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have no claim to his property, it belongs to his relations on the maternal line, and they seize upon it, as was the case in this instance.”

McGillivray’s “relations on the maternal line” were his sisters Sophia and Sehoi. Sophia married an Anglo-American deerskin trader named Durant. Arturo O’Neill reported that Sophia and Durant planned in 1783 to settle on the upper Escambia River with “a good herd of cattle and some forty slaves.” The governor was either ill informed or the couple lost much of their enslaved property in ensuing years because in 1798 Benjamin Hawkins noted Sophia owned only “fourteen working negroes.” She and her husband also had eight children by that year, and Hawkins noted Sophia “can spin and weave.” Sehoi married Creek trader William Weatherford and the couple had “about 30 negroes.” Despite their statuses as slaveholders and domestic managers, the McGillivray sisters disappointed the U.S. agent because of their lack of “civilized” habits. According to him, Sophia had “no economy or management” and “seldom makes bread enough” for her family. “They live poorly,” he observed. Sehoi appeared even worse in Hawkins’s eyes. She “is extravagant and heedless, neither spins nor weaves, and has not good government of her family. She has one son, David Tate, who has been educated in Philadelphia and Scotland. He promises to do better” than his mother. In other words, the two sisters were disappointingly unlike their brother and his more “civilized” living arrangements.

Still, for all Hawkins’s rhetoric about their supposed idle laziness, Sophia and Sehoi were swift to claim their brother’s property as rightfully theirs, much to Hawkins’s

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60 Benjamin Hawkins to William Eustis, August 27, 1809, Hawkins Letters, 556.
61 Arturo O’Neill to Josef de Ezpeleta, October 19, 1783, Panton and Leslie Papers, Reel 1, frame 1075–77.
and Panton’s chagrin. Sophia Durant, especially, became a thorn in the side of William Panton. McGillivray had been a silent investor in Panton’s firm for years, but when he died he owed his partner considerable debts. Durant insisted McGillivray’s wealth was hers regardless. “I am now to inform you some disagreeable actions of late acted by the Wind family [clan],” Panton’s agent wrote to him in 1800. “The Women has taken all the Cattle that was [from McGillivray’s estate], and now they are for taking the Negroes . . . I suppose for Mrs Durrant [has] undoubtedly sent them.”

Recalling the outcome years later, Hawkins informed William Eustis that “Mrs. Durant and Mrs. [Sehoi] Weatherford . . . took possession of the greatest part of [Alexander McGillivray’s] property and have destroyed the stock of horses and cattle. The former of her sons have made away with all the negros they possessed themselves of. Mr. David Tate, a son of the maternal sister [Sehoi], has possession of most of the property which was in possession of his mother . . . he lives on the Alabama [River].”

Alexander McGillivray’s business and economic connections ensured he served as a hub of his kinfolk’s trading activities. His transaction records with Panton & Leslie show that he managed many of their purchases from the company. For example, on March 9, 1790, he acquired $20.35 worth of goods in the name of his wife’s brother, Sam Moniac. Nearly three months later McGillivray sent eighty-one beaver pelts to Panton for his sister Sehoi and her husband William Weatherford. The next year he ordered $90 worth of goods for Sehoi as well as placed an order for $100 “in favor of Mrs. Cornells.”

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63 Daniel McGillivray to William Panton, October 13, 1800, Greenslade Papers, Box 1, unfolded. The events described in this letter also related to the conflicts erupting in Creek country at the arrival of William Augustus Bowles and his “army” among the Lower Creek towns. For details on Bowles, see J. Leitch Wright, Jr., William Augustus Bowles, Director General of the Creek Nation (Athens, Ga., 1967).

64 Benjamin Hawkins to William Eustis, August 27, 1809, Hawkins Letters, 556.
When Alexander Cornels’s son required $450 worth of supplies for his slaves, it was McGillivray who managed the purchases. An entry for April 30, 1791, indicates McGillivray paid $70 of Panton & Leslie’s cash to Sophia’s husband, “Mr. Durant for attending his [McGillivray’s] cattle.” Just nine days later Durant purchased $32 worth of goods from Panton’s store. Once again, McGillivray served as the conduit for the transaction. The ledger also names two of McGillivray’s slaves—Gloucester and Cyrus—who apparently served regularly as runners and messengers between Panton in Pensacola and McGillivray in Little Tallassie. In fact, McGillivray seems to have been rather careless with regard to his expense account with Panton. The bottom of the ledger from 1791 indicated that the Creek leader owed the company nearly $7,500 at that time. To put this amount in perspective, the average individual Creek hunter, dependent on the peltry trade alone, managed to bring in approximately $30 worth of deerskins in a year during the 1790s.65

The controversy over McGillivray’s estate and its rightful inheritors continued for over a decade after the Creek leader’s death. David Tate, McGillivray’s nephew and Sehoi’s son, was still receiving inquiring correspondence about it from John Forbes—who took over Panton & Leslie after Panton’s death and renamed it the John Forbes Co.—in 1816, by which time Tate was an established cotton planter and debtor to Forbes himself. “You will have no doubt heard of the [law] suit instituted against us by a certain R. P. Johnston on a pretended claim derived from Genl McGillivray’s daughters,” now named as Lizzy and Margaret McGillivray. Forbes asked Tate a number of questions,

hoping to learn how he might combat the plaintiffs’ claim, including whether “the transfer of the claim” of Alexander’s property was made by Lizzy and Margaret alone, “or did their Uncle’s and Mother’s relations join in it according to Creek Customs[?]” Forbes finished the letter to the Scots-Creek planter by “congratulating [him] on a fine crop of Cotton that we hear you have made, which will render the payment of your outstanding debt [to us] as easy to you as it will be agreeable to us.”

Alexander McGillivray left behind a significant documentary record, and partly for that reason he has been prominent in historical literature on the Native South. The McGillivray family was at the forefront of the transformation of Creek country, but it was joined by others who were not quite as prolific with the written word. The McIntoshes, for example, also challenged contemporary understandings of what it meant to be Creek. Like Alexander McGillivray’s father, Lachlan, William McIntosh arrived in Indian country by way of Georgia but was of Scottish descent. He traded peltry and other goods among the Creeks in the 1770s, and according to one historian he commanded a handful of warriors as a Loyalist officer during the American Revolution. He then married and fathered children with two Creek women and moved to Creek country permanently after the Georgia general assembly exiled him from the state—a long with Timothy Barnard, William Panton, and Lachlan McGillivray—in 1782 for his Loyalism. William McIntosh’s son, William the younger, was born sometime between 1775 and 1778 and

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66 John Forbes to David Tate, November 21, 1816, Heloise H. Cruzat Papers, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida (hereinafter cited as “Cruzat Papers”), Box 3, Folder 2.
67 Griffith, McIntosh and Weatherford.
68 Statement of the Georgia General Assembly, May 4, 1782, Panton and Leslie Papers, Reel 1, frame 745–57.
was also known as Tushtunnuggee Hutkee. Similar to the McGillivray clan, the Scots trader McIntosh’s son, William, became an influential force for change in the Gulf South.

The younger William McIntosh became a planter, slaveholder, tavern owner, and a headman of the Lower Creek town of Coweta during his life. He had at least two wives. One of them was Liza Grierson, the Anglo-Creek daughter of Robert Grierson. The couple’s children included Chilly—who went on to become a headman and a planter himself—Jane, Kate, and finally Daniel, who was born in 1822. McIntosh later led a group of Creek warriors alongside Andrew Jackson against the Redsticks during the Creek War.\(^{69}\) He was well known for his extensive collaborations with the U.S. government. When Benjamin Hawkins arrived in the late 1790s to set up his Creek Agency near the Lower towns on the Flint and Chattahoochee Rivers, McIntosh “the halfbreed” quickly became one of Hawkins’s most important contacts in “the Nation.”\(^{70}\) By late 1806 McIntosh had built a tavern and operated a ferry on the Chattahoochee River near Coweta in order to service the increasing numbers of migrants streaming into Indian country. According to Hawkins, McIntosh even wrote to Henry Dearborn of “his intentions to keep a ferry and a house of entertainment at Coweta,” and McIntosh pressed Dearborn to ensure that “the stages for the accommodation of travellers were to be kept by Indians or half breeds” only. Hawkins himself wrote to Dearborn in 1807 to inform

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\(^{69}\) Griffith, *McIntosh and Weatherford*; Chapman, *Chief William McIntosh*; Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 238–40

him that McIntosh had indeed “built his house [for migrants] at the most direct and proper place at the upper end of Coweta town, near the falls.”

Such families were not limited to Creek country. One of the most prominent among the Chickasaws, for instance, was the Colbert family. Their progenitor, James Colbert, was a Scotsman who traded with the Chickasaws and the Choctaws in the 1760s, 1770s, and 1780s. Colbert had at least six children by three Chickasaw women. He and his sons James, George, and Levi gained a reputation for raids on Spanish shipping up and down the Mississippi between Natchez and St. Louis, and what little evidence we can find of his children provides tantalizing examples of the diverse ways Gulf southerners lived their lives in the midst of regional and cultural upheaval. James Colbert’s oldest son, also named James, was born sometime in the late 1760s. Whereas Lachlan McGillivray and William McIntosh sent their oldest male children to the United States for their educations, the elder James Colbert placed James in “the care of Messrs. Panton, Leslie, and Co., closely engaged with the business of their store.” While on business in St. Augustine, he wrote to an acquaintance in Mobile, “I hope [James] may be teachable, that he may be fit for such a business.” No doubt the elder Colbert anticipated that the apprenticeship would pay dividends for his trade prospects as well. But the son died under suspicious circumstances before he could realize those dividends, after being thrown from his horse in 1784 according to Alexander McGillivray, on the way to trial in Natchez to answer for his raiding activities.

72 DuVal, Native Ground 153–54.
73 James Colbert to Unknown, November 12, 1783, Natchez Court Records, 257.
74 Alexander McGillivray to unknown, September 25, 1783, Panton and Leslie Papers, Reel 1, frame 1038–40.
The elder Colbert left instructions that, in the event of his death, “all such money” that emanated from his surviving estate should be “appropriated to the use and benefit of his son, James Colbert, a half breed, whom he had placed in the counting house” of Panton & Leslie. The younger Colbert must have used his apprenticeship as well as his Chickasaw mother’s kinship connections to good effect, because by the 1790s he was a wealthy man and a respected leader among the Chickasaws. Colbert led a pro-American faction of Chickasaws by 1793. According to Manuel Gayoso, pro-Spanish chief Payemingo was concerned about Colbert’s growing influence. “The two principal [leaders] attracted to his party and [who] favor [the Americans] are called Colberts, one of whom . . . . is a man of great influence.”

William Colbert, probably James Colbert’s brother or half-brother, engaged in the slave trade. But he did so in large measure with Euro-Americans in Natchez, thereby highlighting the ways native Gulf South networks closely connected Indian and Euro-American communities. Records of William Colbert’s transactions appear in Natchez court records from 1794. In April of that year, for example, “William Colbert and John Brown, both of the Chickasaw Nation, acknowledge to have received of Mr. Arthur Cobb, two horses, for the full balance of payment for a negro wench Nancy, a boy, and girl Emma, which they sold to William Cobb for the account of his father.” In a note recorded just three days later, “William Colbert, of the Chickasaw Nation,” settled his final payment with a man named Jeptha Higdon for $153, which was “the balance due by

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75 Statement by attorney of James Colbert, Anthony Hutchins, March 7, 1791, Natchez Court Records, 257.
76 Manuel Gayoso to Baron de Carondelet, December 6, 1793, Paths to a Middle Ground, 209–29.
77 Colbert slave contract, April 25, 1794, Natchez Court Records, 101.
s[ai]d Higdon for price of a Negro named Cesar.” 78 In addition to enslaving African Americans, Colbert still dealt in Native American bodies as well. As late as 1795 he owned an “Indian slave” named John Smith, who escaped bondage that year when he stole a canoe with a “mulatto girl” and escaped down a river. 79

By the mid-1790s William and George Colbert were traders and leaders of a significant faction within the Chickasaw towns. At the very least they became the most commonly referred-to headmen by Euro-American observers. Both of them kept a running account with John Turnbull’s trading company throughout that decade. Turnbull’s secretary listed the “Chickasaw halfbreed” George Colbert’s debt at nearly $360 in 1798. 80 At least one of the Colbert brothers also held debt with Panton & Leslie. 81 When the Creeks and Chickasaws held a meeting in 1798 to jointly decide how to respond to the increasing number of white squatters on their lands, they “appointed one man in the Chickasaws,” William Colbert, to be their representative “to remove the Land Speculators in their neighborhood” and to “keep the white people within their line” in the future. 82 William and George became missionary Joseph Bullen’s main contacts with the Chickasaws while he visited in 1799 and 1800. Bullen referred to William as “General Colbert,” while ranking George as “Major.” It is unclear whether these were titles they had taken for themselves or whether they held old commissions from the British or Spanish governments, similar to Alexander McGillivray. 83

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78 Colbert slave contract, April 28, 1794, Natchez Court Records, 101.
79 “James Hoggatt, for James Bosley, Claiming a slave, a mulatto girl named ‘Cass’” April 1795, Natchez Court Records, 205.
80 Turnbull and Joyce Account books, 1795–1798, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.
81 Balance Sheet of 1795, Entry for “Colbert” Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.
82 Mad Dog to James Burges, August 2, 1798, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.
83 Diary of Joseph Bullen, May 19–21, 1799, 261–63.
Missionary Joseph Bullen apparently had some success in his dealings with the Colberts. He spoke with all five Colbert brothers during his stay in Chickasaw country, William, James, George, Levi, and Joseph. “[W]e were assisted in conversing with the Indians by Joseph Colbert, who speaks both languages [Chickasaw and English],” Bullen wrote in May 1799. When the missionary arrived at Levi Colbert’s house, he described him as having “two wives, [and] appears to live comfortably.” Bullen then “taught Levi to write his name” while he “made him and others acquainted with the history of the creation.”

At Bullen’s request, Levi brought Bullen and his companions to visit “Chief [James] Colbert in a neighboring town. Bullen later expressed his satisfaction after meeting James, who he called “a native of this country,” who “has been baptized.” Unlike his brother Levi, James “reads and writes,” and “is a man of property; one quarter Indian; is a sober man; knows something of religion, [and] wishes his nation to know and observe the same.” James Colbert even granted Bullen permission to give him and one of his wives, Susannah Colbert, “the marriage covenant,” and to baptize their son Charles, “Peggy Allen, daughter of Colbert’s sister, . . . and also Mary, Hannah, James, and Margaret, children of James.” When he reached Colbert’s estate, “[Colbert’s] slaves . . . met together, requested my son and I preach to them; they are about twenty in number . . . . [I] explained to them the character and great love of Christ, that he loves poor blacks and others.” One of William Colbert’s slaves spoke with Bullen and implied that she had had prior experience with Christianity: “An aged negro woman, property of William

84 Diary of Joseph Bullen, May 22–24, 1799, 263.
85 Diary of Joseph Bullen, May 16, 22, and 24, 1799, 268–77.
Colbert, has come 30 miles to hear sermon, and said ['']me live long in heathen land, am very glad to hear the blessed gospel[']."

Americans officials grew well acquainted with the Colbert family in the nineteenth century. Benjamin Hawkins, despite living several hundreds of miles away from Chickasaw country in the Lower Creek towns on the Flint and Chattahoochee Rivers, praised the Colberts’ “civilized” planting efforts. Reporting to Secretary of War Henry Dearborn, he explained that “The Chickasaws are setting out from their old towns and fencing their farms. . . . Major [George] Colbert, who ranks high in the government of his nation and was the speaker at the treaty here, has laboured at the plough and hoe during the last season, and his example has stimulated others. Several of the families have planted cotton, which grows well.”86 William C. C. Claiborne, the new governor of the Mississippi Territory, noted in 1802 that our “old acquaintance Major George Colbert has expressed [a wish] to have his son educated in the United States.” Claiborne passed the request on to Thomas Jefferson. “Major Colbert shall be informed, of the President’s disposition to grant his request, respecting his son,” Claiborne wrote several months later. “I will direct him to be sent to the city of Washington in the Spring [of 1803].”87

During the first decade of the nineteenth century, as Chickasaw country became an increasingly valuable agricultural space, the Colberts tried to consolidate their position on the land. When the United States attempted to open the federal road between Natchez and Tennessee, George Colbert used his influence to resist the nation’s efforts. “Major

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86 Benjamin Hawkins to Secretary of War Dearborn, October 28, 1801, Works of Hawkins, 392–93.
Colbert, I understand was opposed to laying out this road.” Edmund Gaines wrote in 1808, “but his opposition evidently proceeded from self interestedness; he has a ferry on the Tennessee [River], and the road that crosses not his ferry, he pretends to consider injurious to the interests of His people.”

The Colberts continued to complain to American officials into 1809. From Nashville Thomas Freeman wrote to the Secretary of the Treasury that George Colbert of the Chickasaw Nation [and] his brothers . . . have frequently complained to [General Robinson] of the intrusions of the white people on their lands.” The Colberts threatened to remove these squatters by force if the U.S. did not do it themselves, using their status as influential Chickasaws to further their financial and property interests.

Perhaps the most compelling members of this Scots-Chickasaw family, however, were Betsy Colbert and her husband, peltry trader James Allen. Colbert and Allen married in 1798 and the couple had a daughter, Peggy, by 1799. Joseph Bullen baptized Peggy while in the Chickasaw towns that year. Allen worked primarily as a trader for Panton & Leslie, though the company once caught him engaging in black market cattle and deerskin trading in 1789, when a Chickasaw informer told Panton that Allen led an illicit operation “sending livestock” to “the west Indies [and] the furs and Skins are to a considerable amount carried to Charleston” instead of to Panton’s Gulf Coast warehouses. Betsy continued to live in the area after the creation of the State of Mississippi in 1817, and she married again in 1836, becoming known as Betsy Love

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88 Edmund P. Gaines to Secretary of War, January 29, 1808, Territorial Papers, 598–602.
89 Thomas Freeman to the Secretary of the Treasury, March 4, 1809, Territorial Papers, 720–22.
(whether Allen died or separated from Betsy is unknown). When in 1837 James Allen’s creditors tried to confiscate Betsy’s slave, Toney, she sued in Mississippi court to keep him. Not only did Betsy possess no formal title to Toney, the creditors argued, but also her marriage to Allen had been in a Chickasaw ceremony, and therefore had not been legally binding. Thus her claim on Toney was invalid. The court, however, recognized her marriage to Allen via an 1829 law that recognized any union “entered into by virtue of any custom or usage of the Indians as if the same had been solemnized by the state.” It then ruled for Betsy, saying “the slave . . . was proved to be the separate property of Betsy Love” because “under the laws and customs of the Chickasaws, it is obvious that no title to this slave vested in Allen, which could subject him to the claims of Allen’s creditors.”

Betsy’s life spanned the Native South-Deep South transformation. She was born and began a family in Chickasaw country, married a peltry trader and became a slaveholder, married a second time, and then died in the state of Mississippi without ever moving far from her place of birth. Betsy also embodied the shifting cultural and ideological ground of the Gulf South in her insistence on the legal validity of her Chickasaw marriage, her claim to Native American female property rights, and her slaveholding status. In an example of the persistence of the Native Gulf South, an Old South court of law took her side on all three issues. Betsy Colbert was both Chickasaw and southerner, and for her, these were not competing identities. The same went for many of the region’s native families. Kin networks crossed racial, ethnic, and national lines and connected urban and interior spaces. And as we will see, surnames like Colbert,

McGillivray, McIntosh, Grierson, and Weatherford attached to others like McQueen, Kinnard, Perryman, and Pitchylynn. Most of them were of partial Native American descent, but also boasted Spanish, Scottish, English, Irish, French, and African ancestors. Though most began their market participation with peltry, blankets, and firearms, their expansion into cotton, cattle, and slaves helped create new cultures and new communities.

The Pitchylynn family, for instance, became a prominent Choctaw family around the turn of the century. John P. Pitchylynn was of English descent but lived in Choctaw country from the mid-1760s until his death in 1835. He married an Anglo-Choctaw woman by the name of Rhonda Folsom and the couple had at least six children.  

Pitchylynn served as an interpreter between the United States and the Choctaws beginning in the 1780s and often appeared in treaty negotiations until the 1820s. Between 1812 and 1813 he was employed by the U.S. government as a Choctaw interpreter for $500 per year. Pitchylynn’s friend, Gideon Lincecum, claimed the interpreter owned approximately forty enslaved African Americans and occupied them primarily with managing his livestock. Pitchylynn had at least three sons: John, James, and Peter. According to Lincecum’s autobiography, John P. Pitchylynn’s oldest son, John, married one of Levi Colbert’s daughters and eventually formed a partnership with Lincecum and

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ran a trading store in the Mississippi boomtown of Cotton Gin Port on the Tombigbee River in the 1820s. Peter Pitchlynn became a Choctaw statesman during the 1830s. Another Gulf southerner, James McQueen, operated as a trader in Creek country for Panton & Leslie from the 1770s through the 1790s. English traveler David Taitt met him in May 1772 and described him as a trader from the Lower Creek town of Coweta. McQueen owned at least one slave named John by the 1790s, who carried McQueen’s correspondence with William Panton and others throughout the Gulf South. By 1798 McQueen was a cotton planter. After William Panton asked one of his contacts in St. Augustine if he had recently heard from him, the man wrote back, confessing “I have not seen our friend McQueen since my last [letter], not for some months past; I understand he is very busy ginning his Cotton.” Benjamin Hawkins occasionally stayed with James McQueen while on his travels through Creek country. On one particular stop there in 1801, Hawkins learned from “Mr. McQueen’s [slave] John” that William Panton was near death in Pensacola.

Though many of the Anglo-Native families pushed the Gulf South toward more “Anglicized” ways of life, the McQueens proved that white ancestry was not a reliable indicator of cultural practices or political beliefs. According to Thomas Woodward, a former Creek country resident writing decades later, James McQueen’s son, Peter McQueen, had married Alexander McGillivray’s niece, Betsy Durant, and the two had

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95 Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 101; Carson, *Searching for the Bright Path*.  
97 James McQueen to William Panton, February 8, 1798, Cruzat Papers, Box 1, Folder 6.  
98 H. White to William Panton, February 24, 1798, Cruzat Papers, Box 1, Folder 6.  
four children: James, Milly, Nancy, and Tallassee. Despite Peter’s strong connections to so-called progressive Creeks, he became a leader of the conservative Redstick faction. When the remnants of the dissident Redstick warriors retreated to the so-called Negro Fort on the Apalachicola River in 1814—with American and Creek armies in hot pursuit—Peter McQueen was among them.100

Anglo-Creek Thomas Perryman also helped defend the Negro Fort from American and Creek attack. Perryman, also known as Kinache, was a headman as well as a planter, slaveholder, and peltry trader. In addition to his actions at the Negro Fort, he fought for the British during the Revolutionary War and in the 1815 battle of New Orleans. Perryman continued to be a thorn in the United States’ side while fighting against them during the First Seminole War in 1818.101

Again demonstrating that the Panton & Leslie Co. became the common thread that tied all of the Gulf South together, several Perrymans, including Thomas, carried debt with Panton & Leslie throughout the 1790s. Thomas appears on company balance ledgers multiple times, usually labeled specifically as a “Half Breed” trader. His debts totaled $217.55 in 1798. On a 1799 document labeled “List of debts due by Traders, Half.

101 Coker and Watson, Indian Traders of the Borderlands, 114–115; Gary Zellar, African Creeks: Estelvste and the Creek Nation (Norman, Okla., 2007), 15; Ingersoll, To Intermix With Our White Brothers, 93. Thomas Woodward relates a rather far-fetched story that Thomas Perryman may have been descended from Polly Perryman, also known as Chehaw Micco Polly, supposedly an African slave from Nassau who was sold to the “mixed blood” Perryman family in Mobile sometime in the 1750s and subsequently sold again to Alexander McGillivray’s Scottish father, Lachlan McGillivray. However unlikely the story, it is suggestive of the ways that Woodward, writing in the 1850s Gulf South, still described the region’s earlier decades as complex, diverse, and interconnected. See Marler, ed., Woodward’s Reminiscences 219.
Breeds, and Indian Factors,” William Perryman and James Perryman appear as well, though their debts were smaller than Thomas’s—William owed $65.73 that year while James had debts totaling less than $24.\textsuperscript{102} Thomas became one of the few Gulf South traders to pay off what they owed to Panton & Leslie at the end of the eighteenth century. By 1801 he had reduced his trading debt by over $60 and in 1803 Panton & Leslie’s bookkeeper wrote a “Nil” next to his name in their books. William Perryman’s debt, on the other hand soared to $287.70.\textsuperscript{103}

The Perrymans resided in the Gulf South into at least the second decade of the nineteenth century. In an 1818 letter a trader informed one of John Forbes’s partners, John Innerarity, that there was a warrant out for “Betsy Perryman a half breed, and one of your Slaves named Nanny, grounded on Information under oath of one Norris, that Betsy and Nanny . . . were at this time harbouring a certain Mulatto Joe [a runaway slave] lately escaped from Prison at Fort Scott.”\textsuperscript{104} Betsy Perryman proclaimed her innocence. Nonetheless the possibility that she aided and abetted a runaway slave and criminal suggests much about the continued possibilities for inter-ethnic, cultural, and racial cooperation in a region on the cusp of becoming the “Old South” in 1818. Betsy Perryman’s possible role in helping Nanny and Mulatto Joe; the Perryman’s sympathy with the Redstick movement; and the fact that none of the Perrymans other than Thomas appear to have owned any African American slaves suggest that their family may not have acquired the color prejudice that later became a fundamental aspect of the Gulf

\textsuperscript{102} List of Debts due…May 1798 to April 1799, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4; List of Debts due…September 1792 to April 1798 Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4; Balance Sheet of 1795, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.

\textsuperscript{103} “Debts owed by Half Breed and Indian Factors,” 1801–1803, Cruzat Papers, unfolded.

\textsuperscript{104} McKinsey to John Innerarity, July 11, 1818, Cruzat Papers, Box 3, Folder 4.
South’s slave society. Thus despite the growing link between African phenotype and slavery in Indian country, a strict racial hierarchy was far from established before 1820. This is further evidenced by the fact that Thomas Perryman’s daughter married an Afro-Creek man named Philatouche, also known as Black Factor.

Black Factor was probably the son of a black captive, but he rose high during his life, becoming a prosperous peltry trader and a headman in the Lower Creek towns. Together the Perrymans and the Factors evinced a long history of resistance to the commercial and racial trends propagated by families like the McGillivrays, the Griersons, and others. Factor and Perryman sided with the rebel William Augustus Bowles in the 1790s—a British adventurer who claimed he identified as a Creek and who twice attempted to establish an independent Creek nation, with himself as “Director General,” in opposition to the Untied States, Spain, and the McGillivray-Panton Creek factions.105 Perryman and Factor once frustrated Alexander McGillivray by sheltering Bowles from arrest after one of his schemes went awry. “I endeavored to draw [Bowles] from the Factor Philatouchie’s house, but without success,” McGillivray wrote to William Panton in 1791. “[Factor’s] father in law Perryman suspected me and would not let him [Bowles]

105 William Augustus Bowles was one of the most unusual sometimes-residents of the Gulf South. After his first attempt at fomenting a Creek rebellion failed in 1792, he spent time in exile and prison in the Caribbean and in Europe before returning to West Florida to try again at the end of the decade, this time coming with a ship and firearms and claiming a pledge of aid from the British. For more details on him, see Gilbert C. Din, War on the Gulf Coast: The Spanish Fight Against William Augustus Bowles (Gainesville and other cities, 2012); and Wright, William Augustus Bowles.
come out.” Factor was also infamous for using his influence among the Lower Creeks to lead raids on Anglo-American settlements on the west side of the Oconee River.  

Historian Claudio Saunt reasonably hypothesizes that Factor’s darker skin may have compelled him to oppose the increasing Anglo-American presence and rising color bias in the Gulf South. Yet that did not stop Factor from acquiring black slaves of his own. When he died in 1816, Black Factor’s daughter, Nelly, inherited at least seven enslaved people including “Katy and her three children, Phillis and her child,” and a young boy named George. Factor’s son Sam received a woman named Rose, who was probably his partner. Both Nelly and Sam Factor moved into Seminole country after their father’s death. Sam’s descendants’ darker skin ultimately cost them their freedom. They were enslaved during a Creek raid into the Seminole towns. Historian Christina Snyder found evidence that the Factor children remained enslaved north of the Lower Creek town of Eufaula on the Chattahoochee River, in what eventually became Stewart County, Georgia. As for Nelly Factor, her cousin and Black Factor’s nephew, William Kinnard, harassed her even among the Seminoles. He repeatedly attempted to claim Nelly’s inherited slaves as his own, arguing his matrilineal link to Black Factor made them his rightful property.  

William Kinnard and John Kinnard appear briefly but often in the historical record between the 1780s and the 1810s. The two likely brothers were either Anglo- or Afro-Creeks, and were among the most active traders affiliated with Panton & Leslie.  

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The “halfbreed” William Kinnard owed nearly $800 to Panton in 1799. John Kinnard carried even more debt. He was obliged to Panton for over $1400 in 1799.\(^\text{108}\) No doubt much of the Kinnards’ trading involved deerskins, but they were also both engaged in the Gulf South slave trade. William, for one, expressed interest in obtaining Black Factor’s enslaved laborers. John Kinnard was known to raid both Indian and white settlements for slaves and cattle. By 1791 he owned at least forty enslaved African Americans and 1,500 head of cattle, undoubtedly only a small fraction of the numbers he had captured up to that year.\(^\text{109}\) He sold many of his slaves either to fellow Creeks or to Euro-Americans in Pensacola.

Despite owing such a large sum of money to William Panton, John Kinnard loaned it to others as well. In 1788 John Etherington, a “Pensacola Carpenter,” solicited “two hundred and Ninety four Dollars good lawful money of the Kingdome of Mexico” from “John Kennard, a Half Breed in the Creek Nation [and a] Merchant and Planter.”\(^\text{110}\) As the Indian country also became a slave country, Creeks like John Kinnard slowly switched from kidnapping to buying their human property.

Benjamin Hawkins and other Indian agents knew John Kinnard and occasionally depended on Kinnard’s influence in Creek country to manage agency business or to keep tensions between Georgians and Creeks from flaring into open violence. Benjamin Hawkins occasionally asked Kinnard, who made much of his fortune from the illegal seizure and sale of slaves, to apprehend runaways among the Lower Creeks. Perhaps ironically his knowledge of the smuggling and hiding of slaves made him perfectly suited

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\(^{108}\) “List of debts due by Traders, Half Breeds & Indian factors to Panton Leslie & Co of Appalachi,” May 1798 to April 1799, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.

\(^{109}\) Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 127, 188–90, 194.

\(^{110}\) Notice of Debt, February 15, 1788, Cruzat Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.
for this task. “I sent a demand down into the neighbourhood of Kinnard for some negroes in that quarter belonging to some of the citizens bordering the Seacoast. And received assurances that they were apprehended and should be carried down to Fort James and lately an Indian informs me that 2 belonging to the late Joel Walker, 1 to Mr. Bailey, [and] 1 to Mr. Walliwer are taken down [personally] by Kinnard.”¹¹¹ One agent listed John Kinnard, along with George Galphin (another Anglo-Creek) and Alexander Cornels, as trusted informants for the U.S. government among the “Coweta” Creeks in 1796. Two years later, when a “red [war] party” of Lower Creeks attacked some settlers near the present day Georgia-Florida border, Hawkins requested that Kinnard personally send “Mr. Holmes, a negro and Indian, who is trusty, to Colerain to know the truth.” Hawkins wrote in his journal that “Kinnard ordered two letters from Colerain, one for him and one for this town; when he gets them, he will send one up.”¹¹²

Kinnard was a Creek man as well as a Gulf southerner, but beyond that, and his slave trading activities, we can know very little about the details of his life. But the documentary record offers tantalizing hints of just how diverse the Gulf South population had become by the nineteenth century. Take, for another example, the “half breed” Forrester brothers, Edward and John, who operated as traders during the 1790s and 1800s.¹¹³ The children of unknown Creek and Anglo parents, the Forrester managed Panton & Leslie’s storehouse at St. Marks on the Apalachicola River. Both men later worked at Panton’s new stores on the St. Marys and St. Johns Rivers, in East Florida, by

¹¹¹ Benjamin Hawkins to James Jackson, July 11, 1799, Hawkins Letters, 253.
¹¹³ Balance Sheet of 1795, Greenslade Papers, Box 2 Folder 4; and List of debts due by Traders, Half Breeds & Indian factors to Panton Leslie & Co of Appalach, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.
1791. Reflecting the transition from deerskins to cotton the company made, John Forrester’s 1801 letter to John Forbes lamented recent Seminole slave-raids in the area. “We are again very much disterbd with the Indians in this Province, and at the most unfortunate time they could be so . . . the planters are all now puting their Negroes out in places of Security and the most flourishing fields of Cotton immaginable laying in full Bloome, the Cotton mostly fitt to gather and they dare hardly venture to let their negroes go into it for fear of loosing them.” Forrester used his influence as the son of a Creek woman and as a highly placed store manager with Panton & Leslie when he “got a party of our friendly Indians to go after those negroes” in an attempt to recapture them. As Forrester stated, the most important thing was to help the “Planters [to] still save their crops.”

Malcolm McGee was a trader and interpreter among the Chickasaws. In 1791 Spanish agent Stephen Minor said he had been a “resident of this nation many years . . . having served as an interpreter for the English” as far back as the 1760s. While relying on McGee’s skills as an interpreter in 1799, Joseph Bullen described him as having been “born in the City of New York”; but nevertheless “his ignorance of the gospel was such, that, at present, he could not interpret it; he could not read, and had never heard a sermon.” McGee had a Chickasaw wife and an unknown number of enslaved African Americans, who “all understand English,” according to Bullen. We know less about Len McGee, who might have been Malcolm’s son, though it is possible they were

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114 John Forrester to John Forbes, September 8, 1801, Cruzat Papers, Box 1, Folder 9; Coker and Watson, Indian Traders of the Borderlands, 32; Wright, William Augustus Bowles, 66.
115 Diary of Stephen Minor’s first mission to the Choctaws, May 30 to June 13, 1791, Paths to a Middle Ground.
116 Diary of Joseph Bullen, May 26, 1799, 264.
unrelated. Benjamin Hawkins only notes that Len McGee lived in the Lower Creek towns, near Coweta Tallahassee, but was “a half breed of the Upper Creeks” who was “prudent, honest, sober, and industrious” and spoke Muskogee “well[,] it being his mother tongue and he is willing to be employed about the factory to interpret, to attend stock, to attend in the store and to do any thing which you may require of him. He asks 15 dollars a month.” It is possible that Len McGee was actually a Chickasaw and that Hawkins was confused about his maternal origins. But Len and Malcolm McGee’s possible paternal link is difficult to know for certain. It is certainly suggestive that Malcolm, an interpreter who had resided in Chickasaw country for nearly four decades, lived in close vicinity to a man young enough to be his son, also an interpreter, of mixed-parentage and with the same last name.

There are many, many other examples of the complexity of the Gulf South’s ethnic milieu at the end of the eighteenth century, though the surviving record provides us with only glimpses of their histories. Most of these men and women receive only brief mentions in the writings of their European and Euro-American contemporaries. But those mere mentions are noteworthy if only to suggest how ubiquitous cross-cultural and interethnic relationships had become in the region. Some representative examples include Arturo O’Neill’s 1788 conversation with “John Linder and his son, with two Indians, a Mestizo, and four Englishmen from Tensaw” who had all “arrived by land” in Pensacola “all at the same time” to trade. The men had been traveling together and were at least acquaintances, if not friends or even kin. O’Neill also mentioned “an Englishman named

117 Benjamin Hawkins to Mathew Hopkins, March 5, 1799, Hawkins Letters, 242; Benjamin Hawkins to Andrew Ellicott, April 5, 1799, Hawkins Letters, 243.
Walcord, who lives at [Alexander] McGillivray’s Cattle Farm, a little beyond Tensaw.”

During negotiations for Choctaw lands at Nogales, Manuel Gayoso used “a mestizo named Fretcher” as his messenger and representative to Choctaw headman Ugulayacave.\(^{119}\) In 1797 Benjamin Hawkins wrote that a trader named Benjamin James, “a reputable inhabitant of the Choctaws,” had three “halfbreed” sons who were all “capable of managing his [their father’s] commercial concerns.”\(^{120}\) Hawkins described a chance encounter with “Sally Waters, a halfbreed wife of Col. Waters late of Georgia” (pointedly he used the term “a” wife instead of “the” wife of Colonel Waters) while on a trek through Creek country in 1796. “She was on a visit to her aunt, the wife of Ogosatah” at the time.\(^{121}\) While missionizing in the Chickasaw towns, Joseph Bullen met William Mizle, a native of North Carolina but “resident in this nation” for sixteen years in 1799. In those years Mizle had acquired detailed knowledge of native medicine. Bullen learned from Mizle “the method of healing in this nation,” (which the missionary then relayed quite poorly) “is to take water, soak roots in it, to blow in it with a pipe, and say over a number of words by way of charm, and wash the body of the sick with this.”\(^{122}\) Presumably, Mizle practiced this form of healing.

One of the most ubiquitous, quintessential Gulf southerners during this period was Stephen Minor. Minor was born somewhere in the United States (possibly Virginia or Pennsylvania) around 1760. By 1779 he was in New Orleans, where he volunteered for the Spanish army and the fight against Britain during the American Revolution. His

\(^{119}\) Gayoso’s Account of the Nogales Assembly, December 6, 1793, *Paths to a Middle Ground*, 224.

\(^{120}\) Benjamin Hawkins to Secretary of War, July 5, 1797, *Works of Hawkins*, 181.


\(^{122}\) Diary of Joseph Bullen, May 28, 1799, 265.
military exploits were doubly successful. Minor stayed on in Spanish territory after the war (becoming known as Estevan Minor), and Governor Manuel Gayoso named him “Capt. of the Royal Armies” in Natchez in 1792. He also gained enough intimate knowledge of Choctaw country—becoming fluent in their language and culture—that he became the most important Spanish Indian agent in the region. Spain heavily relied on Minor for a variety of services—from interpreter and treaty negotiator to military commander and cotton inspector. He was often at the forefront of Spain’s diplomatic and meager military efforts to keep the United States out of the Gulf, suggesting that he became yet another war-time migrant who permanently cut ties with the country of his birth after it won independence. When Spain attempted to place a new fort at Nogales (which later became Vicksburg) in the midst of Choctaw hunting territory in 1791, Governor Manuel Gayoso sent Stephen Minor to treat with Choctaw and Chickasaw leaders Franchimastabe and Sulusmastabe. Minor used his advantageous sociopolitical position, his business acumen, and his relationships with Indians in the Gulf South interior to advance himself financially as well. He became a slaveholder, and a cotton dealer, mostly in and around Natchez.

Stephen Minor never became a major cotton planter, but he owned large tracts of land along the Pearl River, east of Natchez, where he produced indigo and tobacco with enslaved black labor. Minor also engaged heavily in the slave trade. His slave sales highlight the many different origins of the enslaved who ended up in the Gulf South at the end of the eighteenth century. For example, Minor sold Francisco Menar a “negro

named George,” an eighteen-year-old “native of Carolina” in 1784, and another
“Carolinian” native named Sam in 1785. In 1786 Minor sold two native Africans—James
and June, “[from] Guinea”—to Natchez planter Daniel Ogden and then purchased a
twelve-year-old girl named Mary. Minor purchased thirty-year-old “Tom Daniel” from
David Ross in 1787, who was listed Daniel as a “native of Mount Serratt.” Also in 1787
Minor sold a woman named Molly, “nat. of Va.,” to Jacob Liephart, and a slave named
Peter, a “Native of N.C.,” to Arthur Cobb. Minor purchased another African named
Guilford as well as a Carolinian “mulatto” named Stephen from James McIntosh in 1788.
During this period in Natchez, slaves were most often purchased with tobacco—two or
three thousand pounds for men under 40, for example, was typical. However, Minor’s
transactions usually involved cash, whether payable immediately or within a year from
the date of sale.125 Very few people in Spanish West Florida had access to large amounts
of specie before the nineteenth century. The fact that Minor seemed to have so much on
hand, so consistently, during the 1780s testifies to his growing financial success as a
slave trader and planter.

Minor became successful enough to eventually lend financial assistance to others.
After Natchez resident William Dueitt fled the colony to avoid his debts in 1784, Minor,
as one of his creditors, received one of Dueitt’s seven slaves, “a Negro Man named
Ben.”126 When in 1786 a “Mr. Woods” decided to leave Natchez to take up permanent
residence with the Choctaws, he sold “two negroes” to Minor in the interest of liquidating

125 See, for examples, Minor’s contracts between 1784 and 1791 in Natchez Court
Records, 26, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33, 40, 42, 47, 49, 50, 58, 61, 84.
126 “Inventory and appraisment of William Dueitt’s estate,” August 21, 1784, Natchez
Court Records, 27.
Minor provided surety for John Lum, a fellow Natchez resident, for his purchase of “a negro boy, newly arrived,” in 1788. As an Indian agent, Minor’s knowledge of Choctaw country proved useful as well. In 1791 an enslaved family—Robert, Mariana, “and her children”—escaped from Minor’s friend and fellow slave dealer, Francisco Menar. Menar gave Minor power of attorney to “claim, recover, and receive [said] slaves which have absconded and are now in the Choctaw Nation.” And it was Minor’s slave Cesar, the Choctaw interpreter, who became so vital to the success of Winthrop Sargent’s new American regime in Natchez in 1800.

Minor occasionally used his status among the Choctaws and the Spanish regime for his own fraudulent gain. In 1784 Georgia trader James Hurst floated down the Mississippi toward New Orleans in order to sell “32 bundles of deerskins, containing in all 1,300 skins,” worth approximately $1,300. Minor’s friend Michael Lopez stopped Hurst on the river above Natchez and informed him that, as an American, Hurst would not be allowed to enter New Orleans with the intent to sell his goods. Disappointed, Hurst “then set off with his boat, which was not of the kind proper to ascend the river.” A few miles upriver Stephen Minor overtook Hurst and appeared to offer him a kindness. Minor “told him that he would buy his [Hurst’s] skins if he would take horses in payment,” and he then could head overland “through the Choctaw nation to Georgia in 8 or 10 days.” But Minor offered Hurst only two horses worth approximately three hundred dollars. Hurst apparently felt he had little choice but to accept Minor’s offer, since Minor assured

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127 “Statement of Mrs. Woods re: her husband, who has gone to the Choctaw Nation” July 1786, Natchez Court Records, 165.
128 Sale Thomas Irwin to John Lum, August 30, 1788, Natchez Court Records, 58.
129 Menar power of attorney to Minor, June 16, 1791, Natchez Court Records, 84.
Hurst “he would not be allowed to go [any farther] down the river on any account” and he had no way to carry his skins otherwise. In another ostensible kindness, Minor provided Hurst with a Choctaw guide, who he paid $30 “to conduct him” safely back to Georgia. “After a six day journey,” Hurst later complained, “the said Indian [guide] left your petitioner in the woods. Not knowing what road to follow or how to subsist being 200 miles from any [Euro-American] settlement, your petitioner wandered about for 34 days and at last arrived at Mobile, where he could obtain no more than $50 for the two horses” Minor had sold him.\(^{131}\) It is unclear whether Minor knew Hurst’s Choctaw guide would abandon him in the middle of Indian country. What is clear is that Minor swindled the American, taking advantage of Hurst’s ignorance of the region for his own financial benefit.

In addition to his interpreter duties and his slave trading business, Minor entered the burgeoning Gulf South cotton market, though not as a planter. Cotton gins were still in their infancy at the end of the 1790s. What primitive ones existed often broke the short staple cotton’s fibers and remained inefficient for seed removal. Still, by 1799 Andrew Ellicott wrote that “the staple commodity of the settlement of Natchez is cotton, which the country produces in great abundance, and of good quality. . . . The crop of the Mississippi Territory alone the late season will amount to 4,000 bales which at the low price of $40 per bale will produce $160,000 which is something very clever for so small a district.” By that year Stephen Minor already owned and managed his own gin on the Mississippi River north of town where many Gulf southerners, both Choctaw and Euro-American, brought their cotton to Minor to be cleaned. Minor claimed one-eighth of the

\(^{131}\) James Hurst vs. Stephen Minor, October 1784, \textit{Natchez Court Records}, 241–42.
cleaned cotton as his payment, which was subsequently sold in New Orleans. In fact, Minor must have become something of a local authority on cotton gins. Governor Manuel Gayoso wrote in 1796 that “the gin for cleaning cotton, belonging to Bennet Truly, is not in good condition, from which a great injury may arise to the planters of this district . . . I have appointed Don Stephen Minor and William Vousdan, who will examine the said machine and report to me their opinion thereof.”

Despite Minor’s extensive service for the Spanish government, the unsettled political realities of the Gulf South forced him and other Gulf southerners to be flexible with their loyalties and agile in their alliances. Minor proved instrumental in bringing the new American regime up to speed on the politics, rivalries, and cultural norms of the Gulf South interior. Shortly after his arrival in Mississippi in 1799, for example, Winthrop Sargent noted that “the country being never wholly without Indians, and almost Daily complaints of aggression from them being made to me, an interpreter has always seemed essential.” Of the only two Choctaw interpreters available to Sargent, one was “a Slave of Major Minor’s whom he was about taking to the line [that was to divide American and Spanish territory] but whom I have detained” to work for the government. Stephen Minor was one of the locals who warned Sargent that “eight hundred Indians,” Creeks, Choctaws, and Seminoles, “had joined [William Augustus] Bowles” in his scheme for Creek independence. Minor used his language skills, his knowledge of

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133 Statement of Manuel Gayoso de Lemos to the court, in the case of George Cochran and others vs. Bennet Truly, May 19, 1796, *Natchez Court Records*, 286.
cotton production, and his slave and deerskin trading profits to make himself indispensable to Governor Gayoso during West Florida’s Spanish regime. He did no less with Benjamin Hawkins or Winthrop Sargent when the Americans arrived in the 1790s. Minor’s personal business and political networks between Natchez and Indian country ensured his rank and status through multiple colonial administrations, and he remained an important figure in the Mississippi Territory and in the U.S. Creek Agency until his death in Mississippi in 1815.135

Stephen Minor had no Indian ancestry but he nonetheless embodied how ostensible outsiders often became native Gulf southerners. Minor lived multiple decades of his life in both Choctaw and Euro-American towns. He spoke English, Choctaw, and probably Spanish, and he was every bit as comfortable conversing with Choctaw headmen and traversing trading paths as he was suing in colonial courts and trading tobacco, cotton, and slaves on the Mississippi. He also traded deerskins and served as an interpreter and guide for new Euro-American migrants. Minor lived at the center of Gulf South transformation, participating in Indian-European diplomacy and regional economic revolutions. Nothing survives to tell whether Minor dressed “like an Indian” or in European garb. His familial and kin relations, if he kept any, are unclear as well (though he apparently married at least three times). But the many years he spent living, working, traveling, and profiting in the Gulf South made him a native of that country every bit as much as a Creek Indian who had spent many years doing the same things.

Outside observers, in fact, viewed former immigrants in Indian country as little different from the Indians. In 1804 Thomas Jefferson appointed Ephraim Kirby to be the

first judge of the Superior Court in Mississippi Territory. In his first report to the
president, after arriving at Fort Stoddard north of Mobile, Kirby was less than
complimentary about his new jurisdiction. “The present inhabitants [of this region] (with
few exceptions) are illiterate, wild and savage, [and] of depraved morals.” Referring to
men similar to Robert Grierson and the elder James Colbert, who had arrived in Indian
country during the 1770s and 1780s as exiled Loyalists, Kirby noted that “the most
antient class [of white residents] is composed of emigrants from the Carolinas and
Georgia, who were attained and proscribed for treasonable practices during the
revolution. . . . having long lived without any restraint, committing many enormities
against society [they] are now hostile to all laws and to every government.” Obviously,
these men were not truly hostile to laws or government, having lived for decades with
Creek, Chickasaw, and Choctaw customs and obligations. For Kirby, however, these men
had in effect abandoned their identity as Americans. Regardless of their origins, they had
become Gulf South natives through their familial and cultural ties to the region.\textsuperscript{136}

In a sense, Gulf southerners from this period formed the links between a declining
Indian country and an emerging slave country. However, that way of viewing the region
forces historians to make artificial distinctions that would have confused people like
Stephen Minor, Alexander McGillivray, Betsy Colbert, Robert Grierson, Sophia Durant,
and others who actually lived and worked there. These men and women lived in
transformational times, to be sure. But whether those times were any more jarring or
fundamental than those experienced by their parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents

\textsuperscript{136} Ephraim Kirby to Thomas Jefferson, May 1, 1804, \textit{Territorial Papers}, 322–26.
is less certain. Change in the North American Southeast had been constant for centuries by the early 1800s.

Nevertheless, these native Gulf southerners, and the families, communities, and communication and trade networks they created, turned an Indian country into a slave country in the course of only a few generations. But it was these communities and networks that made such a swift transition possible in the first place. Native families of mixed ethnicity like the Griersons and Colberts, and long-resident individuals like Stephen Minor and Alexander Cornels planted new fields, raised new animals, established new practices, learned new languages, and opened new markets. They invented new cultures and thereby participated directly and crucially in the invention of a new South—one that paradoxically became the Old South. In short, they were the Deep South’s founding families. But native Gulf southerners created a Deep South that, though increasingly devoted to black slave labor, exhibited a high degree of integrated diversity. Indian towns and colonial settlements were not separate worlds and in some cases were not even separate places—no more than Gulf southerners who had Euro-American and Native American parents were of separate cultures or dual identities.¹³⁷

Much of this cultural invention originated in relationships between distinct peoples and populations: Scotsmen and Creeks, Spaniards and Choctaws, Africans and Seminoles. But by the early nineteenth century, decades of interactions, connections, and couplings had created extensive families of men and women who failed to fit such discrete categories. Indian nations, of course, remained potent in a cultural and ethnic sense all the way until their removal at the hands of the U.S. government, despite the

¹³⁷ For “dual identities,” see for example Frank, Creeks and Southerners, chapters 5–6; and Chapman, Chief William McIntosh: A Man of Two Worlds.
growing internal and external pressures. Yet, whether descended from immigrant or
Indian, many of these men and women had become Gulf southerners, and the ways they
connected the region together—across not just geography but also in terms of race,
kinship, agriculture, and markets—created the conditions that allowed the Cotton South
to emerge in the 1820s and 1830s.
CHAPTER 3:

CATTLE, COTTON, AND THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF INDIAN COUNTRY, 1770–1820

In 1825 the Duke of Saxe-Weimar Eisenach took a tour of North America. One December morning while in Alabama, he and his companion walked to a nearby plantation on the Tallapoosa River. The owner, whom the Duke named only as “McIntosh,” was away when they arrived, but the planter’s wife received them “quite politely” as they surveyed the estate. According to the Duke, McIntosh was “in very good circumstances, and possesse[d] seventy negroes.” Without more context for Eisenach’s visit, this particular antebellum Alabama cotton plantation seems unremarkable. Yet a full reading of the Duke’s account renders McIntosh’s place, and his family, a bit more unusual. The Duke eventually noted that McIntosh was “an Indian,” the son of a Creek headman, and at the time of the Duke’s visit McIntosh had two wives, “a white woman” and an Indian. “We did not see the Indian wife,” the Duke went on to write, but he was not surprised by the proprietor’s multiple partners, noting simply and accurately that “[p]olygamy prevails among the Indians.”

The McIntosh whose plantation the travelers explored that day was almost certainly Chilly McIntosh. He was the oldest son of William McIntosh, also known as Tushtunnuggee Hutkee, who was of mixed Creek and Scottish parentage, had been a headman in the Lower Creek town of Coweta, and was a fur trader and tavern owner as well as a planter himself before he died in 1825. Chilly’s mother was most likely a woman named Eliza Grierson, who herself was of mixed parentage and the daughter of a

1 Bernhard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar Eisenach, Travels through North America During the Years 1825 and 1826 (2 vols.; Philadelphia, 1828) II, 27.
Creek woman and a trader and planter named Robert Grierson. Chilly and his extended family exemplify a region still in rapid transition in 1825 and demonstrate the remarkable racial and cultural complexity of the American Gulf South at that time. His status as a slaveholder and a cotton planter marked him out as a force for the new order. Yet his equally valid status as an Indian made him a visible symbol of native persistence in the antebellum Southeast. Historians who explore the origins of the Deep South frequently focus on the expansion of agriculture and slavery in Alabama and Mississippi during the first decades of the nineteenth century, when cotton rapidly transformed the landscape and culture of the territory. Migrant planters and slaves from the United States traditionally form the center of this narrative. Its central figures are newly arrived white men and women who ostensibly pushed back Indian peoples and plowed up the “wilderness” to make way for cotton fields. Yet Chilly McIntosh was not a migrant from Georgia or Tennessee. He had grown up—as had his father before him—in Creek Country and in most ways continued to live as a Creek. He practiced polygamy and was a leader in the Lower Creek town of Coweta. When the Duke arrived at Chilly’s plantation, his wife stated that he was away in Washington negotiating a treaty on behalf of his people. Though he owned a cotton plantation, two taverns, and two ferries, as one scholar argues, he “vigorously asserted both his and his father’s Creek identity” during his life.²

² Bernhard, Travels though North America, II, 27; Christina Snyder, Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America (Cambridge and London, 2010) 238–40; George Chapman, Chief William McIntosh: A Man of Two Worlds (Atlanta, 1988) 74, 82–86, 93–96, 99, 102, 105; Andrew K. Frank, Creeks and Southerners: Biculturalism on the Early American Frontier (Lincoln, Neb., 2005), 96–113, for “vigorously…” see 126. William McIntosh was actually murdered by Creeks who were upset with the Treaty of Indian Springs he had recently signed, as well as his notorious corruption and profiteering during his career as a Creek diplomat. Two recent examples include Adam Rothman, Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins
Where does the McIntosh family fit in the narrative of the origins of the American Deep South? The McIntoshes were Creek hunters, traders, and warriors. They sold deerskins and other pelts for various trade goods. They fought in Indian wars, specifically the Creek War, the War of 1812, and the Seminole conflicts. The McIntoshes were also Deep South slaveholders and planters. They raised cattle and other livestock and employed enslaved laborers—dozens of them and more—in fields and among herds. Their status as slaveholders and planters did not negate or replace their identity as Creeks. They were leading members of a faction propelling Creeks toward social and cultural transformation, and when they engaged in commercial agriculture and the expanding regional economy, they undeniably became agents in the Gulf South’s economic and ecologic transformation as well. The McIntoshes, and many native Gulf southerners like them, set the stage for the rise of the plantation economy in Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. When waves of migrants arrived to set up the Cotton Kingdom in the nineteenth century, they found, not a blank slate of forests and wilderness, but rather a country filled with large herds of cattle, scattered cotton fields alongside rows of corn, African American slaves, and developing infrastructure. In other words, Anglo-Americans had to first integrate into an already emerging Deep South before they could build their own.

of the Deep South (Cambridge and London, 2005) and John Craig Hammond, Slavery, Freedom, and Expansion in the Early American West (Charlottesville and London, 2007). James C. Cobb famously (and inaccurately) describes the Gulf South as a kind of jungle of forests and impenetrable thickets prior to extensive immigration by Americans in The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity (New York and Oxford, Eng., 1992) 5–28; Chapman, Chief William McIntosh. Note: for ease of reading, in this paper I have usually used subjects’ Anglo names, though the vast majority of them also had “Indian” names as well.
As the eighteenth century drew to a close, the deerskin trade that had been so vital to the southeastern economy was clearly on the decline. Large numbers of southeastern people (though certainly not all) spiraled into debt as a result. Ethnohistorians’ analyses of the peltry trade in the Southeast revolve around that ever-deepening cycle of debt that ultimately crippled Indian autonomy as it forced Indian nations to cede more and more territory to other groups, primarily the United States. In other words, the late-eighteenth-century trade economy supposedly represents at least one instance in which a majority of Native Americans were overwhelmed by the historical challenges they faced. However, Indians and other natives also found new ways to participate in the growing market economy after deerskins became a losing proposition. They were not simply victims of the debt and decline. Most Indians must have been vividly aware of the crisis the declining deer population and deflating European market represented.\(^3\) When Stephen Minor negotiated with the Choctaws for the Nogales district in 1792, Choctaw headman Franchimastabe knew change was imminent, whether the Choctaws as a people welcomed it or not. “[T]he time of hunting and of men’s living by means of the gun were, according to his opinion, near its end.”\(^4\)

As the South’s deer population waned, native people and other Gulf southerners looked for alternative sources of trade and profit. Livestock served as that alternative and as a bridge between the peltry trade and agricultural staples like cotton, as well as an

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\(^4\) Diary of Minor’s Second Mission to the Choctaws, March 13–April 3, 1792, *Paths to a Middle Ground*, 172–81.
important impetus for the rise of slavery in Mississippi and Alabama. Near Euro-American settlements along the coast and others in Indian country, the size of herds and the number of herd-owners grew sharply at the end of the eighteenth century. Native Americans in the Gulf South adopted livestock herding relatively quickly. Residents of Okfuskee, an important Upper Creek town, for example, began integrating herding into their agricultural activities by the early 1770s. By the end of that decade, cattle had already significantly altered Creek settlement patterns and town life—“the physical and social geography”—along the Tallapoosa, Coosa, Alabama, and Tombigbee Rivers.\(^5\)

Whereas cattle had once been an unwelcome presence in Indian communities because they disrupted hunting and displaced deer, many Indians themselves adopted herding and ranching as ways to replace hunting and deerskins.\(^6\) Cattle and other livestock became important to native Gulf southerners for the same reasons they were important to their Euro-American neighbors: they provided a relatively easy and stable commodity with which to profit from land where eighteenth-century agricultural commodities like tobacco and indigo proved impractical, either due to poor soil, insufficient labor, or lacking economic and physical infrastructure.

Even before the 1770s, many Euro-American residents in the Gulf South depended on livestock. Animal fraud and theft must have been a constant plague for colonists in British West Florida, who passed a law in 1769 to “prevent stealing of horses and neat cattle and for the more effectual discovery of such persons as shall unlawfully brand, mark, or kill the same.” The text of the act noted that “said wicked practices are


becoming very common.” Dishonest colonists stole livestock and then claimed they purchased the animals from “the Indians,” or else had their slaves secretly brand others’ cattle as their own, and the local assembly passed several other laws in this regard. Stock animals were clearly an important way for colonists to secure their financial futures, and it became paramount to protect them. Many stolen, stray, and scattered cattle, however, did end up in Indian country. By the 1780s, small but growing herds existed in nearly every native community. And cattle were both the symptoms and the cause of fundamental shifts in Gulf South native lifeways.

Before the second half of the eighteenth century, native Gulf southerners—especially Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws—did not subscribe to European notions of private property and profit. Objects, animals, and land were community-owned in Indian country, possessed only by the person or persons who were using them at a given time. All the women of a given town worked that town’s fields, and individuals shared resources. The authority of leaders and the prestige and honor of individuals were based on their generosity—their ability to provide goods and sustenance to their constituents.

But a series of complex, momentous shifts altered these realities between the 1750s and the end of the century. Ever more interactions with Euro-Americans—traders, squatters, neighbors, and government officials—combined with increasing reliance on manufactured goods that Native Americans could not make themselves, and that Indians needed to obtain with fewer and fewer available deer hides, precipitated a general social

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8 Some have suggested that a good analogy would be to call this “upside-down capitalism,” in which spiritual and earthly power and prestige are won by those who can give the most away.
and cultural transformation across the North American Southeast. Indians developed new ideas surrounding personal ownership and land use—people asserted “ownership” over land and goods in a fundamental, new way. Their simultaneous adoption of stock-raising drove this transition forward. Individuals began branding their animals and acquiring ever larger numbers of animals, and herds accelerated the decline of town life as herd owners spread out in search of grazing land and privacy. Theft became both a concept and a problem in Indian country for the first time. All of this also necessitated cultural change; hunting and war waned as method of the achieving male honor and prestige, and native leaders, whose authority was once tied to their generosity, instead hoarded more and more land and animals for their own profit and trade. Some grew wealthy—a few remarkably so—and many others continued to spiral into debt. The market revolution arrived in Indian country, fostered by Indians themselves.

Cattle provided a mobile and relatively low maintenance commodity and could also be consumed locally during food and game shortages. Most Indians drove their livestock overland to sites like St. Augustine, Pensacola, and Mobile for market. Barnard himself owned several hundred head. The sharp growth in the numbers of cattle, hogs, and horses necessitated the utilization of much larger expanses of land for grazing across the region. This hastened population dispersals throughout Indian country and severely limited the land available for traditional deer hunting. By the 1770s Choctaws all along the Tombigbee and Yazoo Rivers had left their towns and dispersed over a much wider

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area, mostly along smaller tributaries and other watercourses. Creeks became adept ranchers by the end of the eighteenth century, and as was the case for the more westerly Choctaws, livestock became a significant force for culture change in Creek society. Many warriors and hunters, who were unable to afford herds of their own, increasingly looked to obtain war honors in cattle raids and debt relief in cowhides and tallow, which took on greater prominence in the local exchange economy and had tremendous consequences for traditional Indian society.\(^{10}\) Individual traders usually composed the front lines of these economic changes.

Indian country resident traders were at the forefront of the transition to livestock as the primary means of engagement in the wider Atlantic economy, as they were usually in the best financial position to invest in other commodities. Timothy Barnard, for example, had been a trader among the Lower Creeks for nearly a decade when he began to invest in ranching as early as 1785. Like Chilly McIntosh, Timothy Barnard illustrates the interpretive dilemma faced by historians of the Southeast. Barnard was born in coastal

\(^{10}\) In Christopher Morris, *Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life, Warren County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770–1860* (New York, 1995), 23–26, for example, Morris notes the importance of cattle as the economic vehicle that allowed many early white settlers to acquire slaves and land, which later proved instrumental in their foray into cotton production. Indian historians, for their part, note a similar phenomenon. See James Taylor Carson, “Native Americans, the Market Revolution, and Culture Change: The Choctaw Cattle Economy, 1690–1830,” in Greg O’Brien, ed., *Pre-Removal Choctaw History: Exploring New Paths* (Norman, 2008), 183–99; Saunt, *A New Order of Things*, 159–74; Ethridge, *Creek Country*, 160–63; and Daniel H. Usner Jr., “American Indians on the Cotton Frontier: Changing Economic Relations with Citizens and Slaves in the Mississippi Territory,” *Journal of American History* 72 (September 1985) 297–317. The introduction of cattle ranching thus should be viewed as a common economic thread that bound Indian country and colonial settlements—the entire region—together into one system.
Georgia to Anglo-American parents.¹¹ A Loyalist during the Revolution, he moved to Creek country as a trader in his twenties. He remained there for the rest of his life, marrying an Uchee Creek woman with whom he fathered eleven children. During the 1770s the vast majority of his economic activities consisted of deerskin trading. But by the 1780s Barnard and his extended family transitioned to livestock and their agricultural efforts, specifically, grew more commercially motivated.

Indeed, the Barnards served as notable examples of the general transformation underway for those living in the Georgia backcountry and across the Mississippi frontier. Barnard’s life also illustrates the Native American influence in that transformation. Though he had an English heritage, his wife, children, and lifestyle were all decidedly Creek. If Barnard himself was a white man in a foreign country, he certainly did not outwardly appear as such. Benjamin Hawkins once described him as “slow” to adopt so-called civilized farming practices, a condescending characterization Hawkins usually reserved for full or “mixed-blood” Indians. Though Barnard served as an interpreter between Creeks and the American government, he apparently never taught his oldest son Timpoochee to read or write. He also had an apparent disdain of Christianity, once remarking to a Moravian missionary that “Moses was a murderer” and “those who wrote the Bible were religious fanatics.”¹² Barnard rejected multiple aspects of his Anglo heritage in favor of his new roots among the Creeks. When he died in 1820, he had lived

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¹¹ For more information on Barnard’s paternity, see “Introduction” material by Louise Frederick Hayes, Unpublished Letters of Timothy Barnard, 1784–1820, Department of Archives and History of the State of Georgia (hereinafter cited as “Letters of Timothy Barnard), 11.

in Creek country for half a century, and while he produced marketable goods with slave labor (he owned approximately sixty slaves upon his death), he never made an effort to claim his ancestral estates in England when they became his by right.\textsuperscript{13} His economic activities, however, help demonstrate that the southeastern interior was far from a wilderness before 1800. Barnard and his family had a large fenced-in farm; large stocks of cattle, sheep, and horses; and a peach orchard. As of 1799 he was in the process of expanding his estate even further.\textsuperscript{14}

Timothy Barnard and his Creek family were raising livestock at least by 1786, animals they sold along with their deerskins in Augusta and St. Augustine. Just over a decade later, Barnard and his sons Timpoochee, Homanhidge, Falope, and Yuccohpee built a dairy—which utilized enslaved African labor—near the confluence of the Flint and Chattahoochee Rivers. Bernard’s sons soon began operations of their own. “Falope and Yuccohpee have begun an establishment for themselves,” Benjamin Hawkins wrote while visiting the family in 1797. “They [are] here with their father’s negros \textit{sic} at work clearing a field, and preparing logs of pine for their house.” Less than a mile away, Timpoochee “and his Cussetuh [Creek] wife” cleared their own land with the help of at

\textsuperscript{13} Introduction material by Louise Frederick Hayes, \textit{Unpublished Letters of Timothy Barnard, 1784–1820}, Department of Archives and History of the State of Georgia, 61; hereinafter cited as “Letters of Timothy Barnard.”

least one “small black boy.” Barnard eventually had eleven sons and daughters, all of whom built their own families and estates in the neighborhood near their father. The Barnard family’s settlement constituted a new community in the Georgia backcountry.

United States Indian agent Benjamin Hawkins used the term “Indian countrymen” to describe the many men like Barnard who entered Indian country during and after the American Revolution as traders. Most eventually began new lives and families there. Hawkins’s use of the term simply alluded to a white man who had lived solely among Indians for a significant number of years, but it also sometimes implied that such men had abandoned their identity as white men altogether, at least in Hawkins’s eyes. He frequently harangued men of European ancestry for “degrading” themselves by marrying Indian women and inevitably becoming “a slave of her family.” In a typical critique of Timothy Barnard’s farming practices, Hawkins wrote that “he [Barnard] receives light slowly on this subject, as is the case with all the Indian countrymen, without exception.” In a 1797 letter to then Secretary of War James McHenry, Hawkins was disappointed to find that these “traders,” despite having amassed “considerable fortunes”

16 Ethridge, Creek Country, 64.
in land, livestock, and enslaved laborers, “have almost all of them been as inattentive to their children as the Indians.” Almost certainly this remark reflected the fact that most white traders had adopted the Creeks’ matrilineal child-rearing practices, in which Creek children’s fathers possessed little to no authority in the upbringing of their offspring.\footnote{Indian scholars have consciously adopted this term as well, though it is problematic in that it implies that these men maintained a separateness from the communities in which they lived and worked. Other than marking their ethnic origins (which increasingly lose relevance the longer one lives in a new place), it is unclear why, for example, Alexander McGillivray should be called “Creek” but Grierson remains an “Indian countryman.” See, for example, Ethridge, \textit{Creek Country}, 77–78; and Perdue, “‘Mixed Blood’ Indians, 31–32, 45. BHF Benjamin Hawkins to the Secretary of War, January 6, 1797, \textit{Works of Hawkins}, 57; For Creeks’ matrilineal practices, see Ethridge, \textit{Creek Country}, 109–17; and Joshua Piker, \textit{Okfuskee: A Creek Indian Town in Colonial America} (Cambridge, Mass., 2004) 10, 22–25.}

Timothy Barnard and his family were not unique. While Creeks had always been farmers, the peltry trade dominated their commercial activities by the 1720s and even earlier.\footnote{Joshua Piker, \textit{Okfuskee}, 79–84, 147–56; Alan Gallay, \textit{The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670–1717} (New Haven, Conn., 2002), 133–35, 161–62, 249, 346.} By the end of that century, however, agriculture emerged as a method of wealth acquisition in Creek country, a movement often led by resident traders.\footnote{This was as much related to cultural shifts in Indian life as economics or the decline in the deer population, as southeastern Indians began valuing property accumulation for its own sake. Further, the entry point for many Indians into the Atlantic and continental marketplace, aside from deerskins, was most often in stock raising. Creeks, especially, acquired large numbers of cattle and horses (which themselves became almost form of currency) in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. All of this is amply documented in Claudio Suant’s \textit{A New Order of Things}. For a description of the frontier exchange economy and the history of the peltry trade, see Piker, \textit{Okfuskee}; and Usner, \textit{Indians, Settlers, and Slaves}.} Robert Grierson, for example, lived and worked as a trader both in Creek country and Augusta in 1772. However, by 1796 his life was much different; he was living near the Upper Creek town of Hillabee with his Creek wife, five children—who Hawkins noted Grierson
“governed as Indians”—and a no less than forty black slaves. Grierson also owned three hundred cattle and thirty horses.

At the Hawkins first met Grierson, however, he was already in the midst of transitioning away from livestock. Hawkins was pleasantly surprised that much of the “civilization” he had come to plant among the Creeks had already sprouted on Grierson’s plantation, because of his own efforts as well as those of his Creek family, his enslaved laborers, and his Creek neighbors. “I took a view of Mr. Grierson’s farm,” Hawkins reported in late 1796, “he had planted the last season two acres of cotton,” and was planning on planting much more during the upcoming season. Grierson was apparently quite inexperienced at cotton. “I saw he had not thinned it sufficiently, nor toped any part and that [his short staple cotton] was mixed with [the long staple] . . . I advised him in the next season to pursue the proper course and to separate the seed.”

Grierson was not simply a white man bringing his “white” agricultural ideas to Indian country, however. Hawkins’s remarks about his Indian family and Creek-style child-rearing practices mark him out as something else. In many respects Grierson grew to become a native of Indian country. His children were certainly considered Creek, and his children inherited and established estates—with cattle, cotton, and slaves—of their own.

Grierson and his Creek family were literally pioneering southern cotton planters. They were probably the first residents of the Tallapoosa River to discover that long staple cotton would not grow well in the region’s soil. During Hawkins’s 1796 visit, Grierson confided to the new Indian agent that “the black seed cotton” did not do well, and Hawkins told him “to plant only the green seed. The seasons being sufficient to bring that

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to perfection” before an early frost ruined the crop. Remarkably, the Griersons were probably the first Gulf southerners to own a cotton gin as well. Hawkins noted “he has a treadle gin, well made, sent him from Providence [Bahamas]. I saw some defect in the putting it up, which I directed him how to remedy.” Even further, Grierson’s burgeoning plantation employed the labor of not just his family and slaves, but of the surrounding Hillabee townspeople as well. “He informs me he finds no difficulty in hiring the Indian women to pick out cotton . . . There is 30 acres in the farm” on which he grew “corn, cotton, rice, peas, beans, squashes, pumpkins, watermelons, [and] colewarts.”

The Griersons evince a family and society in transition. On the one hand, they were unusual in Indian country for their production of cotton, and in their proto-manufacturing activities. On the other, they continued to practice the same sort of agriculture that Creeks had practiced for generations—mixed fields that produced a variety of subsistence produce and that were worked by women. The traditional existed alongside the novel, the Native South and the Deep South at the same moment on the same farm.

Hawkins visited the Grierson family again the following year, and they had expanded their cotton production. The Indian agent arrived to find that Grierson “had his family around him ginning and picking cotton.... He [has] made a considerable quantity and is preparing it to send to T[ennessee] where he expects 34 cents lb.” Grierson made efforts to maximize his profits as well. He wrote to the William Panton in 1797, saying “I will thank you to have my Cotton sent some where for sale if yet on hand[.] I have some thoughts of carrying this crop to Tallicoe as they have offered me 18p Sterling p[er] lb which is more than I can get in England.” Grierson’s comments demonstrate a significant

degree of comfort and familiarity with the cotton market. In the following years, he expanded operations even further.

According to Benjamin Hawkins, by 1799 Grierson produced two thousand pounds of cotton for market each year. His family and a handful of others of mixed Creek and European ancestry eventually formed their own community on the Tallapoosa, and together they produced enough raw cotton that Grierson obtained a crude loom to go along with his gin. As Hawkins noted, though “he has raised a quantity [of cotton] for market, [he] finds it more profitable to manufacture it” himself. Grierson paid a woman named Rachel Spillard two hundred dollars a year to oversee his spinning operation in which he “employ[ed] eleven hands, red, white, and black” in addition to his slaves; and he utilized additional “Indian women [who] gather in the cotton from the fields.” Grierson sold at least some of his manufactured cloth to William Panton in Pensacola. Grierson, his paid and enslaved laborers, and his children present a vivid picture of change among the Upper Creeks. The description of their lives and lands mirrored those of so-called pioneer white settlers of the American backcountry far more closely than those of their neighboring Creek villages. Yet Grierson’s children and grandchildren were

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no less “Native” than anyone else in Hillabee. The differences from traditional Indian communities that they embodied were wrought from within Indian country, though, rather than from Anglo-American incursion or acculturation.

Examples of traders who became farmers in Indian country like Grierson are numerous. Richard Bailey was a peltry trader in the Creek town of Autossee in the 1770, but at the end of the eighteenth century he also raised livestock and some cotton with his Creek family. His Creek wife continued to manage their estate after Bailey died sometime before 1797. John Kinnard, a Creek of mixed ancestry, operated as a merchant and a planter in the 1780s, and he hired a white overseer in 1788. He also became a slave trader. Creek headman and “Indian factor” Alexander Cornels, with his extended family near Tuckaubatchee, annually raised livestock and at least two acres of cotton, doing so with his nine enslaved laborers. Benjamin Hawkins, filtering his view of ethically mixed Gulf southerners through an Anglo-American racial lens, praised Cornel’s wife for having “the neatness and economy of a white woman.” The Indian family of John Townshend, formerly a trader in Eufaulau, stated that they planned to begin growing cotton in 1799. The large extended kin network of the famous Creek leader Alexander McGillivray owned a succession of plantations near the confluence of the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers. By the 1790s his sisters Sophia and Sehoi owned nearly fifty enslaved people between them.25

Benjamin Hawkins praised another peltry trader, “Mr. Marshall,” for his efforts at cotton production in 1799. Like Grierson, Marshall “has set up a manufactory of cotton cloth.” Marshall also experimented with different varieties of cotton, much to Hawkins’s pleasure. “The cotton raised by him the last season is fine; it is the green-seed; the experiment was commenced with the green-seed, and this year the black seed of the seacoast has been tried” on Marshall’s land. Though Marshall clearly recognized the superior quality of the black seed, long staple cotton, “the season is too short for it.” Hawkins professed pleasure that “the traders here adopted with spirit” the Plan of Civilization. “They have made gardens, fenced their fields, and they have this year raised wheat, rye, and barley.” But what Hawkins failed to note is that, in the case of Grierson and Marshall, at least, “the plan of the government” was already well-underway in Indian country before the United States government arrived to implement that plan. Moreover, none of this could have been accomplished without the participation of Grierson’s and Marshall’s Creek family and neighbors. The cotton fields Hawkins saw were, at bottom, the results of native initiative and effort.\footnote{Benjamin Hawkins, “Sketch of the Creek Country in 1798 and 1799,” \textit{Works of Hawkins}, 55s.}

Southeastern peoples’ move towards commercial agriculture did not mean a wholesale abandonment of the deerskin trade. Most traders participated in both at the same time, especially early on, raising and selling livestock, corn, and cotton as a way to diversify their economic efforts. For example, Panton & Leslie Company papers show that Alexander Cornels and John Kinnard both continued to sell peltry while engaging in

\footnote{Hawkins Journal, December 14 and 20, 1796, \textit{Works of Hawkins}, 35, 43; Saunt, \textit{A New Order of Things}, 99.}
cotton production and ranching.\textsuperscript{27} Coweta trader John Marshall “was very well off in negros and cattle” in 1797, but that same year he built a trade store that Americans hoped would funnel more deerskins down the Oconee River (and hence into Georgia and the American economy) rather than to Pensacola, which received the bulk of the traffic at the time.\textsuperscript{28} In an 1801 letter to the trading outfit John Forbes & Co., Creek Efau Haujo blamed these new economic activities for Creeks’ spiraling debt. He pointed out that both white traders and “Indian factors” had been accumulating “property in negros, cattle, and horses” with the skins they received instead of concentrating on paying down what they owed to Forbes. Indian and white traders’ efforts at building their agricultural wealth in the face of a deer population that was “almost gone” (in Efau Haju’s words) illustrates native Gulf southerners’ role in initiating a transition to settled commercial agriculture in the face of ecological changes and new economic realities.\textsuperscript{29}

Local, native cotton production prior to the 1820s and 1830s remained relatively small scale. A handful of elite Indians, traders, and other Gulf southerners produced the majority of the cotton, while most people continued to rely on subsistence agriculture, deerskins, and, increasingly, livestock. Nonetheless, cotton undeniably gained a foothold in Indian country due to Indian and native activities. When combined with the growing practice of cattle herding (some people’s herds reached into the hundreds and even

\textsuperscript{27} Panton and Leslie Balance Sheet, 1795, entry for “Cornel,” Greenslade Papers, Box 2, folder 4; “List of debts due by Traders, Half Breeds & Indian factors to Panton Leslie & Co of Appalach, May 1798,” Greenslade Papers; Mad Dog of the Creeks to John Forbes, May 31, 1801, Greenslade Papers, Box 1, folder 1; Benjamin Hawkins, “Sketch of the Creek Country,” \textit{Works of Hawkins}, 30s–31s; Benjamin Hawkins to the Secretary of War, April 1, 1801, \textit{Hawkins Letters}, 357.


\textsuperscript{29} Efau Haujo of the Creeks to John Forbes, May 31, 1801, Greenslade Papers, Box 1, folder 1.
thousands), and the increasing numbers of enslaved people of color used to manage herds and work fields, the early outlines of a commercial plantation economy were clearly visible. Not all Gulf southerners participated directly in this economy. But those who did initiated a transition that ultimately resulted in the full realization of a cotton kingdom in Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia during the antebellum period. Characterizing the origins of the cotton South in terms of indigenous initiative, rather than as evidence of Indians’ decline and inability to adapt, demonstrates that the Gulf South’s transformation was in fact consistent with a long history of creative adjustments and accommodations that defined Native, African, and Euro-American interactions on the continent for centuries. Prior to the disruption wrought by large numbers of Anglo-American migrants and Indian Removal, these men and women were well on their way towards building their own Deep South.

Small-scale production certainly was not unique to Indian cotton planters. In work on antebellum expansion and migration into the South, historians’ descriptions of early white settlements in the region strongly resemble those of their Indian counterparts. Indeed, when comparing accounts of white settlers and Indians—who lived and worked on a common landscape—it can be difficult to differentiate between them. Early white settlers along the Yazoo and Big Black Rivers, for example, burned underbrush and girdled trees in order to clear fields for planting, which directly mirrored Creek practices for this purpose. Neither white settlers nor Indians employed extensive plowing, even after metal plows became available, because of the damage these early plows caused to
both soil and horses. Both groups also raised livestock without building fences, employed enslaved men to manage their herds, and sold cattle alongside one another in Natchez, Mobile, Pensacola, and St. Augustine. Some Gulf southerners owned enough slaves that they would have qualified as elite planters in a later period. Yet historians imply that these whites were pioneers who ushered in a new era, while Indians could only watch while their way of life was destroyed. White settlers were not carving a life from the “wilderness.” Rather, they introduced their homesteads into an evolving but already established society comprised of multiple ethnic groups. Both whites and non-whites depended on subsistence and small-scale commercial agriculture, ranching, deerskins, and, to a growing extent, slave labor. In other words, small-scale production was a feature of agriculture in the Gulf South in general and belies binary distinctions that imagine the region as a land of white “planters” and native “farmers and hunters.” All Gulf southerners engaged the economy in multiple ways that encompassed both local exchange and production for the continental and Atlantic markets.

30 Historian Robbie Ethridge notes that despite Benjamin Hawkins’s repeated attempts to introduce the plow to the region, few families ever adopted it due to the erosion to the clay soil and “killing [of] horse flesh” they caused. Ethridge writes that “even white farmers refused to use them until the mid-nineteenth century.” Creek Country, 144.

31 On the similarities between white and Indian agriculture, see Morris, Becoming Southern, 22–41; Ethridge, Creek Country, 142–74; Thomas D. Clark and John D. W. Guice, Frontiers in Conflict: The Old Southwest, 1795–1830 (Albuquerque, 1989), 99–116; Morton Rothstein, “‘The Remotest Corner’: Natchez on the American Frontier,” in Noel Polk, ed., Natchez before 1830 (Jackson, Miss., 1989), 94. For references to the early frontier South as wilderness, see for example Morris, Becoming Southern, xiv, 5–6, 20; James C. Cobb The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity (New York, 1992), 7; Robert V. Haynes, The Mississippi Territory and the Southwest Frontier, 1795–1817 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 3; In his book, Adam Rothman uses a quote that is intended for hyperbole, describing the region as so “wild” that “‘a dozen trees must be cut before one can fall…on the most irregular hilly broken and unfinished part of the globe’s surface.’” See Rothman, Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South, (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 37.
Benjamin Hawkins’s attempts to “civilize” the Indians certainly had a direct impact on agricultural development among southeastern native groups. His influence should not imply that such transformations would not have taken place without American encouragement, nor does it make the rising production of cotton among native Gulf southerners any less significant when analyzing the Deep South’s origins. His letters and journals often mentioned attempts to introduce cotton to Creeks, though he intended it only as a material for local textiles and not for the Atlantic market. He often pushed Creek women to learn spinning and weaving, one of his most important goals of the Plan of Civilization. Hawkins proudly reported in 1809 that “all the Indians who have planted cotton within thirty miles of the [A]gency express a desire to have a gin ready [when] their cotton crop comes in.” One year later he noted, “our cotton gin is visited almost daily and lately we have had cotton packed on horses from 120 miles [away] to be gin[ned].” While much of this was probably intended for home use, some Indians also sold and traded their cotton for profit, though not necessarily outside of Indian country.

Robert Grierson was one planter who produced cotton for more than his own household needs. Many others did likewise to varying degrees. In 1801 a Chickasaw headman asked an Indian agent to supply them with tools by saying “we are about to raise cotton… [and] shall want canoes to carry it to market, and adzes are necessary to build them.” By 1803 Chickasaws were asking if the United States trader at the Chickasaw Bluffs would give them cash for their cotton crops. Benjamin Hawkins informed merchant and trader William Panton in the fall of 1801 that “two canoes with

1500 lb of cotton will [soon] go down to Mobile for a market...the cotton [has been] raised on the Tallapoosa.” Coweta Old King used the profits from his cotton to purchase six cows, two horses, and “some” hogs in 1809. According to one account, in 1802 Creeks near the Hickory Ground sold their cotton to trader Abram Mordecai in return for various items. Mordecai owned and operated a cotton gin near Creek headman Charles Weatherford’s estate at the confluence of the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers. While ostensibly encouraging “civilization,” U.S. Indian agents like Hawkins helped foster the earliest beginnings of a Cotton South as constructed by Indians.

Cotton production was not limited to Euro-Americans and Indians. As early as 1800 Mississippi Governor Winthrop Sargent asked that the territorial judges “prohibit by Law, the Slaves within the Territory from raising or Vending of Cotton,” a practice that Anglo-American planters must have worried provided a dangerous precedent for their slaves. Hawkins feared for the failure of the Plan of Civilization when he lamented slavery’s growing presence to Thomas Jefferson in 1801. “One disagreeable circumstance attending this [cotton] business is the keen desire generated by such great profit to accumulate slaves by any and every means in their power, regardless of future consequences.” This applied to individuals as well as former peltry trading companies,

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34 The law also likely emerged from a fear that slaves would steal their owners’ cotton and sell it on the black market. Winthrop Sargent to Territorial Judges, May 5, 1800, in Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Mississippi Territorial Archives, 1798–1803* (Nashville, 1905) 231–32; hereinafter cited as Miss. Terr. Arch.
35 Hawkins to Henry Dearborn, October 25, 1801, *Works of Hawkins*, 390-93; Hawkins to William Panton, February 7, 1801, Cruzat Papers, Folder 9, Box 1; Hawkins to
who also began importing small numbers of enslaved Africans and Afro-Caribbean peoples to sell to Indian country ranchers and fledgling cotton planters.

Companies traditionally engaged in the “Indian trade” began exporting the products produced by native Gulf southerners, other than deerskins, in increasing amounts. In June of 1787 at least five ships belonging to Mather & Strother and bound for London listed indigo, lumber, and cotton among their contents in addition to the usual deer, bear, and beaver pelts.\(^36\) William Panton regularly sent lumber along with his deerskins to London by 1788, and during that same year Panton’s fellow Pensacola merchant, Zenon Balls, asked Arturo O’Neill for permission to ship lumber to the “French Isles” in the Caribbean and other locations on the north coast of the South American mainland.\(^37\)

Turnbull, Joyce & Co., Panton & Leslie’s main competitor in West Florida, began gearing their operations toward exporting more cattle, lumber, and cotton as well. Originally a peltry-exporting firm out of Natchez and Mobile, the company began to sell slaves to planters in and around Baton Rouge, Mobile, and the small community of Tensaw by the end of the 1790s.\(^38\) Company owner John Turnbull clearly made a decision to invest in the trade and production of agricultural commodities during that

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\(^36\) Note by Joseph Villavaso, June 16, 1787, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 3, frame 540–42.

\(^37\) Arturo O’Neill to Jose de Navarro, February 9, 1788, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 3, frame 1439.

\(^38\) Charles Norwood to John Turnbull, May 16, 1798, Turnbull-Allain Family Papers (Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; hereinafter cited as Turnbull Papers) Box 2, Folder 3; hereinafter cited as Turnbull Papers. Charles Norwood to John Turnbull, June 13, 1799, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 3.
decade. Turnbull, especially, eventually owned large herds of cattle, and he used slave labor to drive them overland between his lands near Baton Rouge and the Tombigbee River to Mobile, Pensacola, and other places in West and East Florida, for market. He also traded cattle to others so they could begin their own ranching operations, for example in 1799, when he sold “fourteen Head of Cattle” to Alexander Boyd, an immigrant living somewhere near coastal West Florida. Intriguingly, the company at least occasionally provided capital for both new and established planters. Tobacco planter Joshua Howard wrote to the company in 1792 that he could not pay back his debts because his attempts at starting an indigo plantation had largely failed the previous year. He insisted, “I now have my Indigo Works finished, my plantation open’d, Myself experienced in the fabrication of Indigo and I hope according to my [labor] force, to make a good crop the insuing [sic] year, out of which I hope to make you a better payment.” Charles Norwood, who operated the company’s branch in New Orleans, wrote to Turnbull in 1799 that a cotton gin he had recently purchased had arrived and that he was preparing to send it upriver to Baton Rouge along with “pieces of the cotton bagging” needed to get the crop to market (baling, which eventually became ubiquitous, was still decades away from becoming practical since it required special machinery and transportation infrastructure). During the 1790s and 1800s, Turnbull’s stores across the

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39 Deposition on slave claims, March 25, 1805, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 10.
40 Receipt for Cattle signed by Alexander Boyd, March 10, 1799, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 5
41 Joshua Howard to Turnbull and Joyce, December 4, 1792, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 1.
Gulf South commonly purchased and shipped “Cotton and Beaver” alongside one another.\footnote{Charles Norwood to John Turnbull, June 13, 1799, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 3; Charles Norwood to John Turnbull, January 3, 1800, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 4; Charles Norwood to John Turnbull, May 16, 1798, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 3.}

John Turnbull also sold enslaved men and women to the native Gulf southerners who also purchased the manufactured goods he imported for the Indian trade. In 1797, for instance, he became entangled in a legal dispute after he sold a twenty-five year old man named Peter to a planter named John Tally. Turnbull claimed the man from the estate of Tombigbee River planter Samuel Lewis in payment for Lewis’s debts to Turnbull’s company. The lead plaintiff, Sarah Fulsom, claimed Peter belonged to her as Lewis’s heir, and that Turnbull had illegally confiscated the man. Turnbull, however, testified that Fulsom—apparently Lewis’s widow, since re-married—sold Peter to Turnbull herself. Turnbull swore that “Mrs. Sarah Fulsom did live at Tombigbee where [Turnbull] kept a store . . . and she had a large family and he constantly furnished her and her family with necessities which was their only support.” The Lewis family was so indebted to Turnbull that he refused to supply them with any more goods until they made a payment. The family, according to Turnbull’s testimony, relied on him to such a degree that they had agreed to hand over Peter to get back in Turnbull’s good graces, so that he might extend their credit line.\footnote{The Heirs of Samuel Lewis vs. John Tally, December 1796, \textit{Natchez Court Records}, 336–37.} Locals, both immigrant and native, depended on Turnbull and other trading firm owners to supply them with manufactured goods and other necessities, including slaves. But Turnbull also used this leverage to obtain and resell additional enslaved men and women.
Raiders and trading companies worked to expand informal and formal slave trading networks, respectively. In addition to selling slaves to planters, though, some companies transitioned into plantation agriculture for themselves. John Turnbull, for example, ventured beyond trading and became a large slave owner and planter in his own right. Utilizing the profits and connections he made in the Indian and slave trades, he eventually owned multiple plantations, livestock holdings, and over one hundred slaves. When Turnbull died prior to 1801, his estate and plantations passed to his wife, Catherine, who continued to manage and operate them for at least another decade.\textsuperscript{44}

Turnbull’s slaves produced cotton on a much larger scale than most planters at the time, and though his company had been based primarily in Mobile, his long years of trading activities provided him with the knowledge and connections to establish cotton plantations near Natchez, Baton Rouge, and Grand Gulf.

The early records from Turnbull’s estates demonstrate that staple crop production in the Gulf South remained primitive, even for the wealthiest planters. After the 1800 sale of cotton from his plantation outside Grand Gulf, along the Big Black River, for example, Turnbull’s Natchez buyers complained that some of it still held seeds and that there had been “no Deduction for the weight of Bags and rope” when it had been weighed, thereby unfairly raising the price.\textsuperscript{45} Moreover Turnbull’s people had utilized many small bags instead of fewer large ones, increasing the price more. Whether the irregular weighing procedure had been result of willful duplicity or not is uncertain. Still, the inefficient

\textsuperscript{44} Deposition on Slave Claims for John Turnbull, March 25, 1805, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 10; \textit{Ibid.}, Box 2, Folders 10–11; Correspondence between Catherine Turnbull and Charles Norwood, 1800–1806, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 4; Cotton Receipts, June 2, 1800, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 6.

\textsuperscript{45} Cotton Receipt, June 2, 1800, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 6; Ferguson & Wooley to Daniel Clark, July 7, 1800, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 2.
cleaning, the loose bagging in lieu of bales, and the lack of an established and accepted routine for weighing and pricing all point to an industry in its infancy. John Turnbull’s cotton plantations bore a much closer resemblance to Robert Grierson’s than to the antebellum versions that became typical by the 1830s and 1840s, despite the fact that his large estates produced far more cotton than Grierson’s.

In many ways, the same must be said of Turnbull’s kin relationships. When looking only at his wife Catherine and the children they had together, combined with his large slaveholdings, he appeared as a quintessential frontier cotton planter and antebellum patriarch. However, Turnbull had two families: one in Baton Rouge and another in the Chickasaw towns east of the Yazoo River. Turnbull married into an Indian kin network, as did many traders, and had at least two Chickasaw sons, which allowed the trader to obtain vital intelligence on ways to expand his company’s operations in the Mississippi interior. It also positioned him to win concessions from the Spanish Government, which relied on the Chickasaws for political and military leverage against the Creeks and the Americans. Turnbull utilized his Indian connections to speculate in land along the Tombigbee River, where he attempted to settle a handful of families in the late 1780s.46

John Turnbull’s name is rarely mentioned in historical literature as one of those who lived “between” Indian and white worlds.47 Yet given the company and kin that he

46 Correspondence between Catherine Turnbull and Charles Norwood, 1800–1806, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 4; Cotton Receipts, June 2, 1800, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 6. Alexander McGillivray to Estevan Miro, May 26, 1789, in John Walton Caughey, ed., McGillivray of the Creeks (Norman, Ok., 1938), 234–35; Coker and Watson, Indian Traders of the Southeastern Spanish Borderlands, 172–76.
47 Andrew K. Frank labels it “biculturalism” instead, as if what existed in the Gulf South was not the emergence of a single new culture, but rather two discrete cultures that existed in the same place at the same time, often in the same individual. Frank, Creeks and Southerners.
kept, and the trading company he owned, it is impossible to define his life in any simple or traditional sense. He was an architect of the cotton boom that ultimately helped incorporate the Deep South into the American nation. Yet Turnbull never exhibited loyalty to any nation unless it furthered his own ends, least of all the United States. He had Choctaw and Anglo relations; African slaves and black business associates; and Spanish, and Creek neighbors. Like Turnbull himself, the region he lived and worked in resisted labels and borders. Contrary to portrayals of Indians and Euro-Americans as largely segregated in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century, people of all ethnicities lived near and among each other as neighbors, kin, allies, and enemies. This certainly does not mean that the line between Indian and non-Indian vanished. However, it blurred considerably—certainly in a spatial sense, and to a lesser extent a cultural sense as well.

The traditional theme in the literature analyzing Indian-Anglo interactions in the Southeast has been white encroachment, a narrative that paints white settlers as aggressors. Undoubtedly they often were. Alexander McGillivray frequently complained to Spanish and American officials about encroaching Georgians, calling them “invaders of our Lands.” However, native Gulf southerners encroached on well-established Euro-American spheres as well. Choctaws immediately pressed their demographic and political advantages during the power transition in Natchez in 1798.

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Governor Sargent complained to his superiors that the town was “in Continual Anxiety from the Choctaw Indians, *They* are almost always in our settlements and living upon *us*—Their numbers so great that the defenceless Planters are very oft [required to] sacrifice almost their whole Crops, for the preservation of their lives.” Sargent never found a way to mitigate this problem, and his replacement, William Claiborne, complained of the very same problem over three years later, noting that “the Indians…[were] encamped by the dozens in every Neighborhood and support themselves principally by depredations upon the Cattle [and] Hogs…of the Citizens.” Indians too could be aggressors. The Choctaws’ push into Natchez thus reminds us that the different Gulf South cultures necessarily abutted and mingled, even in established colonial centers, and that the movement of white society on the Mississippi frontier was not always in one direction, even in the nineteenth century.

For American leaders, who especially frowned upon this mingling for one reason or another, it frequently became cause for anxiety and complaint. While on a religious mission to the Chickasaws in 1799, Joseph Bullen met a Virginian named James Gun. Bullen was surprised to learn that Gun owned a plantation not in Natchez, but in the Chickasaw Nation, and lived near Chickasaw headman Wolf’s Friend. Both Gun and Wolf’s Friend attended the same religious service that Bullen had offered. Bullen did not

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The Choctaws who were there were probably Indians who felt displaced by the decline of hunting as a way of life. Thus one could argue that their presence was in a sense defensive, rather than aggressive. Nonetheless, Natchez had been a colonial center for three quarters of a century by 1800 and their inability to hunt, except by killing cattle, was every bit as limited as if they had stayed in Choctaw country. Their presence in Natchez was undeniably a choice.
seem surprised, even though Gun was “a white man,” but his presence in an Indian nation would have certainly irritated American officials. Benjamin Hawkins reported in 1801 that “unlicensed settlements have been made on [the rivers in Indian country. . . and] they are now thinly scattered along the western banks of the Mobile and Tombigbee for more than seventy miles, and extend nearly twenty-five miles upon the eastern borders of the Mobile and Alabama; the whole population may be estimated at five hundred whites and two hundred and fifty blacks, of all ages and sexes.” Over the following decades, their numbers exploded, and these rogue settlements became a serious problem for the United States. Officials in Washington and Natchez fretted over how to remove them, and Indian headmen—most of whom were slaveholding elites who did not like the competition they represented—frequently complained about their presence. U.S. agent Return Jonathan Meigs, who was tasked with the job of eliminating squatters in Chickasaw country, reported in 1809 that he had removed “201 families,” which had been well established when he found them. He assured the Secretary of War that they were far from an uncivilized rabble and were “rich in Cattle and horses—no hunting [and] agriculture [is] their sole pursuit.” One year later, U.S. Chickasaw Agent James Neely reported “from four to five thousand white persons [were] settled within the Indian Boundary.” By 1820, historian Gary Zellar figures eighty-five thousand whites and forty-two thousand


54 Return J. Meigs to the Acting Secretary of War, June 12, 1809, in Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., The Territorial Papers of the United States, Volume V: The Territory of Mississippi, 1798–1817 (Washington, 1937; hereinafter cited as Territorial Papers), 739.

55 Governor Holmes to the Secretary of War, February 7, 1810, Territorial Papers, 44–45.
blacks (most of whom were enslaved) resided in Creek country. The majority of them lived there illegally.\textsuperscript{56}

Despite complaints by Indian councils and government officials to the contrary, many of the interactions that resulted from such close proximity were not unwanted, especially by the parties involved. Native and non-native people were not only enemies and rivals, but also business partners and kin. Indian country was no longer a world-apart by the early nineteenth-century. Migrants made their homes along the Gulf South’s interior rivers and streams regardless of legal prohibitions. Historians have noted this, but they continue to focus primarily on official Indian resistance to the use of their lands by white settlers.\textsuperscript{57} When arguing that Creeks were “quick to avenge any violation of their land rights,” for example, anthropologist Robbie Ethridge posits that “day-to-day life in Creek country…was underscored by a tension that consistently threatened to rend the fabric of life.” Yet she goes on to note that most of these Euro-American squatters adopted Indian farming practices and with the resulting produce participated in the local exchange economy. They also engaged in small-scale cotton production and practiced free-range cattle herding “like the Creeks.” It is exceedingly unlikely that squatters mirrored the techniques and practices of their Indian neighbors without at least occasional free, active, and positive interactions with them as well. This likelihood necessarily softens portrayals of Euro-Native interaction as defined by tension and violence. Indeed, Ethridge rightly asserts that these settlers freely and frequently “engaged in a frontier

\textsuperscript{56} Zellar, \textit{African Creeks}, 21.
\textsuperscript{57} Certainly, violence characterized many intercultural relationships, especially in the contested region surrounding the Flint, Oconee, and Ogeechee Rivers between Creek country and Georgia. While extremely important, violence only described a portion of such relationships. See Pulley Hudson, \textit{Creek Paths and Federal Roads}, 30–31.
exchange economy with Creeks and other southeastern Indians, as well as freemen and black slaves.”

Nearer the Mississippi River, squatters in the Natchez area adopted conceptions of land use and rights that far more closely resembled those of their Indian neighbors than those of other Euro-Americans outside Indian country. Anglo-American outsiders found white squatters’ ideas about land ownership just as unusual and perhaps even as “primitive” as the ideas of Native Americans. These white “intruders” participated in the peltry trade during its waning years, thus profiting, at least minimally, from the most “native” of economic pursuits. 58 One archaeologist found that nineteenth-century settlement patterns were increasingly integrated—after 1800 white homesteads were invariably found in the same locations as Creek farms all across the region. 59 No doubt, violence and tension were important, omnipresent realities for Gulf southerners. But Indians and Euro-Americans, two supposedly distinct communities, also cooperated, learned, and benefited from each other as well.

Though peltry trading largely declined as an impetus for Euro-Americans to reside in the Gulf South interior, this did not entirely eliminate individual migrants who desired to actually integrate into Indian communities, not simply farm next to them. Some men appeared to leave everything when they did so, with little in the record to explain seemingly rash actions toward the people they left behind. In 1790 Natchez planter Samuel Martin agreed to purchase a plantation from Robert Abrams that included “a house, kitchen and sundry negro cabins and tobacco house, the crop in the ground, 25 head of cattle, [and] 93 hogs,” for $1250. Martin planned a $300 down payment. At the

58 Morris, Becoming Southern, 14–20, 24–47.
time, he had a wife and children. Less than a year later, however, Martin had emigrated to live among the Chickasaws, leaving his family and obligations behind. When a court-appointed courier found him in 1791, with letters from his wife and Abrams begging him to return, he informed the messenger he had no intention of doing so. “There is nothing to prevent my wife from marrying again for I will not return to live with her again. It may be that I shall return in the course of the winter to see my children but never will I live with my wife again. I am settled here [among the Chickasaws] and intend to remain. Tell my wife that she may manage my concerns as if they were her own.” It is tempting to think Martin moved in order to simply avoid creditors or family obligations, though he does not seem to have been deeply in debt. He told his wife that his debts could all be paid off at once “out of the tobacco which I have [already] in Town.”

Other individuals like Martin who entered Indian country must have seen it much the same way many enslaved viewed it—as a place of escape, either from fiscal hardship, familial problems, or something else. A judge in Spanish Natchez “proceeded to an inventory and appraisement” of William Dueitt’s estate in 1784, “in consequence of [his] meditated flight” into Indian country “with the intent to avoid the payment of debts.” Included in the household Dueitt left behind were seven enslaved men and women between the ages of seven and thirty-eight who went to the highest bidders. While

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60 Petition of Robert Abrams regarding Samuel Martin’s purchase of his plantation, July 12, 1790, Natchez Court Records, 79; Deposition of Baker, August 1, 1791, Natchez Court Records, 79.
61 Inventory of the estate of William Dueitt, August 21, 1784, Natchez Court Records, 27. Each of Dueitt’s seven enslaved individuals went to different buyers. Whether any of these people were related or not, it is likely that at least some of them were close with one another. Thus William Dueitt’s flight to Indian country not only saved him (at least temporarily) from his creditors, it also broke up relationships, perhaps even families and marriages, of the African and African American members of his household.
Dueitt left his property behind, others who escaped into Indian country took theirs with them. Plaintiff Berryman Watkins “obtained a judgement against William Smith formerly a citizen of this territory . . . but now a resident among the Chactaws,” for unpaid debts. According to Watkins, Smith had property that could be confiscated to make a partial payment, but because Smith had it with him in Choctaw country, the Mississippi Territorial government “has no authority to take the cognizance of the case, and hence it results that the creditor cannot obtain his money.” The governor thereafter asked the U.S. Secretary of War to immediately “[clothe] the agent [if Indian Affairs] with powers to coerce payment by delinquent debtors who have or may take refuge in the Indian country,” which remained a continuous problem into the nineteenth century.\footnote{Acting Governor T. H. Williams to Secretary of War, April 24, 1809, in Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., \textit{The Territorial Papers of the United States: Volume V: The Territory of Mississippi, 1798–1817} (Washington, D.C., 1937), 730.}

The Gulf South interior remained largely out of reach of the law, and it thus offered a potential escape from legal troubles. Timothy Barnard complained to Georgia that fugitives from the state often arrived to join growing bands of transient criminals and were often blamed for thefts and crimes that occurred in the backcountry. Previously these bands had consisted primarily of disaffected Indians, but by 1786 “there [was] a great many White people in the Nation that [were] turned as bad as the Indians” in this regard.\footnote{Timothy Barnard to Edward Telfair, August 22, 1786, Timothy Barnard Letters, 61.} Benjamin Hawkins grew frustrated with these groups as well, and bands of “red and white” horse thieves remained a persistent problem for the Indian Agency. As late as 1806 Hawkins informed Thomas Jefferson that he had finally managed to formally try “two white men” who had stolen a “valuable mare from a traveler.” According to Hawkins, they were “part of a banditti forming in this quarter to live by theft,” and he
looked forward to making “a few more [such] examples…on red, white and black people…which will [finally] render travelling secure among us.” Though arranged by Hawkins, this was a trial conducted under Creek authority, at least officially. After the Americans gained de jure possession of the Mississippi Territory, the legal status of those who escaped debts in Indian country created questions about jurisdiction and the reach of American law. For instance, Berryman Watkins sued William Smith, “formerly a citizen of this Territory…but now a resident among the Chactaws,” for unpaid debts in 1809. The government appealed to U.S. Choctaw Agent Silas Dinsmoor to compel Smith’s cooperation, but Dinsmoor explained that he had “no authority” to do so. Once Smith claimed membership in his new native community, he effectively removed himself from Dinsmoor’s legal grasp.

Some Euro-Americans who passed into Indian country never intended to be permanent residents, but their presence nevertheless presented opportunities for cross cultural relationships and added to the Gulf South’s growing ethnic mosaic. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the speedy growth of coastal commerce centers like New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Natchez, and Mobile meant that the Gulf South interior became a virtual thoroughfare for both goods and people. While attempting to preach in the Chickasaw towns in 1800, missionary Joseph Bullen noted the consistent presence of

64 Benjamin Hawkins to Thomas Jefferson, September 13, 1806, *Hawkins Letters*, 507; A Creek court arranged by Hawkins forced the two white men in question to pay the traveller for the price of the horse (presumably they had already sold it to another and it was unavailable to simply be returned), as well as the expenses of the witnesses who had travelled to testify. Finally, they received “twenty lashes each on their bare backs.”

65 Acting Governor T.H. Williams to the Secretary of War, April 24, 1809, *Territorial Papers*, 730. In order to curtail this recurrent and frustrating problem, Governor Williams asked that U.S. Indian agents be granted “powers to coerce payment by delinquent debtors who have or may take refuge in the Indian country.”
a large number of “men from Orleans [Territory], mostly Kentucky people; not less than
one thousand annually pass this way on their return from market. They go down the
Mississippi with their produce, then get horses and return” via the federal road through
Chickasaw country. 66 These men likely relied on the Chickasaws for food, shelter, and
probably other necessities such as directions and medical care (Bullen also mentioned
that many of the men arrived “sick” from New Orleans). Far from a bounded space with
separate Indian and non-Indian spheres, the emerging Deep South had a great deal of
cultural and demographic diversity. Even in 1819, English traveler Adam Hodgson, then
in eastern Alabama, could still remark that “at the edges of the creeks, and on the banks
of the rivers, we usually found a curious collection of sans [s]oucis, sulkies, carts . . . little
planters, Indians, [and] Negro horses.” 67

Scholars often cite Indian leaders when arguing that such intruders symbolized
the retreat of Indians themselves, both literally and figuratively. But if Indian country
became a thoroughfare, it was not in spite of native Gulf southerners, but largely because
of their presence. They provided accommodations and supplies for travelers and
migrants—whether they stopped and settled in the interior or moved on towards urban
centers along the coasts and major rivers—which helped to knit the region together in
new ways and thereby helped facilitate integration of the Gulf South into the United
States. As demonstrated in the example of the horse theft trial above, Indians eventually
took a vested interest in making trade paths safe for travellers. Locals also aided in the
construction of new infrastructure. When Benjamin Hawkins testified that the stage route

67 “Journal of Joseph Bullen, 254–81; Hawkins to Henry Dearborn, December 18, 1801,
Works of Hawkins, 410-11; Adam Hodgson, Remarks During a Journey Through North
America in the Years 1819, 1820, and 1821... (New York, 1823), 146–47.
planned by the U.S. through Creek country was geographically infeasible, he based his recommendation on information he solicited from “Indian hunters and white people” who were best “acquainted with the country.” When construction on the project began, it was Creek men who helped the U.S. surveyor “cut thro the swamps.”  

Not only did Indians and other Gulf southerners help build the Deep South; they were partially responsible for enabling its assimilation into the United States more generally.

When migrants streamed into the region after 1810, Gulf southerners smoothed their journeys by opening ferries for river crossings and taverns for room and board. Creek headman William McIntosh operated a ferry that crossed the Chattahoochee at Coweta. By 1807 he also owned a tavern, which he built “at the most direct and proper place at the upper end of Coweta town, near the falls,” and sheltered travelers headed into Alabama and Mississippi. Chickasaw James Colbert operated a ferry service across the Tombigbee River by 1808. In 1801 the U.S. Postmaster complained that an Indian who kept the ferry across the Tennessee, in northern Mississippi, was often not there and charged too much money, which slowed the progress of the mail. Migrant settlers and the U.S. mail continued to rely on native Gulf southerners well into the nineteenth century, and the Creek National Council eventually agreed to regularize ferry crossings in 1818. “Hitherto they ha[d] been held by the Indians of Certain towns, and were a subject of constant complaint as well on account of extravagant rates being often demanded, [and] of negligence and inattention by which travelers were detained.”

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68 Benjamin Hawkins to Thomas Jefferson, September 13, 1806, Hawkins Letters, 507.
69 Benjamin Hawkins to Henry Dearborn, January 22, 1807, Hawkins Letters, 511; For more on McIntosh and his operation, see Saunt, A New Order of Things, 217.
70 Slave Contracts between Brown, Colbert, and Cobb, April 25, 1794, and William Cobb vs. Arthur Cobb, January 1795, Natchez Court Records, 101 and 203; Snyder, Slavery in
Eisenach described crossing the Chattahoochee River “in one of the ferries belonging to
the Indians and kept in order by them,” as well as crossing a number of smaller streams
“at which we were obliged to pay the Indian toll.”

Native peoples played a vital role in the development of mail service in the
American Southeast. For over a century colonial settlements along the Gulf Coast
remained relatively isolated from other North American ports. Travelers and traders
going overland relied exclusively on well-worn but diffuse trading paths that networked
Indian country. Cities like New Orleans, Mobile, and Pensacola often had better
communication with correspondents in the Caribbean than with those on the Atlantic
seaboard. In the vast majority of cases, both migrants and messages arrived on the
southern coast via water transport—first through the Gulf of Mexico and later, the
Mississippi River. After the United States gained control of the Mississippi Territory,
Indian towns became crucial waypoints for overland postal riders. The mail passed

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Indian Country, 185–96; Chapman, Chief William McIntosh; Edmund P. Gaines to
Secretary of War, January 29, 1808, in Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., The Territorial
Papers of the United States, Volume 5: The Territory of Mississippi, 1798–1817
(Washington, 1937; hereinafter cited as Territorial Papers), 598–602; Postmaster
General to Secretary of War, March 12, 1801, Ibid., 118–19; David B. Mitchell to the
Secretary of War, February 3, 1818, Territorial Papers, 242–47. This is also a good
example of the centralization of Indian authority structures in the wake of Saunt’s “New
Order.”  
72 Pulley Hudson, Creek Paths and Federal Roads, 74–79.
73 Partly this resulted from the fact that the nations who claimed the Gulf Coast for most
of its colonial history, France and Spain had little appreciable presence on the Atlantic
Coast, and thus the Gulf’s inhabitants had greater connections with fellow imperial ports
in the West Indies and Central America. During the brief British tenure in West Florida,
Anglo-American planters and merchants had strong connections to South Carolina,
Georgia, etc. See Fabel, Economy of British West Florida; and McMichael, Atlantic
Loyalties. Still, the majority of contact with the rest of colonial America occurred via
ocean travel around the tip of Florida. For Euro-Americans, this made travel between
Pensacola and Havana more efficient than between Pensacola and Charleston, despite the
distance of the latter being far shorter on paper.
through both Coweta and Tookaubatchee in the early years on its way to New Orleans, Mobile, and Pensacola, and the federal road between Nashville and Natchez passed directly through the Chickasaw towns. In 1799 as American officials considered possible routes for riders, their over-arching constraint was the location of Indian towns. “The way proposed at present would be from Natchez through the Nocksaby, a Choctaw Town,” Winthrop Sargent wrote. “Tis much the same Distance by the Big Town of the Chickasaws.”

Early post riders were often Indians or people of color, much to the chagrin of American officials. Benjamin Hawkins—a man as race-conscious as any American at the time, perhaps even more so—explained to Thomas Jefferson why he could not employ white riders. “The white people here are few in number, generally fugitives from labour and not to be relied on…. Our present riders from Coweta are half breeds, they are faithful and I have directed such to be employed in all things wherein they can be useful.” The U.S. Postmaster General Gideon Granger decried the use of “negroes or people of color in transporting the public mails” in 1802, a practice he feared would allow enslaved black Americans to develop informal communication networks and to acquire intelligence of other kinds, possibly planting the seeds for future insurrections. Granger’s concerns were not addressed. By 1807 the continued use of non-white mail carriers compelled the U.S. postmaster to explicitly forbid his subordinate in the Lower

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74 Winthrop Sargent to Timothy Pickering, April 20, 1799, *Territorial Papers*, 140.
Creek towns from employing black men as riders. Though the United States hoped to quickly transition to white riders as well as ferrymen and tavern owners, official Indian hostility towards American encroachment made this difficult. William McIntosh, who hoped to profit from the route by having it pass by his ferry and tavern, was especially insistent that Indians and “halfbreeds” remain in control of the paths through Indian country.

In addition to roads, ferries, and taverns, native locals also demonstrated an interest in the infrastructure and development of cotton agriculture, including cotton gins, spinning wheels, and looms. Despite the scarcity of cotton gins, Indian country residents managed to acquire them. If Eli Whitney’s claim to its invention in 1793 is taken at face value, then the machine arrived in the region extremely quickly. A Natchez resident named John Barclay obtained the region’s first gin in 1795. Less than one year later, Robert Grierson had one and used it to clean his own cotton as well as that grown by members of his extended family. Choctaw headman Robert McClure asked that the United States furnish his people with a gin in 1801, explaining that though his nation had once rejected the offer of a gin, they now thought it necessary. He couched his request in language intended to pander to the Plan of Civilization by saying “We halfbreeds and young men wish to go to work, and the sooner we receive [gins] the sooner we will begin

77 Hawkins to Thomas Jefferson, September 13, 1806, and Hawkins to Henry Dearborn, January 22, 1807, Hawkins Letters, 507 and 511; Postmaster General to the President, August 4, 1806, Territorial Papers, 472–74; Postmaster General to Dennison Darling, February 16, 1807, Ibid., 511–15. See also Pulley Hudson, Creek Paths and Federal Roads, 73–74.
79 Morris, Becoming Southern, 29.
to learn.” The United States provided a gin to Benjamin Hawkins in response to the growing number of Creeks producing cotton by 1809. Some were so eager for its arrival that they followed its progress as it moved up the Flint River toward the Agency. Within a month Hawkins reported that surrounding Creek farmers and planters brought in enough cotton that it was in use about “two or three days” per week. Within four months, it operated “almost daily and lately we have had cotton packed on horses [from as far away as] 120 miles to be gined.” This occurred throughout the winter and spring of 1810, and thus Creek farmers must have been bringing cotton harvested during the previous fall. In other words, word of mouth, not the harvest season, was responsible for the increasing amounts arriving to be cleaned. At the same time Hawkins noted that the demand for spinning wheels, looms, and other materials had soared. One year later, in early 1811, Creeks had manufactured “nearly thirty” looms of their own (in addition to twenty others furnished by the Agency), though he declared them “imperfectly made and wrought.” By that time, a handful of Chickasaw headmen, who reported they had grown cotton for the past two seasons, began asking for looms and other items for their towns.

By the second decade of the nineteenth century, native peoples in the Gulf South had been totally transformed in the space of only about fifty years. While the forces of an external market economy—deerskins and trade goods—had exerted a profound influence in Indian society for much longer than that, native Gulf southerners in 1760 still relied on

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80 Robert McClure to Indian Commissioners, December 12, 1801, Works of Hawkins, 406; O’Brien, Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age, 104.

81 Cotton is generally ready to be picked in October.


83 Benjamin Hawkins to William Eustis, February 24, 1811, Hawkins Letters, 583.
subsistence farming, hunting, and local exchange for their daily bread; Most features of Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw culture, though under stress, had remained in force. But the peltry economy combined with emerging notions of private ownership and gave way to cattle herds and chattel slavery, and these paved the way for budding cotton production and an embryonic plantation system. With the advent of livestock in the 1770s, and of cotton in the 1790s and 1800s, the Gulf South by the 1810s was utterly transformed in multiple, interconnected ways—economically but also socially, ethnically, culturally, politically, and even racially. It had changed so quickly that some individuals might not have recognized the Gulf South of their own childhood.

William McIntosh was born sometime in the mid-1770s into a world where hunting remained the primary male occupation and women retained responsibility for agricultural labor—into a world in which animals and fields and food were possessed by the community, but not owned by anyone. McIntosh spent his childhood in this world. But by the time he himself was old enough to hunt, livestock and ranching were already pervasive. By the time he was thirty, cotton was well on its way to becoming king. A thoroughly capitalistic McIntosh veered sharply away from his Indian grandparents’ way of life. He became a planter himself, and he opened built ferries and a tavern to facilitate and profit from the people who arrived in Creek country in the nineteenth century—people arriving precisely because of that cotton’s potential. William McIntosh’s son, Chilly, also a Coweta headman, owned a cotton plantation and at least seventy people as slaves by the 1820s—far more property and people than the vast majority of his Anglo-American neighbors. The McIntosh family lived and worked in a Creek country that their immediate ancestors would have viewed as utterly foreign. But the McIntoshes had
helped to build it. It was not foreign. It was still the Native South, even as it was also the Deep South.\textsuperscript{84}

Gulf southerners—of many ethnicities and ancestries—were of course not entirely responsible for the rise of the American Deep South. However, their influence was crucial. From pioneering the techniques and infrastructure necessary for cotton agriculture, to contributing to regional developments like river transport and navigation, road construction, and communication—Euro-Americans, Indians, Africans, free men, and slaves together initiated the transformation of an entire region. Moreover, they did so as native locals and as a result of their own initiative. Often, their participation was not strictly voluntary, and their living conditions were rarely entirely of their own making. Still, the fundamental seeds of change were well sown before large numbers of Anglo- and forced African American migrants became demographically and culturally dominant in the region. By employing a perspective that recognizes that both Indians and settlers lived and worked in relation to one another, we see that the emergence of an antebellum plantation society in Alabama and Mississippi was in large part a grassroots phenomenon forged by Indians and other native inhabitants as much as by Anglo-American migrants. Thus, we must remember that native peoples, too, were southerners.

\textsuperscript{84} For information on the McIntoshes, see Snyder, \textit{Slavery in Indian Country}, 238–40; Chapman, \textit{Chief William McIntosh}; and Benjamin W. Griffith Jr., \textit{McIntosh and Weatherford: Creek Indian Leaders} (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1988).
CHAPTER 4:

Both Person and Property: The Transformation of Slavery in Indian Country and West Florida, 1770–1812

Slavery was a feature of life in the Gulf South well before Europeans arrived on the continent. Native American slavery, however, was originally far different from the African chattel slavery eventually brought by Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Slaves in Indian society were not property—indeed, into the eighteenth century, Indians in the Gulf South did not, technically speaking, believe in owning property of any sort, let alone other people. Slaves, almost always captives taken in wars or raids against other native groups, could hope to be adopted into the community, and to establish kin relationships, whether fictive or real. Of course, slavery could also be violent and brutal. Captives were often tortured and killed for the spiritual power they possessed. Slaves were, in a way, non-entities in the native South. By virtue of being captives, they had no kin connections, and therefore they had no power, no person. So, though slaves were not property and their captivity was not based on their skin color or some other proto-racial characteristic, slavery, violence, and inequality were nonetheless indelibly linked from an early stage in the Gulf South. And ideas about slavery and captivity inevitably evolved in Native Gulf South society, where the fall of the Mississippian chiefdoms in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had thrown the entire region into turmoil. Native Americans were no strangers to rapid change, nor to adopting new ideas, at the time they discovered Europe.¹

¹ Christina Snyder, Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), ch. 1; Alan Gallay, The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670–1717 (New Haven, Conn., 2002); Robbie Ethridge and Sheri M. Shuck-Hall, eds., Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone:
Initially, Europeans in Carolina and lower Louisiana not only eagerly participated in the Indian slave trade they also accelerated it. Indian captives were in as high demand as Indian deerskins, and they were either put to work in tobacco fields or sent to work on sugar plantations in the Caribbean, creating a destructive cycle of violence and war in the Gulf South. In the mid-eighteenth century, Indian slavery in the region was on the wane, but the interactions that had resulted in that trade, combined with rising numbers of Europeans and enslaved Africans in Georgia, the Floridas, and trans-Appalachian Tennessee meant that native Gulf southerners began encountering more and more enslaved and runaway African Americans. As racially based slavery rooted along the coasts, the ideology and logic behind the growing institution filtered into Indian country. Runaways made their way to Indian country towns, and some were eventually integrated into Indian communities. But by the late eighteenth century, a growing number of native Gulf southerners began to embrace the chattel slavery practiced by their European and Euro-American neighbors. Those who did so were the same individuals and families that began embracing other new ideas—private property, profit, and commercial agriculture in the form of livestock and, by the end of the century, cotton. There was no real border between Indian nations and European colonies in the Gulf South, and slavery practices and ideas about racial difference seeped across porous borderlands just as thoroughly as did other aspects of Native American and European culture.

Between the 1770s and the 1810s, slavery was a fact of life across the Gulf South. At the beginning of that period, slavery in Indian country was fundamentally different from the racially based bondage that existed in Euro-American communities. Over

*The Colonial Indian Slave Trade and Regional Instability in the American South* (Lincoln, Neb., 2009).
subsequent decades, though, inhabitants in the interior increasingly adopted new ideas about racial difference and about private property. This occurred in concert with the final decline of deerskins and the rise of newly important agricultural commodities that were suited to the use of slave labor. Elite native southerners like Alexander McGillivray, William McIntosh, and Chilly McIntosh enslaved dozens and even hundreds of African Americans. Others owned only a few. But the notion that black people were uniquely fit to the condition—an unprecedented idea in Indian polities—permeated the sociocultural landscape. Some native Gulf southerners—notably the Red Sticks and the Seminoles—thoroughly rejected the equation of blackness and bondage, and did their best to live as older generations of Gulf southerners had done. Most, however, whether consciously or not, adopted the new cultural imperatives, including plantation slavery, adapting to change much as their ancestors had done for thousands of years. In so doing, they transformed their society. Where hunting had once been the predominant commercial activity, Indian country residents replaced it with livestock and cotton, cleared grazing lands and open cotton fields. Slavery in Hillabee and Coweta became less distinguishable from slavery in Mobile and Natchez. Native Gulf southerners brought slavery into the Gulf South interior. They thereby erected the framework upon which the region’s full transformation into the Deep South would rest.

Of course, Africans would never have been enslaved in Indian country if they had not first been brought across the Atlantic to North America. Native Americans were perhaps the first Deep southerners, but Europeans were the first to arrive in the region in hopes of using Africans as chattel to construct a successful new plantation regime. The coastal Gulf South, however, presented a challenging environment for such a project.
Indeed, a Euro-American slave society would not come to full fruition, outside of the Lower Mississippi Valley, until well into the nineteenth century. Most of the soil along the coast was either too sandy or otherwise too infertile to give rise to large plantations, and European colonies—both British and Spanish—remained demographically and militarily weak relative to their more powerful and numerous native neighbors. So weak, in fact, that the only people who could take advantage of the fertile soil in the Gulf South interior were native Gulf southerners.

As early as the 1760s, the British regime in West Florida attempted to regulate slavery in much the same fashion as it had in other British colonies, “where custom has prevailed to distinguish [Africans’] color for the badge of slavery.” Much like legislative bodies in Virginia, South Carolina, and others, the British West Florida Assembly dictated strict laws stating that slave status “shall follow the condition of the mother”; that slaves could not leave the limits of “Pensacola, Mobile, or any other town” without a pass; and that delineated specific corporal and mortal punishments for a variety of slave offenses—from striking whites to running away.\(^2\) In practice, of course, such laws meant little. In reality, sparse settlement and paltry enforcement capabilities meant that slaves in the Gulf South before the nineteenth century were highly mobile. Some even experienced a degree of autonomy that would have been unheard of in late-eighteenth-century Charleston or Savannah, and they learned valuable skills in the process. White slaveholders were averse to giving slaves freedom of movement in the abstract. But in reality, the demands of a frontier colonial society forced whites to rely on them for a

variety of roles, and enslaved Africans and African Americans became crucial to West Florida colonial life from an early period.³

Poor or nonexistent infrastructure, for instance, allowed many to become experts at navigating the region’s multiple, complex waterways. Early in the eighteenth century, slaves regularly piloted boats on the Mobile, Pascagoula, and Pearl Rivers, which made movement between coastal communities possible. In Mobile, twelve slaves, owned by the colonial government, officially plied local waters for this purpose, leaving them free from white supervision for long stretches of time. When in the early 1770s William Bartram departed a plantation at the mouth of the Pearl River on his way to New Orleans, several enslaved men served as his guides. He set out “in a large handsome boat” with the help of “three Negroes.” The men’s owner, a planter named “Mr. Rumey,” lent them to Bartram because they knew how to navigate the creeks and “winding . . . marshes, in to Lake Pontchartrain.”⁴ Presumably, Rumey fully expected his bondmen to return, unsupervised and unmolested, after seeing Bartram safely to his destination.

Some slaves were able to purchase their mobility, if not their freedom, by earning their own money. In the Sandy Creek District, east of Pensacola, in 1794, for example, one enslaved man arranged to “hire himself from his master to trade for himself.” The

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³ In many ways, this mirrored the development of many North American slave societies, in which, before the escalation of the plantation economy (and sometimes even afterwards) slave owners relied on their bondpeople for the efficient operations of communities. The example of South Carolina is the clearest parallel. See Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, 1974) and Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, and Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Low Country, 1740–1790* (New York, 1998).

“negro man” agreed to provide his owner, William Lee, with a portion of his profits in return for, essentially, being largely left alone. “[T]he said William had wrote a free pass for the negro” so that he could move about the region as he pleased, though what goods he traded in were not recorded. Thus enslaved men and women could function as actors in the local exchange economy as well. They both produced and transported foodstuffs and petty goods between scattered estates and coastal communities. William Lee provided his man with a permanent pass, thus maintaining the patina of authority in the master-slave relationship, even if, in reality, the man was his own master on a day-to-day basis.

Those who regulated slavery in the coastal settlements employed—or at least attempted to employ—mechanisms of labor discipline that mirrored those in Virginia, Carolina, New Orleans, and the Caribbean. In short, eighteenth-century migrants to the Gulf South from other slave societies wanted to reproduce the structure of those societies in their new homes. Shortly after the British takeover of West Florida, in 1766, British Army officer Captain Harry Gordon noted the evidence of chattel slavery scattered along the coast between Lake Pontchartrain and Mobile Bay, despite the sparse population and a landscape ill-suited to plantations, or even agriculture in general. The few slaveholders who lived there managed to find other ways to take advantage of enslaved labor. “We Landed several Times and Saw the Shore the whole way . . . The few inhabitants being only Six on this Tract of Country, that is near 100 Miles in Length, having Numbers of Black Cattle; Any Quantity of Tar or Turpentine may be easily made; One Crips,

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employs a dozen Negroes on this account.” Slaves could be used in a variety of profitable activities beyond the production of indigo, tobacco, cotton, or sugar. Livestock, lumber, and naval stores, in this instance, were valuable commodities, both locally and throughout the Atlantic world. When Gordon entered Mobile Bay ten days later, however, he found that the soil there was much more fertile and believed “it will fetch Corn and Cotton . . . and Excellent Pasturage.” Still, livestock, lumber, and naval stores remained the easiest ways to take advantage of enslaved labor, even in the fertile portions of coastal West Florida. Outside Mobile, “An Inhabitant called Rochon, has by repute above 1000 Head of black Cattle, he has likewise a Number of Negroes, who he chuses chiefly to Employ on the Tar and Lumber.”

The slaveholder that Gordon described was most likely Augustin Rochon, the head of an old Mobile creole family. Augustin Rochon died sometime before 1781, but he must have left his widow, Luisa, with large slave and property holdings. She appears repeatedly in the Mobile Catholic church’s “colored” baptismal book as the owner of dozens of slaves. She also seemed to feel heavily invested in her bondpeoples’ souls, as she had the vast majority of them baptized. She owned at least thirty-two people in 1795. All-encompassing racial divides, however, remained both impractical and probably undesirable as well. By the early nineteenth century, the Rochon name had name crossed the color line, as the baptismal books record an extensive branch of free people of color with that name by the 1810s. Belarise Rochon, for instance, was designated as a free

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woman of color who baptized her own son in 1813. Erena Rochon, another free woman of color, acted as godmother to the daughter of another family of color in 1818. After 1783, when Spain gained control of the Floridas from Britain, enslaved persons had access to the legal system. In Spanish Natchez, some took advantage of this to seek their freedom. In March 1789 two women named Betty and Jude asked the court to free them, arguing that they were the “daughters of a free woman in Carolina” and had been “bound as apprentices,” for unknown reasons, in the English Atlantic colonies “by Court of Judicature until they should arrive to the age of 21.” They subsequently stated they had been taken in an unspecified raid during the Revolutionary War and “were sold here [in Natchez] as slaves. The Petitioners have served the whole time of their indenture and several years more, [and] ask to be liberated.” In 1793 an enslaved woman named Molly directly petitioned Spanish governor Arturo O’Neill for her freedom. Molly testified that she had been “the property of the late Jacob Leaphart,” a Natchez resident who had just died after a long illness. Molly not only took care of Leaphart during that time, but she had also managed his financial and business affairs— and she apparently managed them well. “She having by it and her own management within a few years paid the great part of his debt,” Molly claimed that “it was [Leaphart’s] intention to give [Molly] her freedom, which he communicated on his death bed to different persons.” Before he could record this in his will, though, “it pleased the Almighty to withdraw him from hence.” Molly received her freedom, despite the fact that Leaphart still had a several

8 Freedom Petition of Betty and Jude, August 27, 1794, *Natchez Court Records*, 255.
outstanding debts. While it is tempting to think the governor was moved by her petition, the more likely scenario is that she was simply too old to be valuable. “The Principal creditors of her said late master . . . [were] willing to give their consent that she be set at liberty” because Molly was “near seventy years old.” Just because slaves could use the legal system under Spanish law, did not mean they were not still considered chattel. 

Before the 1790s, individual Euro-American slaveholders struggled to find profitable ways to employ enslaved laborers. Scots-American transplant William Dunbar eventually became one of the first cotton planters in the Natchez district. But during the 1770s and 1780s, he primarily employed his slaves in making barrel staves, which he shipped to West Indian sugar plantations for the construction of hogsheads. Dunbar, who owned dozens of enslaved men and women, kept a work diary during the 1770s that commonly included matter-of-fact entries such as “Ten hands sawing, 5 cutting in the morning and 7 after breakfast,” and “Made 2 hundred staves & a half hundred heading . . . Negroes employed falling White Oaks and sawing.”

Dunbar grew a very small amount of indigo and corn, for subsistence purposes, but for the most part his daily life as a slaveholder was much more akin to managing a manufacturing workforce than an agricultural one.

In perhaps the most significant way, however, Dunbar’s slaveholding experience was exactly like those of his South Carolina and New Orleans counterparts: he and his white slaveholding neighbors dealt with near constant resistance, and occasionally, overt rebellion, on the part of his bondpeople. This consisted primarily of passive and non-

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9 Petition of Molly, a negro woman, September 23, 1793, *Natchez Court Records*, 169.
violent forms of resistance. Nearly every day Dunbar noted that one or several slaves were “sick,” and often the same laborers became ill, got better, and became ill again in successive weeks. They also frequently ran away for short periods, thereby depriving Dunbar of their labor. In July 1776 “Ketty and Bessy ran away because they had received a little correction the former evening for disobedience.” The very next day, however, “Ketty came home herself, finding it uncomfortable lodging in the woods,” or so Dunbar reassured himself.\textsuperscript{11}

Dunbar seemed to be a particularly cruel master. He often brutally punished his laborers for even slight infractions. In August 1776, “All hands [were] employed as usual” except for the “Wench Bessy,” who had apparently been insubordinate and had been placed in “Irons.” Dunbar ordered her out of her restraints and given “25 lashes with a Cow Skin as a punishment and Example to the rest.”\textsuperscript{12} Dunbar was capable of being even more violent than that, however. When “two negroes ran away but were catched and brought back” Dunbar “condemned them to receive 500 lashes Each at 5 Different] times, and to carry a chain and log [attached] to the ankle.” One day Dunbar found “Adam” to be drunk, so he “ordered him to be confined” and given “500 lashes the next day in order to draw a Confession from him how he came by the Rum.” Once this was done Dunbar sentenced Adam to a similar punishment as the previous two workers, “a large Chain to be fixt to his leg which he has carried untill today,” but which had to be taken off; “his leg being swelled” and bleeding grotesquely. Apparently Adam had

\textsuperscript{11} Dunbar Diary, July 29 and 30, 1776, \textit{Papers of William Dunbar}, 29–30; This kind of “petit marronage,” in which periodic or episodic running away from plantations was not always a permanent attempt to escape bondage, was common in other parts of the Atlantic world. See Richard Price, ed., \textit{Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas} (Baltimore, 1996).

\textsuperscript{12} Dunbar Diary, August 3, 1776, \textit{Papers of William Dunbar}, 30.
proved rebellious enough that even Dunbar found no more purpose in physically brutalizing the man. “I intend carrying him to the Point Coupee, where I shall sell him if I find an opportunity.”

As the example of William Dunbar demonstrates, slavery was far from mild in Spanish West Florida. Frontier conditions did not necessarily result in better treatment, nor did ostensibly more humane Spanish slave codes grant Dunbar’s laborers any reprieve. Dunbar may well have been unusually cruel, but certainly no one challenged his ideas of labor discipline. Dunbar’s enslaved men and women proved so unruly that he mused about the causes in his journal. He confessed that they had him confounded and expressed exasperation at their ingratitude. “Poor Ignorant Devils; for what do they runaway? They are well cloathed, work easy, and have all kinds of Plantation produce at no allowance.” Dunbar further made cold calculations about profit and loss, even as the people he owned experienced horrible pain and death. In 1780, for instance, “Cato was seized with” stomach pains caused by an unknown illness and, within a week, died “after suffering excruciating pains,” in Dunbar’s words. Though he recognized human agony when he saw it, Dunbar expressed absolutely no concern for Cato’s physical suffering. On the contrary, his only remark was to cry that “this was the most likely negro upon the plantation and wou’d have fetched at Market a hundred pounds sterling.” Similar comments from Dunbar on the deaths of others of his slaves were common.

Dunbar, like many slave owners in the Atlantic world, also fancied himself something of an expert on black bodies. In 1803 he recommended to Thomas Jefferson

13 Dunbar Diary, April 12, 1777; and 55, December 12, 1777, Papers of William Dunbar, 46.
14 Dunbar Diary, April 12, 1777, Papers of William Dunbar, 46.
15 Death of Cato, Dunbar Diary, January 24, 1780, Papers of William Dunbar, 70–72.
that the U.S. government should employ “negros,” rather than “white laborers,” for the work of surveying the line between Spanish Florida and the Louisiana Purchase. African Americans, he averred, “will be more tractable and will execute much more labor.”\textsuperscript{16} He also made ostensibly discerning requests for specific African nationalities when he purchased slaves, preferring those from the “interior” of the continent, whom he had “always found more Civilized.”\textsuperscript{17}

In terms of his attitudes and understanding of racial difference, then, Dunbar was a quintessential British colonial slave owner. His vision of slavery, along with those of his Anglo-American counterparts in the region, introduced a marked contrast to more traditional notions about of slavery in the wider Gulf South. Dunbar, though, lived on the Mississippi, where the agricultural conditions were quite favorable for that area’s most productive crop, tobacco. Along the Gulf Coast, where tobacco would not grow, and in Indian country, where most continued to rely on deerskins, slavery looked markedly different. In the Mississippi Valley, white slaveholders were quite capable of erecting the rudiments of a European Atlantic slavery regime. As a slaveholder, however, Dunbar represented an exception to the more general rule; slavery in Natchez bore little resemblance to slavery elsewhere in the Gulf South before the 1790s.

Even in Natchez, any picture of real control over enslaved laborers was largely a fiction. Surrounding areas remained sparsely settled by Europeans. Try as they might, Dunbar and his fellow slaveholders could not control their laborers to the degree that they might have in other places in the second half of the eighteenth century. Natchez in the

\textsuperscript{16} William Dunbar to Thomas Jefferson, September 29, 1803, \textit{Papers of William Dunbar}, 125.
\textsuperscript{17} WDP William Dunbar to Tunno & Price, February 1, 1807, \textit{Papers of William Dunbar}, 351–52.
1770s and 1780s was small, at least in terms of its number of Euro-American inhabitants. And black bodies could not be monitored by white eyes for even most of the time. Slaves in British West Florida managed to covertly communicate with each other across miles of open country. In 1776, for instance, an unknown number of Dunbar’s enslaved men and women were conspirators and perhaps leaders in a rebellion scheme. “A very disagreeable and unexpected accident hath interfered and prevented the keeping of my journal with regularity as heretofore,” he wrote on July 12, after not recording an entry for twenty days. On June 24 “I was visited by my Neighbors Messrs. Ross, Francis, [and] Gordon; They informed me that a conspiracy among . . . [the] Negroes had been discovered and that it had [originated] at my House.” Though Dunbar had long treated his enslaved laborers severely, he professed being “surprise[d]” by the plot. “Of what avail is kindness and good usage when rewarded by such ingratitude; ‘tis true indeed they were kept under due subordination and obliged to do their duty in respect to plantation work, but two of the three [instigators] had always behaved so well that they never once received a stroke of the whip.” Dunbar and his fellow slaveholders rounded up the “Principalls” for interrogation. In the end most of the conspirators, and perhaps some who were not part of the plot, were captured. Most of them were hanged, including two of Dunbar’s slaves. He later noted that though “By a law of this Province, Masters of Negroes executed by order of a proper Court are entitled to receive their value of the Receiver General agreeable to an appraisment made by the Court . . . , At present there is no Assembly and consequently no mones can be raised.”

As in Pensacola, then, a well-regulated slave society existed on paper only, even on the Mississippi. Planters expressed that owners were entitled to compensation, but
they had no true ability to execute such regulations. The sparsely settled and frontier character of the Gulf South in the 1770s made traditional reimbursement promises useless, and underscored that, Dunbar’s plantation mastery to the contrary, slavery itself was regulated by a series of informal practices and relationships, rather than by the written, formal regulations.  

The conspiracy among the Natchez district’s enslaved people demonstrates that even though they were separated by miles of uninhabited territory, slaves were still able to communicate, organize, and maybe even form an underground community across space. Perhaps unexpectedly, this may have been precisely because plantation agriculture remained impractical in the Gulf South outside of the Mississippi Valley. Whether herding livestock in unfenced clearings or cutting timber in dense forests, slaves’ workdays must have left them relatively unsupervised. Few frontier slaveholders appear to have employed overseers, likely because there was a shortage of available white labor or because they could not afford them. This space and time to themselves would have allowed enslaved men and women multiple opportunities to move, talk, commiserate, and conspire with their fellows in bondage. Thus, while legislative assemblies, like those in Pensacola and Natchez, and white slaveholders, like Dunbar and his neighbors, made every effort to reproduce the circumscribed, well-regulated slave societies they were familiar with in other parts of the Americas, the Gulf South’s demographics and terrain made such a society impossible. In terms of day-to-day mobility, those who were enslaved in Euro-American communities in the Gulf South had much in common with their counterparts in Indian country, even while Indian and white racial ideologies

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remained quite dissimilar prior to the nineteenth century. The remote nature of the Gulf South interior had a leveling effect on regional slavery despite divergent ideas of what actually grounded slavery in the abstract. Even as West Florida whites did their best to restrict slaves; autonomy, the work in which they employed their bondpeople, the unenforceability of slave codes, and the weakness of colonial governments allowed them nearly as much freedom of movement as those enslaved to Creek and Choctaw masters.

The enslaved people who arrived in the Gulf South came from all over the Atlantic world. A 1781 inventory of Natchez planter John Alston’s estate included sixteen slaves. Eight had been born locally while one each had been born in North Carolina and Jamaica, three were “native[s] of Virginia,” and three had been born in Africa, including a thirty-seven-year-old woman named Mary, “of the Senegal Nation.”

There was also a twenty-nine-year-old named Magdelen from “the nation called ‘Nard.’” Records of slave sales usually noted bondpeople’s nativity. In addition to Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and the standard stand-in for Africa, “Guinea,” there were enslaved people from multiple African nations—the “Hibo Nation,” “the Congo Nation,” and “the Mandingo Nation”; from all over North America—including “New England,” Boston, and New Orleans; and from throughout the rest of the Atlantic World—Martinique, Jamaica, Cuba, and even England. In a region where diversity had become the rule, the enslaved population was certainly no exception. In 1807, William Dunbar

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19 Of course, slave conspiracies occurred in well-populated plantation societies as well. But we often think of them as products of black-majority regions—or, at least, planters at the time thought this. The example of the conspiracy surrounding Dunbar’s bondpeople did not occur in a black-majority area. Given their physical separation from nearby plantations, it is telling relatively that small populations of African Americans managed to organize and communicate across wide distances.

20 Inventory of the Alston Estate, July 29, 1781, Natchez Court Records, 1.

21 Slave sale receipts Natchez Court Records, 69, 71, 86, Books A, B.
inquired with Charleston slave traders Tunno & Price about purchasing several new slaves. He noted that Natchez slaveholders had developed preferences and dislikes of certain “nations” of slaves. “The Iboa nation lies under a prejudice here and may be excluded,” he told the Charleston company. He further noted a preference for men and women supposedly from the African interior, including “Bornon, Houssa, Zanfara, Zegzeg, Kapina, Tombootoo, all or near the river Niger.”

When peltry trader and planter John Turnbull died at the end of the eighteenth century the Spanish authorities took an inventory of his estate. In addition to landholdings in Baton Rouge, Bayou Sara, St. John’s Plains, Big Black, New Orleans, and Natchez, the inventory (written in French) listed 100 slaves. Most were recorded as local, “Creole”-born slaves (forty-eight). Forty of Turnbull’s slaves, however, were African, while seven were natives of South Carolina, four were from Jamaica, and one had been born in Georgia. The document also noted that some of them were skilled laborers and artisans. For example, American Will, born in “Guinea,” was a “good carpenter,” and a “Mulatre nomme Billy,” a fifty-year-old Jamaican, was a “cooper.” One entry for a thirty-year old man from Africa named Mahomet also suggests the possibility that at least one, if not more, of Turnbull’s slaves was Muslim. These men, women, and children were divided up between Turnbull’s widow and the widow of his previously deceased partner, John Joyce. Catherine Rucker Turnbull and Constance Rochon Joyce (a descendant of the same Mobile family as Augustin Rochon) split the remaining company property between themselves too, which included $15,994.20 in “land, buildings, and tools.” Finally, they inherited their husbands’ debtors. When John Turnbull died, the

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22 Of course, Dunbar’s “expertise” was nonsense. This did not keep him from imagining himself as informed on the imagined racial characteristics of Africans.
court concluded he was owed a total of $78,718, and his debtors included planter William Dunbar, peltry trader and planter Jacques Rapalje, peltry trader Daniel Clark, and forty-nine others.\textsuperscript{23} The deerskin trade and the burgeoning Gulf South cotton economy had made John Turnbull a very wealthy man.

Before the 1790s, many, perhaps even most, of the enslaved African Americans in the Gulf South were not plantation laborers, however—at least, not in the traditional sense. White slaveholders in Mobile and Pensacola used slave labor to manage cattle herds, work as woodsmen, and in a variety of other tasks—as messengers, guides, and even interpreters. As it happened, slaves in Indian country were employed in many of the exact same capacities. Native Gulf southerners and Euro-American immigrants may have still conceived of slavery in fundamentally different ways, but the actual work of slaves themselves was remarkably similar across the Gulf South—whether in Tuckaubatchee or Mobile, slaves found themselves herding animals, working in corn fields, and plying waterways and footpaths.

Slavery in Indian country from the 1770s through the 1790s remained overwhelmingly an informal condition—almost no Native American slaveholders had official bills of sale or titles to their slaves, and no written law kept them as such.\textsuperscript{24} Most slaves had either been captured during raids or had escaped to the interior only to be re-enslaved there. And slave status rarely acted as an anchor that tied individuals to the land,

\textsuperscript{23} "Inventory and Estimation" of estate of John Turnbull, May 5, 1800, Box 2, Folder 11, in Turnbull-Allain Family Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana (hereinafter cited as "Turnbull Papers").

\textsuperscript{24} On the evolution of slaves from person to property in Indian country, see Snyder, \textit{Slavery in Indian Country}, chs. 5–7; and Claudio Saunt, \textit{A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733–1816} (Cambridge, Eng, 1999), chs 5, 7.
especially outside of population centers. Indeed, many of the tasks masters required of slaves necessitated the freedom to move and act autonomously, a quasi-freedom that allowed some to develop sophisticated knowledge of regional geography. Enslaved persons served as interpreters, participated in the local exchange economy, and labored as messengers, pack horsemen, and cattle drivers.25 Long before there was a formal postal service in the region, the Panton & Leslie Company, for example, often used enslaved men to carry letters between their partners and traders. An enslaved man named Bazil worked as a runner for William Panton. During the 1790s he carried messages between Pensacola, Mobile, and Choctaw country. John Turnbull’s secretary, Charles Norwood, sent messages from New Orleans to his employer in Baton Rouge through an enslaved man named Polinard at the end of the eighteenth century.26

Individual traders and planters employed slaves as messengers as well. For instance, Timothy Barnard used a “negroe express” named Ned to send and receive messages to his connections among the Lower Creeks in 1795, and Robert Grierson used “[his] Negroe Pompey” as his runner between his plantation near Hillabee and William Panton’s house in Pensacola in 1797.27 Similarly, Panton used (and trusted) another man named Pompey (though he conceivably could have been the same person) to drive horses

25 The use of slaves as semi-autonomous laborers was common under frontier South conditions. See, for example, Peter Wood, Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion (New York, 1974), chaps. 4–7; Pulley Hudson, Creek Paths and Federal Roads, 73; Usner, Indians, Settlers and Slaves, chaps. 5–7. Slaves worked in a variety of other roles as well, including as boatmen and timber workers.
26 Charles Norwood to John Turnbull, May 16, 1798, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 3.
27 Timothy Barnard to George Mathews, January 21, 1795; Timothy Barnard to David Blackshear, October 14, 1795; Timothy Barnard to James Seagrove, December 18, 1795; all in Timothy Barnard Letters, 242, 248, and 256. Robert Grierson to William Panton, February 8, 1797, Cruzat Papers, Box 1, Folder 5.
between Mobile and Pensacola. This was not a simple task, as horse theft was among the most common crimes in the lightly populated interior regions. On one occasion in 1797, Panton instructed his associate, John Forbes, to provide an Indian to help Pompey protect the horses from “the vagabonds[,] White and Red thieves,” that preyed upon livestock trains. In addition to acquiring a good understanding of Gulf South geography, then, many messengers must also have developed relationships with the native Gulf southerners they met while moving through the borderlands between Indian country and European coastal settlements. Pompey undertook his journey in the company of an Indian. The two men, alone and traveling for days if not weeks, undoubtedly developed a relationship and maybe even a repaire.

Though some Indians had begun to plant cotton by the 1790s, cattle remained the dominant commodity replacing or supplementing deerskins in the Gulf South. For all its importance at expanding slavery in the Gulf South, livestock herding was still a practice that required bondpeople to be mobile. Rapidly growing herds of Creek cattle and horses demanded increasingly skilled management. For a variety of practical reasons, herd owners rarely fenced fields to contain their cattle and horses. When it came time to take them to market, the task of rounding up a herd, which had usually dispersed over a wide area, usually fell to slaves. These men became known as “cowhunters.” For example, according to the Panton & Leslie trader Daniel McGillivray, Creek rancher Mucklasawopay employed “a young Negro fellow” as his “cowhunter” in the 1790s, and he must have been highly skilled. When McGillivray asked that Mucklasawopay lend the company one of his cowhunters in 1799, he requested this man specifically.

28 William Panton to John Forbes, November 9, 1797, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.
Indian ranchers’ Euro-American counterparts often adopted this and other practices. When John Turnbull drove his cattle to market in Mobile, he did so with the help of his slaves, who he charged with rounding up and managing the herd as they moved. Many of the first whites settled near the Yazoo River became ranchers and small slaveholders. Like the Creeks, Chickasaws, and Choctaws, they saw little need to build fences on wide-open grazing land. This necessitated the use of laborers to round up their widely dispersed animals when it came time to lead them to market. This task often fell to their slaves, and those who grew especially skilled at “cow hunting” were highly valued.29 The emergence of skilled, enslaved cowhunters among Euro-American settlers was partially the result of the mingling of native and Euro-American cultures combined with influence from the Atlantic market. In another sense, however, cowhunters were a product of the economic and ecologic practicalities of raising livestock in the Gulf South—practicalities that applied to Indian and non-Indian alike. Owning cow-hunting slaves was common for ranchers of all ethnicities because it was an efficient system of herd management.30

Slaves were thus becoming increasingly vital for the efficient functioning of the Gulf South economy. When Indians depended on hunting and deerskins, they had no need for multiple enslaved laborers to work fields or manage herds. Men’s success or failure in obtaining valuable manufactured goods, and more importantly, prestige and honor, depended on the fruits of their own labor. Their sustenance depended on the labor

29 Some of them also participated in selling skins to traders, demonstrating more parallels between their life and Indians’ lives see Morris, Becoming Southern, 28.
30 Daniel McGillivray to William Panton, September 28, 1799, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4; Morris, Becoming Southern, 26–29, 35–36; Snyder, Slavery in Indian Country, 139–42, 188–189.
of women in corn fields. The declining viability of peltry, and the rising importance of livestock fundamentally altered this arrangement. Suddenly, with women increasingly relegated to domestic pursuits, Indian ranchers found that extra hands were an advantage. In a place where wage labor remained rare, slaves became valuable, and slavery became an important feature of the labor regime. Thus, when native Gulf southerners became cattle herders, there were profound cultural and social consequences to go along with the economic changes livestock impelled.

Allowing enslaved people so much unsupervised mobility carried risks for any slaveholder who hoped to exert maximum control over his or her labor. The most obvious danger was that slaves might run away, though given that masters trusted them to traverse hundreds of miles on their own, usually while charged with valuable property or correspondence, this must not have been a very common occurrence. Likely, only the most trusted slaves became messengers. Another danger for the slaveholder included the potential losses to slave catchers. These groups kidnapped men and women as they passed through the region, moved them to new areas, and re-sold them to others. An Anglo-Creek man named John Kinnard, for example, earned a reputation for slave catching. He and his associates would raid backcountry Georgia settlements or capture African American men and women he found traveling alone and transport them across Indian country, where he would sell them into slavery in Natchez or Baton Rouge. He used the profits (and kept his captured slaves himself) and became a wealthy rancher and planter by the turn of the century. By 1791 he had forty African American slaves and over one thousand cattle.31

31 Snyder, Slavery in Indian Country, 188–89.
Sometimes slaves’ mobility led to ambiguous ownership. In 1805 Catherine Turnbull, John’s widow, found herself in a quarrel with her husband’s former employee, Andrew Carney, who claimed to be the owner of three of her slaves. The dispute centered on the status of two enslaved women—Madelane and her sister Jenny—and an enslaved man named Mobil. Multiple witnesses testified that they had known the three slaves for at least “twenty two years” and had “known them frequently to pass and repass through the Indian Nation” while on errands for Turnbull, “which slaves he always continued in peaceable possession of…to [their] knowledge.” Indeed, according to an estate document, Mobil, Madelane, and Jenny had belonged to Turnbull since at least 1786, when he inherited them from a previously dissolved partnership with his brother, Walter Turnbull. According to the 1805 deposition of one man, Carney and Mobil had known and worked with each other for years, and had often “Assisted to Drive Mr. Turnbulls Cattle” between Mobile and Natchez before Turnbull died sometime before 1800, which may have given Carney the knowledge and impetus to claim Mobil for himself.

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32 Carney may have been a free person of color. There are several entries in the Mobile diocese’s baptismal records for “colored baptisms” of the Carney family – at least one of which, Arthur was married to a Choctaw woman. There is no specific mention of Andrew Carney, however, so it is impossible to tell if Andrew Carney and Arthur Carney were the same person. Entry for “Jeremiah Carney,” Mobile Baptismal Records, Mobile Archdiocese, Colored Baptisms 1781–1826.

33 A State of the Property of Messrs. Walter and John Turnbull now in the care of John Turnbull, June 1, 1786, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 13. Jenny must have been quite young at that time, because she was valued at less than half the price of her sister, Madelane.

34 Deposition of David White, March 25, 1805, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 10; Deposition of Ladoc Brashears, March 25, 1805, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 10. A second, speculative possibility is that Mobil and Carney plotted together to secure Mobil’s freedom. The two men had spent a great deal of time alone together, traveling through Indian country, while working for Turnbull. They may well have been friends. It
Turnbull trusted Mobil enough to allow him to transport and protect his livestock, just as he trusted Polinard to deliver valuable business correspondence without white supervision. Further, that Madelane and Jenny had the freedom to travel to and from “the Indian Nation” for at least two decades—perhaps to visit kin, purchase goods, or ferry items for Turnbull—indicates that “bondage” remained a relative term, even in the early-nineteenth century. As the slavery evolved to meet changing market needs, the institution itself in the Gulf South took a variety of forms. Owners granted enslaved messengers and interpreters a relatively large degree of autonomy, free from both the supervision of their owner or overseer as well as from most of the brutal physical labor that was required of slaves in fully developed plantation societies. But there were certainly examples of mistrust between masters and enslaved persons in Indian country as well. Timothy Barnard, for example, must have suspected that his slaves stole from him, at least occasionally. In 1785 he wrote to his brother, John Barnard, that he needed his help to transport a small herd of horses. Timothy was unable to make the trip himself and wrote, “I shall not Know what to Doe with my horses and mare I shall take Down . . . Therefore Shall want [you] to take them in as it will not Doe for me to trust them in my negroes.”

Just as Indian country provided enslaved individuals with opportunities to escape hard field labor, before 1800 it could also serve as a place of refuge for those who attempted to permanently escape their condition; runaways in the Gulf South often made

is at least possible that Carney agreed to claim Mobil as his own once their employer died, hoping to save Mobil from an uncertain future as the property of Turnbull’s widow, Catherine. She turned all her financial resources to cotton after John’s death. If Mobil had gotten the feeling that he was about to be confined as a cotton plantation laborer, he certainly would have been anxious to avoid such a fate.

their way to “the Nation.”"36 Passing as a free person, especially if one had escaped from a coastal settlement, would conceivably have been a simple proposition before 1800, given the limited de facto reach of colonial governments. West Florida Governor Vicente Folch had to rely on native Gulf southerners—like Alexander McGillivray, who was officially in Spanish pay—to find and return runaways, though not often to great effect. In 1789, for example, he wrote to McGillivray looking for several escaped slaves. McGillivray professed he could offer little help in this instance, though he knew that one of them, “The Negro Luis[,] was long in this Country and no one Claiming him he passed as free and used to go where he pleased.” Despite his professed inability to help, the Creek leader assured Folch that “any Negroes that run away and come into the Nation shall always be delivered to their owners whenever demanded.”37 In 1791 Natchez slaveholder Francisco Menar granted Spanish Indian Agent Stephen Minor, who had many connections among the Choctaws, power of attorney to recover an entire family: “Robert and Mariana and her children…which slaves have absconded and are now in the Choctaw Nation.”38 On the eastern periphery of Indian country, in 1797, Georgia backcountry settlers Wiatt Collier and William Slaughter lost three of their slaves, Jim, James, and an unnamed girl—“her colour very like that of an Indian”—when they escaped to the other side of the Oconee River. “The negroes were seen…near the mouth of Shoulderbone [Creek], and it is expected they are gone to the Creek Nation.”39

37 Alexander McGillivray to Vicente Folch, March 2, 1789, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 5, frame 37–42.
38 Power of Attorney for Don Estevan Minor to recover slaves, June 16, 1791, Natchez Court Records, 84.
One of the aspects of Benjamin Hawkins’s job as Indian Agent that required far more attention than he had expected was the issue of runaways. As the first U.S. official with the responsibility to “manage” Indian country, he fielded constant complaints in this regard. On one day alone, October 5, 1797, he fielded three claims from Georgia slaveholders. William Fitzpatrick lodged a complaint about “A negro who run from him 7 years past, from Oconee, of a yellowish complexion.” The man had also stolen one of Fitzpatrick’s horses during his escape. John Lang claimed “A negro girl, about 12 years old, named Lucy,” who escaped into Creek country “from his plantation near Oconee” on May 9, 1787. By the time of Lang’s complaint, Lucy would have been twenty-two, and likely well established in an Indian community somewhere in the region. Silvanus Walker, however, had the longest memory of the three. “That about 18 years past he lost two negros; one a lad about 12 years old, named Cesar, very black complexion; the other a wench, about 25 years old, of a yellowish complexion. . . . They were taken from Phillip’s Fort on Little River.” Some slaveholders made claims from as far away as Virginia. William Banks, “of Patrick County, Virginia,” lodged a claim to “Tom, who called himself Johnson in the Cherokees.” Tom, Banks averred, had been “brought from Africa when young” and escaped from Virginia into Indian country in 1802 “in company with Israel, a light complected fellow about 35 years old.” Israel was claimed by another Virginia planter named George Anston. Indeed, Anston lodged two claims with Hawkins in 1805, one for Israel, and another for “a negro carpenter about 53 years old at this date,” who also “play[ed] on the violin and [was] fond of drink.” He noted that the ex-slave had

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40 Claims for slaves stolen or lost in Indian country, October 5, 1797, Works of Hawkins, 204.
run away sometime in 1792, that his name was “Vole,” but that he liked to go by the “alias” William.⁴¹

Even Benjamin Hawkins was not immune to losing enslaved laborers in Indian country. Hawkins brought an unspecified number of bondpeople with him when he arrived in Creek country from Georgia in 1796. At least one of them soon escaped to the nearby Lower Creek town of Coweta, and apparently found refuge there. Hawkins knew he was there, but was ultimately powerless to get him back. In late 1797 Hawkins’s friend John Bard passed through the Lower Creek towns, and wrote to Hawkins that “When I was in the Coweta town I saw you negro . . . . I have directed your negro to be sent to the public smith in Tallauhassee, three miles from Mr. Marshall.” Hawkins seemingly asked Bard to find a buyer for the man, so that he could be rid of the burden. Bard tried to sell him, in absentia, to “Mr. Marshall,” but Marshall “could not give the amount you ask, and he offered me 200 dollars; perhaps he may be willing to give fifty more.” According to Bard, however, Hawkins needed to resign himself to never seeing the ex-slave again. “I am informed he has declared that he would die before he would be brought out of the [Indian] nation, and it is believed he would fulfill his threat.”⁴²

Competing legal regimes complicated slaveholders’ attempts to recover their human property, as Spain, the United States, and Indian polities all claimed overlapping jurisdictions. In 1797, for instance, Joseph Thompson, “an inhabitant of Tensaw,” and Zachariah McGirt, who lived near the Upper Creek town of Tuckaubatchee, both presented competing claims to “two negros, Munday and Nancy.” Thompson claimed that they were his property and that McGirt “prevail[ed] on” the two slaves “to leave his

plantation and go into the Creek Nation.” Thompson also averred that McGirt had been overheard declaring “his intention of getting possession of these negros under pretence of having claim to them.” McGirt, for his part, “acknowledged he had the negros in his possession,” but also provided “two bills of sale” for Munday and Nancy. The Commandant of Tensaw rejected McGirt’s claim, but McGirt kept the slaves anyway, knowing that Spanish administrators were more or less powerless to enforce their authority outside of coastal communities. Thompson appealed to the Spanish Commandant of Mobile for a redress, but this went nowhere as well. Thompson decided to appeal to a new authority, and “sent a writing to the Mad Dog, [the headman] of Tuckabatchee.” Mad Dog, however, refused to adjudicate the case. Finally, Thompson turned to the U.S., asking Benjamin Hawkins to help him retrieve Munday and Nancy in his capacity as the U.S. Agent for Indian Affairs. Hawkins, too, was largely impotent. The most he could do was ask Mad Dog to force McGirt to return the two people. Even at the turn of the century, the locus of regional power remained in Indian country, and this had important financial consequences for slaveholders on the fringes of Indian communities, as Thompson’s case bears out.43

Slaves who spent any length of time in Indian country could actually lose value. Buyers and sellers learned to see them as a flight risk. Panton & Leslie employee George Butler sold a number of company-owned slaves to the firm Daunoy & McCarty in 1794. When they immediately ran away, Danouy filed suit to force Butler to either refund his money or recover them at Panton & Leslie’s expense, accusing him of selling “negroes

that were bad subjects.” Butler was at a loss. “I know not what kind of Laws there are in the country that will compell us” to issue a refund, Butler wrote to Panton, and wondered openly whether Danouy had fully understood the risks of owning slaves in West Florida. “Pray was it not made known to the purchaser that the nigroes were from Indian Country[?]” he asked, incredulously. The possibility that bondpeople had lived and established connections in Indian country presented one more thing for buyers to consider before purchasing slaves.

Historians have frequently noted that Indian country could be a place of escape for enslaved peoples, but by the last decade of the eighteenth century its status as a place of refuge was growing tenuous. Indians not only began desiring more slave labor for their own pursuits but they also increasingly agreed to find and capture runaways for pay. In 1798, for example, several slaves ran away from John Houston McIntosh, a planter in Spanish West Florida. McIntosh “employed an old Indian named Coweta John to get his negros and restore them to him.” According to Benjamin Hawkins, Coweta John and his family “exerted themselves and apprehended two of the negros.” The others were eventually found by Hawkins’s acquaintance, Georgia landowner George Wells Foster. In 1799 Benjamin Hawkins recruited slave catcher and trader John Kinnard to find and retrieve at least seven slaves claimed by Georgia planters who had escaped into Creek country. Kinnard later assured Hawkins that they “were apprehended and should be carried down to Fort James.”

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44 G. Butler to William Panton, March 19, 1794, Cruzat Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.
45 G. Butler to William Panton, March 30, 1794, Cruzat Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.
47 Hawkins to James Jackson, September 11, 1799, Hawkins Letters, 253.
By the 1790s Creek leaders began to crack down on slaves who hoped to be sheltered in native communities. In 1797 the headman in the Lower Creek town of Uchee, for example, received word that “there were two negros” in his town “who were guilty of thieving” from neighboring white settlements. Benjamin Hawkins recorded that the headman “went and had them both shot, and gave notice that he would put all to death who kept disturbing the property of the white people, and kept confusion in their land.” Stable relations with Anglo-American settlements were a higher priority than harboring refugees. “He gave notice to the negro holders that they must take care of their slaves, as he would undoubtedly put the law in force against them.” Slave executions were of course not quite what these slaves’ owners had in mind. The aggrieved owner of one of the executed men complained about his property loss, demanding recompense. “This chief replied: You have justice in the execution of the thief, that is all you are entitled to,” Hawkins recounted. “I have negros” too, the headman replied, “if they are guilty of theft, come you and you may execute them as additional satisfaction.” The Uchee headman acknowledged the need for peace between his town and Georgia. He also clearly asserted his authority to settle the manner as he saw fit. While Indians had no written slave codes, they began cracking down on fugitive slaves, often with American encouragement. Slaves who ran away from their owners found that escape to permanent freedom in Indian country became increasingly difficult, and Indian communities became places of captivity rather than freedom at the turn of the century. Not all Indians invested in slave labor, but most of them at least began acquiescing to demands for the return of runaways. And Indian slaveholders themselves began to lose their slaves to flight. Far from

providing them with a refuge, Chickasaw headman James Colbert made his slaves John and Cass desperate enough that they ran away in 1795, stealing one of Colbert’s canoes to do so. They escaped down stream to an unknown fate.\textsuperscript{49}

Some native Gulf southerners began to go to great lengths to recover, hold, and keep their own slaves. John Randon lived in the mixed Anglo-Creek community of Tensaw, northeast of Mobile, on the fringes of Creek country. Randon was the son of Peter Randon and “a Creek woman of the Cotchulgee.” Peter Randon owned at least nine African American men and woman while he resided in Creek country, but when Peter died sometime before 1784, they were auctioned off in Georgia, because, like his Indian neighbors, Peter had no official titles to his slaves, and several people claimed that he had in fact stolen them. Indeed, this may well have been true. Technically speaking, before the 1780s, nearly every slave in Indian country had been “stolen” at one time or another. Peter’s Anglo-Creek children, however, embraced the growing formality of slave ownership in the Gulf South and attempted to recover their father’s slaves by legal means.

John Randon and his brothers, David and James, “were all minors at the death of their father,” and therefore were unable to stop the confiscation of their family’s human property. In 1785, John Randon traveled from Creek country to Savannah, where he pleaded his case in front of a new governor, managed to reclaim the slaves by right, and “proceeded . . . [to] recover nine negroes, little and big, and in the year 1785 set out with them to the Creek nation.” During their trek back into Indian country, however, “two of the negroes, Manuel and George, left him and run off.” Randon presumably managed to

\textsuperscript{49}“Statement of James Hoggatt regarding claim on slave ‘Cass’ by James Bosley,” April 1795, \textit{Natchez Court Records}, 205.
return with the seven others, but he did not forget the loss of Manuel and George. Over
twelve years later, in 1797, those two men turned up again, but they were not living as
free men. “[Randon] has been informed they are in possession of Francis Paris on Briar
Creek,” a small settlement in the Lower Creek towns on the Chattahoochee River.
Randon claimed that Manuel and George belonged to his brothers, David and James, and
he made a statement to Benjamin Hawkins to this effect. Randon asked that “justice may
be done,” and that the slaves be returned to his family. Far from providing a place of
escape, Indian country for Manuel and George became a place of capture and re-
enslavement multiple times over.

Trading companies began using firm-employed slave catchers by the beginning of
the nineteenth century. In 1802 John Forrester, a employee for Panton & Leslie, agreed to
help retrieve “two Negroes Simon and Lusy his wife,” who their owner claimed had been
stolen by a group of Seminoles. He also used company resources in an attempt to capture
thirty-eight others that had been stolen by the Miccosukees. In 1816 firm employees
attempted to aid a longtime customer, Captain Yellowhair, in finding a slave that had
been stolen from him by another Creek man. Illustrating the continued informality that
slave transactions still exhibited even by that date, the writer noted the added difficulty
that Yellowhair “has no titles to show for the negro[,] he purchased him from another

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50 Statement of John Randon to Benjamin Hawkins, December 5, 1797, Works of
Hawkins, 263–64.
51 George Fleming to John Forrester, July 16, 1802, Glunt Collection, Box 1, Folder 10; It
is likely that the Seminoles were effectively liberating these slaves. Though they
probably maintained technical slave-status among the Seminoles, their lives would have
been far less constrained by the racial strictures that dominated their lives among Euro-
Americans and, increasingly, Creeks.
trading companies took a vested interest in regulating slave ownership.

By the end of the century, Creeks were much more likely to be slaveholders, or at least slave catchers, than protectors. Benjamin Hawkins wrote that “on entering the duties of my agency in the Indian department I found no provision had been made by treaty for runaway negroes or stray horses.” Hawkins offered monetary remuneration for native help in tracking down runaways, testifying to the increasing allure of profit and property in Indian country. “I entered into an agreement . . . with the Chiefs of the Creek nation to give 12 dollars 50 cents for every runaway slave . . . and they on their part agreed for that sum.” This arrangement and the growing importance of slavery regionally helped drive a wedge between African and African American ex-slaves and their Native American neighbors. Indian slaveholders joined their white counterparts in asserting the right to literally own and control their labor forces. “The negroes now not unfrequently [resist], and in three instances I have been constrained to order the Indians or white people to fire on and put them to death.”

Even in communities that still accepted Africans as full members, theirs and their descendants’ freedom was precarious. Seminole towns like Mikasuki and Alachua famously adopted people of African descent, some of whom even became headmen. But such places had become small oases in a region increasingly offering only bondage for their people.

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52 William Hambly to John Innerarity, October 29, 1816, Cruzat Papers, Box 3, Folder 2. The name “Yellowhair” is suggestive that this man had European ancestry. However, it is interesting to note that he does not at all seem “acculturated.” Not only is he not literate, but the trader writing the letter implicitly sees him as simply “an indian.”

53 Benjamin Hawkins to Josiah Tattnall, May 24, 1802, in C.L. Grant, ed., Letters, Journals, and Writings of Benjamin Hawkins (Savannah, Ga., 1980; hereinafter cited as Hawkins Letters), 446.
African descended peoples. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Coweta headman William McIntosh often led men on slave raiding expeditions into Seminole territory. Two travelers through the area in the early 1820s noted the devastation wrought by the Cowetas on Seminole towns, reporting that a group of them had just recently “carried off or dispersed a band of 60 negroe slaves.” As the nineteenth century progressed, Creek warriors raided Seminole settlements and captured hundreds of Black Seminoles who were destined for enslavement. “Blackness” increasingly imperiled freedom status. Adoption and fictive kin connections, once important ways for African Americans to gain entry and protection in Indian communities, gave way decisively to the ascendancy of racial identity as slavery grew ever more profitable and attached to “blackness” in Indian country.54

The expansion of slavery in Indian country was partially driven by the Panton & Leslie Co., which continued to cater to its native customers as herding and cotton planting replaced deerskin hunting as the most important local market activities. Panton & Leslie had a monopoly on the Creeks’ deerskin trade during the last decades of the eighteenth century. The company's ships traditionally brought Indian trade goods like cloth and firearms to West Florida and filled their holds up with deer, otter, beaver, and other pelts destined for Europe. By the 1780s, however, company ships also added lumber and cotton to their list of exports. Panton’s partner in St. Augustine, Robert Leslie, purchased Indians’ livestock, which they drove overland to East and West Florida.

To meet the increasing demand for agricultural and other types of labor, Panton began importing slaves from the Caribbean as early as 1786, when he asked for permission from the Spanish government in New Orleans to import a ship “loaded only with Negroes.”

Deerskin-trading companies became significant slave owners as the eighteenth century drew to a close, and they began to participate in both the domestic and overseas slave trade. Trading companies used enslaved laborers sparesly in the 1770s and early 1780s as runners, messengers, and as general laborers. But during the 1780s and 1790s, just like their native customers, firms branched into livestock and agriculture, and with that came larger investments in slavery. Further, as individual native Gulf southerners became ranchers and planters, they began using and thinking about slave labor in less “native” ways. Indians’ embrace of private property and of proto-racial notions of difference had consequences for those already enslaved in Indian country and for those hoping to escape to it. By the nineteenth century, Indian country would be a place of capture and bondage—a new kind of slave country—rather than a place of possible escape and refuge. Trading companies like Turnbull & Joyce and Panton & Leslie, which already controlled well-established exchange networks throughout Creek, Choctaw, and

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55 William Panton to Jose de Navarro, January 14, 1786 (translated from the original Spanish), Papers of Panton, Leslie and Company, (materials collected by the Papers of Panton, Leslie and Co. Project, John C. Pace Library, University of West Florida, 26 microfilm reels; hereinafter cited as Panton and Leslie Papers) reel 2, frame 860-67; Spain required special permission for merchants to import slaves at the time. Panton and Leslie Company to Joseph Villavaso, June 16, 1787, PLC, reel 3, frame 540–42; Arturo O’Neill to Jose de Navarro, February 9, 1788, PLC reel 3, frame 1439; John Hambly to Robert Leslie, May 22, 1796, Box 2, Folder 4, Greenslade Papers; John Innerarity to Joseph Fernandez, February 15, 1813, Box 2, Folder 8, Heloise H. Cruzat Papers, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida (hereinafter cited as “Cruzat Papers”).
Chickasaw communities, facilitated this by employing slave laborers themselves and by providing them to their native customers.

Spanish administrators’ correspondence indicates that the several peltry-trading companies that operated along coastal Louisiana and Florida made concerted efforts to diversify their trans-Atlantic cargos during the 1780s and 1790s. Importing slave labor from the Caribbean became an increasingly common activity for Panton & Leslie. After his initial request in 1786, Panton wrote to Louisiana governor Estevan Miró thanking him for allowing his ship *Friendship*, loaded with enslaved Africans, into New Orleans, noting that he soon hoped “to engage this little vessel in the Negro trade” on a long-term basis. Five years later Panton requested a more permanent license to import “Negroes” from the Bahamas (Panton had business partners in New Providence) and Jamaica, as he was often “in need of a number of Negroes for myself and others.”

Alexander McGillivray, an Upper Creek leader and a silent partner in Panton & Leslie, received permission to send his own vessel, the *Eliza*, to either Providence or Jamaica and bring back enslaved laborers. There are hints that Panton & Leslie participated in a small-scale internal slave trade as well. In 1797, for example, a new planter named “J. Linden” wrote to Panton that he was looking to sell him ten enslaved men and women—two separate families. Linden wrote that he had just settled in the region, hoping to grow rice just upriver from Mobile, and so he may have learned from others that Panton was willing to buy slaves from local traders.

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56 William Panton to Estevan Miró, June 3, 1791, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 6, frame 790–94.
57 Estevan Miró to Edward Stewart, captain of the Eliza, June 27, 1791, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 6, frame 832–34; translated from the original Spanish.
58 J. Linden to Panton, April 26, 1797, Cruzat Papers, Box 1, Folder 5.
The overseas slave trade in West Florida remained small in scale throughout this period, and it never attained the level it would eventually reach in places like Natchez and New Orleans, especially after the outlawing of the trade in 1808. Still, Panton & Leslie’s incremental engagement in the trade indicates both rising demand for enslaved labor and recognition by merchants that kettles, rifles, and blankets were no longer the only goods that paid. And, though small in numbers, Panton’s commitment to importing slaves demonstrates his company’s willingness to diversify economic activities in a changing Gulf South. Panton had used a monopoly on peltry to rise to prominence in the Native South. But native Gulf southerners did not need immigrants from the United States to instruct them in the value of cattle, cotton, and, by extension, chattel slavery. As peltry’s viability decreased, his company helped lead the way toward the Deep South transformation by filling the demand for enslaved laborers and exporting slave-produced agricultural commodities.

Before the 1780s, peltry companies provided Indian goods almost exclusively to Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Creeks. By the 1790s, however, the two biggest companies, Turnbull & Joyce and Panton & Leslie, provided merchandise and occasionally loans to a much wider variety of customers. This increasingly diverse and changing customer base included hunters, farmers, planters, tradespeople, and communities that ranged from Coweta and Tookabatchee to Mobile and Pensacola. Turnbull & Joyce’s account books betray no detectable prejudice toward one debtor or another. Regardless of skin color, everyone’s money was good. Take, for example, the record of goods sold to a Chickasaw man named Cletabie, who regularly purchased from the company’s Mobile outfit between 1791 and 1797. During those years Cletabie’s transactions mostly appear like
those of any other eighteenth-century Indian hunter. He sold Turnbull & Joyce a variety of skins—primarily deer but also the more valuable otter, beaver, and bear—in return for sundry items ranging from rum, salt, and rifle ammunition, to “Earbobs” and kettles. At least one purchase, however, was notable. In 1791 Cletabie decided to invest in slave labor and purchased three enslaved people for $750 (two male children and an adult woman). The transaction involved a relatively large outlay of cash and was slightly unusual in that these were not slaves that the Chickasaw hunter had kidnapped in a raid or captured as runaways, traditionally the most common ways that Indians obtained slaves in the eighteenth century.\(^{59}\)

How Cletabie planned to employ his slaves is unknown, but the fact that he purchased them from a slave trading company outright is suggestive of the changing Indian attitudes towards slavery as an institution.\(^{60}\) For at least a century, slaves in Indian country had been obtained as war captives. Cletabie, who was predominantly a hunter and trader, not (as far as we know) a planter, instead bought three “negroes” from a slave trader, much like any Euro-American slaveholder would have done. Cletabie thus evinced the ways that Indian country was also becoming a new kind of slave country—one that more closely resembled the slavery of their Euro-American neighbors. And Cletabie was not alone. When failed farmer John Smith moved out of Creek country in 1794, he was forced to abandon most of his property on the Tombigbee River. Because he was “at some expense for [his] sustenance,” he “was forced to sell [his] negro boy” to

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\(^{59}\) Goods and slaves sold Cletabie, a Chickasaw, July 1791, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 2; Cletabie account with Turnbull and Joyce, 1793–1797, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 4. It is not stated in the documents that the slaves Cletabie purchased were Africans, though it is extremely likely that they were at least black.

\(^{60}\) For an explication of this phenomenon, see Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 182–212.
a Creek purchaser before he left. In the 1790s, Turnbull & Joyce’s customer base continued to be primarily made up traditional hunters like Cletabie, but had expanded to serve the needs of a growing list of Indian planters and slaveholders—including planters and Chickasaw headmen George Colbert and Chatabrei, and Creek planters like Benjamin Durant (a kin relative of Alexander McGillivray) and William Weatherford, all of whom appear on Turnbull’s account books. In this way, Indians continued to propel the region’s sociocultural, economic, and environmental transformation into the Deep South.

While Native Americans and others purchased slaves from trading companies and expanded slavery in Indian country, Turnbull & Joyce also began to provide goods, slaves, and capital to white planters and artisans living in colonial communities along the Gulf Coast. Tombigbee planter Benjamin Reynold mortgaged seven slaves—Sanco, his wife Flora, and their five children—to the company as security for a loan in 1790.

William Dunbar appears as a customer multiple times in company books. Others included Baton Rouge planter Jacques Rapalje (who was also a Choctaw trader along with his brother, Isaac), and Juan Chastang, Pierre Trouillet, and Simon Landry—all owners of plantations or ranches outside Mobile. Still more customers included Mobile hatter Samuel Walker, Pensacola mason Joseph Narrials, and Mobile “Indian trader[s]” Philip

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61 “Appraisements of James Smith’s property…a negro not included as he disposed of him in the Indian Nation and produced nothing in his place…” July, 1794, Natchez Court Records, 195.
62 Turnbull and Joyce account books, unk dates 1790s, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 2; Receipt for Arthur Carney’s debt, June, 1796, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 3; Turnbull & Joyce Account Books, 1795–1798, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.
63 Slave Mortgage, Benjamin Reynold to Turnbull and Joyce, January 14, 1790, Box 2, Folder 9.
64 Jacque’s nephew and Isaac’s son, George Rapalje, eventually became one of the wealthiest cotton planters in Mississippi. See Morris, Becoming Southern, 37–39.
Hay, Arthur Carney, Benjamin Allen, and Daniel Clark, among many others. But Turnbull had no racial qualifications for customers either, not when he conducted business in such a diverse, expansive borderland. Listed alongside names of prominent planters and traders, Turnbull & Joyce also counted many men and women of color among its customers. A sampling includes a “free negro woman of Mobile” named Marlon, “free Negro Cook of Mobile” Francisca, and “Mullatoes” Reases Bernadee and William Smith.

Panton & Leslie’s account books from the same period exhibited many similar examples. Natchez District planter James Kirk owed Panton & Leslie $2,234 in 1793 for which he had to mortgage two slaves to the company as partial security. In addition to the many Indian traders indebted to their house—men like Oakalouky, Oppalkie, Ninnygaweechee, and Philatucky (the latter two were in fact of African descent)—their ledgers listed white traders Edward Forrester, James Allen, and Caldwell Eastridge; traders and free men of color “Mulatto John,” “Joseph, a free negro” and “Negro Gloucester”; planters Robert Grierson, his Anglo-Creek son Alexander Grierson, and Juan Chastang (who patronized Turnbull as well); Creek headmen Blue King, White

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65 Turnbull and Joyce account books, unk dates 1790s, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 2; Receipt for Arthur Carney’s debt, June, 1796, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 3; Turnbull & Joyce Account Books, 1795–1798, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.
66 Turnbull and Joyce account books, unk dates 1790s, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 2; Receipt for Arthur Carney’s debt, June, 1796, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 3; Turnbull & Joyce Account Books, 1795–1798, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 8. There is no town of residence listed for either person of color; also note that records showing exactly what each person purchased were not found.
Lieutenant, Alexander Cornels (who also planted cotton), and Warrior King of the Cussetuhs; and a slave trader and Anglo-Creek man named John Kinnard.67

Kinnard, in fact, tried to pay his debts to Panton with slaves, which he had probably stolen in the first place. Kinnard obtained his captives through kidnapping, theft, and raids, the way all native Gulf southerners would have done before the 1780s. Even while Chickasaw hunters like Cletabie began purchasing slaves as did their Euro-American neighbors, Kinnard and others continued to acquire them through warfare and the taking of captives. In 1798 the manager of Panton’s Appalachee store wrote to Panton to say that “John Kinnaird has left me five Negros in part payment of his debt . . . [but] they are protesting [that] they were free – they are French Negroes [from] Granada” who professed they had been headed for Cuba when they were shipwrecked on the Florida coast. Kinnard, for his part, claimed that he had purchased them in Savannah. This story is unlikely however; these men were skilled—three of them were masons, one was a cooper, and the last was a carpenter, according to the store manager. They would have been expensive, and the chances are very small that Kinnard could have bought them in Savannah and then sold them to Panton and not have lost money in the

67 For more on the two Philatuchys as Afro-Creek traders, see Saunt, New Order of Things, 131–35. “List of debts due by Traders, Half Breeds & Indian factors to Panton Leslie & Co of Appalachee comencing October 1787 and ending September 1792,” Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4; Debts at same place from May 1798 to April 1799, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4; Unfolded business ledgers, 1801, Cruzat Papers, Box 4; Panton and Leslie Company Debts, 1807, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4; Acknowledgement of Debt by James Kirk, May 2, 1793, May Wilson McBee, ed., The Natchez Court Records, 1767–1805: Abstracts of the Early Records (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1953; herein after cited as Natchez Court Records), 95; Outstanding Debts due Turnbull & Joyce, 1799, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 11.
transaction. More likely he enslaved them himself, perhaps coming upon them on the
Georgia coast after their shipwreck.  

But the growth of chattel slavery in Indian country did not necessarily mean an
equally corresponding ascent of race ideology or black codes. In many Atlantic slavery
regimes, enslaved people were legally forbidden from acquiring property and from
participating in the market economy (though in practice, of course, such things occurred
regularly). However, for Gulf South trading companies, dealing in black bodies did not
prevent traders from keeping enslaved individuals as customers at the same time. Even
into the first decades of the nineteenth century, race was far from a barrier to participation
in the market, nor was freedom status. Business ledgers produced by the Panton & Leslie
Co. partner John Forbes between 1804 and 1807 frequently listed a number of customers
that illustrate how misleading the title “Indian trader” could be, including entries like “3
Gal. Rum deliverd to the Negro Monday” and “sundry [goods] to Negro Harry…ditto to
Negro Sally.” In the same ledger from 1806, Forbes indicated they paid cash to a handful
of “negroes” for unspecified trade goods, including to Simons, Jacob, Shaine, Hine,
Cornelia, and Tom. These names surround an entry for the sale of a “Negro Wench” to a
Seminole woman for $350.  

Forbes clearly saw no irony or danger in the juxtaposition
of blacks as both person and property, nor any philosophical or ideological conflicts in

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68 Laurence to William Panton, August 15, 1798, Cruzat Papers, Box 1, Folder 6.
69 Goods ledger, John Forrester to Fernando Mara Arrendondo, January 13, 1804 to
August 7, 1805, Glunt Collection, Box 1, Folder 10; Goods ledger, John Forrester to
Frances Sanches, February 20, 1806 to August 13, 1807, Glunt Collection, Box 1, Folder
10. These enslaved peoples were possibly purchasing goods for their masters, though
there is no indication of that in the records. But, even given this possibility, that masters
entrusted their slaves with their business transactions speaks to the comfort all involved
had with slaves handling goods and money, as well as a master-slave relationship that
was highly unusual in terms of others in places like New Orleans or Charleston.
profiting both from slavery as well as slaves’ own purchasing power. If bondage was increasingly linked to race in the Gulf South at the beginning of the nineteenth century, freedom was certainly not.

Indian trade companies sold enslaved Africans to Chickasaws and Creeks while simultaneously selling muskets and blankets to free Africans. They provided goods to traders and other Gulf southerners in Indian country as well as to farmers and tradespeople in Pensacola, Tensaw, Mobile, and Natchez. They granted loans to tobacco and indigo planters like Joshua Howard as well as sold firearms and jewelry to Indians like Cletabie. Even the priest of the Mobile Catholic Diocese, Father McKenna, found himself in debt to Turnbull and Joyce. As peltry traders expanded their merchandise and customer bases during the 1780s and 1790s, they incidentally connected diverse individuals with each other economically; and the network that resulted crossed boundaries of race, ethnicity, and sovereignty.70

Some Gulf southerners of African descent became slave owners and even slave traders themselves. Take the free woman of color Euphrosine Hinard, for example. Hinard was probably born in New Orleans in 1776 as the daughter of a white man named Francisco Hinard and a free woman of color named Mariana Grondel. In 1790 she was the mistress of a Spanish government official named Nicolas Vidal and had two daughters by him, Mercedes and Caroline Maria. Sometime after Nicolas Vidal’s death in 1806, the mother and two daughters moved to Pensacola, where Hinard became a

70 In the Colored Black Baptismal records of the Mobile diocese, Constantine McKenna is listed as the presiding parish priest between January 1793 and October 1798. He is also listed as in debt to Turnbull and Joyce for $189 in 1798. Mobile Baptismal Records, Mobile Archdiocese, Colored Baptisms 1781–1826; Turnbull and Joyce Account books, 1795 to 1798, Entry for “Father McKenna,” Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.
property owner and eventually an independent slave trader as well. Undoubtedly she counted both Anglo-American migrants and Indian country natives among her customers—possibly she even had buyers of African descent as well. Both of Hinard’s daughters became well-known Pensacola residents, though whether they followed in their mother’s footsteps as slave traders is unknown. Both Mercedes and Caroline were later heavily involved in a dispute involving the trader John Forbes over their father’s estate (Nicolas Vidal was heavily in debt when he died, including to Forbes, formerly Panton & Leslie). 71

In another example, a free woman of color named Julia Villars, who alternately resided in Mobile and Pensacola in the early nineteenth century, was also a slaveholder. How she came to live as a free woman in the Gulf South is unknown, but in 1804 she purchased a residence in Pensacola on Zaragoza Street from a man named Francisco Hindenburg. She also apparently owned property in Mobile and was active in the Catholic parish there. Villars first appears in the Mobile Diocese baptismal records in 1801 as the “free mulatto” owner of “negro” slaves named Constance and Celina. Thereafter Villars appears again as the godmother to “legitimate free mulatto[s]” named Luisa Colon and Julia Lalande, in 1803 and 1805 respectively. She is also subsequently listed as the owner of at least eight slaves between 1803 and 1805. 72 Villars’s race did not keep her from prosperous business activities or property ownership, including property in


72 UWF Pensacola Settlers, p90-96. Mobile Baptism records for January 16, 1801; September 6, 1803; January 20, 1805.
other human beings. Like Nelly Price, Villars’s Big Black and Natchez contemporary 
who traded deerskins with Choctaws and later practiced commercial agriculture, Villars’s 
own lifestyle was symptomatic of a region in which ambiguity, in regard to race, was still 
the rule. Yet this did not last. The equation of blackness with bondage was spreading in 
Indian country.

Trading companies and individual traders together began to knit together a once-
disparate Gulf South and provided the earliest outlets for its new slave-produced 
commodities. Native Gulf southerners made “black” slavery a practical reality in Indian 
country before conceptions of black racial inferiority—which provided the theoretical 
and ideological foundations for that form of slavery—became universal across the Gulf 
South. The region’s racial hierarchy remained pliable and perhaps contested. The Gulf 
South remained a borderland even as it became increasingly delineated and defined by 
black slavery and slave-worked ranches and plantations. So, when large numbers of 
Anglo-American migrants arrived in the Gulf South in the nineteenth century looking to 
found a formalized racial hierarchy—and the rules, laws, and slave codes that went with 
it—enslaved men and women of African descent were already pervasive throughout the 
region. Migrants, then, did not start their enterprise from scratch. Increasing participation 
in the slave trade on the part of both individuals and corporate entities, along with the 
continued rise of slave agriculture along the coasts and in the interior, meant that people 
of African descent became increasingly constrained by their race.

Black chattel slavery was certainly on the rise in Indian country. But the transition 
still happened piecemeal, over multiple decades, giving the culture of slavery in Gulf 
South interior a patchwork-like quality between 1770 and the 1810s. While some, like
Alexander McGillivray, employed black slave labor on his estate very much like any Euro-American slaveholder might have done, many others continued to take slaves in war and occasionally sheltered runaways. Outside of the larger urban centers like New Orleans, Mobile, and perhaps Natchez, the experience of slavery prior to the 1820s for Africans or those of African descent remained quite different from the systems that predominated along the Atlantic coast. Native groups did not begin to see slavery as correlated with a concept of race until at least the late eighteenth-century, and this idea may not have actually been embraced by the majority until just before Indian removal in the 1830s, or even later. Further, many small slaveholders did not often engage their slaves in the same regimented hard labor that was customary among slaveholders in places like Charleston and New Orleans. While the influence of white ideologies surrounding race and slavery began to change native peoples’ ideas about these concepts during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, it is possible to glimpse native slavery customs influencing migrants practices as well. Though they often served as agricultural labor, enslaved men and women of African descent occupied a number of other roles in both white and Indian communities that helped knit the region together economically and socially.73

When the United States arrived on the Gulf Coast, most officials found the social and economic mobility still enjoyed by slaves and other people of color, especially in the marketplace, to be worrisome. Louisiana Governor William C. C. Claiborne anxiously

73 See, for example, Pulley Hudson, Creek Paths and Federal Roads, 24; Usner, Indians, Settlers, and Slaves, 228–43. For the same phenomenon in other Atlantic world contexts, see Robert Olwell, Masters, Slaves, and Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Low Country (New York, 1998) (especially chapter 4); and Alida C. Metcalf, Go-Betweens and the Colonization of Brazil, 1500–1600 (Austin, Tx., 2005).
asked for advice from his superiors upon noting the freedom with which people of color were allowed to keep and own firearms and other forms of property. In Natchez, free people of color used rifles for hunting, owned their own businesses, and bought and sold land. American planters who arrived in the Natchez district were appalled to find that slaves could even legally raise and sell cotton, ostensibly because such commerce encouraged theft, but also no doubt because of the precedent it set. In terms of American racial ideology, the hierarchy in the Gulf South was a mess at the turn of the century.

Bondpeople in Indian country, for example, sometimes developed expertise that proved vital for the operation of Euro-American regimes. In a region often lacking in guides and interpreters, colonial governments and Indian nations relied on enslaved blacks for communication. These were individuals who were experienced in moving across the borderlands between Indian and European spheres, and the skills they developed while doing so proved invaluable. Take, for example, the dispute over Cesar, an enslaved African American and a Choctaw interpreter owned by former Spanish Indian agent Stephen Minor. In 1798 the new Mississippi territorial governor, Winthrop Sargent, asked if he might rent Cesar’s services. Sargent was inexperienced in dealing with southeastern Indians, and their omnipresence in Natchez and aggressive demands for

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gifts immediately unnerved the former soldier from Massachusetts. He was willing to pay a high price for a reliable interpreter. Minor eventually agreed to lend Cesar to the government at fifteen dollars per month, an amount Sargent wrote incredulously was “the highest Wages I had known to have been given to a Prime slave.”

Given Sargent’s likely discomfort with black autonomy, relying on Cesar for help must have made him anxious. Still, the aggressiveness of the Choctaws forced his hand.

From almost the moment of Sargent’s arrival in Natchez, relations with these neighboring Indians had become tense. Sargent complained that Choctaws were constantly in town asking for presents, and that they frequently harassed white settlers. “Mutual Complaint and Crimination are almost every day arising between the White and Red people, absolutely Requiring the services of an Interpreter for amicable adjustment.” Sargent noted that Cesar was the only suitable candidate he could find for the job.

However, without informing Sargent, Minor reneged and promised to lend Cesar to his friend, Philip Nolan, who needed Cesar as his guide. “Nolan a dealer in horses…means

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77 Initial problems in relations and negotiations between Indians and American government officials were common themes during the period that the U.S. gained legal control over the Gulf South. There are multiple reasons for this. However, it frequently boiled down to the fact that the Americans were often ignorant (sometimes willfully) in their conceptions of Indian culture and customs. This was seemingly due to an unwillingness of the United States to engage with Indians as equal negotiating parties. Often they talked to and about Native Americans in racist fashion—as if addressing children. Spain and Britain had courted Indian favor for decades in attempts to maintain their foothold on the continent. Many Indians—aside from a few Creek communities—probably assumed that the U.S. would continue to do the same when they arrived in force on the Gulf Coast. When Americans did not seem to hold up their end of the bargain, it frequently led to conflict, as Sargent was among the first Americans to find out.
79 It is not clear whether this was a miscommunication between Minor and Sargent, or if one was intentionally trying to take advantage of the other. Either way, a lawsuit resulted. Nolan was an (in)famous horse dealer originally from Ireland who made his fortune
to use [Cesar] for [his] safe passage through the Indian Country to Kentucky.” Stephen Minor eventually agreed to let Cesar remain in Sargent’s service. However, he demanded thirty dollars per month instead of fifteen, a sum Sargent found outrageous. Sargent instead used his authority as governor to forcibly detain Cesar, and Minor quickly filed a suit against the governor in the Court of Common Pleas.80

Unfortunately the surviving record does not allow us to know Cesar’s thoughts on the argument over the rights to his labor. He does not appear to have had any say in where or for whom he worked (though its possible, maybe even probable that he did). Most likely he appreciated that his unique skills helped him avoid the brutal physical labor and disregard to which the majority of enslaved Americans were subjected. As a guide and interpreter, Cesar illustrates the ways that slaves continued to prove crucial for local communications and for forging and maintaining inter-group relations. It also demonstrates how the proximity of autonomous Indian groups still afforded opportunities for slaves to escape the emerging plantation complex.

Enslaved people participated in the nascent cotton economy as well. In Natchez, for instance, they both raised and sold the valuable textile, which concerned newly arrived Anglo-Americans as a threat to their own bottom lines and to their notions about conceptions of a proper racial order. Governor Sargent implored the territorial judges to issue an immediate injunction that would “prohibit by Law, the Slaves within the Territory from raising or Vending of Cotton.” Slaves’ access to cotton—rapidly

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moving horses and contraband back and forth between Texas, the Gulf South, and the United States. For more information on Nolan, see Donald E. Chipman and Harriet Denise Joseph, Spanish Texas, 1519–1821 (Austin, Tex., 2010), ch. 10; and Maurine T. Wilson and Jack Johnson, Philip Nolan and Texas: Expeditions to the Unknown Land, 1791–1801 (Waco, Tex., 1987).
becoming the sure ticket to wealth and, in turn, power in the Gulf South—had the potential to encourage theft and illicit cotton trading “between the Negroes and those [whites or Indians] who may be disposed to engage with them.” In the same letter, in order to curb what Sargent viewed as excessive mobility of the enslaved, the governor asked that the judges’ order also prohibit the practice of “Slaves holding property in horses.”

The Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw nations became ever more race conscious, however, at least among wealthy elites. Their national councils “passed” laws that used “Negro” interchangeably with “slave,” fined Indians who “disgrace[d] the Nation by marrying “a negro,” and began restricting slaves’ access to trade and property. Racial slavery became more and more entrenched as centralized national councils, dominated by slaveholding elites, began protecting the institution. One historian claims that by the 1830s, there were about 2,600 enslaved African Americans held by the Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Creeks (compared to approximately 47,000 Indians). But that number is almost surely far too low. Due to the fact that Indians almost never recorded their transactions on paper and that slavery practices remained largely informal among native Gulf southerners, it seems reasonable to assume that the numbers of slaves among Indians was actually much higher. When summarizing the state of slavery among Gulf South Indians, Christina Snyder asserts that by the 1830s “larger slaveholders produced staple goods like cotton for the burgeoning trans-Atlantic market, while smallholders used enslaved labor to supplement that of their household,” a description that aptly

81 Winthrop Sargent address to Territorial Judges, May 5, 1800, Miss. Terr. Arch. 231–32.
encapsulates slavery in the Deep South—for slaveholding Indians and for slaveholding whites—until the Civil War.\(^82\)

It remains difficult to know exactly how many enslaved African Americans lived in Indian country during the early nineteenth-century. The scattered evidence that does exist indicates that most slave sales consisted of small-scale transactions involving barter and handshake deals, unencumbered by formal contracts and often taking place among local networks of neighbors and acquaintances. Chickasaws William Colbert and John Brown, for example, sold planter Arthur Cobb a “negro wench ‘Nancy,’” [a] boy ‘Abraham,’ and [a] girl ‘Emma,’” in 1794. One year later Cobb, who by then must have been acquainted with the Chickasaw factor, returned to Brown to purchase another man. Choctaw headman Franchimastabe traded two of his slaves for horses in 1799.\(^83\) Thomas Marshall, who Benjamin Hawkins described as a resident of the Lower Creek town of Coweta, purchased a single enslaved man named Ned for $250 from a trader in 1798.\(^84\) Robert Grierson was on his way towards becoming a cotton planter by the 1790s, but he also had become a small-scale provider of slaves for his neighbors along the Tallapoosa and Chattahoochee Rivers. For example a Creek country resident named “Mr. Clark” purchased an unknown a few slaves from Grierson sometime shortly before 1795. The details of who was sold and precisely when are largely guesswork, however, speaking to the limitations of the documentary record. The only reason we know about these particular people at all—“Scipio and his son Dick”—is because an associate of Benjamin

\(^82\) Snyder, \textit{Slavery in Indian Country}, 210–11. See also Gary Zellar, \textit{African Creeks: Estelvste and the Creek Nation} (Norman, Ok., 2007), 15–35.
\(^83\) O’Brien, \textit{Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age}, 87.
Hawkins mentioned them as runaways and described them as two “negros [Mr. Clark] got from Grierson.”

Enslaved people experienced being bought and sold in a wide variety of ways. Some were sold and resold several times in transactions involving diverse participants. Tombigbee resident and Anglo-Chocataw woman Sarah Fulsom sold her slave Peter to Turnbull & Joyce in payment for a debt in 1788, and the company later re-sold Peter to Fulsom’s neighbor in the Tombigbee settlement, John Tally. The trading company Benjamin Stradham & Son sold an “old negro called Tom” to Noah Harrod in the years before 1798, though exactly when is unclear. Harrod later sold Tom to a Creek man named Stomolutkee, who apparently gave Tom de facto emancipation without ever relinquishing ownership of him, because by 1798 Tom resided “among the Cherokees,” presumably in quasi-freedom. When Stomolutkee later decided to sell Tom in absentia to a trader named Christian Russel for “200 chalks and a rifle gun,” it became Russel’s responsibility to find Tom and inform him that he was his new owner. Russel was thus forced to travel hundreds of miles to find Tom, living as a free man with the Cherokees, only to then have to convince him to live once more as a slave. Whether Russel was ever successful in finding Tom is unknown. But even imagining such an odd and perhaps awkward encounter throws the unique qualities of early Gulf South chattel slavery into

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86 Oath of John Turnbull regarding ownership of Peter, unk date, 1797, Natchez Court Records, 337. On the ethnicity and for more information about the Fulsom family, see James Taylor Carson, *Searching for the Bright Path: The Mississippi Choctaws from Prehistory to Removal* (Lincoln, Neb., 1999), 44, 70–124.
87 Statement of Stomolutkee to Benjamin Hawkins, April 21, 1798, *Works of Hawkins*, 304; “Chalks” were essentially an acknowledgement of debt (literally a diagonal mark on a piece of paper followed by a signature) that eventually became a type of circulating currency in a region starved for specie. Each chalk was worth approximately thirty to forty cents. See Ethridge, *Creek Country*, 186.
sharp relief. Even as slavery in the Gulf South moved closer in nature to slavery in Euro-American communities—the growing link between bondage and race; the emergence of slave codes; the increasingly plantation-bound, circumscribed character of slaves’ daily work and lives—features from an older Gulf South persisted.

Given the ongoing informality of this system, native Gulf southerners increasingly engaged in extra-legal ways of profiting from the slave trade. Or, perhaps more precisely, older ways of profiting from the slave trade became increasingly extra-legal. Mixed-Creek man John Kinnard, for example, carried on more traditional ways of obtaining slaves, through raid, capture, and kidnapping them, transporting them hundreds of miles away, and selling them to others in the interior or near coastal centers. Free people of color became vulnerable to capture and enslavement, too. In 1799 two brothers from backcountry South Carolina kidnapped a free woman of color named Poley Russell and her infant twins, smuggled them through Georgia, and sold her into slavery in Indian country. Poley and her children eventually wound up in the town of Tensaw, near the mouth of the Alabama River. Fortunately for Poley, Benjamin Hawkins learned of her plight and she was “stopped in the [Creek] nation” by his orders and given safe passage back to her home state. One imagines that many other men and women who suffered similar fates were not quite so lucky.

Some enslaved African Americans who had been captured and forced into Indian country endeavored to return to their friends, family, and masters, rather than stay. John White, for instance, was captured in a raid by Creeks in Georgia in 1797 but escaped and eventually made his way to New Orleans, where he informed the Spanish government of

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88 Snyder, Slavery in Indian Country, 188–90.
89 Benjamin Hawkins to James Jackson, July 11, 1799, Hawkins Letters, 253.
his desire to return to his master. Timothy Barnard once encountered two enslaved men, Ned and Sam, who had been kidnapped from a backcountry Georgia plantation by Creeks. They informed Barnard who their real owner was and said they were “desirous of returning” to him immediately.\(^{90}\)

Indians’ growing racial consciousness created problems even for slaves whose skills once allowed them mobility. In 1798 the enslaved Choctaw interpreter, Cesar, whom Winthrop Sargent had been grudgingly forced to rely on for his negotiations with the Choctaws, was an important cultural and linguistic go-between in Indian country. But Cesar’s race became his downfall. In 1799 multiple Choctaw headmen complained to Mississippi officials “about Cezar’s acting as interpreter whose color they say degraded them in the eyes of their own Nation.” Cesar had apparently been acting “very insolent” as well. And it was not simply Cesar’s slave status that proved the problem. The headmen refused to pass on the governor’s messages to their people, “having received them from the mouth of a Negro.” The headmen were so insistent that U.S. Choctaw agent John McKee ultimately recommended that the governor get rid of Cesar and hire Daniel McCurtin (a Scots-Choc-taw) or “another whiteman” to treat with the Choctaw Nation.\(^{91}\)

Much as the Native South and the Deep South existed simultaneously, between the 1770s and the 1810s Indian country was also a slave country. Strictly speaking, of course, Indian country had always been a slave country. But this was a new kind of slavery, based on newly adopted Native American ideas surrounding race, property, and profit. In the mid-eighteenth century, Native Americans captured slaves via warfare and did not use them for commercial agriculture. Slaves, even African American ones, could

\(^{90}\) Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 200–201.

\(^{91}\) Quotes on Cesar taken from Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 193–94.
hope to eventually be adopted into their new communities as full members, and perhaps even rise in power, war honors, and prestige. But as cattle and cotton replaced peltry and Anglo-American populations expanded in the Gulf South borderlands, racial slavery arrived and evolved. Once places of escape, occasional refuge, mobility, and autonomy for enslaved peoples of African descent, Indian polities for blacks became places of bondage, and their lives grew circumscribed by new slavery-conducive commodities and by new notions race and black inferiority. Once recognized as fellow residents of the Native Gulf South, Africans and African Americans became objects—bodies to control, property to be traded, sold, or stolen. By no means did this reality become universal across the region during this period. But there is no doubt that it took root. Native Gulf southerners—though certainly not all of them—embraced racially defined chattel slavery and put their enslaved laborers to work in fields and forests for profit. They were Deep South slaveholders just as surely as their white counterparts in New Orleans or Natchez, and they were crucial actors in the transformation of the Gulf South more generally.
CHAPTER 5:

NATIVE TOWNS AND SOUTHERN TOWNS: THE SHIFTING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDIAN COUNTRY AND THE COAST, 1770–1820

When British Army officer Harry Gordon visited Mobile, British West Florida, in 1766, he came away unimpressed. Though founded over six decades earlier—in 1702—by the French (before even New Orleans), the settlement Gordon saw was little more than a collection of small wooden buildings huddled next to the brick Fort Condé. Even the fort seemed a dismal place. “The Barracks in the Fort are so low, that they are deprived of air, and are mere Ovens in the Summer time, from the Reflexion of the Sun. 60 Men will defend the Fort against Indians,” Gordon recorded, alluding to Mobile’s most existential threat as well as its primary economic lifeline: the peoples of Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw countries. Gordon’s visit to Pensacola several days later proved no better. “I was Astonished to see the poor Huts that are in it . . . . Their Barracks are covered with Bark on the sides and roof . . . . [and] The Men were walking About like Ghosts.”

Over a decade later, in 1777, traveling naturalist William Bartram suggested that these humble colonial settlements remained largely unchanged. Bartram described Mobile as “chiefly in ruins,” with “Many houses vacant and mouldering to earth”—the effects of the American Revolution, neglect, and the decline in the deerskin trade. Bartram, however, was also struck by the diversity of the town’s inhabitants: “yet there are a few good buildings inhabited by French gentlemen, English, Scotch, and Irish, and emigrants from the Northern British colonies.” Also echoing Gordon’s emphasis on the military and economic importance of Indian peoples, Bartram claimed that the finest and

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best-maintained buildings were those owned by “Messrs. Swanson and McGillivray who have the management of the Indian trade, carried on to the Chicasaws, Chactaws, Upper and Lower Creeks.” In fact, Bartram thought most of the town’s older buildings seemed “in some degree to have copied after the Creek habitation in [their] general plan”—rectangular buildings that “formed a complete square” arranged across from one another so as to create a central yard for each habitation and “encompassing an area of about a quarter of an acre.” Though Bartram described Pensacola as somewhat improved since Gordon’s visit, those who owned the few “respectable and convenient buildings” in that town remained primarily merchants as well.2

The picture Gordon and Bartram offered of the early European settlements in the Gulf South is thus one that is quite familiar to historians of the so-called Old Southwest. With the exception of New Orleans, the colonial towns of the Gulf South—Mobile and Pensacola, along with Tensaw, Manchac, Baton Rouge, and Natchez—remained small backwaters in the 1770s and 1780s, made economically consequential almost solely via the “Indian trade” that exported peltry from their few docks.3 The earliest reliable Spanish census of Pensacola was taken in 1784. It listed only 593 inhabitants of all colors and statuses. Not until an 1805 census, taken in the wake of the Louisiana Purchase, had

3 It is this fact that makes the historiography’s overreliance on New Orleans and Lower Louisiana as a stand-in for the Gulf South misleading. New Orleans presents researchers with far larger source bases a much greater population. At the same time, its stark dissimilarity from the rest of the Gulf Coast makes that city an outlier, rather than representative of the region.
Pensacola’s population climbed over one thousand. Mobile, somewhat larger than Pensacola, remained similarly stagnant, though its better soil and more extensive river network allowed the town to experience significant population growth during the later Spanish regime. Mobile had 746 inhabitants in 1785, but that number more than doubled by 1796 to 1,725. For context, in 1788 the Spanish listed the combined non-Indian population of Louisiana and West Florida at 42,611, the vast majority of whom lived in the lower Mississippi Valley. Suffice it to say, the Euro-American settlements that hugged the Gulf coastline east of New Orleans were not centers of colonial power or economic activity. For much of these places’ histories they were garrison towns populated by soldiers and their families, merchants, and peltry traders—providing the minimum presence necessary for French, Spanish, and British governments to include them in their respective empires.

Meanwhile, the center of life in the Gulf South during the 1770s and 1780s was in Indian towns and villages, located in the interior. The various Indians polities of the region remained the true powers to reckon with for the United States, the Spanish regime, and merchants. Indian towns continued to be the locus of social and political activity, serving as community hubs that promoted social and cultural unity. When Euro-Americans hoped to conclude treaties and alliances with native peoples, they were frequently required to wait on Indian leaders in Indian communities. In contrast, coastal towns like Pensacola and Mobile were largely ignored by their imperial rulers across the Atlantic (and often, even by nearby New Orleans). Deerskins then cattle and cotton

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5 Coker and Inglis, *Spanish Census of Pensacola*, 59.
6 Coker and Inglis, *Spanish Census of Pensacola*, 47.
flowed from the native interior, largely free from direct imperial influence, giving the Gulf Coast a mixed character different from other port cities in the Atlantic world.

However, during the nineteenth century these settlements began to cast off their backwater trappings. Residents in Indian country moved out and away from their population centers, resulting in the decline of Indian town life and cohesion—families remained connected, but in far less communal, intimate ways. As the region became a destination for thousands of new Anglo-American and African American migrants and the locus of a burgeoning cotton economy, Gulf southerners’ social orientation began to match their economic inclinations, shifting to face the ocean. Mobile and river settlements like Natchez became newly bustling ports for cotton exports, land speculation, slavery, and regional power by the 1820s, and they emerged as the new foundations for the further growth of the plantation complex.

Indian population centers like Coweta and Tuckaubatchee, formerly central to Gulf South life, began to lose their social and political leverage in the nineteenth century; few interactions, whether in terms of commerce or politics, took place on native terms after the turn of the century. While Indians continued to produce commodities—primarily livestock and cotton—intended for external markets, these commodities no longer required Indian participation for their production. Native Gulf South southerners were agents in the agricultural turn toward cattle and cotton, but they were increasingly joined by new Anglo-American migrants who brought along forced African American labor. And, as native peoples began parting with more and more land to pay off debts or as punitive measures in the wake of war with the U.S., the Native Gulf South became far more politically dependent as well. Indians no longer came to treaty negotiations as equal
partners. Both Euro-American coastal settlements and Indian towns grew simultaneously more Atlantic and American in their character.

While the United States recognized that powerful Indian groups still occupied the interior, the Americans were emboldened by Indians’ growing dependence and Spain’s chronic weakness. In the 1790s and 1800s, the Spanish garrison towns along the coast appeared as insignificant to the U.S. government as they had to Harry Gordon and William Bartram decades earlier. The western lands and New Orleans remained their real prize, while “mouldering” coastal settlements dependent on Indian commerce were afterthoughts in the evolving contest for empire. But long years of imperial neglect led to a high level of diversity in these towns’ populations. Mobile and Pensacola alone boasted residents from several African nations, nearly a dozen European polities, numerous American states, and multiple Indian groups. The seeming irrelevance of the small colonial settlements east of New Orleans has led to historiographical neglect as well. Scholars of Revolutionary and early republic America have long set their sights on the Mississippi Valley, while Indian historians continue to (rightly) emphasize the interior regions. In a sense, most of the Gulf Coast outside of New Orleans has become an afterthought in the literature every bit as much as it was for Atlantic empires.

At the end of the eighteenth century, town life on the coast reflected the fact that Gulf South culture and society remained centered in Indian country. While Mobile and Pensacola limped along during this period, merchant firms and the Indian trade

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dominated commercial activities in a region where ubiquitous sandy soil made the cultivation of cotton impractical on a large scale without Eli Whitney’s cotton gin.

Neglect from Spain meant a forced self-reliance and the necessity of good relations with Indian country residents. Small numbers of Chickasaws, Choctaws, and especially Creeks were a near-constant presence in town, whether arriving to sell deerskins or participate in treaty negotiations. Further, many locals felt little loyalty to the Spanish colonial regime, and the United States’ ambitions for the region partially relied on the inhabitants living up to their reputation as “men of no country.”

William Panton and his competitors were leading examples of men with no country. In the 1770s and 1780s deerskins remained the most valuable market commodity produced in the Gulf South. Though commercially motivated hunting was clearly on the wane as a means towards subsistence and wealth, the same trade systems that hunters and traders had long operated within continued to dominate the lives of the men and women of the region. As a result, the major locus of regional production remained on the headwaters of the Tombigbee, Alabama, and Chattahoochee Rivers. For decades, this encouraged the influx to Indian country of Euro-Americans. For example, Robert Grierson and Timothy Barnard moved there from Georgia. Richard Bailey moved from

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8 Quote in Hammond, *Slavery, Freedom, and Expansion*, 15; See also Andrew McMichael, *Atlantic Loyalties: Americans in Spanish West Florida, 1785–1810* (Athens and London, 2008). Most Indian historians now understand that much of the negotiating and economic power in the colonial Southeast was held by Native American groups until the nineteenth century. See, for example, Joshua Piker, *Okfuskee: A Creek Indian Town in Colonial America* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2004). Historians of early republic expansion are right to acknowledge Indian power early on in their works. Too often, however, they then proceed as if Indian prerogatives rarely affected the ostensibly inevitable Americanization of the Deep South, to say nothing of Indians direct and crucial participation in that process. See, for example Hammond, *Slavery, Freedom, and Expansion*; Rothman, *Slave Country*; Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*. 
coastal British Florida, and John Turnbull from Natchez and Mobile. These men and women mixed and integrated into Native American kinship networks on their arrival. Social networks and settlements in Indian country thus expanded at the expense of languishing Euro-American colonial settlements, which existed largely as *entrepôts* for goods, bases for trading firms, and small military garrisons.

Eventually, however, new commodities like cattle and especially cotton—combined with rising immigration from the United States—began to grow Euro-American coastal communities for the first time. Mobile’s population more than doubled between 1785 and 1796. Pensacola did the same between the 1780s and the 1800s. Due to a lack of data, the population of Indian country during this same span is unclear. However, Gulf South natives participated less and less in town-centered life as they scattered and dispersed along waterways in search of greater and greater amounts of land for grazing and cotton fields. Indians, who before had done most of their exchanges with resident traders in Indian towns and who had visited places like Mobile and Pensacola primarily for their seasonal presents from colonial governments, began buying and selling goods and people there instead—skins, cotton, cattle, and slaves. As Indian centers like Coweta, Tuckaubatchee, and Autosee declined as places of economic and political exchange, Euro- and African American immigrants flocked to new interior boomtowns: places like Tuscaloosa and Cahawba in Alabama, and Columbus and Cotton Gin Port in Mississippi. They became Coweta’s and Tuckaubatchee’s neighbors, but they also became their replacements. These small boomtowns gathered in local cotton—from natives and new immigrants alike—to be sent to growing coastal markets. Flatboats and steamboats replaced pack trains and pirogues as the most important forms of
transportation. Way-stations and services for travelers and mail carriers emerged there, replacing their Indian town precursors. The Deep South thus emerged in the midst of the Native South. In the early nineteenth century, they were the same place.

During their occupation of West Florida from mid-1760s until the conclusion of the American Revolution, the British had high hopes for the Gulf Coast’s agricultural potential. William Bartram, despite the fact that he had arrived in an old, well-established, but stagnant settlement, wrote as if the area was poised to emerge. He stated his belief that the area in and around Pensacola, for example, would grow rapidly once settlers took advantage of the potential offered by Escambia Bay and the rivers that emptied into it. In 1777 he noted there were “good spots of good high land, and rich swamps, favorable for the production of rice.” Bartram averred that this land had already “given rise to some plantations producing Indigo [and] Rice” along the Escambia and Conecuh Rivers.\textsuperscript{9} But most who arrived on the coastal plain quickly recognized that, in actuality, traditional staple crops like tobacco, rice, and indigo grew poorly in its sandy soil. Captain Gordon described the coastal lands of what later became Mississippi as a “general barren Land” good only for “pasturage” or the production of naval stores.\textsuperscript{10} With agriculture a poor option, those Euro-Americans who hoped to make their lives in one of the coastal settlements depended on lumber, cattle, and trade with Indians. The wealthiest among them became merchants in the peltry trade. Merchants became a vital link between native Gulf southerners in the interior and residents along the coast. And they maintained an extensive correspondence with fellow traders all along the coast as well.

\textsuperscript{9} Journal of William Bartram, August 1777, \textit{Travels of William Bartram}, 263.
\textsuperscript{10} Journal of Captain Harry Gordon, September 26, 1766, \textit{Travels in the American Colonies}, 485–86.
John Fitzpatrick, for example, resided in Manchac, nestled on a small bayou connecting the Mississippi River with Lake Pontchartrain. William Bartram described it as a rude place. The only “large and commodious” structures were those owned by “Indian traders and merchants.” Fitzpatrick’s business prospects depended on his store on the Big Black River and his Choctaw and Chickasaw customers—the same store run by the free woman of color Nelly Price throughout the early 1770s. Fitzpatrick had an extensive network of correspondents strewn across the Gulf South. For example, between 1769 and 1785, Fitzpatrick wrote hundreds of letters to merchants and customers in eleven different colonial towns. The vast majority of this correspondence was sent to small companies similar to his own. Firms like McGillivray & Struthers and John Ritson, both of Pensacola, traded in peltry, “Indian” corn, indigo, and manufactured goods in Mobile, Natchez, and New Orleans. Fitzpatrick also corresponded with suppliers and clients as far away as the Illinois country, St. Louis, Jamaica, and London. The trading economy established and developed by Euro-American merchants and native Gulf southerners thus thoroughly connected the Gulf South to a wider world.

Before William Panton tightened his grip on the Indian trade in the late 1780s and 1790s, Pensacola and Mobile hosted a plethora of smaller firms engaged in the peltry economy. Fitzpatrick exchanged multiple missives with companies like Miller, Swanson, & Co., which had stores in Mobile and Pensacola; Evan and James Jones & Co., based out of Pensacola; McGillivray & Struthers out of Mobile (perhaps Lachlan McGillivray,

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13 *Fitzpatrick Letters*
Alexander McGillivray’s father); Godley & Raincock, in Pensacola; and Miller, McIntosh, & Co. in Mobile. He also corresponded with a number of individual traders. The vast majority of these men lived in either Pensacola or Mobile, but, like Fitzpatrick, they depended on the deerskins produced in Creek, Chickasaw, and Choctaw countries.

A perusal of Fitzpatrick’s letters highlights some of the vagaries and minutiae of the peltry trade as conducted on a far smaller scale than that eventually practiced by Panton & Leslie or Turnbull & Joyce. In August 1768 Fitzpatrick wrote to trader John Stephenson, in Pensacola, that “Deer Skins in the hair are at 45 sols & 50 per lb. and [in] the Leather 37 ½ sols to 40 per lb.” The exact reason for the discrepancy in this case is unclear, since “finished” skins “in the leather” were usually worth more.\textsuperscript{14} It might have had to do with the higher potential for unprotected hides to rot in the summer heat and humidity. Fitzpatrick later wrote that “the skins Take A great Deal of Care in this time of the year,” and that on the arrival of “the summer Convoy” from Indian country, “I shall Endeavor to Change [my stock] for Deer Skins in the Hair [instead].” Fitzpatrick also indicated just how complex monetary matters could be in a borderland situated between multiple empires and Indian groups. In a single missive in 1769 he converted currency several times, from Spanish “sols,” to British pounds, to dollars, and back to sols—a frequent task for the Manchac merchant.\textsuperscript{15} One year later he wrote to the Mobile firm McGillivray & Struthers that, not having cash on hand, he would need to pay his debt to them “part in Bear Skins and part in some of the Inferiour sort of Deer Skins Which

\textsuperscript{14} On deerskin preparation and production, see Kathryn E. Holland Braund, \textit{Deerskins & Duffels: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1685–1815} (Lincoln, Neb., and London, 1993), 68–69.

would not suit” the New Orleans market, demonstrating that even merchants at the end of
the trade line from the interior to the coast were forced to deal in credit and barter, rather
than specie.16

Pelts were not always of a consistent quality on their arrival in coastal towns. In
1771 Natchez trader Henry Lefleur complained of the poor prices Fitzpatrick gave for
Lefleur’s deerskins, to which Fitzpatrick responded “I have paid you as much as I could
afford; Seeing that they w[ere] Drest with oil And I must git them all done over Again.
Your Illinois leather I have paid You the price it sells for in town.” Lefleur’s complaint
did not prevent Fitzpatrick from doing the trader a favor, however. Fitzpatrick finished
his reply by noting that “I will sell your Elk skins for your Acct. As I [purchase] none of
them” myself.17 Timing the peltry’s seasonal arrivals was also crucial. Tiny West Florida
settlements like Manchac received few visits from Atlantic buyers during the year, and
missing one boat or barge could mean a significant profit loss. Further illustrating his
town’s literal backwater status, Fitzpatrick wrote to Michael Hoopock, who traded with
the Choctaws north of Grand Gulf, in 1777, asking him “to make all posible hast with
y[our] Skins; the arivalle of which will inable me to Discharge my affers . . . But if your
Skins Came to hand after the Vessells have Saild for England, they will fall in there Price
Besides the trouble and Expances that will attend Keeping them on hand all Summer.”18
Fitzpatrick, like most of his fellow traders, could not make his entire living from
deer skins. His letters frequently discuss exchanging small amounts of indigo, cotton,
corn, textiles, and a long list of “Sundries” during his decades in West Florida.

16 John Fitzpatrick to McGillivray and Struthers, April 13, 1769, Fitzpatrick Letters, 44–45.
Fitzpatrick does not appear to have dealt directly with Native Americans, leaving that to his store manager, Nelly Price, and to the middleman traders who comprised most of his customers.

We know that many of these middlemen traders were intricately—even intimately—involved with Indian country kinship and daily life. But coastal resident proprietors depended on personal relationships with native Gulf Southerners as well. Many of Fitzpatrick’s counterparts had extensive contacts in Indian country. In 1771 Fitzpatrick complained about the debt owed him by a firm named Connor & Mathews, but lamented that he might never see this money. “[Connor] is not hear [sic] Nor hadnt been these some Months past; he keeps with the Indians about the Grand Gulph above the fort Natchez, so as there is no such thing As my seeing him.”

Fitzpatrick also did business with the Alston brothers of Natchez. John and Philip traded with the Choctaws northeast of that town and apparently also with the small Indian group, the Chittimachas, in lower Louisiana. John Alston eventually permanently moved to a Choctaw community in 1781. Natchez trader and planter George Rapalje also developed a business relationship with Fitzpatrick. George along with his brothers Isaac and Jacques were peltry traders among the Choctaws in addition to their agricultural endeavors—they were some of the first Euro-Americans to farm near the Loosa Chito region. Jacques also once worked as a trader for John Turnbull in Turnbull’s Walnut Hills store. And, of course, William Panton became quite personally involved in business relationships with a

19 John Fitzpatrick to McGillivray and Struthers, October 9, 1771, Fitzpatrick Letters, 111.
20 John Fitzpatrick to Philip Alston, July 24, 1777, Fitzpatrick Letters, 259.
number of Creek headmen and “Indian factors,” at least several of whom occasionally corresponded with Panton and visited him in Pensacola.

By all accounts, Pensacola remained a miserable little village huddled on the Gulf of Mexico for much of its early history. That it survived at all is surprising. During the period of British occupation, Euro-American and European officials there felt isolated. In 1766 the West Florida General Assembly lamented the sorry state of the town’s fortifications, noting they would be nearly useless against the specter of the “ten thousand warlike savages that immediately surround us . . . [who] can depend on supplies from [Spanish] New Orleans,” and thus—the reasoning must have gone—might think nothing of wiping them from the map. The area immediately surrounding Pensacola initially appeared to offer substantial natural and agricultural advantages. When visiting in the late summer of 1778 William Bartram hailed the surrounding “rich swamps, favourable for Rice . . . Indigo, Corn, Batatas, etc.”¹² But instead the land turned out to be nearly unusable for plantation agriculture. Once visitors became familiar with the sandy, poor soil of the coastal plain, the reason for the continual lack of extensive plantations became obvious. Coastal settlements east of New Orleans relied on trade to prosper. And by far their most important trading partners were the residents of Indian country.

The unsuitability of Pensacola’s hinterlands for commercial agriculture and the town’s location in a “no man’s land” resulted in neglect from both imperial officials and European immigrants. This kept Pensacola small, but it also made it an extremely self-contained, organic, and eclectic community over the decades. The first reliable census of the town was taken by Spain in 1784, and of the 593 inhabitants, the recorder

¹² Journal of William Bartram, August 1778, Travels of William Bartram, 263.
enumerated 183 “mulatto and negro” slaves, 28 “free mulattoes and negroes,” and 381 whites.\(^{23}\) No Indians were listed, and national identities were left blank. Through several subsequent censuses in subsequent decades, however, there were hints of the increasing diversity.

In 1798 a Catholic bishop visited the colony in order to perform confirmation sacraments for locals. Of the 135 people who were confirmed into the Catholic faith during that visit, 58 were slaves “of color” and 15 were free people of color. This meant that over 54 percent of Pensacola’s newly confirmed residents were non-white. This was during the time that Panton & Leslie dominated local commerce, and three of the company’s slaves received confirmation: Francisco, Juan, and an unnamed son of “Nanci.” The mothers of all three also belonged to Panton, showing that he kept at least six slaves with him in town, and probably many more than six. Given the most common ways Panton acquired slaves—either from the West Indies or Indian country—at least a few of these men and women had likely been born elsewhere.\(^{24}\) Other examples of the diverse origins of Pensacola’s people of color include a man named Manuel, who received confirmation though he was “a negro of the Congo Nation” and enslaved to a man named Juan del Dugue. Thirty-one of the confirmed were noted as mixed or “mulatto,” including intriguingly “Valerio, Quarteron slave,” the son of a free woman of color and Juan Cyprien, the “mulatto son” of the “free negra” India (why Valerio’s and Cyprien’s conditions did not follow those of their mothers is unknown). India’s name is

\(^{23}\) 1784 Pensacola Census, Coker and Inglis, *Spanish Census of Pensacola*, 45.

\(^{24}\) Prior to Vatican II, most Catholics were eligible to receive Confirmation only after age thirteen, meaning none of these individuals would have been young children and many would have been adults.
unusual, and it is possible she either had kin in Indian country or in the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{25} Miscegenation also appears to have been relatively common in Pensacola. In the 1784 census Juan LaCosta, a single white man, is listed as cohabitating with Silvi, a free woman of color. Their similar ages—twenty-six and twenty-one, respectively—strongly implies that they were a couple. Beltrán Sucie, thirty years old and single, cohabitated with Juana, an enslaved black girl of nineteen and a free child of color named Maria Josefa who was four months old at the time. This also might have been a familial relationship.\textsuperscript{26} By 1802 the number of free people of color residing in town had doubled from twenty-eight to fifty-six, though whether these men and women were local-born or immigrants is impossible to tell definitively.\textsuperscript{27}

Like Pensacola, Mobile’s early years did not exhibit much growth, either in terms of population or agriculture. It also had a reputation as an “unhealthful” place that required seasoning to survive. James Adair called Mobile “the graveyard for Britons” in 1775, and a British doctor once remarked with some astonishment that “[if] one leaves off his shoes for one day they are quite mouldy and . . . the hardest and best polished wood will gather mouldiness in a short time.”\textsuperscript{28} Also similar to Pensacola, Mobile’s Indian trade featured prominently in local commerce, though many individuals raised cattle as well, much like their Creek and Choctaw neighbors to the north. Before the nineteenth century, the names of Mobile’s most significant families remained fairly consistent over multiple decades, illustrating the general isolation of the town and few

\textsuperscript{25} Confirmations in Pensacola, 1798, in Coker and Inglis, \textit{Censuses of Pensacola}, 64–77.
\textsuperscript{26} 1784 Census of Pensacola, in Coker and Inglis, \textit{Censuses of Pensacola}, 31–32.
\textsuperscript{27} 1802 Census of Pensacola, in Coker and Inglis, \textit{Censuses of Pensacola}, 78.
newcomers. Names like Dubroca, Chastang, Rochon, Touillet, and Lalande fill local church, civic, and estate records for multiple generations. Most of these families, as evidenced by the church’s separate “colored baptisms” volumes, also had branches of free people of color with the same names.

Travelers of this period, however, could not fail to notice that Mobile and Pensacola were certainly not similar in terms of soil quality. Though Mobile and its jurisdiction’s population hovered around seven hundred, residents had apparently achieved some success with cotton. As early as 1772 Bernard Romans wrote to British officials that “although [cotton] has not yet been raised in a sufficient extent to export a considerable quantity thereof . . . when we consider the number of manufactures in Lancashire, Derbyshire, and Cheshire that consume this beneficial commodity . . . we may perhaps find it worthy of a more universal propagation.” Mobile’s soil and climate was not that of the Carolina and Georgia Sea Islands, however, and only short staple cotton grew productively in Mobile. Thus, before Eli Whitney’s cotton gin, such “universal propagation” would not have produced the yields Romans imagined. This, however, did not stop Mobile’s residents from attempting to use their own ingenuity to solve this problem. “One of these [ginning] machines I saw at Mr. Krebs,” Romans noted, but Krebs had it “partially taken down” during his visit and the planter was “very cautious in answering my questions” about its construction. Mobile’s residents clearly understood cotton’s potential for their future.29

Mobile was destined to be an important center for the Gulf South’s cotton exports and thus an important Deep South city. Longtime residents of the town and surrounding

29 Quoted in Hamilton, Colonial Mobile, 290–92.
hinterlands, however, demonstrated that a stereotypical Deep South racial hierarchy was slow to materialize. Mobile retained a vibrant free black community that appears to have thrived well into the nineteenth century. Take the free black branch of the Chastang family, for example. Dr. John Chastang owned an estate on the Mobile River that eventually became known as “Chastang’s Bluff” (also known as “Chastang’s Landing”), but he journeyed into Mobile fairly frequently. He was a slave owner, a cattle rancher, and a regular customer of traders Turnbull & Joyce, whose records indicate that Chastang owed the company $424 in 1798. Records also show he did business, and was perhaps friendly, with William Panton, who often utilized the landowner’s estate to stash supplies and fresh horses for Panton’s associates on their way to the Upper Creek or Choctaw countries.\(^{30}\) Chastang lived in a big house known to locals as Harigay Hall.\(^{31}\) Just like many of his neighbors, he can be interpreted as the vanguard of a Deep South plantation complex. But Chastang’s partner was a free woman of color and Mobile native named Luisa, and together the two of them were the progenitors of an extensive multi-racial family.

The Chastang family remained active in the Mobile Catholic Church, and church records provide clues about the connections they formed in and around town during the first decades of the nineteenth century. John and Luisa’s oldest son, Basilio Chastang, married a woman named Desiree Laurent, who was also the child of black and white

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parents. Basilio followed in his father’s footsteps to raise cattle with enslaved labor. He also became a corporal in the mulatto militia regiment of Mobile by the late 1790s. Basilio and Desiree had at least two children that appear in the Mobile baptismal records—two daughters in 1802 and late 1803, respectively—both of whom are listed as free females “of color.” John and Luisa’s second son, Zenon Chastang, also became a cattle rancher and slaveholder. He married the daughter of a mixed couple named Maria Teresa Bernoudy. Between 1811 and 1827 Zenon and Maria Chastang had at least five children of their own.32

Free men and women of color certainly experienced racial discrimination. Church officials kept their baptismal, marriage, and burial records in separate “Colored” books in the local diocese, for example. But they were not excluded from church, civic, or political life. Most of the Chastangs became property owners, and many owned slaves. In 1809 Zenon Chastang (erroneously transcribed as “Trenon”) affixed his signature, along with several other local whites, to a petition to the U.S. Congress. The petition asked the United States to divide the Mississippi Territory in two due to the fact that “the remoteness of their situation, and the total dissimilarity of their channels of Trade, give the people of the Mobile [River] and its adjacent waters, no common interest with those of the Mississippi,” and that they therefore required their own government. At least three

other free people of color signed the petition as well, including Edouard Chastang, Baptistie Chastang, and Silvester Andry.\textsuperscript{33}

The Chastangs were thus not the only prominent free family of color in Mobile by the nineteenth century. Other families include the Colons; branches of the Dubrocas and the Andrys—who were also slaveholding families; the Treniers, who owned slaves and at least one of whom, Juan Bautista Trenier, worked as a Choctaw interpreter for the Spanish government; and the Lalandas, whose patriarch owned a plantation on Mobile Bay by 1796 and commanded the mulatto militia. All of these families intermarried with each other and often acted as godparents to one anothers’ children until at least the late 1820s and 1830s.\textsuperscript{34} One free black man named Nicolas Mangoula worked as a mason, and John Joyce, John Turnbull’s junior business partner, trusted his skills enough to employ Mangoula as an inspector for the brick Fort Condé in 1793.\textsuperscript{35} The arrival of American government and the subsequent sharp increase in Anglo-American migration increased local racial prejudice and threatened free people of color’s autonomy. But free people of color also managed to maintain many of their property holdings and access to the legal system into the 1820s.

Mobile’s free people of color were as linked to the changing Indian trade economy as were their white neighbors. According to the records of Turnbull & Joyce,


\textsuperscript{34} Mobile Catholic Church records, “Colored Baptisms” and “Colored Marriages,” entries for Chastangs, Dubrocas, Andrys, Treniers, and Lalandes (no page numbers).

\textsuperscript{35} Hamilton, \textit{Colonial Mobile}, 338.
the Chastangs, the Landrys, and the Dubrocas were all regular customers (and debtors) to John Turnbull. The surviving ledgers do not indicate what goods they purchased from Turnbull, but they were buying goods from him by at least 1795, around the time that Turnbull and his partner John Joyce began purchasing multiple properties in town. A host of other Mobile residents—many of whom were cattle ranchers and some of whom became cotton planters in later years—show up on these ledgers as well.36 As we know, Turnbull himself made concerted efforts in the 1790s to count less on the declining deerskin trade and invest more of his company’s capital in land, cotton, cattle, and slaves. His Mobile customers were an integral part of that company transition. A man named Pierre Trouillet, for example, was a customer and a business associate of Turnbull. Trouillet owned land (whether he planted or raised livestock on it is uncertain) near the mouth of the Tombigbee River, not far from one of Turnbull’s plantations, and occasionally operated as a slave dealer as well in the late 1790s.37 Turnbull’s ledgers list Trouillet as indebted to the company for over one thousand dollars in 1795, and he also owed money to Panton & Leslie that same year, though exactly how much is unknown.38 During that same year, Trouillet sold a slave to Arthur Carney—a Choctaw country resident of African and Choctaw descent and a deerskin trader and slave trader himself at the time. Carney was forced to give up his “Negro bought of Pierre Trouillet’s estate” to John Turnbull in 1796 as part of own Carney’s debt payments to the company, again illustrating the degree to which John Turnbull and William Panton occupied the center of

36 Turnbull and Joyce Account Book, 1795–1798, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.
37 Hamilton, Colonial Mobile, 330.
38 Panton and Leslie Balance Sheet of 1795, unknown dates, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.
multiple social and economic networks in the Gulf South.\textsuperscript{39} Several of Pierre Trouillet’s kin traded with Turnbull as well.\textsuperscript{40} Indeed, Mobile residents’ names litter Turnbull’s account books, including multiple members of the Chastang, Dubroca, and Landry families.\textsuperscript{41}

Before the nineteenth century, then, Indian-to-coast trade and social relationships kept Mobile afloat. John Joyce, John Turnbull’s partner in the deerskin trade, was a leading, and wealthy, resident during the 1780s and 1790s, and Turnbull & Joyce operated a store in town. In 1788 Joyce purchased a house and large lot from a free man of color named Ruiz on the corner of what is today St. Joseph and St. Michael Streets, and by the 1790s he and Turnbull had used their peltry profits to purchase several other buildings in town. Joyce donated and invested a significant amount of his own money in renovating Fort Condé for the Spanish military garrison in 1793 and acted as the project’s contractor. Panton & Leslie docked several of their fifteen schooners in Mobile during the summer seasons, and the company operated a branch store there as well, selling to the Choctaws and Upper Creeks from a more accessible vantage point than Pensacola provided. John Forbes, Panton’s eventual successor, ran Panton’s Mobile store, and he owned some “small cabins” on St. Charles Street by 1795 before later inheriting all of Panton’s operations upon the proprietor’s death in 1798. A man named William Loyson, a Mobile silversmith during the British regime, transitioned into deerskin trading after the

\textsuperscript{39} Receipt for Arthur Carney’s debt, June 1796, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.
\textsuperscript{40} Many of these entries simply list “Trouillet” next to the amounts owed, but the context seems to indicate that many of these represented separate members of the same family.
\textsuperscript{41} It should also be remembered that the names of these Mobile residents—both whites and free people of color—appear in debt account books alongside equal numbers of Indian country residents like the Colberts, the Perrymans, and many others. This again underscores the way that traders like Turnbull and Panton directly tied together the peoples and economies of interior Indian towns and coastal European communities.
Spanish takeover. He sold most of his deerskins, which he personally purchased from Upper Creek hunters, to John Joyce. When Loyson went bankrupt in the late 1790s, most of his property went to Joyce to pay off his debts.\(^{42}\) Between Joyce, Turnbull, Panton, and Forbes, much of the financial power in Mobile emanated from the peltry trade.

Indian-produced commodities remained vitally important to Mobile’s residents through the last decades of the eighteenth century. But Indian social and cultural influences exerted pressure on Mobile as well. Take for example the previously mentioned stonemason and free man of color, Nicolas Mangoula. As historian David Wheat has pointed out, “Mangoula” translates as “my friend” in Mobilian Jargon, a local pidgin and a trade language among the Choctaw and Chickasaw groups northwest of Mobile. Mangoula shows up in Mobile sometime during the 1760s, but his name suggests he may have been partly raised among Native Americans. Given that he personally chose his own last name during his life (he was not apparently born with a surname), his choice of Mangoula, rather than a name directly derived from French or African patois, was telling. At the very least, the choice illustrates that Mangoula could and likely did converse with local Native Americans when he met them.\(^{43}\)

Turnbull & Joyce was a significant part of financing Mobile’s economic changes at the turn of the century. But the same was also true for the neighboring, much smaller, and ethnically mixed community of Tensaw. Tensaw was founded as a predominantly


Creek settlement in the 1770s. Non-native Americans later settled there as well, in the same neighborhood as those Creeks. By 1804, according to Ephraim Kirby, about “fifty or sixty” white families lived in “the Tensaw settlement,” most of whom raised cattle and practiced subsistence agriculture. The earliest European settlers in Tensaw were led by former British Army officer Robert Farmar, who settled in the area with his family sometime in 1776 or 1777. He established a small community of Tories who lived neighbor to the Creek families that settled near the small Tensas River around the same time. But other ethnic Europeans soon joined the mix. “Besides Mr. Farm[a]r’s dwellings,” William Bartram wrote while visiting, “there are many others inhabited by French families.” A few Spanish colonials moved there as well, such that by 1780 the community demonstrated a unique mixture of Creek, British, French, and Spanish influences, habitation practices, and cultural expressions.44

Europeans’ habitations had begun to illegally utilize Creek lands by then, as Kirby reported they “have effected most of their cultivation upon ground where the native right remains unextinguished.” Tensaw residents also traded extensively with John Turnbull. Turnbull’s Tensaw debtors included Samuel Hines, Robert Gilchrist, Joseph Thompson, John Branton, and Charles Conway. Branton and Conway, at least, purchased slaves from Turnbull. The company ledger noted that sometime in the 1790s Turnbull had repossessed one of Branton’s “negroes” as collateral for the rest of the debt he owed. In 1799 Conway complained directly to Turnbull that another one of his slaves, “named

Isam,” who he had purchased from Turnbull & Joyce, had run away and was suspected of hiding near Baton Rouge.\(^45\)

Tensaw was frequently the scene of extensive interactions between Gulf South natives and immigrants. While the community was ostensibly Creek, those Creeks who lived there seem to have occupied an ambiguous position in an evolving Creek society and did not apparently recognize the authority of the more significant headmen in the Upper and Lower towns.\(^46\) Combined with the number of Europeans and Euro-Americans who made their homes and farms there, Tensaw became a quintessential “melting pot” of the Gulf South, a region that was full of such racially and culturally diverse places by the end of the eighteenth century.

Tensaw was far from a traditional Creek town and, true to the Gulf South’s famously ambiguous loyalties, it developed something of a reputation for political dissidence. Alexander McGillivray, for example, found the inhabitants there to be a continual thorn in his side. Though McGillivray never enjoyed total authority among the Upper Creeks—and was openly rejected by most Lower Creek towns—Tensaws inhabitants’ activities often belied his claim to be the leader of a unified Creek nation. When Creek headman William Weatherford was wanted for questioning by the Spanish government in 1787 in relation to rumors he was part of a simmering pro-British faction

\(^{45}\) Turnbull & Joyce Account Book, 1795–1798, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 8; Charles Norwood to John Turnbull, June 13, 1799, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folder 3; Ephraim Kirby to Thomas Jefferson, May 1, 1804, Miss. Terr. Papers, 322–36.

\(^{46}\) Tensaw’s founding as late as 1776 is odd, as it was not a traditional Creek town or village. Perhaps the community was initially settled by a splinter group of Creeks who were no longer satisfied with their headmen. Certainly, given Alexander McGillivray’s well-known dislike of the town, this suggestion appears suggestive. Regardless, Tensaw’s ethnically mixed character made it one of the more unique communities in the Gulf South borderlands. See Karl Davis, “The Founding of Tensaw: Kinship, Community, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Creek Nation,” in Brown, ed., Coastal Encounters, 81–98.
in the region, officials relied on McGillivray to bring Weatherford in. “I wish that
Weatherford had been better secured,” a defeated McGillivray wrote to Arturo O’Neill in
July 1787, after Weatherford escaped his custody. Inhabitants in Tensaw had apparently
provided him a safe house. “[I] have reason to believe that they [Weatherford and his
friends] are harboured about Tensaw or Tombigbee River, there are Some bad people as
him in Tensaw and the other place,” McGillivray wrote. Less than a year later, the
Spanish commandant of Mobile accused McGillivray of illegally sending warriors to
attack Tensaw settlers. In reply, McGillivray did not deny “throw[ing] out menaces
against those Settlers of the Tensaw,” but he justified it by claiming that he was only
acting in Spain’s imperial interests. “They [Tensaw settlers] and the Tombegbie Settlers
another, similarly diverse settlement] are Very desirous of being Joint with the
americans,” he claimed. McGillivray singled out one man in particular, “one Walton
come from Cumberland and Georgia who,” the Creek leader claimed, “is now making
plans” to aid the American cause in the region.

McGillivray’s characterization of Tensaw was incomplete, however. At the least,
not all the settlement’s inhabitants actively opposed McGillivray. In late 1788, as Spanish
officials continued to suspect McGillivray’s loyalties to their regime, Governor Arturo
O’Neill’s spies claimed that the Creek leader had enlisted “two Youths from Tensaw,
named Walcord and Walsh,” to “Spread the rumor . . . that the said McGillivray has
given commissions for the enlistment in that settlement of whites who would like to arm

47 Alexander McGillivray to Arturo O’Neill, July 12, 1787, Papers of Panton, Leslie and
Company, (materials collected by the Papers of Panton, Leslie and Co. Project, John C.
Pace Library, University of West Florida, 26 microfilm reels); hereinafter cited as
themselves and unite with him and the Indians.” O’Neill remained concerned about the town’s loyalties as well, fearing a pro-English conspiracy was underway. When Tensaw and Panton-affiliated trader John Linder, with whom O’Neill was familiar, showed up in Pensacola in 1788, he arrived in the company of another trader along with “two Indians, a Mestizo, and four Englishmen,” all of whom resided in Tensaw. O’Neill pointedly asked Linder “if in Tensaw they did not talk of the landing of goods and munitions and arms on the Mosquito Coast [near the mouth of the Apalachicola River] by some English emissaries[?],” an accusation they apparently denied. Tensaw was thus poorly defined by its status as a “Creek” community. It exhibited a diverse mix of people from all over the Atlantic world by the 1790s. Undoubtedly this resulted from the late date of its founding—sometime about 1776—as well as its growing reputation as a haven for exiles, whether in the form of Anglo-American Tories, Creek outliers, or refugees from various failed colonial ventures.

Indeed, about the only thing that appeared to unite Tensaw before the turn of the century was its heavy involvement in the deerskin trade, just like Mobile, Pensacola,

49 Arturo O’Neill to Estevan Miró, August 15, 1788, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 4, frame 1407-8. This is another testament to how unique and diverse the Gulf South had become. Not even considering the many “whites” who had already integrated into Indian country kin networks, an military or political alliance between Native Americans and “whites” was not as outlandish as it might sound, nor would have been an independent “Creek Nation.” Certainly when the British adventurer William Augustus Bowles attempted to claim the title of “Director General of the Creek Nation” in the interest of establishing the independent state of “Muskogee,” Spanish and American officials (and McGillivray himself) took his threat very seriously. Bowles even successfully won a handful of Lower Creeks and Seminoles to his cause before he was captured and imprisoned in Havanna. See Gilbert C. Din, War on the Gulf Coast: The Spanish Fight Against William Augustus Bowles (Gainesville, Fla., and other cities, 2012); and J. Leitch Wright, William Augustus Bowles: Director General of the Creek Nation (Athens, Ga., 1967).

50 Arturo O’Neill to Estevan Miró, August 15, 1788, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 4, frame 1407-8.
Manchac, and other Gulf South communities.\footnote{Davis, “The Founding of Tensaw.”} Even in Natchez, where along the banks of the Mississippi the soil proved more than fertile enough for plantation agriculture, and where New Orleans was a relatively simple (if still perilous) journey downriver, the collective attention of residents often remained fixed on Indian country. Choctaw country residents, for example, spent time socializing, and occasionally fighting, with Natchez’s inhabitants. U.S. Choctaw agent John McKee recounted an unfortunate example to Benjamin Hawkins in 1801, writing that “Lewis Vaun, a half breed Chactaw, states to me . . . [that] his brother Samuel Vaun was in the town of Natchez where he was seen in the evening in company of a[another] Chactaw, both intoxicated and quarreling.” After the two separated, Lewis Vaun further reported that his brother got into a second fight later that same night, and “that his brother Samuel was killed by a Negro.”\footnote{John McKee to Benjamin Hawkins, December 9, 1801, Miss. Terr. Arch., 358–59.} Natchez’s whites also established relationships with Indian country residents. Indebted, wanted, or unhappy Natchez residents often “abscond[ed] to the [Indian] Nation . . . and never heard of again,” as was the case for planter/traders like John Alston, William Dueitt, and Miguel Lopez; economic refugees like Tacitus and Isaac Gaillard; and day laborers like Samuel Smith.\footnote{Alexander McIntosh to the Commandant of Natchez concerning John Alston’s children, July 29, 1781, in May Wilson McBee, ed., The Natchez Court Records, 1767–1805: Abstracts of Early Records (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1953; hereinafter cited as Natchez Court Records) 1; Auction of William Dueitt’s slaves, August 21, 1784, Natchez Court Records, 27; The King vs. Michael Lopez, March 1786, Natchez Court Records, 246.} Indian country provided the surest way to start a new life at the end of the eighteenth century. Alston and other planters even took their slaves with them to Choctaw country. Natchez officials, like the Spanish colonial government more generally, recognized the need to influence the peltry economy in order to promote their
regime’s stability, leading to attempts to build a new Spanish-controlled trading fort north of Natchez, at Nogales, in the early 1790s.

Residents and governments in colonial towns like Natchez, Mobile, Pensacola, Tensaw, as well as smaller settlements like Manchac depended on the trade economy, and increasingly livestock, rather than staple plantation agriculture. This necessarily oriented them toward Indian country and its inhabitants—the place and peoples who produced the deerskins that drove the economy. Partially as a result, Indian towns themselves grew ever more diverse in the 1770s and 1780s with the incorporation of increasing numbers of Euro-American traders and homesteaders. Indian life in the interior nevertheless remained the center of Gulf South social and economic life, for Indians as well as whites and blacks, into the 1790s.

Before that decade, Indian traders only seasonally or occasionally made their way to coastal settlements, where they deposited their collected pelts. But they spent a great deal of time moving between Indian country communities in the interior. Travelers’ journals sometimes highlighted the ways that resident traders moved in and out of these towns for trading or other purposes. While visiting the Upper Creek towns in 1772, traveler David Taitt wrote that he “went this Morning to the Worsita Square (adjoining this Town) in company with a [trader] Mr. Scott from the Hillabies [town].” While there, Taitt encountered John Miller, another trader who was visiting customers and friends there, but who was himself “from the Euchties [Lower town].”

Richard Bailey was another trader who ultimately started a family among Creeks in the late eighteenth century. He became a close associate of Benjamin Hawkins in later years, but in the

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1770s he was “a hireling trading for Mr. Mackay” in the town of Autosee, to which he traveled in the winter and spring months from Georgia. When Taitt met him in February 1772, he was in Tuckaubatchee, but had just “arrived from Pensacola where he and some others had been to purchase Rum with Skins.” Taitt also noted the presence of Robert Grierson and William Simory during his stay. The former became a permanent Hillabee resident, but in the 1770s he traveled back and forth between Upper Creek towns like Tookaubatchee, Autosee, Okfuskee, and others. Simory himself was “another hireling [trader] for Mr. Mackay in the Hochlawalla Town” who was staying in Tuckaubatchee at the time for unknown reasons.55

The actions and activities undertaken in Indian country routinely had important consequences for coastal settlements. Traders made their living from the deerskins hunted and produced by native Gulf southerners, and firm owners in Pensacola, Mobile, and Natchez depended on those skins for their own prosperity. In essence then, Pensacola and Mobile, still largely ignored by Madrid and Havana, depended on those same firms—to purchase, build, and maintain buildings, to loan money, to pay important taxes, and to provide sorely needed manufactured goods to town residents. In the 1770s, 1780s, and 1790s, coastal and interior residents alike depended on peltry. But the Gulf South interior remained central in political and military senses as well. The political decisions made in Indian country carried significant weight for various colonial regimes—not only for Spain but also for Britain and the United States as well.

55 David Taitt to Charles Stuart, February 26, 1772, Travels in the American Colonies, 512; David Taitt to Charles Stuart, March 16, 1772, Travels in the American Colonies, 524–25.
The Spanish regime’s survival in North America often hung on the decisions made by the region’s various headmen, and their official correspondence reflected this reality. Tuckaubatchee, for instance, one of the larger towns in Creek country, frequently acted as a political hub. In 1786 a group of Creek headmen gathered there to confer and discuss how they would address recent encroachments by settlers and traders from the United States. As Alexander McGillivray wrote from Tuckaubatchee to Estevan Miró after the conference, “it was our duty to check the Americans in time before they got too strong for us to contest them”—and too strong for Spain to contest them as well, the Creek leader might have added. Miró was impatient to know what the Tuckaubatchee conference had decided. He must have been relieved to hear that McGillivray managed to convince his fellow headmen to adopt fairly aggressive recommendations: “to traverse all that part of the Country in dispute and whenever they found any American Settlers to drive them off and to destroy all the buildings on it.”56

Though the Creeks acted in the best interest of Spain’s colonial government in that instance, the fact that the Spanish regime’s rapt attention hung on the decisions made in Indian country—in the Gulf South interior—was emblematic of the political and military power still commanded by the region’s native peoples before the nineteenth century. By almost any metric—demographics, economics, sociocultural influence—European settlements continued to exist on the margins of Gulf South society, both in physical and symbolic senses. Local events still hinged on decisions made in the interior by native Gulf southerners. This is not to discount the power of colonial regimes like that in British America. The inhabitants of Indian country understood they did not have the

56 Alexander McGillivray to Estevan Miró, May 1, 1786, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 2, frame 1044–49.
leverage or the unity necessary to act unilaterally. The diffuse, persuasion-based nature of Indian political leadership did not allow for such action. Nevertheless, Indian power—not Spanish and not American—was still the most significant factor in the local political and military equation.

Though more potent than the waning Spanish colonies, the Americans’ fortunes often depended on swaying Gulf South natives to see things their way. Though they had advantages over the perilously weak Spanish in the Floridas, the fledgling United States did not have the power to dictate its will in the region west of the Ogeechee River and South of the Tennessee River—the borderlands between native and American spheres of influence. In 1785 Benjamin Hawkins, well before he became resident at the Creek Agency, was part of a five-man commission sent by Georgia to the edge of Creek country in an effort to cool relations between the two peoples. The commissioners came away disappointed after the headmen from only two towns, “instead of about one hundred—the number in the whole nation,” showed up to treat with them.57

As Hawkins came to realize, the fate of the Gulf South was largely in the hands of native leaders. Europeans and Euro-Americans at least needed Indian cooperation before they could effectively pursue their own goals.58 Spain’s multi-year negotiations with the Choctaws for permission to build a trading fort at Nogales, near present day Vicksburg,

57 The fact that the United States apparently expected over a hundred Indian leaders to show up for negotiations betrays the inexperienced way that the American government approached diplomacy with their Native neighbors in the Southeast. Historically, the British government had handled these types of talks, and American experiences with the Iroquois and other peoples further north were not as helpful as they expected in the South, primarily due to the relatively strong geo-political position held by the Creeks, and to a lesser extent by the various Choctaw and Chickasaw groups.
58 Benjamin Hawkins, Andrew Pickens, Joseph Martin, and Lachlain McIntosh to Charles Thompson, November 11, 1785, Panton and Leslie Papers, reel 2, frame 768-69.
reflected this reality as well. Though the colonial government asked only for enough land
to build the fort, the negotiations lasted nearly two years. Throughout that period, Spanish
negotiators like Stephen Minor were required repeatedly to wait on the pleasure or arrival
of Choctaw leaders, their representatives, or resident white traders (who had an important
influence on the Nogales talks). At one point, when Franchimastabe told Minor he would
have to wait for at least three days for other headmen to arrive, he punctuated it by
“adding that when he would go to see white people he would have to wait until they
wanted to speak and that I should have to do the same in his country where he was as
much a Chief as Governor Miró in New Orleans.”

Near the end of negotiations in 1792, Franchimastabe and “the King of the Chicasas” finally agreed to meet officials in
Natchez. Manuel Gayoso reported that they arrived in force, “with over two hundred
Indians, including Chiefs and Warriors.” When the large group finally arrived in town,
Gayoso was frustrated to find that the Native American delegation insisted on native
customs—everyone sitting in specific places according to rank, “giving preference to the
King of the Chicasas, followed by Franchimastabe, . . . [eight other chiefs], and many
captains and warriors of both” the Choctaws and Chickasaws. Much to Gayoso’s chagrin,
the meeting lasted several days, “thousands of repetitions” and dozens of speeches, “as is
customary among the Indians,” before a treaty was finally signed. Despite the
weakening geopolitical position of Indian towns during the last decade of the eighteenth
century, negotiations continued at Nogales and Natchez on Indian terms, and the

59 Diary of Stephen Minor’s First Mission to the Choctaws, May 30 to June 13, 1791, in
Charles A. Weeks, Paths to a Middle Ground: The Diplomacy of Natchez, Boukfouka,
Nogales, and San Fernando de las Barrancas, 1791–1795 (Tuscaloosa, 2005), 155.
60 Manuel Gayoso’s Account of the Natchez Congress, May, 1792, in Weeks, Paths to a
Middle Ground, 184–99.
Choctaws forced Gayoso to participate as such. Natchez waited on the Choctaws, just like Mobile and Pensacola waited on the Creeks. Further, the concerns of resident traders—the middlemen in the peltry trade—remained paramount in the negotiations for Nogales. As Gayoso lamented before the treaty was done, the Indians’ demands were heavily influenced “by traders already established in the [Indian] Nation whose interest opposes there being trading posts on the Ya[zoo River] whether Spanish or American. They advise the Indians that they not permit either one or the other.”

Peltry, and those who controlled its exchange, still dominated the Gulf South trade economy and thus the region’s political economy as well.

By the time of the negotiations for Nogales, however, the deerskin exchange economy was nearing the end of its dominance. This shift altered the nature of town life in Indian country. Those who could afford large herds and fields began spreading out along rivers with their families. This combined with the other pressures on southeastern Indian society adversely affected communities’ cohesion, fomenting factionalism. The final decline in peltry’s viability as a commodity, sharply increasing immigration—illegal or otherwise—from the United States, and the rise of new commodities like cotton, made many native Gulf southerners far more reliant on port cities than they had been previously. Between the 1790s and the 1820s, the importance of Indian towns (and Indian prerogatives) waned as, for the first time, coastal towns acquired increased importance and deeper links to the Atlantic world. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, Spain’s role in North America came swiftly to an end, and Anglo- and African American migrants poised to sweep into the Gulf South in unprecedented numbers.

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61 Manuel Gayoso to Estevan Miró, July 1, 1791, in Weeks, Paths to a Middle Ground, 168.
As the United States increased its presence in the Gulf South, the declining autonomy of Indian towns became more evident. The U.S. proved far more adept than Spain at providing the goods Indians demanded and depended on, and Benjamin Hawkins and the Plan of Civilization spearheaded this effort. Indian elites, anxious to hold on to their leadership positions, asked the U.S. for the means to provide for their townspeople. These ranged from Upper Creek leader Puckshunubbee’s 1801 requests for more interpreters “from among the white people” in order that “we may do our business with more satisfaction with the chiefs of the districts”—by whom he meant the American political officials in Natchez—to headman Mingco Hom Massatubby’s demand for white women to immigrate to Indian country to “teach our women” to spin and weave cotton. Massatubby assured the U.S. that “the white people may return to their own people again” after imparting their skills before he also requested ploughs, hoes, axes, saws, augers, “and a man to make wheels and a small set of blacksmiths tools.” Creek headman Puckshunubbe also asked for a blacksmith and “somebody to be sent among them to teach” his town’s women to spin.62 In the eighteenth century, deerskins had been produced by native hands with relatively inexpensive tools, and diplomacy had been conducted on native terms. In the nineteenth century, the Spanish and the deerskin economy failed, and cattle, cotton, and American power expanded. The locus of political and economic power in the Gulf South shifted toward the coasts.

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These shifts were primarily the result of multiple cultural and social incursions and debt that other historians have examined. But Native Americans also did this out of necessity. New commodities required better, more efficient relationships with external powers and more expensive manufactured tools. In other words, Indians needed a more unified voice in order to negotiate with the United States government that could no longer be either ignored or fought. Since the earliest days of American colonization, Europeans and Euro-Americans tried to address Indian leaders as if they spoke for their entire “nation,” eliding the diffuse and persuasion-based politics that actually defined Indian governments. By the end of the eighteenth century, circumstances finally led Indian elites to push their peoples toward becoming “nations” in more than name. This was a decision fundamentally made by Gulf South natives themselves. In 1801 Benjamin Hawkins reported with some satisfaction that the Chickasaws, well after their Creek neighbors had done the same, “begin to have a taste for individual property,” and they acquired it “by every means in their power.” Hawkins was proud that many seemed to be “setting out from their old towns . . . fencing their farms . . . [and] attend seriously to labour.” An even more positive development for Hawkins: “after several years of effort the Chickasaws have been prevailed on to appoint a [single] head to transact their [government] business; they now have a mingco, who is the chief of the [whole] nation, and a deliberative council” capable of making binding agreements and executive

63 Most prominently this includes Claudio Saunt, A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733–1816 (New York, 1999); Robbie Ethridge, Creek Country: The Creek Indians and Their World (Chapel Hill, 2003); and Andrew K. Frank, Creeks and Southerners: Biculturalism on the Early American Frontier (Lincoln, Neb., and London, 2005).
decisions. Benjamin Hawkins had seen Indian-American negotiations come a long way since that day in 1785 when he had hoped in vain to treat with over one hundred individual Indian leaders.

For Native Americans in the Gulf South, more efficient, centralized governance supplanted individual autonomy and authority based on persuasion and consensus because new commodities required new kinds of relations with external powers. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, especially, Native Americans began growing and manufacturing cotton in more and more quantities. Whereas deerskins were hunted, cleaned, tanned, and often sold all within the confines of Indian country with native means, cotton required larger, coastal-based companies as buyers along with complex manufactured tools and equipment from external suppliers. Spinning wheels, cotton cards, looms, and gins—the vast majority of which were produced outside Indian population centers—became essential. By 1809 Benjamin Hawkins reported that Creeks were not just making cotton but also “wool, tanning leather, making saddles, looms . . . [and] spinning wheels.” The gin he had brought to the Lower Creeks had become inadequate too. “The small saw gin heretofore in use at the Agency will be placed this summer on scale to meet the increased demand for [its use]. All the Indians who have planted cotton within thirty miles of the agency express a desire to have the gin ready [when] their cotton crop comes in,” Hawkins noted.

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64 Benjamin Hawkins to Secretary of War Dearborn, October 28, 1801, Works of Hawkins, 392–93.
Most histories render such demands for manufactured goods and machines as evidence of Gulf South natives’ growing dependence. This interpretation is accurate but it is also incomplete. With the decline of peltry and the rise of cotton and cattle, the residents of the interior indeed grew dependent on external resources and ideas in fundamental new ways. Such dependence, however, was not entirely unlike that of other regions of eastern North America. Northern textile factories depended on southern cotton in the nineteenth century. Seaboard commerce depended on goods and foodstuffs from interior regions. South Carolina and Virginia plantations required manufactured goods from elsewhere as well. In other words, native Gulf southerners pulled the bindings that tied the United States’ incipient national economy together into the Gulf South by their participation in new activities and new markets. They thereby integrated the region into a continental economy in a way that ultimately transformed it into an American region. Indians enmeshed themselves in a wider continental system—they were agents of their own transformation, despite their growing dependence. Many native cotton producers and cattle ranchers welcomed greater access to cotton gins, transportation infrastructure, and markets. If not for Indian Removal, there is no reason to believe that Indians would not have remained at the forefront of the region’s Deep South transformation.


67 No matter how inevitable Indian Removal may have seemed in retrospect, it was a contingent, political decision made by specific men (primarily the vehement anti-Indian president, Andrew Jackson) operating under a specific set of historical circumstances. Indian Removal was not a foregone conclusion.
None of this is to say that many other native Gulf southerners did not attempt to hold off their growing dependence. Benjamin Hawkins remained hopeful that Native Americans would adopt economic activities beyond simple agricultural production, but many appeared reluctant to embrace Anglo-American “civilization” without imposing limits. As Hawkins wrote in 1799, “With respect to manufactures, the progress is slow but the prospect increases.” He hoped the next step in the Plan of Civilization would be the universal Indian adoption of gins, looms, and other forms of mechanized production. A small number of Gulf southerners did this. “The traders are coming with the plan,” Hawkins wrote to James McHenry. “Robert Grierson of Hillaubee has upon my recommendation set up a manufactory of cotton.” Grierson, once a peltry trader, became a manager of labor and production. “He has employed an instructor, has five wheels and one loom which employs eleven hands …; another manufactory of mixed people is established by Thomas Marshall at [the Lower Creek town of] Coweta. He will have ten women red and black” working for him soon. At Cussetuh, another Lower Creek town, Hawkins reported there was “an establishment of Indian girls” producing cotton textiles. He sent a sample of their spun cloth to McHenry with his letter. Approximately thirty miles further south, at Palachocola, there was yet “another establishment of Indian women who have now for the loom 100 yards” of cotton cloth. 68 Robert Grierson and his neighbors, at least, also made efforts to exert greater control over the means of their production. One Indian headman made his own loom and two spinning wheels for his

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family in 1799. Within several years of Grierson’s acquisition of a cotton gin and a loom, “nearly” fifty other native Gulf southerners were using their own new machines. Hawkins described them in 1811 as having been constructed locally and “imperfectly . . . wrought.”

Hawkins’s formal report to Thomas Jefferson in 1801 indicates that manufactures and non-subsistence agriculture, and the corresponding links to external markets and logistical networks, were slowly picking up steam. “There has been a [higher] demand this season for plows, and seventy have been issued out of those sent by the Secretary of War . . . . Cotton is raised in several places, but in small quantities, by Indians.” Indians were not passive recipients of United States generosity. They actively innovated and experimented with different kinds of crops, searching for greater yields and new commodities. “The green seed [short staple cotton] is in general use, and well suited to the northern half of the [region]; and the sea island [long staple] cotton, from two successive experiments, promises to do well in the southern half.” Native Gulf southerners also experimented with sheep, fruit production, and flax, which Hawkins reported “does well, and the next season will be cultivated in several places.” In a remarkable example of entrepreneurial spirit, Indians tried crushing hickory nuts and acorns for saleable oil at the initial behest of the Indian agent.

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69 Benjamin Hawkins to Thomas Jefferson, “A Sketch of the Present State of the Objects Under the Charge of the Principal Agent for Indian Affairs South of the Ohio,” March 1, 1801, Hawkins Letters, 351–56.
70 Benjamin Hawkins to William Eustis, January 6, 1811, Hawkins Letters, 580.
71 Native Gulf southerners’ innovations were part of a long history of such efforts in the American South, extending back to the colonial period and white planters’ attempts at mechanizing and increasing the efficiency of their agricultural production. See, for example Joyce E. Chaplin, An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730–1815 (Chapel Hill, 1993).
In the year 1797, the agent finding that the hickory trees were mixed through the waving land... made an effort to encourage this manufacture [of hickory oil]; he offered three-fourths of a dollar [per] quart of oil that should be made that year... In 1798 he received eight gallons. In 1799 he purchased thirty gallons, and the last winter he fixed the price at one dollar a gallon, and the manufacture has increased to three hundred gallons actually delivered for market. Some has been sent to Mobile, and sold at two dollars, and a trader is now descending the Alabama [River], on his way to New Orleans... with two hundred and forty gallons of the oil.

The production of this oil was not a simple process. As Hawkins described it—the nuts were dried, ground, boiled, and, as the oil rose to the top, “brushed off with feathers”—makes the idea of producing hundreds of gallons appear quite ambitious.72 The manufacture of such products was the result of a combination of hard won traditional knowledge and newly informed understandings of their market potential.

The ever-diminishing returns from peltry compelled more and more Indians to switch occupations. In another 1799 letter to Henry Gaither, Hawkins claimed that “some of the Indians of the upper towns have returned from hunting without any skins and I have heard from one town who have not killed fifty [deer], some of whom immediately on their return began and have fenced their fields.” Such an immediate cause-and-effect scenario is likely an oversimplification. But certainly more and more indebted peltry

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hunters decided to grab the economic lifeline that cotton appeared to offer. This was especially true for women, who stood to regain a great deal of their own social and economic power in Indian country with the advent of cotton textiles and the movement of men into fields and behind plows. Hawkins noted, “I have had for some time past a man making spinning wheels in my hut, which excited the attention of the women in the neighbourhood. The little girls have shewed much desire to be instructed [in spinning].” Sophia Durant, Alexander McGillivray’s sister, became their teacher, and some of the girls were producing “good thread” by the third day of instruction. In the spring of 1801 Hawkins “delivered to Indian women one hundred pair [of] cotton cards, and eighty spinning wheels. There are eight looms in the Nation, four of them [used] by Indian or half breed women and the remainder by white women.” Hawkins even went so far as to employ a “temporary assistant, a young Englishman, from a manufactory in Stockport, in England, who can make looms and spinning wheels” to fulfill the climbing demand for the machines. “The women,” he concluded, have “adopted this part of the plan with spirit.”

By 1809 ordinary Creeks’ activities had extended well beyond simple forays into the market economy. “The Indians of the lower towns have very generally moved out of their old towns and settled on the margins of the rivers and creeks,” Hawkins wrote in his report that year. They continued to grow their traditional subsistence staples like corn,

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74 Benjamin Hawkins to Thomas Jefferson, “A Sketch of the Present State of the Objects Under the Charge of the Principal Agent for Indian Affairs South of the Ohio,” March 1, 1801, Hawkins Letters, 351–56.
pumpkins and beans. They also used their new situations to grow cotton, wheat, rice, tobacco, and flax, among other crops. And Hawkins noted that general participation in cotton cultivation, especially, continued to rise. “The present year all the [cotton] seed which could be had in the agency and a quantity procured from Georgia have been planted.” The Gulf Coast’s growing cities became the natural destination for much of their produce, as “some has been taken to Mobile, Pensacola and Georgia for a market.”

During the harvest season in 1809 Hawkins remained impressed with the Creeks’ endeavors, writing to William Eustis that “Our cotton crop, for a cold, dry, late spring is pretty good and corn abundant compared with former times.”

Native cotton producers began to more fully orient themselves toward coastal and other Atlantic ports—not only where they marketed their produce, but also where they obtained tools and other manufactured goods. Hawkins told Thomas Jefferson that already “some cotton has been sent to market” in Mobile. One month earlier he had written ahead to William Panton to notify him that his associates at his store and warehouse there should expect at least fifteen hundred pounds of cotton “raised on the Tallapoosa” to be arriving soon by canoe. In this way, colonial towns that for Indians had once been places to receive emissaries, gifts, or ammunition became places to personally market produce. Indian producers thus cut out the resident trader middlemen who had previously marketed their deerskins. In the nineteenth century, two of those

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77 Benjamin Hawkins to William Eustis, October 10, 1809, Hawkins Letters, 557.
78 Benjamin Hawkins to William Panton, February 7, 1801, Cruzat Papers, Box 1, Folder 9; Benjamin Hawkins to Thomas Jefferson, “A Sketch of the Present State of the Objects Under the Charge of the Principal Agent for Indian Affairs South of the Ohio,” March 1, 1801, Hawkins Letters, 351–56.
markets were Mobile and Pensacola. The two Gulf Coast towns had long been
destinations for deerskins, but few individual hunters truly had a direct relationship with
the firms based there. But cattle and cotton were different, and individual herders and
planters needed to market their own produce, as most traders became planters or, in
Robert Grierson’s case, manufacturers themselves.

Pensacola and Mobile became important markets for new immigrants’ produce as
well. However, their journey to these markets remained constricted by the region’s lack
of transportation infrastructure. Many visitors believed the region was a “wilderness”
partly because there were few known roads—at least few wide enough for horse drawn
carts or wagons—almost no bridges, and scarce ferries for fording watercourses. One
reason Mobile and Pensacola became such important destinations for locally produced
commodities and new immigrants was because of their connections to the interior via an
extensive network of rivers and streams that spread their tendrils deep into the interior.

Rivers were the lifeblood of the emerging Gulf South economy. Within a year of
the U.S. takeover of the Mississippi Territory in 1798, the inhabitants of Tensaw sent a
petition to Washington, D.C., asking U.S. to quickly settle river navigation rights with
Spain, who still technically controlled the port towns, and open Mobile and Pensacola to
river traffic. “It is by naval intercourse only, with the United States, the West Indies, and
Europe, that the Citizens of these settlements can vend the surplus of their produce . . . .
On this point they are most urgent.”79 U.S. Indian agent John McKee kept a journal
during an 1804 journey through the region, and it gives us a picture of a Gulf South that
had not previously required, and still did not have, extensive roads, bridges, or travel

79 Petition to Congress by Inhabitants of Tombigbee and Tensaw, August 28, 1799, Miss.
Terr. Papers, 69–70.
lodgings. As people traveled, they instead relied on the scattered homes and farms of individuals to provide them room and board. Traveling slowly and with difficulty in the company of his assistant after leaving meetings with the Cherokees and Chickasaws in northern Mississippi Territory, McKee went “as far as Jolly’s,” where they stayed the night. Thereafter bivouacking on their own in the forests, the two men’s horses often wandered off during the nights, forcing the travelers to repeatedly track the animals down in the mornings. Finally the agents came to the home of an Anglo-Creek trader named John Goskalooka, where they found shelter. They managed to reach new dwellings for several nights in a row after Goskalooka’s, including “call[ing] on Will Elderoonakati” on November 7, “Gunter’s” on November 8, “Jack Thompson’s” on November 9, and “Red Bird’s” on November 12. By the time the two reached the heart of Chickasaw country, McKee’s “horse [was] much the worse,” and he was “forced to leave [it] at [Chickasaw headman] Levi Colbert’s and borrow one [horse] from [Colbert] to ride.

On a similar journey in summer 1805, McKee, over the course of four months of travel, stayed in the homes of different Gulf southerners nearly every evening. This included stops in Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Euro-American homes. Some of the proprietors bore familiar names—several Colberts, including George, William, James, and Levi; Levi Perryman; Benjamin Allen; “Mrs. McIntosh”; Robert McClure, and John Pitchylynn, for example—as well as names of more obscure individuals—Charles Inzons, “Mrs. McDonald,” Simeon Burrey, Toota Hooma, and Ocknoxubbie, to name only a few.\textsuperscript{80} Travel across country in the Gulf South interior remained difficult and inefficient

\textsuperscript{80} Journal of John McKee between Natchez and New Orleans, September through November, 1805; and Journal of John McKee describing meeting between Cherokees and Chickasaws, September 1804; both in the John McKee Papers, #1194-z, Southern
at the beginning of the nineteenth century, especially for large shipments of goods that required wheeled vehicles. Water remained the most effective way to transport agricultural commodities.

Indian towns usually rested on rivers, but as Indian country residents spread out from those communities, their centrality to Gulf southern life declined. Dispersing populations hastened the decline of multiple ligatures of pre-1770 Native American cultural and social life. Correspondingly, the significance of coastal or river port cities like Natchez, Mobile, and Pensacola—newly resurgent population centers—was on the rise. And collectively these towns transitioned from an existence on the imperial periphery into becoming hotspots for new immigrants and newly significant entrepôts for regional cotton and livestock.

In Pensacola, William Panton died in 1798, and one of his partners, John Forbes, acquired his firm, renaming it the John Forbes Co.\textsuperscript{81} Forbes largely picked up where Panton left off, maintaining his deceased partner’s network of contacts and traders in the interior as well as moving the company in some new directions. Forbes also gave an expanded roll to two brothers, James and John Innerarity, who became his representatives in the Mobile and Pensacola stores, respectively. Continuing what Panton had started as peltry declined, Forbes and the Innerarity brothers, along with other merchants in these towns, shifted their investments toward cotton and lumber, which they regularly exported with their deerskins.

\textsuperscript{81} John Leslie, Panton’s first partner, who split time between the Bahamas and London in the 1770s and 1780s, appears to have no longer been significantly involved with the company’s operations by the time of Panton’s death.
Even decades into the nineteenth century, Pensacola seemed a quirky place to newcomers. Georgian Thomas Stocks praised its “situation” in 1819, but observed that “it is difficult to describe the Customs and Language of the Inhabitants . . . the Frenche Spanish and English Language is spoken nearly in Equal Proportion. Manners [are] mostly Spanish and Frenche.” What scattered papers from the Forbes Co. survive demonstrate that by the 1810s and 1820s peltry had become a secondary commodity. John Innerarity, who became an important resident of Pensacola, wrote to his assistant in Mobile about an upcoming shipment of skins, stating that he “wish[ed] them to be Sent round to Pensac[ola] in the first place and am desirous that my brother [James] should rather purchase cotton to fill up the expected Vessel with . . . . If he does not however, purchase Cotton the Cedar lumber must be shipped” instead. At least some of the Forbes Co.’s exports were sent to the company’s traditional clients in the West Indies. A “Dr. David Nagle” wrote to the firm from Havana in 1815 noting that the “Brig Rebecca” had arrived there with a shipment of “Deer Skins and Cotton,” but that there was “no possibility of a sale of them here upon any terms.” Though the cotton and skins left the Gulf Coast in one ship, Nagle decided to separate the two commodities, as he had “determined on shipping the Cotton to Messrs Hamnett Roscoe & Wilson” in Liverpool, while sending “the Deer skins p[er] Ship Neptune and Capt. King” to London.

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82 Journal of Thomas Stocks, April 28, 1819, in the Alabama Papers, Acc # M1968-13/137, John C. Pace Special Collections Library, University of West Florida, Pensacola, Florida.
83 John Innerarity to Joseph Fernandez, February 15, 1813, Cruzat Papers, Box 2, Folder 8; on John Innerarity, see Coker and Inglis, Censuses of Pensacola, 8.
84 Dr. David Nagle to John Forbes & Co, January 17, 1815, Cruzat Papers, Box 2, Folder 10.
Forbes and the Inneraritys acquired Panton’s creditor-debtor relationships as well as his trading networks. Based on complaints Panton made shortly before he died, the substantial debts he was owed from Indian deerskin hunters left the company’s finances in disarray. Late in the 1790s, Panton and his partners began demanding land from Creeks in payment. Most Creeks were weary from fighting decades of illegal settlers and speculators and were reluctant to sell. Company agent Daniel McGillivray wrote in 1798 that “Agreeable to what you wrote me the 18th of March concerning the quantity of Lands sufficient to pay the debts due you [I] have slightly sounded the Allibama [Creeks] by our friend [Opayamicko] . . . they told him it will not do.” McGillivray noted he had actually managed to obtain a small tract on the Tombigbee River called “Oven Bluff,” but that for the most part “the whole Nation seems very Loath to give away a foot of land if they can avoid it.” 85 Meanwhile Indians attempted to pay off Panton or Forbes in other ways. A headman known as the Singer wrote to James Innerarity in 1805, on behalf of his nephew, a hunter named Chashimchie. James Innerarity ran Forbes’s store in Pensacola, and the Singer promised him that Chashimchie was on his way there “to pay his Father’s debts to the house [the company] with skins.” But the Singer also noted that Chashimchie did not have enough to pay off his debt and hoped Innerarity would take his prized horse as part of his payment. 86

Pensacola and Mobile, meanwhile, underwent changes of their own in the nineteenth century. Though coastal West Florida remained a Spanish possession after the

85 Daniel McGillivray to William Panton, April 24, 1798, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.
86 Oporamicco the Singer to James Innerarity, July 10, 1805, Cruzat Papers, Box 2, Folder 1. Innerarity had once offered to buy the horse and Chashimchie had declined. Now he had no choice but to sell.
1803 Louisiana Purchase, both towns experienced growth as a result of the migrations prompted by the Purchase. In the 1790s William Panton, representing the deerskin interest, owned the most substantial house in town. It was a three-story brick mansion that commanded the streets fronting the Bay. The average resident, however, lived in one of many small creole-style wooden cottages. Pensacola consistently had a population of between five and six hundred before 1803. Population numbers were up slightly in 1802 to 650 inhabitants of all sexes and colors. But the censuses of 1805 and 1810 both counted one thousand people or more.

Later censuses of Pensacola, though frustratingly incomplete, indicate that increasing numbers of native Gulf southerners moved south into coastal communities in the nineteenth century for the first time. Indians began to show up on the post-1800 Spanish censuses, none of whom seem to have been present before the turn of the century. East of Pensacola, in the small Fort San Marcos de Apalache, the 1802 census taker listed 179 soldiers, 17 convicts, and “An indian woman and her [two] children.” Just one year later the number of soldiers had declined to 145, and there were only 8 convicts left. But the Indian population had risen to “twenty or twenty-five.” In Pensacola proper in 1820, one household head was listed as “Haigar Perryman,” a seventy-three-year-old widow and “free Negro from the Indian Nation.” Most likely, Haigar Perryman had been a slave, or perhaps even a kinswoman, to the Creek-Anglo Perryman family,

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87 The United States maintained that West Florida was part of the Purchase, but Spain refused to acknowledge this and held on to portions of the coast until 1821. See David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, (New Haven, Conn., 1992), 191–92.
88 There are no known images of Panton’s house, as it burned down in 1848, though there are surviving pictures of his Pensacola trading store, another multistory building and itself among the largest in town. See Coker and Inglis, *Censuses of Pensacola*, 13.
89 Coker and Inglis, *Censuses of Pensacola*, 6.
who were Indian country planters and slaveholders during the previous two decades. 

Haigar’s “children” in 1820 were Isabel, age 20; Diana, 16; and Nancy, 9. All three were labeled free women of color from the “Indian Nation.” How they ended up in Pensacola and why they left Indian country is uncertain, but all three “children” were probably too young to be Haigar’s actual offspring. Still their household likely reflected some type of kin or fictive kin relationship.\footnote{Coker and Inglis, 	extit{Censuses of Pensacola}, 96–126.}

The 1820 census featured Mariana Prieto, a forty-two-year-old “Mestiza” from the “Indian Nation” and probably the partner of Felipe Prieto, a widower originally from Madrid, who lived in the same household. Also in the Prieto home was a sixty-one-year-old man named Federico Dayrlen, “single” and “from Germany,” as well as the Prietos’ probable children, Carlos and Isabel, both adolescents and “mestizos” born in Pensacola. Thus, in a single household in Pensacola, in 1820, lived a Spaniard, an Indian country native, a German, and two West Florida creoles of Spanish and Indian descent. Finally an entry for “Bobe Panton,” a fifty-year-old “free negro from Charleston” and a carpenter is interesting for his possible connection to William Panton, who had been dead for over two decades in 1820. Bobe’s wife was Delaida Panton, a thirty-year-old “free negro” from the “Indian Nation” and a “Laundress.” The couple had three children in 1820 between the ages of 13 and 9, all born in Pensacola. Both had likely worked for or even enslaved to Panton & Leslie before 1799. Perhaps they had somehow obtained their freedom. Together with the Indians of Fort Apalachee, the Prietos, the Panto...
Perrymans, they emphasize the increasing, permanent movement of native Gulf southerners into Pensacola.  

In 1805 Pensacola’s population had risen sharply to 1,398, including 195 free people of color and 449 enslaved people of color. Thereafter, the town seems to have peaked (or perhaps the censuses are simply unreliable). The 1819 census recorded only 992 residents; however, the population of free people of color had risen to 217 while the enslaved population declined to 343. The following year’s census in 1820, however, suggested that the overall decline reflected a choice not to count increasing numbers of illegal settlers. The last West Florida governor, José Callava, found out late in 1819 that a considerable settlement of Anglo-American and African Americans were squatting approximately thirty miles north of Pensacola, on the Escambia River. When Callava sent a man to investigate, his findings show that despite the area’s poor soils, new migrants were still coming. Callava’s assistant reported a settlement of over 450 men and women—380 whites and 73 blacks (most likely all enslaved). He also noted there were actually more than that, but that he had been unable to finish his count because of a bad storm. Most of the squatters appeared to be raising livestock, grazing nearly three thousand head on 1,200 arpents of Spanish land, according to the man’s estimation. Additionally, the settlers were growing small amounts of cotton, tobacco, and rice along with more traditional Indian country crops of corn and beans. All of the whites claimed to be from either the United States or Scotland. The largest slave owners among them, Abraham Pringle and his wife Mary, reportedly had nine enslaved blacks, 80 cattle, 25

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91 Coker and Inglis, *Censuses of Pensacola*, 96–126
hogs, and 75 cultivated arpents of land. Immigration from the United States was thus poised to oust Spain’s last claims to West Florida. This did not mean, however, that the newcomers did not still have significant numbers of Gulf South natives to contend with.

Despite the growth, however, Pensacola continued to exhibit its traditional polyglot character inherited from its years of benign neglect from Spain. In 1796 John McQueen—possibly a relative of the Anglo-Creek traders and Indian country cotton planters James and Peter McQueen—remarked that in Pensacola, despite the increasing presence of Spanish and English residents, “the inhabitants are half French[,] and they you know will dance and be merry anywhere; so altho the [social scene] is but small we generally of a Sunday evening have a kick up at some of their houses.” Over two decades later, in 1821, Andrew Jackson’s wife visited Pensacola and described it to a correspondent in the U.S. She appeared to disapprove of the town’s unusual population. “The inhabitants all speak Spanish and French. Some speak four or five languages. Such a mixed multitude you, nor any of us, ever had an idea of. . . . Fewer white people by far than any other [place]. . . . Seamen strolled with their knives in their belts and coins burning in their pockets; absurd little Spanish soldiers; yellow women bearing prodigious burdens on their heads; a fish peddler; . . . a Seminole with a set expression of unfriendliness,” and so on. But Jackson reserved her harshest critique for the newest arrivals: “And I must say the worst people here are the cast-off Americans.” Census data corroborated Jackson’s observations (if not her opinions). The last Spanish census of Pensacola in 1820 included residents’ places of birth. Pensacola still boasted residents

92 Coker and Inglis, *Censuses of Pensacola*, 129–45. This must mean square arpents, which are just slightly smaller than a traditional acre.
93 Quotes in Coker and Inglis, *Censuses of Pensacola*, 7.
from Africa; the Canary Islands; Europe (including Spain, France, Italy, Portugal, England, Ireland, and Germany); the Caribbean (including Cuba, Guadeloupe, Jamaica, Haiti, and Santo Domingo); and the Americas (including Virginia, Maryland, South Carolina, Georgia, Philadelphia, Louisiana, Mexico, and “The Indian Nation”). The legacy of Pensacola’s unique colonial past remained potent in the 1820s, even as the emergent American Deep South moved toward a more racially homogenous ante bellum future. Remnants of the Native Gulf South persisted.

Just to the west, and far more important than Pensacola to the future king cotton, Mobile’s population increased from 746 in 1785 to 1,725 in 1796. In 1812 a Connecticut immigrant and one of the town’s largest new landowners, Josiah Blakeley, described Mobile and its hinterlands as “the great object of contention at this moment between the United States and the Spaniards. . . . Better land for rice and cotton perhaps the world does not afford.” Blakeley purchased three large islands in the Mobile River, and he wrote to his niece that his “Festino plantation is about three miles from Mobile, where next month, March, I begin planting Rice. Rice generally grows about as high as wheat; on my island it grows six feet high. It also produces cotton superior to any other land in this country. But I have not negroes to cultivate it; and as the situation of the country now is [uncertain because of the dispute between America and Spain], I cannot sell plantations.”

Blakeley underscored the ways that the Native South both persisted and disappeared in coastal Alabama and Mississippi. On the one hand, Blakeley had purchased his land from one of the city’s oldest families, the Chastangs, a large branch of

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94 Coker and Inglis, Censuses of Pensacola, 96–126.
which consisted of a sizeable number of free people of color. The absence of a Protestant church forced Blakeley to “sometimes attend Mass” in town if he wanted to worship God, “though [I am] no Catholic.” On the other hand, in 1812 the native New Englander seemed to think Mobile—once a hub of the Indian trade—was much divorced from the wild Indian country to the north: “From this [city] for 500 miles north, I do not believe there is a church or clergyman,” emphasizing the area’s ostensibly uncivilized nature. The people who actually lived north of the city, natives and immigrants alike, along the Alabama and Tombigbee Rivers, “were almost savage,” according to Blakeley.95

The residents of Tensaw may have been among Blakeley’s “savages,” but they were not immune to the transformations underway in the nineteenth century. Tensaw residents began acquiring black slaves at increasing rates. Benjamin Hawkins and others sometimes mentioned that the settlement had a reputation for providing safe harbor for runaways from the Gulf Coast and Georgia who were in the midst of escaping into Indian country. By 1797 at least some Anglo-American Tensaw residents began re-enslaving those runaways and keeping them for themselves—they used violent means to do so. Hawkins relayed the narrative of the 1797 murder of Jacob Townshend, writing that Townshend had gone to Tensaw “with powers of attorney from some persons in Georgia to claim and take possession of some negros and property in the possession of some inhabitants of the Tensaw settlement; that Gerald Burns, Adam Hollinger, John Miller, and Melton” all possessed slaves belonging to Townshend’s clients. “They appointed to

95 Quotes in Hamilton, Colonial Mobile, 331–33, 404–7, 449.
meet Townshend at Joseph Thompson’s, and while there took him [Townshend] prisoner . . . [and] shot him, with two balls, through the body and through the head.”

Like Mobile and Pensacola, Tensaw transitioned away from an economy centered around deerskins—and hence away from one centered around Indians’ hunting and exchange practices—toward an economy that favored increasingly commercial agriculture and racial slavery. However, residents of all three communities persisted in more traditional regional practices into the nineteenth century as well. Pensacola retained its uncommon multi-ethnic character. Mobile oriented itself toward cattle and cotton but failed to erect a rigid racial hierarchy that effectively excluded people of color from public life before at least the 1820s. Tensaw settlers acquired slaves but failed to declare, implicitly or otherwise, their loyalty to any particular government. And they captured slaves to whom they had no formal title. Such changes represented both breaks with the past as well as the continuation of practices from earlier decades.

Companies like Turnbull & Joyce and Panton/Forbes highlighted such a mix of change and persistence. Forbes’s partner James Innerarity married into one of Mobile’s oldest families, the Trouillets, and established his own slave-worked cotton plantation on the Mobile River sometime in the late 1790s. The John Forbes Co. continued to do business in Mobile into the 1830s. In 1817 the company donated funds for the construction of a badly needed new city street, Water Street, and the expansion of Mobile itself. John Turnbull’s widow Catherine continued to manage her husband’s property after his death, including his extensive cotton plantations in Natchez and Baton Rouge and his cattle herds near Mobile. She and her children and grandchildren thus continued

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to reap the benefits of John Turnbull’s deerskin and slave trading, which originally had been made profitable by Choctaws and Chickasaws.⁹⁷

If Mobile, Pensacola, and Tensaw moved slowly toward a new economy, the Gulf South towns closer to the Mississippi River did so with much more speed. The comparative ease of travel to New Orleans and the relatively large amount of river traffic from Tennessee and Kentucky meant that life in Natchez and Baton Rouge transitioned rapidly. Natchez, which had been an important home base for trade with nearby Choctaws and Chickasaws, quickly became a nexus for cotton and slavery in a changing Gulf South. Longtime locals recognized the increasing value of land, and those who could afford to do so bought it up in large chunks, rather than the smaller parcels of places like Tensaw. As early as 1774 Jacques Rapalje sent his eldest son, Jacques Jr., “with a number of settlers on land I purchased on the Homochitto [River, just south of Natchez] or where he would like; he then returned with a reserve of 25,000 acres.” Rapalje then reported that “I sent out a vessel to Guinea for slaves” to work his new plantation. Jacques Jr. himself later purchased a tract outside of Baton Rouge “and settled the same with negroes from New York.”⁹⁸ Stephen Minor, the former Spanish Indian agent who was well integrated into both the peltry trade and Choctaw social networks, also recognized the potential profits to be had from Mississippi’s river lands after the introduction of the cotton gin. Minor purchased large tracts of land on the Pearl and Mississippi Rivers, dealt heavily in the regional slave trade, and owned one of the early cotton gins in Natchez, where he became one of the leading residents. Minor began

⁹⁷ Hamilton, Colonial Mobile, 445, 510; Correspondence between Catharine Turnbull, and Charles Norwood, 1800–1810, Turnbull Papers, Box 2, Folders 4–5.
⁹⁸ Testimony of Isaac Rapalje, March 3, 1790, Natchez Court Records, 96; Morris, Becoming Southern, 14–17, 37–42.
ginning his neighbors’ cotton in return for a portion of their profits, and continued to do this as late as 1827, when Natchez planter John Nevitt recounted riding “to Mr Minors” to “ingage him to gin my cotton” in return for a “twelvth of the toll.”99 John Turnbull, a central figure in the deerskin trade, became one of the first large cotton planters in Mississippi, and he owned multiple plantations. His estate on the Big Black River boasted one of that region’s first cotton gins, and Turnbull sold at least a portion of his cotton to a new Natchez firm called Ferguson & Woolley, including a shipment of six thousand pounds in 1800.100

The arrival of the cotton gin allowed cotton to immediately become the most valuable commodity in the Natchez district. But gins themselves remained scarce, and residents quickly began taking steps to secure the proper operation and availability of those that existed. In 1799 local residents presented grievances to a Mississippi grand jury, lamenting that “qualified persons are not appointed to visit and examine the several public and private cotton gins throughout the Territory,” and that “the success and prosperity of this Country chiefly depend on our particular care and attention to that valuable branch of agriculture and to prevent any frauds and neglects in preparing it for exportation.”101 Cases of fraud were apparently common. In 1796 Natchez merchants John Ferguson (of the aforementioned Ferguson & Woolley) and John Murdoch sued planters Bennett Truly and Ebenezer Rees. According to the suit, Ferguson and Murdoch had sent nearly 4,500 pounds of “cotton in the seed” to Truly, who then brought it “to

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99 John Nevitt Diary, February 27, 1827, in the John Nevitt Diary #543, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
100 Turnbull cotton receipts, June 2, 1800, Turnbull Papers, Box 1, Folder 6.
[be] clean[ed] in the gin on the plantation of Ebenezer Rees.” When Ferguson and Murdoch got their cotton back, however, “eleven bales were reported as entirely useless as water and seed have been introduced in these bales to add weight.”

Also in 1796, planter George Cochran hired a man named James McIntyre to “construct a ginning machine conformably to one [recently] introduced” into the region by another planter. McIntyre failed at his task and Cochran was forced to sue him. Despite such incidents and the crude process of packaging and exporting the staple crop, Natchez cotton earned something of a reputation for quality. In 1807 Augusta, Georgia, planter Ed Bacon wrote to his sister, who had migrated to Natchez with her husband, hoping to obtain the region’s secret. “I must impose on [you] a request,” he wrote, “I am very anxious to make an experiment the ensuing year with the best of your Orleans or Mississippi Cotton-seed; perhaps that planted in your Neighborhood is equal to any. I have therefore to request you to have shipped . . . two hogs heads of the most approved seed in your Country.”

In terms of economy, then, Natchez rapidly emerged as a Deep South city. In terms of its social, racial, and cultural dynamics, however, older patterns persisted, often to the chagrin of new Anglo-American migrants. For example, Natchez residents tolerated what new American governor Winthrop Sargent found to be a volatile mixing of races, and the governor fretted over the constant presence of roaming enslaved and free

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102 Ferguson and Murdoch versus Truly and Rees, June 1796, Natchez Court Records, 286.
103 George Cochran versus James McIntyre, July 1796, Natchez Court Records, 286.
African Americans and Choctaws. Sargent’s successor, William Claiborne, was similarly concerned. “I continue to be much harassed with visits from my Chactaw Brethren; these poor, Idle and humble People are really great pests to this Territory; I suppose at this moment there cannot be less than two or three hundred (consisting of Men, Women, and children) Encamped within six miles around Natchez.”

Natchez’s Indian population was not the only group of native Gulf southerners that frustrated American officials. Despite the rapid growth of cotton and slavery, Natchez’s history of Spanish law and other customs resulted in an active and vibrant free population of color, much like Mobile, Pensacola, and New Orleans. In 1808 English traveler Fortescue Cuming visited the transitioning settlement while on a tour through North America. Cuming found Natchez to be unlike any American city he had yet visited. He noted, for example, that the market stalls were manned “by a motely mixture of Americans, French and Spanish creoles, Mulattoes and negroes.” He later decided he was “struck with the similarity of Natchez to many smaller West India towns . . . several little shops kept by free mulattoes, and French and Spanish creoles—a great mixture of colour of the people in the streets . . . [and] with the aid of a little fancy to heighten the illusion, might have made one suppose [one was in] the Arabian Knight’s Entertainments.” Cuming was quickly reminded that he was not in Arabia or even the West Indies, however. “When the illusion was almost formed, a company of [Choctaw] Indians 105

106 William C. C. Claiborne to James Madison, April 3, 1802, Miss Terr. Arch., 402.
meeting me in the street dispelled it.” Cumings’s descriptions of Natchez highlighted both Deep South change and Native South persistence. Around the time of his visit however, Deep South changes began to show up in the heart of Indian country for the first time.

While coastal and Mississippi River port towns began to bustle with commerce and activity, Anglo-Americans began erecting brand new settlements in Indian country. These burgeoning cotton towns—with names like Columbus, Cotton Gin Port, Tuscaloosa, and Montgomery—hastened the decline of neighboring Indian towns like Tuckaubatchee and Coweta. These late-arriving immigrants were the first in Indian country who were not forced to integrate into established Indian communities and kin networks. One such example was Gideon Lincecum, who along with his family arrived in the boomtown of Tuscaloosa, on the Black Warrior River, in 1818. He found the town “full of people just landed, mostly from Tennessee, and they were felling timber and hastily building up a town of poles and clapboards.” Whites began settling Tuscaloosa, in the Mississippi Territory, sometime in the 1810s, but in 1818 Lincecum described the town “as a small log cabin village” in Upper Creek country. The settlement, however, grew quickly, “and in the course of that year it grew to be a considerable town.”

American William Ely wrote in 1821 that though it had only been “but 4 or 5 years since the first white Family settled [in Tuscaloosa] . . . the Population now may be from 6 to 800 souls”—bigger already, than Pensacola. Ely also noted that none of the surrounding

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land was actually legally settled, as none of migrants, “except a few to whom I have sold land since I came here, have any title to the Land they live on.”

Ely was less impressed with Tuscaloosa than was the young Lincecum. “What they call their houses, are either the most despicable rough dirty and uncomfortable rotting log Cabins, or less durable and more mean buildings; most of them without a single pane of glass . . . and almost as destitute of furniture . . . Some have no floor but the bare Earth.” Despite the haphazard nature of the town, African American slavery arrived immediately. After describing the town’s kitchens as “the filthiest place you can conceive of,” Ely noted that the particular kitchen near where he was staying, as dirty as the rest, “contains two beds, in which and on the floor, from 6 to 10 Negroes of both Sexes and various ages all unmarried sleep Promiscuously.” Only at the end of his letter did Ely note the reason those enslaved men and women had been forced to the Gulf South interior. “Notwithstanding” the white population’s habits of being universally “indolent” and “lazy,” he thought “them a very avaricious People – Money is their God and Cotton the Idol of their devotions.”

Between the 1810s and 1820s immigrants thus erected their own settlements in the interior of what is today Alabama and Mississippi. For the first time, they did so away from Indian towns, unassimilated into local social and cultural life. These migrants were certainly not in the same category as those who had arrived before them: Robert Grierson, Richard Bailey, Timothy Barnard, and many others—men who integrated into Indian life and who became, in many ways, native to the area themselves. Nonetheless,

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the older generation of migrants, and their descendants, were these new migrants’ neighbors. Gideon Lincecum recalled that “the old Indian [Creek] town of Tush-cah-loo-sa lay a mile or more below where Tuscaloosa is situated.” Lincecum, who had grown up in backcountry Georgia near several Lower Creek villages, also established relationships with a town of Choctaws on the nearby Tombigbee River. “Two of them [Choctaws] came the third day after we had arrived [at the Lincecum family’s new homestead] and with all the indications of familiar friendship introduced themselves.”

Years later, after moving further west to the new village of Columbus, Mississippi, Lincecum entered into a business partnership with “a halfbreed Choctaw” named John Pitchylynn Jr. “Pitchylynn had a pretty good storehouse at the ferry opposite Columbus, and four or five thousand dollars’ worth of goods. I had about the same amount, and we put them together.” Though the business often suffered from what Lincecum described as Pitchylynn’s alcoholism, the partners sold “sugar, coffee, whiskey,” and other dry goods along the upper waters of the Tombigbee River. They received their shipments regularly by water from Mobile, which had become the region’s center for commerce.

Gideon Lincecum was a white immigrant from Georgia. John Pitchylynn Jr. was an Anglo-Choc'taw from Indian country. As partners in business, they helped build the American Deep South. They did so from a town—Cotton Gin Port—that had not existed a mere decade before they arrived. Cotton Gin Port was built, both literally and figuratively, by many similar partnerships.

During the last decades of the eighteenth century, the towns and villages of Indian country had functioned as the focal points of regional life. Gulf southerners hunted,

111 Diary of Gideon Lincecum, Lincecum and Philips, Frontier Naturalist, 54; 69–70.
produced, bought, and sold their most important commodity, deerskins, in Indian country. They made their most important political and diplomatic decisions in Indian country. Migrants to the region integrated into Indian country. Colonial towns on the coast like Mobile and Pensacola largely languished—they depended on the peoples of the interior rather than their imperial metropoles for their commerce. But around the turn of the century, clearly visible fissures in this Native Gulf South began to emerge.

In the nineteenth century, the decline of peltry, the rising appreciation for private property, slavery, and profit among Indian peoples, and increasing immigration from the United States moved the locus of regional life and commerce toward the Gulf Coast and the Mississippi River in fundamental new ways. Indian country residents adopted herding and cotton cultivation, they spread out along rivers in search for more land. Town-centered life in Indian country declined, extended kin networks deteriorated, and the population of coastal centers increased. Floods of migrants—both voluntary and forced—infiltrated the Native Gulf South as never before. This occurred primarily with the aid and participation of native Gulf southerners themselves, and with the capital investment of former peltry trading firms like John Forbes Co. and Turnbull & Joyce.

By the 1820s, the Gulf South’s transition into the Deep South was nearly complete. Steamboats began to replace pirogues and flatboats. Anglo-American-style, centralized government and law began to replace native law and custom, common usage rights, and informal trade. And, as they always had before, native Gulf southerners were crucial players in the final acts of the region’s transformation.
CHAPTER 6:

FORGOTTEN INDIANS: IMMIGRANTS, STEAMBOATS, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF ALABAMA AND MISSISSIPPI, 1810–1835

Adam Hodgson was from Liverpool, England, and in the late spring of 1820 he found himself lying down to sleep in the middle of Creek country in a “little cabin . . . situated on the ridge which separates the waters of the Chatahouchy from those of the Coosa and Tallapoosa” Rivers. Hodgson’s had hoped to meet “the Indians” on his trip, but the Indian country he found was quite different from the one he expected. Indeed, he found much that was familiar. “I was a little surprised to find [here],” he wrote in his journal, “the son of the owner of one of the principal inns in Preston in Lancashire, projecting the introduction of a woolen manufactory among the Creeks, under the sanction of the natives.” Far from the simple nation of hunters Hodgson imagined, many of the native Gulf southerners he encountered were slaveholders, planters, ranchers, and manufacturers. Hodgson, however, could not help but project his expectations onto the reality he actually witnessed. “The [Indian] nation at this time exhibits the very interesting spectacle of society in several of its earlier stages. The hunter . . . is the possessor of perhaps several hundred head of cattle; and if the warrior do not literally turn his tomahawk and scalping knife into pruning-hooks, he is satisfied to regard them as mere articles of dress . . . and is ambitious to attain distinction in agricultural pursuits.”

By the time of Hodgson’s visit, of course, these had been realities in Creek country for multiple decades. As had his next observation, which Hodgson professed he thought disturbing. “I saw several neat and flourishing little farms . . . but my pleasure was alloyed by observing, that the labour generally devolved on either the African negro, or
the Indian wife. As few of the Creeks are rich enough to purchase many negroes, all the drudgery is performed by women.”

Hodgson observed two Souths simultaneously. In many ways, he witnessed the ongoing evolution of a Native South. In Creeks’ centuries-old practice of dividing labor by gender, women performed the agricultural work, even “with an infant hanging on their necks,” while her husband instead “walked before them, erect and graceful, apparently without care.” Yet natives had established the framework of a Deep South too; they were ranchers and planters, and enslaved “African negroes” replaced women in performing the “drudgery” where Creeks could afford to use them. Change and persistence existed alongside one another, juxtaposed, even in 1820.

As Hodgson proceeded further westward “through the woods, along an Indian path,” he met individuals who embodied this juxtaposition. One evening he “reached the dwelling of a half-breed Choctaw, whose wife was a Chickasaw, and whose hut was on the frontier of [the Creek and Choctaw] nations.” The man owned approximately sixty horses and two hundred “very fine” cattle. He also owned “a few slaves to cultivate as much land as was necessary.” The man told Hodgson that “he had chosen this situation” because of its remoteness. Though the Louisiana Purchase and the aftermath of the Creek War had already unleashed thousands of new migrants into Indian country, the Choctaw man managed to locate a spot where “in some directions, he had no neighbors for fifty or a hundred miles.” Despite such rapid changes, in other words, a place of “retirement,” as Hodgson termed it, was still to be found. Hodgson asked the Choctaw slaveholder about his homeland’s ongoing upheaval. “He told me that great changes had taken place among

1 Adam Hodgson, Remarks during a Journey Through North America in the Years 1819, 1820, and 1821 . . . (New York, 1823), 265–70.
the Indians, even in his time—that in many tribes, when he was young, the children as soon as they rose, were made to plunge in the water and swim,” and that they had lost this sense of self-reliance and independence. Conservatives’ resistance to these changes, which had devolved into a Creek civil war several years earlier, continued to smolder. “Many [Indians] have talked of resuming their old customs,” he told Hodgson, “which the whites have greatly undermined.”

The Choctaw man Hodgson conversed with underscored the ambiguities of the nineteenth-century social upheaval for Native Americans. On the one hand, he seemed to resent the rapid population growth—having set down in as remote a homestead as he could find. He also blamed unnamed “whites” for changing his world. Yet his cattle, his horses, and his enslaved laborers evinced that he had unequivocally played a fundamental role in the very changes he lamented. The man embraced cattle and racial slavery, even as he sought to retreat from the flood of immigrants drawn by the economic potential of those very things—the same potential the man and his Choctaw neighbors had themselves recognized.

One evening, before going to sleep on a newly settled plantation, Hodgson described meeting some of these newly arrived men and women, thereby recounting a “novel” scene of a region in transition. “On my left hand, were my friend the Alabama planter, and his daughter . . . [but] about 100 yards from us were the emigrants from Georgia and Carolina, with their five or six little fires . . . on our right were the Indian wigwams; and before us, at a distance, some acres of pine woods.”\(^2\) Hodgson’s portrayal could very well have described similar scenes in Indian country in 1800, or even 1790.

\(^2\) Hodgson, *Remarks during a Journey*, 265, 278.
But by the 1820s, his sleeping spot was no longer technically in Indian country but instead the new state of Alabama. Much else had also changed since 1800. Only five short years after Hodgson’s visit another European observer in 1825 described Alabama this way:

Signs of cultivation [were] every where. Upon several plantations, the cotton fields exhibited themselves in beautiful order; the log houses were only employed as negro cabins; the mansion-houses, two stories high, are for the most part painted white, and provided with piazzas and balconies. At most of them the cotton gins and presses were at work. . . . We met several caravans of emigrants from the eastern part of Georgia, who were on their way to Butler county, Alabama, to settle themselves on land which they had purchased very cheap from the United States. The number of their negroes, wagons, horses, and cattle, showed that these emigrants were in easy circumstances.³

Remnants of the Native South persisted into the 1810s, 1820s, and 1830s. But the remains of that older South were quickly being drowned by the growth of the Anglo-American Cotton Kingdom. As Spain languished and finally evacuated the coast for good in 1821, and as black and white immigrants streamed into Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, the United States was able to extend both its de jure and its de facto authority, setting up new local governments and legal systems and dominating local economies. Native Gulf southerners participated in this process. Alongside the newcomers, they carried the mail and drew out new jurisdictional boundaries; they shipped cotton and

other produce on flatboats and steamboats; they continued to buy and sell enslaved African Americans; and they helped develop new interior settlements like Tuscaloosa, Cahaba, and Montgomery. Many also violently resisted. The disruptions of the War of 1812, the effective annihilation of the Red Stick movement at the conclusion of the Creek War, and the growing isolation of the Florida Seminoles were all equally part of Native Americans’ contributions to the region’s transformation—comprising both constructive and destructive elements.

By the mid-1830s, Indian removal was underway, and the U.S. government, pushed along by the vehemently anti-Indian president Andrew Jackson, made no distinction between native Gulf southerners who owned slaves and cotton plantations and those who continued to live “by means of the gun,” in one Choctaw headman’s words. By and large, Indian “blood” meant “Indian-ness” and removal. Indian removal was, however, a contingent event in American history, and prior to its occurrence, native influence on the emergence of the Deep South was evident into the 1830s, despite native Gulf southerners’ sharply declining proportion of the population. Change and persistence continued to exist alongside one another, even as Anglo-American migrants began new lives in a place where it was ultimately possible—for the first time—to forget that the “Indian” had helped make those new lives possible. Thanks to new, antidemocratic governmental policies and white rhetoric about the dying days of these “children of the forest,” native Gulf southerners would have little no part in the region’s antebellum future.

If the time of living by the gun was over by the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, so was the peltry trade that had made such a life possible. After John Forbes renamed Panton & Leslie the John Forbes Co., he and his partners, James and John Innerarity, continued to push their company in new directions. One of these was slave trading, though still on a small scale. The importation of slaves became more difficult after the outlawing of the overseas trade in 1808 (the Atlantic slave trade was prohibited by Congress on January 1 of that year), but the internal trade, probably combined with smuggling operations, allowed it to go on. Forbes continued to operate stores in the company’s traditional headquarters of Mobile and Pensacola, along with an expansion of the company presence in East Florida. The coast, and the stores based there, existed under Spanish rule until 1821, but Forbes’s customers were still native Gulf southerners, along with increasing numbers of Anglo-American immigrants. In 1808, for example, a Florida planter named “Yonge” received sixteen slaves, once “the Property of the late House of Panton Leslie Co.” Much to Yonge’s chagrin, “Peter, Mary, and Phillis” among the group “Claim their Freedom[,] which I will contest.” Another, “Negro Jack,” apparently escaped “to the Indians.” Yonge, however, made clear his intention to “recover” him.\footnote{Slave receipt for Yonge, October 23, 1808, Box 1, Folder 10, James David Glunt Collection, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida (hereinafter cited as “Glunt Collection”). “Yonge” was an ancestor of Philip Keyes Yonge (1850–1934), a prominent Florida businessman, for whom several buildings, including the P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History at the University of Florida, are named.} From available records, John Forbes, who appears to have usually resided in Nassau, Bahamas, during this period, sent only small numbers of slaves to West Florida. The manager of the company’s Prospect Bluff store wrote in 1811 that William Perryman, an Anglo-Creek headman, had recently visited Nassau, bringing
Forbes’s correspondence back with him. “Billy Perryman’s visiting Nassau by desire of some of the chiefs enables me to acknowledge the receipt of your favors of the 10th and 11th June last,” the manager replied to Forbes. The letters “came to hand on the 2nd July [along] with the family of Negroes you were pleased to send us.”

The Forbes Co. shipped slaves in its own vessels from the Bahamas and North American ports to other locations along the West Florida coast. In the same letter the store manager informed Forbes that he was attempting to recapture a cargo of enslaved men and women that had somehow escaped one of their ships before they could be secured. “One of these Negroes was taken up by [our sloop] the Shark at the Mouth of [the Apalachicola] River.” Two others managed to take “protection in the next indian village to this place”—most likely a Seminole town called Cowpen. The recaptured man aboard the Shark claimed that he had originally come from New Orleans, and when he later escaped again and made it to Cowpen himself, Forbes’s manager seemed to think he would have no trouble recapturing them. “I now hear that he is one of the three that ran away from Mr. Johnson, [a Pensacola slaveholder,] and if he could send on a vessel to take them onboard at the Mouth of the River we could make the indians carry them onboard for a trifling consideration.”

Indians continued to purchase enslaved men and women from the John Forbes Co., at least occasionally. A company employee wrote to John Innerarity in Pensacola in 1817, describing the attempts to sell a family to either some Lower Creeks or Seminoles. “The Negro family which the indians wanted to purchase is worth at least $2,000,” but

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6 Edmund Doyle to John Forbes, September 1, 1811, Box 2, Folder 6, John G. Greenslade Papers, M1977-14, John C. Pace Library, University of West Florida, Pensacola, Florida (hereinafter cited as Greenslade Papers).

7 Edmund Doyle to John Forbes, September 1, 1811, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 6.
presumably they could not afford that price. Apparently the slaves resisted the sale as well, fearing that the purchasers intended to take them to Pensacola, which had possibly acquired a poor reputation among the enslaved population by this time. “The Negroes does not wish to go to Pensacola, & if they got the least hint of it, might run away[.] [For now] I have them at work preparing to plant on the Island opposite the Spanish bluff where Mr. Hambly lives.”

Despite Forbes’s efforts to invest more money in slavery, however, the peltry economy’s decline had left the company’s finances in disarray. Many Indians had accumulated large debts. In October 1811 a Choctaw man named Puckshunubbe informed Forbes’s partner James Innerarity in Mobile that he had just sent him “foure hors Loads of Skins.” But after asking Innerarity for items in return—including a dozen shirts, two blankets, and three beaver traps—Puckshunubbe acknowledged there would still be “a ballance in your favor,” which he promised to pay off “in the Spring.” But an aggregate view of surviving company ledgers from the nineteenth century shows that paying off debts became a pipe dream for many Indians by then. In 1812 Forbes managed to get the headmen of the Upper Creek towns to “promise to pay Messrs. John Forbes & Co. to their order the sum of Twenty one thousand nine Hundred and sixteen Dollars,” representing the collective debt of the Upper Creeks and indicating just how much debt Native Americans had accrued. Some of the largest individual debtors were Native

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8 Edmund Doyle to John Innerarity, January 28, 1817, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 7.
9 Puckshunubbe to James Innerarity, October 14, 1811, Heloise H. Cruzat Papers, Box 2, Folder 6, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida (hereinafter cited as “Cruzat Papers”).
10 Headmen of the Upper Towns of the Creeks to John Forbes & Co., November 1, 1812, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.
American traders (not individual hunters), including Anglo-Creek men Tingyhaby McPherson ($508), Josiah Francis ($905), Peter McQueen ($734), and Charles Weatherford ($1,110). Alexander McGillivray’s sister, Sehoy, owed Forbes over $1800 in 1812, and trader John Clark owed nearly $2,300. By comparison, cotton planter and manufacturer Robert Grierson owed only $109, and Grierson’s Anglo-Creek son, Alexander—who likely had taken up planting himself by this time—owed $133. Forbes must have noted how much more readily planters like Grierson paid their debts.\(^{11}\)

The Forbes Co. continued to purchase and ship cotton and livestock, though sparse surviving records make it difficult to know just how much of it they managed to transport. There are tantalizing clues. In February 1813 James Innerarity wrote that he wished his brother in Pensacola to halt a shipment of cedar lumber and that he “should rather purchase cotton to fill up the expected Vessel with.”\(^{12}\) Several months later a manifest for the company schooner *Fidelity* noted the ship’s cargo hold contained eighty bales of cotton along with twenty-two barrels of Indian corn and a variety of other foodstuffs. The *Fidelity* departed New Orleans bound for Pensacola, perhaps to load more cargo there before setting off for the Caribbean or elsewhere.\(^{13}\) In 1815 a company correspondent mentioned the arrival of the “Brig Rebecca” in Havana, which left Pensacola some weeks earlier with a cargo of “Deer Skins and Cotton.”\(^{14}\) As for

\(^{11}\) “List of Debts due by the Traders and Factors of the Upper Creek Towns to the firm of Messrs Panton Leslie & Co, and John Forbes & Co of Pensacola, adjusted to 1\(^{st}\) November 1812,” Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.
\(^{12}\) James Innerarity to Joseph M. Fernandez, February 15, 1813, Cruzat Papers, Box 2, Folder 8.
\(^{13}\) Manifest for Schooner Fidelity, May 21, 1815, Box 2, Folder 8, Cruzat Papers, Box 2, Folder 8.
\(^{14}\) Dr. David Nagle to John Forbes & Co., January 17, 1815, Cruzat Papers, Box 2, Folder 10.
livestock, the store manager at Apalachicola reported in 1814, for example, that he was preparing to drive “two hundred & fifty head of beef cattle” overland to Pensacola.

Unfortunately, he had been having trouble finding cattle drivers. “I had a party selected for the purpose and when required to go they absolutely refused so doing alledging as an excuse the backward state of their fields of corn.” The manager suspected something else held them back, though. “I believe the chief cause was fear of the Red Sticks encamped at [Escambia Bay],” north and east of Pensacola. This was not the first or the last time Creek dissidents would disrupt Forbes’s business matters.15

Most of Forbes & Co.’s capital was tied up in Native Americans’ debts, and this placed a financial stranglehold on the company. The Apalachicola store manager later noted that “These cattle have been very expensive in herding them upwards of two months & this detention . . . together with the loss that will accrue and already sustained will completely bankrupt me.” He went on to complain of the sorry state of the remaining deerskin reserves. After noting that his store needed fresh supplies of “Strouds, binding, paints, Powder & Ball, hoes, axes, & a few good scalping Knives,” he added the caveat that “the indians have few skins . . . therefore a very inconsiderable supply of the articles above mentioned will be sufficient.” Before concluding the letter, he lamented, “we have not more than half a Load [of skins] for the schooner Henry on hand.”16

Desperate for capital, Forbes began forcing Creeks to sell land to the company if they could not pay cash. The Lower Creeks had long been loath to part with their land, especially after so many bloody conflicts with illegal Georgia settlers during earlier decades. But Forbes’ lack of capital meant that the firm had correspondingly few trade

15 Edmund Doyle to unknown, July 4, 1814, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 7.
16 Edmund Doyle to unknown, July 4, 1814, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 7.
goods on hand to sell to Indians, or even to advance on credit, since the company itself had no way to purchase them. In order for Indians to maintain their access to their particular trade goods—which by the nineteenth century, came almost solely from Forbes—several towns had no choice but to give in to company demands. After acquiring the rights to a large tract on the Apalachicola River—which were dubious because the region remained under Spanish control—the company immediately began listening to offers from American speculators. North Carolina emigrant Calvin Jones wrote to John Innerarity in Mobile, in 1817, saying “I understand that . . . the house of Forbes and Co. . . . are the owners of a large tract of land in Spanish Florida.” Jones and several other investors (including Benjamin Hawkins’s nephew, William) “have had thoughts of making a purchase of some of those lands . . . provided we thought . . . the situation of the lands such as to make them eligible to attract settlers of some wealth and consideration.”

By the early nineteenth century, then, what had once been the deerskin-trading firm Panton & Leslie had become the John Forbes Co., dealers in lumber, cotton, livestock, land, and a dwindling supply of peltry. Forbes maintained Panton’s traditional Indian customers and trading relationships, but he established new ones as well. Once a fundamental part of the Native South, the company’s pursuit of new commodity streams helped to propel the sea changes taking place in native Gulf South society. For the many Native Americans, especially young men, who continued to subsist on older commodities and insist on eighteenth-century native traditions, the transformations of the nineteenth

18 Calvin Jones to John Innerarity, November 9, 1817, Cruzat Papers, Box 3, Folder 3.
century pushed them to the breaking point. As the final contest for empire in North
America broke out in the War of 1812, a so-called conservative faction of Creeks—who
became known as the Red Sticks—decided they had had enough. The eventual failure of
their movement, and their defeat at the hands of a joint American-Creek military force in
1813–1814, would remove the final obstacle to a flood of white immigration and the full
flowering of the American Deep South.

The Creek War began in 1813, in the midst of the wider War of 1812. The John
Forbes Co. had feared, years earlier, that a bloody conflict was brewing, and the partners
expected it to exacerbate their already-distressed finances. The Red Sticks began
threatening the firm for failing to supply them with trade goods in 1811. The manager of
the Prospect Bluff store, Edmund Doyle, wrote to John Forbes, telling him “in the course
of conversation we asked [Creek headman] Tame King if he thought [to] obtain payment
from the Upper Creeks and the best manner he thought it could be accomplished. He says
if you can only send out a few families and commence the settlement [on the planned
land cession], and [thereby] let the store be better supplied, [Tame King] will undertake
the Houses affairs . . . [and] that the young indians,” the Red Sticks, “would immediately
silence any opposition against the House.” Tame King argued that the rumblings of the
unhappy “young indians” over the possible cession of land would die down if only
Forbes would supply his store with more goods, which they needed to continue hunting
deer. Doyle offered his own opinion, however. “If some satisfactory measures are not
entered into so as to silence the murmurs of the indians it would be advisable to withdraw
the store, and whatever property there is here, indeed there is evident signs of danger . . .
and that the result of this embassy [visit from Tame King] will turn the scales one way or
the other. We are insulted by the young people, our property is beginning to be sacrificed without getting satisfaction, which is generally the prelude to something worse.”

The following year Mobile store manager James Innerarity expressed his worry about unrest among the Creeks, as well as the rumored possibility of war between the U.S., Britain, and Spain. He requested that the company not send any more goods to him that season. “The situation in [West Florida] is somewhat critical; & may be such as to render it desireable to have as little property of a destructible nature there as possible.” Innerarity was just as frightened that their property would be seized by the United States as by dissident Creeks. “Only three days ago we received information of the American declaration of War,” he wrote in July 1812. “[I]t is no doubt the intention of the U.S. Government to seize [West Florida] . . . [and] our firm will in consequence of being British Subjects be placed under arduous circumstances, particularly in Regard to real property.” Innerarity came up with a plan to prevent the seizure of their land, imploring company shareholders in Nassau to let them “sell” the land to an American who was loyal to the company, and thereby protect it from confiscation. Innerarity argued in fact that this might be for the better since the U.S. was likely to obtain the Floridas in the end anyway. “The long pending question of to whom shall the Floridas belong? appears now on the point of decision . . . . If it passes into the hands of the U.S. there will be no obstacle to the settlement [of our tract], and we must then set about it with energy.”

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19 Edmund Doyle to John Forbes, September 1, 1811, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 6.
20 James Innerarity to Alexander Gordon, July 14, 1812, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.
21 James Innerarity to “Craik,” July 27, 1812, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.
Looming war threatened unsettled things for the Anglo-Americans in Mississippi as well. Territorial governor David Holmes wrote worriedly to his militia commander, James Wilkinson, that “altho’ I have no reason to believe that our neighbors the Chactaw Indians are at present unfriendly, yet as they have the opportunity to obtain knowledge of our defenceless state, that alone may tempt them to commit aggressions. Of the slaves, who compose so large a portion of our population I entertain much stronger apprehensions.”

Several months later the possibility of an alliance between disaffected Choctaws and Mississippi’s enslaved laborers had only grown in Holmes’s mind. “Remonstrances and petitions have been presented to me [from the planters] stating the danger to be apprehended from the Negroes and Indians, should the Militia be marched out of the Territory” to provide military support elsewhere. As Mississippi’s slave population grew, and as many Choctaws felt increasingly excluded from the emerging Deep South, the demands of security became exponentially more pressing in the event of a more general war. Already by 1812, “Nearly one half of the entire population [here] are slaves,” Holmes continued, “and the frontier Counties are thinly inhabited [by whites]. . . . In slave Countries the Danger of insurrection always exists, and the inhabitants should be prepared to meet the event.”

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An alliance between African Americans and disaffected Creeks is exactly what occurred during the outbreak of the Red Stick conflict. In 1813 Anglo-Creek trader and Red Stick leader Peter McQueen helped unite blacks and Creeks in a final outbreak of hostilities over repeated American intrusions and the increasingly autocratic Creek National Council. In the summer of 1813, McQueen brought a small force to Forbes’s Pensacola store to threaten its manager, John Innerarity. McQueen demanded substantial supplies of ammunition and firearms from the company, no doubt in preparation for war. Innerarity described McQueen’s “vehement threats and menaces against me if I did not furnish them with powder, ball, etc.” McQueen told Innerarity that “the House [of Forbes] had acquired all their property from the [Indian] Nation & that they now must give back a part of it to assist them, nay he told the Governor that he must compel us” to participate in their cause. McQueen and his entourage demanded twenty-five cases of gunpowder. When Innerarity refused, “McQueen came with all his warriors” and cornered him in his Pensacola store. They “squatted themselves on the galleries & staircase as thick as they could be & in all their military attire with their Shaker who trembled, grinned terribly & made the most convulsive movements so as to endeavor to inspire terror.”

25 It was McQueen who would eventually lead a defeated, mixed force of blacks and Creeks to make their last stand at the so-called Negro Fort.
26 John Innerarity to James Innerarity, July 27, 1813, Greenslade Papers, Box 1, no folder. The “Shaker” Innerarity describes was most likely a prophet. In making the case that the Creeks should reject the new commodities and cultural imperatives that were transforming their society, the Red Sticks drew spiritual inspiration from “prophets.” These prophets asserted that the Red Stick cause was divinely blessed, and that their warriors could not be defeated. In this case, McQueen seems to have brought along his
McQueen proceeded to “harangue” Innerarity, shouting “how they had taken up the Tomahawk” and, in a great exaggeration, “that the whole Nation with the exception of [some Upper Creek towns] and [the] Tuckabatchees had joined them, that the Choctaw were about [illegible] [and that the] flames of war would be kindled from the Mississippi to [illegible]. They said that the Great Spirit above had [blessed the] Chiefs, and had commanded them to go to war.” Later that afternoon, Innerarity received still another visit, this time from an unknown Shawnee chief from the Ohio country. Innerarity reported that the Shawnee man told him “that all the Nations between the Missouri, the Mississippi & the Lakes had joined in the war excepting one Nation, meaning I believe, the Cherokees, that they were all now like one fire, that they were determined to make the land clean of Americans or to lose their lives, that they had come a great way to see their Brothers, the Creeks.”

As it had in the 1780s, the John Forbes Co. once again found itself at the center of Gulf South political turmoil. McQueen and the Red Sticks turned to the company for supplies because its stores were places they had always sought such things. But Forbes increasingly traded in the very objects the Red Sticks were rebelling against—slaves, cotton, and livestock—and which were helping to push the region toward greater integration with the American nation state on their periphery. Later in the Creek War, Red Stick groups regularly slaughtered Forbes-owned and managed cattle herds and, far worse from the company’s perspective, liberated firm-owned slaves. For the Red Sticks “Shaker” for spiritual support and to further intimidate Innerarity, in hopes he would provide his men with ammunition. For more on the connection between the Native American Prophet movement and the Creek War, see Joel W. Martin, Sacred Revolt: The Muskogees’ Struggle for a New World (Boston, 1991).

27 John Innerarity to James Innerarity, July 27, 1813, Greenslade Papers, Box 1, no folder.
and their perceived allies, James Innerarity cried from Mobile, “Negro stealing is no crime but rather the chief of Virtues.”

The Red Stick conflict was not one of “mixed-bloods” versus “full bloods,” as the leadership of the Anglo-Creek McQueen demonstrates. Rather, dissident native Gulf southerners decided to wage war over their loss of personal power at the hands of both their own national councils and the United States government. When McQueen became a trader in the 1770s, neither Spain nor Britain had the power to extend their authority into Creek country. Aside from the economic control exerted by the peltry trade, individual towns and people exercised autonomy. In the 1810s, however, growing new commodities and American immigrants, arriving in force, exacerbated latent tensions in Native American society. Further, an oligarchic Creek National Council had begun consolidating authority over a newly conceived “Creek Nation.” Young people, who had yet to earn their honor or place in Indian society, formed the core of the disaffected party.

Not all young people identified with this conservative impulse, however. Just as the Red Stick movement was not about blood quotients, it was not totally defined by generational divides either. Despite the Red Sticks’ convictions about the direction of their whole people, they remained thoroughly a small splinter faction. Among a Creek population of approximately 8,000, at most several hundred actually took up arms for the Red Sticks. Many more young warriors sided with the Creek National Council and the United States government, and when the movement was crushed, first at the battle of

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28 James Innerarity to John Forbes, August 12, 1815, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 7; Spencer & Gamble Co. to John Forbes Co., May 6, 1815, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 1.
Horseshoe Bend and finally at the so-called Negro Fort, Indians—Creeks and Choctaws—helped lead the attacks against them. Many did so in the pay of the U.S. government.

America’s Choctaw agent, John McKee, for example, enlisted at least 180 Choctaw men in the service of the U.S. army between 1813 and 1814. While McKee listed the majority as “Privates,” who received $8 per month, he also singled out seven “Sergeants” and two “2nd Lieutenants,” who received $11 and $25 per month, respectively. Possibly these men had more military experience than the rest. Perhaps the men themselves had elected them as their leaders. McKee did not provide racial designations on his ledger, but a few might have had Anglo heritage—listed privates like Jonathan Grant, Cornelius Mechan, English Hadjo, and Joseph Kinhade. The vast majority of the enlisted men used their Choctaw-derived names. These included the two lieutenants, Nee-ab-by and Tan-een-chub. The group also fought with at least one man who identified himself as a Chickasaw, Mas-Tubbee. Of the 180, 12 were apparently killed in combat against the Red Sticks, and their salaries were paid to their next of kin. Most of those killed were privates, except for listed sergeants Thle-pa-a-hadjo and Poosh-mas-tub-bee.30

Those native Gulf southerners who fought for and against the Red Sticks had diverse motivations for doing so. As already noted, blood and age divides were poor predictors. So, too, was occupation, as it turned out. One of the privates McKee listed on his payroll, for example, was Puckshunubbee, who remained active as a deerskin trader

30 Choctaw Payroll list, “Choctaws who served the US Army in the late Creek War,” John McKee Papers, Folder 1, W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama (hereinafter cited as “Univ. of Alabama McKee Papers”).
until at least 1812. Indeed, he must have been one of the few successful traders left by then. At a time when most hunters struggled to make ends meet with about a dozen pelts per year, Puckshunubbee delivered “four hors loads” of deer pelts to the John Forbes Co. in 1811. Despite his status as a hunter and trader, however, in the Creek War he fought on the side of those who ultimately pushed the trade to extinction. Further demonstrating the complexity of the conflict, and much to the dismay of U.S. agent Benjamin Hawkins, supposedly “civilized” Creeks occasionally allied with the Red Stick movement. In June 1813 he bemoaned that the “Alabama” Creeks (likely meaning those settled along the Alabama River) had joined the fray and declared for the rebels. The Red Sticks had lacked sufficient supplies of gunpowder and ammunition, but “The Alabamas have a pretty good supply... The Alabamas were the most industrious and best behaved of all our Indians,” Hawkins lamented, “Their fields were the granary of the upper towns and furnished considerable supplies by water to Mobile. But the Fanaticism [of the rebels] has rendered them quite the reverse.” The people of one of the most important Upper Creek towns, Autosee, declared for the Red Sticks as well, despite the apparent protests of their headmen. “The Autosees lately converted, and have driven off their Chiefs. They lately said... [']you think the white people strong and numerous. We shall soon try their strength['].” The Creek War even produced divisions within families. “Such is the degree of Frenzy,” Hawkins continued, “that the brother, brother in marriage, and son of [Creek

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31 Entry for Private Puckshunubbee, “Choctaws who served the US Army in the late Creek War,” John McKee Papers, Folder 1, Univ. of Alabama McKee Papers; Puckshunubbee to James Innerarity, October 14, 1811, Cruzat Papers, Box 2, Folder 6.
32 The lack of firearms helped define the dissident faction of Creeks. They became known as Red Sticks partially because they lacked guns and powder, but asserted that they could use clubs because their warriors could not be killed by bullets in any case. Most carried a war club, painted red, as a badge of their allegiance—but also because they had no rifles, which they surely used when available. See Saunt, New Order of Things, ch. 11.
planter and trader] Sam Macnac actually burnt his houses and destroyed much of his property.”

By August 1813 “the war party in the Creek nation had gained a complete ascendency,” Mississippi governor David Holmes wrote. “About three hundred of them marched to Pensacola,” where Holmes relayed a rumor that the Spanish governor provided them with firearms and ammunition. Though some Choctaws, like those who signed on with John McKee, clearly opposed the rebels, Holmes received a letter from “Mushuclataba, a Chief of the Chactaws,” who warned him that “a part of the Chactaws are disposed to join the [rebelling] Creeks.” By the end of that month the Red Sticks had defeated a large force of Mississippi militia.

Of course, the Red Sticks remained hopelessly outnumbered. They wrought havoc on cattle herds and other property for several months. But in the end, theirs was a lost cause that was crushed at the battle of Horseshoe Bend and at the Negro Fort. Andrew Jackson and his American militia traditionally receive credit for the defeat of the Red Sticks in 1814, but Native American participation was a significant part of Jackson’s victory. Hundreds of Choctaws and Creeks fought for the American army. They helped American forces find their way through forests and up obscure watercourses. They acted as interpreters, messengers, and guides. In short, they helped Andrew Jackson and his subordinates operate quickly and efficiently in unfamiliar territory where, without native help, the Red Sticks would have been at a distinct informational and terrain advantage.

34 David Holmes to Secretary of War, August 3, 1813, Miss. Terr. Papers, 390–91.
35 David Holmes to Secretary of War, August 30, 1813, Miss. Terr. Papers, 396–97.
The journal of a single North Carolina militia commander, Edmund Bryan, makes this clear. “Seven Red Warriors” guided the militia’s river descent on June 1, 1814 for instance. Seventy more joined Bryan’s force at Fort Jackson the next day. A Creek man later guided the American force to a camp near the town of “Au-ta-ge, a town and creek of that name on the West Bank of the Allabama,” where the commander of an accompanying Creek force acted as interpreter with the local headman. Bryan then dispatched “an Indian Runner” with information for his superiors. The commander noted that he “found [the runner] very usefull to me afterward.” In July 1814, Bryan noted that “2 Indian Kings” joined the company encamped at Fort Decatur. When the army set out from there, they camped at least one night at Creek man Sam Moniac’s home and they later crossed Euchee Creek, near the Chattahoochee River, with the help of a Creek-built and maintained bridge.

Perhaps American forces would have eventually proved overwhelming for the Red Sticks without help from native Gulf southerners, but victory surely would have come slower, and been more costly. The Seminoles kept the United States at bay in eastern and southern Florida well into the 1840s with a similarly outnumbered force of warriors and soldiers. There is no reason to think the Red Sticks could not have held out much longer without Creeks’ and Choctaws’ logistical and military support. In the fight for the direction of Gulf South society, Native Americans’ military action proved to be a force pushing it new directions.

36 Journal of Edmund Bryan, Bryan and Leventhorpe Family Papers, #3994, Series 1.1, Folder 2, Southern Historical Collection, the Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereinafter cited as “Bryan Papers”).

And so, in the end, was the John Forbes Co., which, after the defeat of the Red Sticks and the British in early 1815, eagerly set about imagining ways it might dig out of its financial difficulties. James Innerarity wrote to John Forbes in the summer of 1815, “The Indian Nations, the Creeks particularly, may now be looked on as annihilated, & their trade has long been an unprofitable one, but from Ockmulgie to the Tombigbee [Rivers], & from the Spanish line to the Cherokees . . . their place will be supplied in a few short months by industrious whites, the products of whose industry will afford hundred fold trade, & a much more profitable one.” As for the land that the company still owned near the Apalachicola and in Baton Rouge, which it had been unable to sell before or during the wars, “As a last recourse, the Lands can be sold to Americans, who will settle them in spite of Indians Negroes or English. . . . I have heard that Land like ours in that quarter are worth with warranted titles from 2 to 3 drs P. acre – The rise in the price of cotton may be expected to enhance their value still further, & the fall being the season of emigration, I shall write to [our employee] Percy to sell ours if he can in entire tracts.”

The virtual elimination of conservative resistance, as well as the end of British designs on the recapture of North America, set the stage for the full emergence of the Deep South. “Mobille, since the bustle of War subsided has been comparatively very dull,” Innerarity continued, but “it will not however long continue so: the great emigration expected this fall to the Alhabama [River] will give it an impulse that will hereafter go on increasing.” This “great emigration,” too, was propelled along with help from native southerners.

38 James Innerarity to John Forbes, August 12, 1815, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 7.
39 James Innerarity to John Forbes, August 12, 1815, Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 7.
The Native South began transitioning into a Deep South as early as the 1780s, but during the first two decades of the nineteenth century this transition became much more apparent, even embodied in single individuals. Take Gideon Lincecum, for example. Lincecum was born in backcountry Georgia in 1793. When he was twenty-four-years old he and his wife moved from Georgia to Alabama Territory before then settling (accidentally, as it would turn out) in Mississippi in 1818. The Lincecum family remained there until 1848, when they moved further west still, to Texas. In 1871, three years before his death, Lincecum penned his autobiography, in which he recounted those years spent migrating across the Gulf South. He described close, personal relationships with Choctaws and Creeks, as well as the picture of a transforming landscape. Writing from the vantage point of Reconstruction-era Texas, Lincecum’s look back at his life tells us much about the transitioning nature of the places in which he lived and worked.

Lincecum’s description of his childhood underscored the fact that the early-nineteenth-century Gulf South remained a borderland, in which Indians, Africans, and Anglo-Americans constantly interacted. While still living on the Georgia side of the Ocmulgee River, on the edge of Creek country, he recalled, “I was educated by the Muskogee Indians and hunters of a frontier country until I was fifteen, having the Muskogee children for my playmates and the bow and arrows and the blow-gun for my hunting implements.” Lincecum also remembered hunting with his Creek companions. “The quantities [of game] . . . that would come in an evening with my Indian associates and myself would . . . be a subject of wonder.” But Lincecum’s parents were not hunters, nor did they live in an Indian town. His father was a cotton planter, and young Gideon labored in the cotton fields alongside the rest of his family. “Sunday [would come] and
since I could pick so much cotton, it was the only day I could go out with my bows and arrows, . . . [but] early Monday morning I pitched into the cotton fields again, and, keeping myself half-bent all day, picked more cotton than I could carry home. . . . I could pick twenty pounds of it and father bragged of it to the neighbors.”

Gideon also claimed his education earned him a reputation, even among his Indian neighbors. “My Indian education in all the branches of natural history was rapid and delightful . . . and before I was fifteen, [I] had the reputation of a ‘sure-cure’ Indian doctor. In short, I was ‘high larnt’ in the woods.”

Gideon Lincecum’s descriptions, obviously, must be read as memory, and not as real-time accounts. Writing as he was from the hindsight of over sixty years, surely his recollections had been colored by his experiences since then—he, after all, witnessed the rapid expansion of slavery in the Gulf region, the final flowering of the Cotton South, and the rise and fall of the Confederacy. His recollections of his “Indian associates,” for example, were often tinged with paternalistic racism that mistook them for simple children of the forest. Whether Lincecum actually saw them as such when he actually lived next to them in Mississippi is an open question, but his descriptions suggest he did not. His reminiscences, after all, included hunting and “bow and arrows,” but they also included Indian country cotton, slavery, and, later, steamboats and large plantations.

Lincecum described a rapidly changing land. Before moving from Georgia, Lincecum noted that by 1817, “my Indian friends had retired from my vicinity [in

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41 Lincecum, Life and Times, 24.
western Georgia. I saw them but seldom . . . [and] Great numbers of people flocked into the new country.” Gideon professed he did not like the crowds, and he moved his family to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, because “I was determined to seek a home in the wilderness.”

Tuscaloosa in 1817, however, was already “full up with people just landed, mostly from Tennessee,” instead of the “wilderness” he sought. The Lincecums decided to move further west, where they finally settled in 1818 on the headwaters of the Tombigbee River, helping to found the town of Columbus, Mississippi. Lincecum, however, was under no illusions that their home was an entirely new one. “The woods [in the area] were burned every year by the Indian hunters. So there were but few logs in our way.” The Lincecums were one of the first migrants to build their house near the eventual site of Columbus, but they already had neighbors, regardless. “As soon as I got my house done, I went over the river to see the Choctaw Indians. They were not exceeding two miles distant. I found there a white man by the name of John Pitchylynn. Sixty two years of age, he had a large family of half breed children, was very wealthy,” and, Lincecum noted, “possessed a high order of intelligence. . . . We lived neighbor to him from 1818 to 1835,” when Pitchylynn died.

Lincecum could already speak Muskogee when he arrived in Mississippi in 1818, but he “soon learned” to speak Choctaw, too. Tri-lingual by 1820, he eventually became a merchant selling “Indian goods” as well as “sugar, coffee, whiskey,” and other dry goods. He bought and sold most of his cargo in Mobile, and he shipped it via the Tombigbee River, on flatboats. He also recruited a partner, “John Pitchylynn Jr., a halfbreed Choctaw son of Pitchylynn I mentioned earlier.” Lincecum recalled how the

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42 Lincecum, *Life and Times*, 33, 42–43.
partnership began: “Pitchlynn had a pretty good storehouse at the ferry opposite Columbus, and four or five thousand dollars’ worth of goods. I had about the same amount, and we put them together. I moved my family into a room that was boarded in, of a large two-story building he had commenced, and took possession of the goods and storehouse and ferry.” Lincecum, one of thousands of Anglo-American immigrants arriving in Mississippi in 1818, set about erecting his business, a new community, and a new life, but he did it in a partnership with a Choctaw man who had a long-established legacy as a native resident of the Gulf South. Their partnership helped to build the Deep South.  

Lincecum claimed he eventually acquired the name “Shappo Tohoba, (white hat)” from his neighbors, “but my most popular name was Anumpatashula ebisya.” He and Pitchylynn’s customers seemed an equal mix of Indians and Anglo-Americans, and the business depended on both to make a profit. “I bartered with them for every kind of produce, consisting of cowhides, deer skins, all kinds of fur and skins; as well as buckhorns, cowhorns, peas, beans, peanuts, pecans, shellbarks, hickory nuts, honey, beeswax; blowguns, blowgun arrows; bacon and venison hams and big gobblers,” Gideon recalled. He and Pitchylynn made “frequent trips to Mobile” where they sold their goods and replenished their stores. The business was moderately successful, even if the partnership was not. According to Lincecum’s recollections, Pitchylynn was an alcoholic whose recklessness forced Lincecum to save their business on multiple occasions.  

Nevertheless, the two men’s relationship emphasized the important ways that native Gulf southerners partnered with newcomers to propel the Gulf South’s transformation.

44 Lincecum, Life and Times, 69–73.
Meanwhile, Indian leaders began to consolidate their power behind a new, coercive Creek National Council by the end of the eighteenth century. This was a feature long hoped for, and perhaps even ultimately compelled, by American officials, but it was nonetheless an Indian-created institution. And this national council acted much like most other Anglo-American southern oligarchic government bodies. As early as 1810 the group agreed, under the force of a newly defined Creek “law” code, to “cause all runaway negros to be restored to their owners.” In addition to a more regular slave policy and a growing equation of blackness with bondage, Creek leaders also claimed ultimate authority over “national” affairs and created a new Creek police force as their enforcement arm.\(^\text{46}\) Indians became slave catchers and slave traders—but they dealt in black bodies only, as the practice of enslaving follow Native Americans had, apparently, virtually disappeared. Indians also began to see the potential benefits of paper titles and legal procedures in the enforcement of their ownership rights over enslaved African Americans.\(^\text{47}\)

Even those who could not afford slaves engaged with new markets and new ideas surrounding profit and private property. Indeed, American David Mitchell expressed disappointment at this development. In 1819 he thought the “charges to which [immigrants] are subject” as they pass through Indian country “are very extravagant . . . they are higher in the Nation than in Georgia or in the Alabama Territory.” After complaining of the high cost of provisions Mitchell received from the Indians, he finally noted, with a little satisfaction, that the cost of ferry crossings was finally coming under


\(^{47}\) William Hambly to John Innerarity, October 29, 1816, Cruzat Papers, Box 3, Folder 2.
American control. “Hitherto [ferries had] been kept by Indians,” who charged exorbitant rates. Mitchell’s solution had been to “employ some honest and Attentive white Man to it in future, and the Moment the Bridges are finished at Uchee Creeks, a New flat will be built,” so that Indian assistance would no longer be required to cross. Nearly two decades into the nineteenth century, native Gulf southerners remained, at least in part, the gatekeepers of the region’s development.

English traveler Adam Hodgson came to realize this during his journey through Choctaw and Creek countries between 1819 and 1821. When one night he stopped at an “inn” that accommodated travelers somewhere in Creek country, he remarked that not only were the provisions supplied and sold by Indians but also that the inn was owned and operated by “a white man” and his partner, “an Indian Chief.” When Hodgson woke the next morning, he noticed that the Creek practice that compelled women to perform the majority of field labor, which he described earlier, had disappeared, at least in the place he had slept that night. “At daylight, the boys were at their agriculture, and the girls at their domestic employments. . . . [and] many spoke English very well.” Hodgson was in the midst of a settled, agricultural people who, by and large, had embraced notions of profit and property. Still, he ignored this when he wrote, “the [Creek] community at large is most solicitous for civilization. In this they have made some progress; many of them growing cotton, and spinning and weaving it into coarse clothing.” Though Hodgson did not take Creeks’ agricultural efforts seriously—the very “civilization” he thought Creeks were “solicitous” for, was literally in front of his eyes—his description of Creek farms

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and fields would have closely matched those of small white farmers in the Gulf South. Save for what Hodgson saw as their “Indian” identity, these Creek men and women were precipitating the transformation of their native land.\textsuperscript{49}

Hodgson’s descriptions of Chickasaw country in 1820 evinced much of the same. He stayed one night at a house on the trail from Kentucky into Mississippi. He described it as a small house and farm, where “several dogs were lying about, and a herd of cattle was coming up to be milked. Near the house were some cabins for the negroes; whom we saw working in the Indian-corn fields at a little distance.” This “stand” was owned by “the elder brother of our half-breed” guide, though, not a white migrant from Kentucky or Tennessee. “We were now in the Chickasaw Nation; but the description is applicable to the houses of most of the richer half-breeds.” Hodgson appeared to equate being a “half-breed” to being more civilized, but to his disappointment he noted that his host did not actually speak English. Nor did white “blood” adequately explain slaveholding or the expansion of private property. The next night he stayed at “Amubee’s, a full blooded Chickasaw,” who also owned slaves. Hodgson proceeded to have a conversation with one of them, “a little negro girl,” presumably because she was “the only person about the house who could speak English.”\textsuperscript{50}

The enslaved population of the Gulf South exploded in the early nineteenth century in the wake of the Creek War and the subsequent cotton boom. As the 1820s wore on, enslaved African Americans grew increasingly numerous in Indian country, though older patterns of slave ownership persisted. The Duke of Saxe-Wiemar Eisenach, while traveling through Creek country in 1825 and 1826, observed that many “possess

\textsuperscript{49} Hodgson, \textit{Remarks during a Journey}, 263, 274, 278.
\textsuperscript{50} Hodgson, \textit{Remarks during a Journey}, 282, 284.
negroes, to whom it is very acceptable to live with them, since they are treated with more equality than by the whites. Some of these negroes were very well clothed in the Indian manner, they drank and jumped about with the Indians. One of them . . . appeared to be in great request among the Indians, to whom he served as interpreter.”⁵¹ Later in his journey the duke “passed through a tolerably cleared, fenced and built district, in which several negro quarters of a decent appearance were scattered about. This plantation belonged to a Chief . . . called the Big Warrior, who owns above three hundred negroes, whose wooden dwelling house stands in the center of his property.” Despite the Big Warrior’s plantation layout, which was, if anything, larger and more “civilized” than those of neighboring Anglo-American planters, the duke noted that many Native Americans in the neighborhood continued to “partly live in wigwams, partly in bark cabins.”⁵²

Even more than in 1776, Indian country in 1826 was not, strictly speaking, a country of only Indians. While still traveling through “the nation,” the duke “noticed a number of Indians collected in the neighborhood of a plantation. We left our carriage to inquire into the cause of it.” The duke and his companion stumbled upon a horse race, with both Indians and “white[s]” watching. They quickly engaged in light conversation “a white planter” there who offered to introduce them to the wealthiest man in attendance. Much to the duke’s surprise, this man was “the son of the Big Warrior. He was himself a chief, and possessed a high reputation.” The duke’s description of the headman also underscored that wealth, plantations, and slave ownership did not necessarily lead to the rejection of other aspects of an older Creek culture. “His dress was a tunic of flowered, clear blue calico, a piece of the same stuff wrapped round his head

like a turban. He wore richly ornamented leather leggings set with glass beads, and moccasins, and had an equally ornamented hunting pouch hung around him. Moderately fat, and of a great stature, he appeared to be about thirty years old. He had mustaches like all his countrymen.”

The man was also unable to speak English, and the two men were forced to converse through an interpreter.

Big Warrior’s son’s clothing and language skills indicated that Indians remained, at least in some measure, autonomous participants in the sweeping changes taking place in the Gulf South. Though Indian Removal was less than a decade away by the time of the duke’s visit, some continued to embrace at least the outward cultural trappings of their parents’ and grandparents’ Native South. Big Warrior’s son chose to remain ignorant of English—surely a man of his standing and wealth could have learned it had he wanted to do so. Such a deliberate choice also indicated that knowledge of English was not yet a vital skill for material or social advancement. In fact, Big Warrior’s son had used his wealth and property—the results of a century of interactions between his ancestors and Europeans—to enhance his native appearance with finely made clothes and ornaments. The headman intentionally marked himself as a native Gulf southerner. But he also lived and acted within a Deep South of racial slavery, plantations, and gentlemanly social activities like horse races.

Ideas about race and, perhaps more crucial, racial prejudice grew ever more rigid in Indian country in the 1820s. Gideon Lincecum, for example, remembered visiting his neighbor, Choctaw headman Mushulatubi, in the early part of the decade. Mushulatubi “was not very wealthy, having but a moderate stock of cows and horses and five or six

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Negroes”—enough property, however, to push him beyond yeoman status in the antebellum South—“he was however certainly rich in his family relations.” Mushulatubi practiced polygamy, and in addition to his “house full of children” he also had “two handsome wives. . . . They all dwelt together in the same house, and seemed to be very happy.” Mushulatubi’s continuation of older Choctaw kinship and marriage patterns, however, did not preclude his growing racial consciousness. “One of his wives was a quarter white blood,” while the other was “fully” Choctaw. “He was in the habit,” Lincecum continued, “when visited by white people, of pointing out his pretty, fair-skinned wife, and bragging a little.” Mushulatubi race consciousness did not stop at equating “blackness” with degradation and bondage. Like most of his Anglo-American immigrant neighbors, he embraced the corollary, accepting the supposed virtues of “whiteness.”

Native Gulf southerners engaged with the society in which they lived, and in turn, they both changed and were changed by that society. Just as Mushulatubi—though not himself white—appeared to adopt notions of “white” beauty, he and his fellow Native Americans, far from retreating from a Deep South that increasingly treated Indians as anathema, also continued to participate in the changing trade economy, even up to the eve of Removal. The Walton family, for instance, emigrated from South Carolina in 1820 and became cotton planters in what became Greene County, Alabama. By 1834 they also acted as middlemen merchants for “persons living along the banks of the Tombigbee, Little Tombigbee, and Black Warrior rivers in Alabama.” Among the entries in their account books, there were several customers singled out as “Indians.” They shipped

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54 Lincecum, Life and Times, 77.
goods to a W. A. Lange, a “Chickasaw” who lived at “Hayes Landing”; Horace, an “Upper Creek”; and A. Patten, a “Chickasaw.” Their book contained at least one entry for a customer named “Free Moses,” likely a free man of color. The Walton family also did business with “the Chickasaw,” implying they sold goods to the Chickasaw Nation. The ledger entry for one man, George Onge, listed no racial identity, but intriguingly, he was noted as residing in “Coosada.” Once an Upper Creek town, Coosada evolved into the town of Coosada, Alabama, which still exists today. Other place names in the Waltons’ account book emphasized an Indian country legacy: “McIntosh Landing,” “Choctaw Bluff,” and on.\(^{55}\) Into the 1830s, native Gulf southerners continued as a presence on the land and in the local economy.

The Native South and the American Deep South existed together. They were, for a time, fundamentally the same place. When Mississippi cotton planters complained to Congress about the Embargo Act of 1807, longtime peltry trader Turner Brashears signed the petition along with Anglo-American newcomers, as did Choctaw Agent John McKee.\(^{56}\) When they petitioned Congress again in 1814, multiple longtime Indian country residents signed, including Brashears, Stephen Minor, Isaac Rapalji, and one of Indian trader John Turnbull’s sons.\(^{57}\) The United States government employed Choctaw man John Pitchlynn as their official interpreter for $500 per year.\(^{58}\) Native and long-

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\(^{55}\) Accounts for Shipping, 1834–1835, Series 3, Folder 25, Walton Family Papers #1437, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
\(^{56}\) Petition to Congress by Inhabitants of the Territory, September 1811, Miss. Terr. Papers, 226–27.
\(^{57}\) Petition to Congress by Inhabitants of the Territory, October 10, 1814, Miss. Terr. Papers, 449–61.
\(^{58}\) John McKee to Secretary of War, June 29, 1814, Miss. Terr. Papers, 440–44.
resident Gulf southerners were integrated into this world, even as it transformed swiftly around them. And newcomers still integrated with them, as well.

Immigrants, for example, continued to employ ranching techniques similar to those that natives had adopted and practiced for decades—free-grazing animals without fencing and employing unsupervised enslaved laborers as herders. They did so in such great numbers that, ironically, the U.S. government felt compelled to actually protect Indians from them. Cherokee agent Return J. Meigs noted “that there is a large number of white men Citizens of the United States who have driven great numbers of Horses and Cattle on the Indian lands lying within the proper limits of the Mississippi Territory.” Meigs complained that they practiced free grazing on Chickasaw land without land titles or permission, and that “those people fly from regular society to live without restraint.” Meigs thus described a way of livestock ownership—and a way of life—that originated in the region a generation earlier, with Native American ranchers. By 1815, however, the growing immigrant population made such practices untenable, or at least unacceptable for American officials purporting to be constructing an “ordered,” “civilized”—or in other words, non-Indian—society in Mississippi. A territorial judge confirmed the problem. Americans were hemmed in on all sides by either oceans or Indian nations, and “the wealth of many of our citizens consists of extensive herds [of cattle] ranging at large in the woods,” herds that seemed to him dangerously wild and mismanaged.59

Newcomers planted cotton like native Gulf southerners too—on small scales. The size of some cotton plantations exploded in the 1820s, but many immigrants also planted in small fields. For every planter producing forty, fifty, or sixty bales of cotton per

season, there were many more who produced only a fraction of that amount with a small handful of enslaved laborers. As Native Americans found out in the 1790s and 1800s, short staple cotton, unlike sugar or rice, could be produced in small quantities for an advantageous return. New York natives Isaac Guion and his family, for example, settled near Natchez in the 1810s and began growing cotton with enslaved labor. In 1816 Guion wrote to his son, away at school in Nashville, that their harvest “may promise ourselves Ten Bales of an excellent staple, or quality generally.” Guion indicated that this amount was slightly less than usual, on account of a drought, though “the rot, so ruinous to many, does not as yet, visit us as much as it does some of our neighbors.” Guion did not learn to plant cotton because of his fellow Indian planters, of course. But his example highlights that while the number of cotton producers was growing rapidly, neither many Indians or Anglo-Americans planted large acreages. Guion’s cotton production, by weight, in 1816 was about the same as Robert Grierson and his Creek family’s had been before the turn of the century. German traveler Bernhard Eisenach emphasized that cotton was both a poor man’s and a rich man’s crop. In 1826 he noted multiple small, struggling plantations along the Mississippi River near Natchez. “We took notice of several little plantations which are exposed to inundations, and have only wretched log-houses. They are fixed there by poor people” who thus lived in houses very similar, perhaps even identical, to the cabins and wigwams in which Eisenach portrayed many Creeks living. Older, native techniques for clearing forest remained much in evidence as well. “At one of these

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60 Isaac Guion to son, September 15, 1816, Folder 1, Guion Family Papers #295z, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Most cotton bales weighed between 400 and 500 lbs.
places, the owner had put fire to all the trees that were not hewn down, to make the land arable, and to change the wood into cotton fields.”

The lack of wealth and sophistication among Natchez’s cotton planters surprised a visiting Adam Hodgson in 1820. He described the lower parts of town as filled with an “odd miscellaneous population of back-woodsmen and others from the western country.” Even those who were “worthy old gentlem[en]” did not stand out as such. Hodgson held a letter of introduction to the state governor, an ostensibly wealthy Virginian named David Holmes. Much to the British Hodgson’s dismay, Holmes “took his meals at the common table, where there was a promiscuous assemblage of merchants, agents, and clerks; and I kept my letter of introduction to him in my pocket two days, little aware that I was in his company.” Meanwhile, at least a few of the wealthiest men in the territory were native Gulf southerners. Hodgson later met Creek leader William McIntosh, for example, who at the time owned multiple ferries, a supply store, and an inn on the other side of the region, on the Chattahoochee River.

Hodgson later stayed at McIntosh’s inn, and their conversation reminds us that the transformation of an older Native South culture was nevertheless profound by the 1820s. McIntosh appeared wistful for the Indian country of his own childhood. “My host regretted, in the most feeling terms, the injury which the morals of the Indians sustained from intercourse with the Whites . . . . The Murderer is no [longer] executed; the law of private retaliation becoming gradually obsolete . . . [and] my host remembers when there was no [Creek] law against stealing, the crime itself being almost unknown . . . [but] a desire of gain, caught from the whites, has chilled their liberality.”

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was sincere in his blame of “whites” for what he portrayed as the social ills of his people is debatable. After all, he was not only a beneficiary of the Native South’s transformation—having a keen “desire of gain,” himself—but he had been a major instigator, as a headman in the Lower Towns, in accelerating that transformation. Regardless, cultural and legal changes had indeed greatly altered Indian life in the previous forty years.\(^{63}\)

Still, visitors to Mississippi in the 1820s found echoes of the Native South everywhere they looked. Still moving through Creek country in 1821, Adam Hodgson set off one morning, “as usual, about four o’clock; and breakfasted at the house of an Irishman, who left Waterford 30 years since, to carry on the Fur Trade, buying the furs from the Indians, and selling them at Mobile and Pensacola.” This Irishman had been swept up in the Gulf South’s transformation as much as had his Indian customers, and with the decline of the peltry trade he was forced to do other things. “The embargo interrupted his trade, and he is settled here with his Indian wife.” Later on still, Hodgson passed through Choctaw country, where one “night we reached the cabin of a half-breed, who took us in. We found him setting a trap for a wolf, which had attempted, a few hours before, to carry off a pig in sight of the family.”\(^{64}\) Tuscaloosa settler James Neal wrote a letter to his brother in 1823, and amid routine comments about cotton prices noted that their mutual friend, Joel Conyers, “was in this town [and] some time past he left this place for the Chickasaw country to see his relations.”\(^{65}\) In 1826 American immigrant

\(^{63}\) Hodgson, *Remarks during a Journey*, 267, 271.
\(^{64}\) Hodgson, *Remarks during a Journey*, 272–73.
\(^{65}\) James Neal to Aaron Neal, August 2, 1823, Folder 2, Neal Family Papers, W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Though Conyear could possibly have been going to visit white family members among the
Henry Hitchcock, on a “ride in the Indian nation,” stayed the night at “Lewises” house. “He lived in the nation 20 years, has an Indian wife whom I did not see. He has a large 2 story house well furnished but not finished.”66 Thus remnants of an older South—of intermarriage between individual white immigrants and Indian country residents, a common feature of the Gulf South since at least the 1760s—persisted in the nineteenth century.

Like many Anglo-American Indian country immigrants before him, Gideon Lincecum established close relationships with multiple Choctaws near Columbus, Mississippi. “During the four years I resided in the Chachta country (1822-1825), I became acquainted with the chiefs of the three districts into which the nation was divided, and quite a number of their leaders, headmen and warriors. At that time Mushulatubi, Apushimataha, and Apukshinubi were the chiefs of the three districts...[and] Until I had raised a crop of corn we procured all our provisions from our Chahta neighbors, on very good terms.” But locals facilitated Lincecum’s new Deep South life in other ways as well. Though Lincecum could already speak Muskogee and English, he initially had difficulty “understand[ing] their [Choctaw] language.” Much as they had done for decades, enslaved African Americans proved vital for bridging the barrier. “The [Choctaws’] Negroes, whom they had purchased from the white people did [speak the language], and we used them for interpreters in our business transactions.”67

Chickasaw, at the very least they would have been neighbors and had relationships with Indians.

67 Lincecum, Life and Times, 75.
But Lincecum’s relationships with Choctaws, as close as they were, also underscored how much had changed from the days when Anglo-Americans and Native Americans would often literally become family. Neither his family nor those of his white immigrant neighbors in the 1820s joined any Choctaw kin networks. That way for outsiders to integrate into Indian country was by then a relic of another era. Lincecum also looked back nostalgically at his time among the pre-Removal Choctaws, but in so doing he inadvertently emphasized the social distance that must have always existed between them. “It affords me pleasure now . . . to recall . . . the many happy days and hours I spent . . . with that innocent and unsophisticated people.” Lincecum, despite close relationships with many native Gulf southerners throughout his life, expressed a naive conception of his former friends as a simple people, from a simpler time. From his vantage point of the 1870s, Indians had not been full participants in the creation of the Deep South but quaint artifacts of a vanished Native South.68

On the eve of Indian Removal, travelers throughout the Gulf South still met Indians, of course, but overwhelmingly those they encountered remained distinct and psychologically distant from immigrants themselves, or so they imagined. New Hampshire native Charles Ladd and his companion, on a rather rough overland trip across Alabama, had an “Indian” guide to see them through to New Orleans. The guide shared the men’s campfire in the evenings, but they apparently conversed hardly at all. Ladd, however, had a far more intimate encounter with other visitors to their camp. One particular night “a negro woman with her child came up to the fire, and bidding us good morning commenced warming herself; in ten minutes twenty negresses and their children

68 Lincecum, Life and Times, 75.
had crowded round the fire, they were going to Mississippi to be sold. . . . While we were talking with them, two men came up, one the owner of some of the blacks. . . . Shortly after the other slave dealer came up,” and the group proceeded to break bread together. Ladd and his companion were much more at ease conversing with other whites, and even with enslaved blacks, than with their Native American attendant who had been with them for days. Indeed, another surprise happening that night symbolized the social distance between these white men and native Gulf southerners in general. Ladd suddenly “heard a rifle discharged in the wood, and turning round saw an Indian with his gun in his hand following his game through the woods.”

69 Indian peoples persisted on their ancestral lands, even as white and black immigrants flooded in to take them. Like the passing of that lone hunter moving through the woods in the dark, Indians’ remaining time as Gulf southerners had grown short.

Around the turn of the century, migration into the Gulf South was steady, but not overwhelming. Families of squatters had frequently attempted to set up homesteads on the margins of Indian country since the mid-eighteenth century, but far more frequently, white “intruders” were traders, many of whom became permanent residents in Indian communities. By the late 1800s, immigrants began to arrive in much greater numbers. In 1808 Mississippi Territory resident Thomas Freeman reported to the U.S. government that in Madison County, “about four hundred miles from Natchez . . . the number of families residing in said county . . . were estimated at about one thousand, and that emigrants from Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, Georgia, and other parts of the

69 Charles Ladd Letter, April 23, 1823, Folder 1, Ladd Letters, W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.
Union were daily coming in and viewing land for the purpose of making settlements.”

In 1811 Benjamin Hawkins wrote that the path through Creek country between his agency on the Flint River and Fort Stoddard, north of Mobile, was “crowded with travelers” moving west. Several years later Adam Hodgson followed that path himself, and little had changed. “Towards evening we passed six wagons, conveying ninety Slaves belonging to [a] General, from his plantation in Georgia, to his settlement on the Cahawba in Alabama.” Indian country became a thoroughfare. “In the course of the day we passed some Indians with their guns and blankets, and several wagons of emigrants from Georgia and Carolina,” Hodgson noted the next day, remarking upon what he saw as an odd juxtaposition of old and new. “We also saw many gangs of Slaves whom their masters were transporting to Alabama and Mississippi.”

In 1815, as Mississippi headed toward statehood, an American census of the population counted “forty thousand three hundred and fifty-two souls,” not counting Native Americans. Despite the professed accuracy of the count, however, the United States had almost no firm control or understanding of many who actually settled in the region. Andrew Jackson forcibly secured large swaths of Creek “National” land at the conclusion of the Creek War, but before it could be offered for sale, two sizeable squatter settlements sprang up on them seemingly overnight. District Judge Harry Toulmin wrote

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71 Benjamin Hawkins to William Eustis, January 6, 1811, Hawkins Letters, 580
72 Hodgson, Remarks during a Journey, 144–45. It is interesting to note that Hodgson remarks upon the Indians’ guns and blankets as if they were singular. Surely the people in those wagons had guns and blankets as well. Hodgson already saw those Indians as distinct, even quaint, and thus their rifles and blankets defined them, while the same articles were incidental in the white travelers.
in 1816 that “one of them is on the Ca[haba], between the Alabama and Tombigby . . . . It is said that several hundred families are established there,” a number that suggested most of them had been there already. “The other main new settlement is on the Alabama itself.” The majority of what became Alabama Territory in 1817 was Creek country, but Toulmin believed its immigrant population was already substantial before that year. “I have never been able to obtain any accurate information, as to the amount of the population in the Alabama settlement. I am told however that all the good land is occupied. There are also small settlements, it is said, in different places between the Alabama and the Chattahouchie [Rivers].”\footnote{Judge Toulmin to the President, January 20, 1816, Miss. Terr. Papers, 641–47.} American official William Barnett was even more explicit. “It must not be forgotten, then, that these lands, tho’ unsold, and tho’ in great part, not even surveyed, are by no means destitute of inhabitants. On the contrary, some districts are quite populous, and settlements are scattered here and there almost over its whole extent.”\footnote{William Barnett to Acting Secretary of War George Graham, March 12, 1817, Ala. Terr. Papers, 67–72.}

Many of the immigrants in the Alabama-Tombigbee watershed expressed a desire to be separated from Mississippi politically. During the decades dominated by the peltry trade, places like Natchez and Manchac had been well connected to traders in Mobile, Pensacola, and in both Creek and Choctaw countries. When the peltry trade finally fizzled, however, and cotton’s importance escalated, Gulf southerners’ access to water transportation, necessary for getting their produce to market, took far greater precedence. Planters’ real and imagined connections to coastal ports like Mobile, Natchez, and New Orleans increased significantly. Correspondingly, residents of the Mississippi watershed
had less and less contact with their neighbors living on rivers in Alabama. As population numbers climbed and cotton acreage soared, the Gulf South grew less integrated on its east-west axis. As early as 1809 inhabitants east of the Pearl and Pascagoula Rivers complained that “We know nothing of our Executive Officers [in Natchez]; we know nothing of our Delegates in Congress. They know nothing of us. We covet not the honour of being a part of a State on the Mississippi. A change of names will not bring us nearer to the seat of Government.” 76 Even those who lived in the western parts of what actually became Mississippi felt little connection with the state’s social, economic, and political heart—the Lower Mississippi Valley. “It would certainly be the wish of the settlers on the Pascagoula [River] and its waters that they should be connected with the proposed [Alabama] territory, instead of the proposed [Mississippi] state,” read an 1817 statement from district judge Harry Toulmin. “All their habits of intercourse and business are exclusively with the people of the Mobile and Tombigby, whilst they are separated by a wilderness of from 80 to 130 miles” from the settlements on the Mississippi River. 77

Fortunately from Alabama’s new settlers’ perspective, Congress did divide Mississippi in two, creating the new Alabama territory in 1817. By 1818 the Alabama territorial census already counted over 67,000 non-Indian inhabitants. This number included over 21,000 enslaved men and women, but counted only 339 free people of color, a surprisingly small number and one that underscored the diminishing options for free people of color in a region newly filled with people who, by design, made very little

76 Petition to Congress by a Convention East of the Pearl River, November 11, 1809, Miss. Terr. Papers, 26–31.
77 Petition to the Senate by Judge Toulmin, January 28, 1817, Miss. Terr. Papers, 763–64.
social or political room for free people of African descent.78 This stark divide between black bondage and white freedom became the norm even in rural areas. Describing a breakfast at a “solitary house” adjacent to “two very bad swamps” in central Alabama, Adam Hodgson wrote that his host’s young daughter “could not refrain the expression of her surprise at the sight of [my] White servant, having never seen one before, and was much more astonished when I told her that the White and Black servants in my country eat at the same table.”79

In the eighteenth century, Indian country was largely a place of refuge and escape for Africans and African Americans, many of whom managed to integrate into Indian communities and kin networks. At the end of that century, however, the decline of peltry, the rising importance of livestock and cotton, and the growing racial prejudices of many native Gulf southerners all combined to curtail freedom’s possibilities in the Gulf South interior. As the nineteenth century wore on, African Americans learned to fear the burgeoning Cotton Kingdom. Adam Hodgson wrote “I have already mentioned the numerous gangs [of slaves] which I have continually fell in with in my route from the Atlantic to the Gulf of Mexico; and I have understood that from Maryland and Virginia alone, from 4000 to 5000 per annum are occasionally sent down to New Orleans; a place, the very name of which seems to strike terror into the slaves and free Negroes of the Middle States.” Hodgson recalled his encounter with a “free Black servant” in Philadelphia who finally gathered the courage to ask him “really whether the free Negroes whom the Colonization Society were professing to send to Africa, were not actually sent to New-Orleans; as it was said, that as soon as the vessel was out of sight of

79 Hodgson, Remarks during a Journey, 148–49.
land, she steered her course thither . . . and that nothing but this apprehension had prevented him from offering to go to Africa.”  

And, of course, African Americans forced to migrate to the Gulf South were also forced to leave their loved ones behind. When members of the Neal family immigrated in the 1830s from North Carolina, they split up an enslaved family. A literate enslaved girl named Peney wrote back to her mother and brother from Meridian Springs, Mississippi. “I can inform you that I have saifley arrivd in Mississippi and are all well and am well pleased with the country. . . . [But] I would willingly leave it to go back to N. C.” Peney, who was literate, also provided her family with news about several other enslaved men and women who had been forced to move by the Neal family, offering precious but necessarily meager comforts for their grieving loved ones back in North Carolina. “Tell Aden that Amy is well . . . Tell Toneys wife that he is well and doing well . . . . [and] Toney wants his brother Dread to send him word how he and his family is . . . [and he] desires to bee remember to his brother Sam and his sister Sarah.” The Neals’ overseer, however, blithely spoke of destroying Peney’s last tenuous connection with her family. He wrote to his employer, “You want to know if I sold Penny and Tonny.” He said he had not yet done so, but only because he had made the calculation that their value might yet still increase: “I have never yet offered them for sail—Penny is likely to have an increase [children]” soon.  

In the 1830s, the Neal family and their bondpeople lived in the heart of what once had been Indian country. Though these lands were once home to Upper Creek and

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80 Hodgson, Remarks during a Journey, 178.
81 “Foxes Peney to Dear Mother,” June 22, 1834; and Burrell Fox to Aaron Neal, May 1835; both in Folder 7, Neal Family Papers, SHC.
Choctaw hunters, ranchers, and slaveholders, the Neals’ correspondence was notable in its omissions. It contained nary a mention of any possible Indian neighbors. If Indians were not yet literally absent, they certainly had become invisible in new ways. The region’s transformation—the seeds of which had been laid and nurtured by native Gulf southerners decades earlier—was near total in this regard. Anglo- and African American migrants picked up where native Gulf southerners began: Cotton, livestock, roads, mail routes, plantations, racial slavery—each and every one emerged in the Gulf South as native phenomena. But Gulf South natives themselves were disappearing by the third decade of the nineteenth century.

Innovation, industry, and mechanization were features of a Native South as well from at least the 1790s, with the arrival of cotton gins, looms, and factories in Creek country. But immigrants experimented with these things, too. As early as 1807, around the same time that Robert Grierson, his Creek kin, and other Indians were experimenting with their own gins, Natchez cotton planter William Dunbar reported to his cotton factor, Green & Wainwright, that “one of our backwoods Kentucky men has lately produced a model of a machine which separates the seed from the cotton, cards & spins all at one operation.”82 Cotton planters were anxious to maximize their yields as well. One Mississippi planter wrote to his friend that “Several wealthy planters on the River Coast have . . . been anxious to obtain Cotton Seed from the Bay of Honduras,” but since “no vessel has as yet departed in that direction,” they instead sought seed from either Columbia or Mexico. The man asked his brother which seed type he might prefer for

82 William Dunbar to Green and Wainwright, October 2, 1807, in Eron Rowland, ed., *Life, Letters and Papers of William Dunbar of Elgin, Morayshire, Scotland, and Natchez, Mississippi* (Jackson, Miss., 1930), 357.
their own plantation, “or if you think proper we can get [it] from the Carolinas.”

Industries beyond agriculture, too, occasionally looked for a home in the Gulf South. George Fisher, for instance, moved to the Mississippi Territory hoping to start an iron foundry, and he asked the U.S. government for “Say One or moore full sections of Lands which Contain the ore, salt Springs, and Water Courses suitable to Carry on said business.”

With new industry and commerce came the need for increased infrastructure development. The Native South had previously been a borderland. Organic features of the land like rivers and trading paths defined movement and meaning for Gulf southerners. But American surveyors in the nineteenth century, by expanding roads and drawing jurisdictions, literally turned the region into a bordered land. For the first time, borders in the Gulf South interior had the power to alter inhabitants’ lives, some despite never moving their locations. When agents ran the “line dividing the [Territory] of Alabama and [state of] Mississippi,” Gideon Lincecum and his family, to their surprise, “found ourselves fifteen miles from the line on the Mississippi side, in a strip of country eighty miles long and averaging twenty miles wide, east of the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations.” The family had planned to be on the Alabama side, where their homestead on the Tombigbee River would have allowed them easy access to territorial government in places like Mobile, Cahaba, and Tuscaloosa. When Lincecum originally settled there, the

83 Wilkens to David Hunt, October 25, 1823, Box 1, Folder 4, David Hunt Letters Ms. 4788, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. It is unclear what relationship “Wilkens” and Hunt had, but context seems to indicate that Wilkens was working for Hunt.
84 George Fisher petition to Congress, January 22, 1814, Miss. Terr. Papers, 415–16.
river, not a line on a map, defined the spot’s logic. Suddenly, that map line took precedence, and it had not been run where Lincecum expected. Much to his dismay, “we were [now] 200 miles from the other portion of the state” and its important population centers along the Mississippi River. They were thus totally “cut off from the law, [and] we were there 18 months before we saw an officer of any kind.”

Watercourses had long been the primary sites of human activity and residence in Indian country, and this continued in the 1810s and 1820s as the region’s creeks and rivers became bustling, makeshift camps for natives and immigrants alike. They also became obstacles in new ways. “At the edges of the creeks, and on the banks of the rivers,” Adam Hodgson observed, “we usually found a curious collection of sans coucis, sulkies, carts, Jersey waggons, heavy waggons, little planters, Indians, Negro[es], horses, mules, and oxen; the women and little children sitting down frequently for . . . sometimes five or six hours . . . while the men were engaged in the almost hopeless task of dragging or swimming their vehicles and baggage to the opposite side.”

Water facilitated transport of goods to and from the Gulf even as it remained an obstacle to overland travel moving east or west. The U.S. Postmaster complained in 1816 that it was still not practical to send regular mail from Georgia to New Orleans, “on account of the numerous water courses which very frequently baffle all exertions of the mail carriers[,] very few of the waters have bridges or boats sufficient to carry the mail and horses.”

In the places where they existed, Indian-managed ferries, like those of William McIntosh on the Chattahoochee at Coweta, still proved vital for facilitating the efficient

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86 Lincecum, Life and Times, 71–72.
87 Hodgson, Remarks during a Journey, 146–47.
88 Postmaster General to Gilbert Russell, March 26, 1816, Miss. Terr. Papers, 674.
movement of migrants into the region. In 1826 Duke Eisenach crossed the “Flint River in an Indian ferry boat.” He also observed that “the Indians have thrown bridges over two brooks with marshy shores, at each of them we paid, with great pleasure, half a dollar toll-money. The bridges are indeed not remarkably good, yet better than several in the Christian state of Georgia,” the duke averred. \(^89\) Rivers, too, became widely recognized boundaries between white “civilization” and Indian “wilderness.” Adam Hodgson described Lime Creek, somewhere in Alabama, in 1820 as the spot he “bade adieu to the Indian nation.” It took him fifteen days to pass on horseback between Augusta and Mobile. Weeks later Hodgson crossed a stream and “passed, not without regret, from the Chickasaw nation into the White settlements.” Later still in his journey, after leaving Natchez, Hodgson “entered the Choctaw Nation” upon crossing the so-called Natchez Trace. \(^90\) After Duke Eisenach’s 1826 trip down the Alabama River from Montgomery to Mobile, he summed up the continuing difficulty of movement across the Gulf South: “We had travelled four hundred and fifty miles . . . [but] the journey by land amounts only to two hundred and fifty-eight miles, and yet is seldom performed, on account of the want of good roads and accommodation.”\(^91\)

Many people continued to use overland routes anyway. While river travel, especially when moving south, proved far more efficient, its possibilities were limited by the course of the water itself. Henry Brackenridge moved from Philadelphia to the new town of Tallahassee, Florida Territory, in the late 1820s in hopes of becoming a sugar planter. In his letters to his wife back in Pennsylvania, he wrote, “My time has also been

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\(^91\) Eisenach, *Travels in North America*, 38.
much employed in building two bridges and cutting a road,” and that “I do not find this
town as much improved as I expected.” Brackenridge became a local judge, which
necessitated regular trips to the surrounding smaller settlements for court hearings. “My
little wagon is a great friend to me, but I am obliged to carefully avoid the sun” for much
of the year, on account of the blistering heat. Brackenridge was forced to treat his wagon
almost like a mobile home, because there were few places to sleep between sparse
immigrant communities. 92 Even in the 1830s, a trip of a few hundred miles could become
a monumental, dangerous, and complex undertaking. Writing from Greensboro,
Alabama—about ten miles west of the Black Warrior River—in 1832, Sarah Ann Gayle
expressed a desire to visit Mobile. “I think I may leave my children with Ann for a few
weeks, borrow Lucinda’s carriage, get to Cahawba, Stay at Matt’s . . . ‘till a Boat arrives,
and go . . . as far as Choctaw Bluff, where I can easily find a conveyance to Edgar’s
house” to stay before finally pushing on to the coast. 93 New Hampshire native Charles
Ladd took a stagecoach southwest, across Creek country, to New Orleans in 1833. He
dejectedly described a rough ride, in a crude stage with no springs, across “the worst
roads in the whole inhabited portion of creation.” Frequently their group became stuck in
the mud, and “often we walked more than a mile with a ton of mud sticking to our
boots.” 94

92 Henry Brackenridge to Caroline Brackenridge, July 27, 1827; March 1, 1830; and June
9, 1830, Box 1, pp 7, 84, 98, in Henry Marie Brackenridge Papers, 1827–1832, John C.
Pace Library, University of West Florida, Pensacola, Florida.
93 Correspondence of Sarah Ann Haynesworth Gayle, October, 1832, Folder 1, in Bayne
and Gayle Family Papers #1101, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library,
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
94 Charles Ladd Letter, April 23, 1833, Ladd Letters, Hoole Special Collections, Univ. of
Alabama.
Even in 1833, however, the Gulf South that Ladd encountered remained partially a Native South. “The only thing that broke the monotony of the road was . . . the meeting [of] an Indian dressed in his blanket or frock with his rifle in his hand, or [else] sauntering among the trees. Now and then a house, with one or two Indian women and their black slaves would be met with.” Native Gulf southerners, indeed, remained a constant presence on the land for most of Ladd’s trip. “[One] night we stopped to change horses, and an Indian youth who was lying on the ground put [his baggage] into the box and took his seat beside the driver – he could not speak a word of English.” On the edges of swamps and streams, they often came across “Indian house[s]” as well.95

As Ladd’s letter demonstrates, most of the ways people moved across the region changed little between 1770 and the 1830s. One large exception, however, became the most important transportation revolution in the early-nineteenth-century Gulf South and had no native precedent. The arrival of steamboats on the Mississippi, Tombigbee, Alabama, Mobile, Pascagoula, Apalachicola, and Pearl Rivers accelerated regional changes even further. With the advent of steam power in the upper reaches of the interior, cotton, which had long relied on canoes, pirogues, and eventually flatboats to reach coastal markets like Mobile and New Orleans, could suddenly be moved in much larger quantities. This expanded capacity in turn pushed many planters to expand cotton production, which accelerated regional development even faster.96

95 Charles Ladd Letter, April 23, 1833, Ladd Letters, Hoole Special Collections, Univ. of Alabama.
96 Abram Ellis cotton sales receipt, August 31, 1812, Box 1, Folder 3, Ellis-Farrar Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
Steamboats arrived in Alabama waters as early as 1818, with the 145-ton *Mobile* and the 218-ton *Alabama*. Many of these early boats were actually sailing schooners that had been converted for steam power. By the 1820s, however, purpose-built, paddle-wheel boats of various sizes and types dominated. Duke Eisenach visited Cahaba, Alabama, in 1826 and remarked “that Cahawba was a depot for cotton, which, partly in steam-boats . . . are transported down the river.” Whereas flatboats were “finished in a very rough way” and could not easily proceed upstream (in fact most were broken up and sold for lumber after reaching market), steamboats provided a new way to move goods and people upriver. Unlike the mighty Mississippi River, however, low water levels in the Tombigbee-Alabama basin, especially in the summer and fall, prevented boats from reaching many locations in northern Alabama and Mississippi for seasons at a time. Even with high water, journeys on steamboats could be harrowing. According to service records, most appear to have either sunk or foundered after only a few years in service. Boats regularly caught fire and burned to the water line (steam power necessitated burning furnaces on board, and dried cotton was a readily flammable cargo), snagged on sandbars or sunken trees, or collided with other boats in narrow channels. Even the act of loading cargo created problems. “By the accession of the new load of cotton,” wrote Duke Eisenach while aboard the 128-ton *Steubenville*, on the Alabama River, in 1826, “our vessel became too heavily laden. She acquired a balancing motion, like a ship at sea. This was exceedingly embarrassing in the numerous bends of the river, and to avoid the danger . . . it was necessary to stop the [engine] machinery at every turn.” Later that day the *Steubenville* passed “by two steam boats that had been sunk in the river, of which the
last, the ‘Cotton Plant,’”—a 72-ton vessel built only 4 years earlier in Point Clear, Alabama, “went down only a month since. Both struck against trees in the river.”

Most early steamboats in the Alabama-Tombigbee river system were built in ports on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers—ports like Louisville, Kentucky; Cincinnati, Ohio; and Clarksville, Tennessee—but a few were built in Alabama and coastal Mississippi. Between 1818 and the 1830s, boats ranged in size from the tiny forty-two-ton Harriet, built at “Saw Mill Creek, Alabama” in 1826 to the 242-ton Elizabeth, built at “Salt River, Kentucky,” in 1819. Smaller boats were far more prevalent due to the relatively smaller plantations in Alabama (as opposed to those along the Mississippi) as well as the lower water levels and narrower, meandering river channels. The first boat built in Alabama was the Tensas, a fifty-eight-ton vessel built in Blakeley, Alabama, in 1819. A very few boats plied the Apalachicola River’s waters and small farms.

Cattle, cotton, and private property became important in the lives of native Gulf southerners during the eighteenth century. Indians, once concentrated in central towns and villages, began diffusing out along rivers and tributaries in search for greater amounts of land and riverfront property for shipping produce to market. This pattern continued as newcomers flocked into the region, and more cotton plantations sprang up and strung out along the Gulf South’s many riverbanks in the nineteenth century. In order to retrieve planters’ cotton, steamboats frequently stopped at individual plantations and at larger “landings” to load a few bales at a time. These places had familiar, locally derived

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98 Bert Neville, *Directory of River Packets*, 12–29;
names: Choctaw Bluff, McIntosh’s Landing, Sinta Bogue, and Chastang’s Landing, for example. Rather than procure their own conveyance, planters in the 1820s and 1830s had only to get their cotton to the dock, wait for passing boats, and pay the ferriage toll in order to get their harvest to market.

Steamboats changed more than transportation and market efficiency for cotton. They also precipitated and fueled other aspects of the local economy, moving farm and planting equipment, mail, food, wood, and both free and enslaved passengers up and down the region. Boats had to stop often to take on wood, which their pilots often purchased from individual farmers and planters. Cotton planter John Nevitt’s diary, for example, contains multiple entries like “nine cords wood sold to steamboat Helen Macgregor at 3 dolls per cord,” and “boat freighted down twelve cords wood and left on landing.”99 While a paying passenger aboard the Steubenville, Duke Eisenach noted that when stopped to load cotton, the boat would “take in wood” from vendors on small docks and landings.100 Boats also moved mail and other kinds of piecemeal freight. Shipping receipts from the Tombigbee-Alabama routes recorded dozens of different articles, often in small volumes, including one man’s “1/2 Barrel [of] Flour,” Steston & Avery Co.’s “Ten Barrels Peach Brandy,” S.S. Kellogg’s “Four boxes ink [and] Three Reams paper,” and Sarah Capell’s “One Barrel [of] Sugar.” Steamboats also carried the materials for the cotton trade, like the “3 chains” received by Gove & Nelson and Nathaniel Norwood’s “10 ps bagging [and] 7 Coils Bale rope.”101

99 Entry for March 10, 1826, John Nevitt Diary #543, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
100 Eisenach, *Travels in North America*, 32.
101 Bert Neville Collection, Steamboat documents, notebooks 1–5, receipts for January 20, 1836; January 21, 1836; May 22, 1834; January 31, 1823; January 1, 1831; May 2,
Undoubtedly, native Gulf southerners continued to participate in the cotton economy as well as the local exchange economy in several capacities. But their appearances in documents and correspondence become extremely sparse after the 1810s. Between Mississippi and Alabama alone, the region’s immigrant population reached well over 100,000 non-Indian people, well surpassing a native population that hovered somewhere around 40,000 or 50,000. In 1816 the Mississippi Territorial census counted nearly 76,000 non-Indian residents. Just two years later, after the United States officially split the territory into two, the 1818 census of Alabama Territory alone counted nearly 68,000 people—almost 46,000 of them were white. Literally thousands—perhaps tens of thousands—had arrived in the span of only a few years. According to one historian’s calculations, approximately 125,000 people migrated to the Deep South (including Louisiana) in the 1810s, at least 50,000 of those were enslaved African Americans. Native Gulf southerners found themselves hopelessly outnumbered within an extremely short time span; suddenly they were surrounded and overwhelmed by foreigners who thought of them as a nuisance, rather than an asset, as previous generations of newcomers had. Whereas the eighteenth-century Plan of Civilization had hoped to make citizens of Indian peoples in the Southeast, white Americans in the nineteenth century arrived and imposed an increasingly rigid racial ideology. This ideology posed that whites and

1820, in W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.
“savages” could never live as equals, or even side by side. This represented a sharp deviation from early-nineteenth-century U.S. Indian policy. Native Americans helped create the world into which these Americans migrated. Within the span of a few decades, natives found themselves being forced out of it.

Native Americans often expressed exasperation at their exclusion. U.S. officer John Norton relayed one Creek man’s frustrations. “[The Americans] had recommended the cultivation of fields of corn, the raising of great herds of cattle and hogs, and the manufacturing of cloth. We have taken their advice, for now we have great abundance of corn, cattle, and hogs, and our women have learned to spin cotton and to weave . . . But still they want our lands, so that if we were to gratify their desires, we would soon be deprived of . . . the advantages we promise to ourselves from encouraging industry, that is, the increasing of our Nation.”103 Arguments for Removal often depended on the mythology—astonishing given the evidence clearly before their eyes—that Indians in the Gulf South remained just “a nation of hunters” who could never truly live in a “civilized” manner.104 The man Norton met, however, wanted nothing more than to continue reaping the benefits of the cattle and cotton he produced on his own land.

Conditions for native Gulf southerners deteriorated rapidly in the 1820s and 1830s, as more and more were forced to give up their lands, whether voluntarily or forcibly, because of personal debts or the treaties made by their National Councils. Some owners received compensation. Alpetter Hadjo, “of the Creek Nation of Indians in the State of Alabama” sold his estate to a settler named Fitzpatrick Harris Walker for $200,

“being the tract of Land located in my name in conformity with a treaty made and concluded with the Creek Nation of Indians and the United States” in 1832. The transaction took place in 1834. Whether Hadjo sold his land of his own volition is an open question. The remuneration Hadjo received was relatively paltry, but others received far less. Koo Yoo Quae, “the head of a Creek family,” sold his land on the Chattahoochee River for a measly $55.00 to a company named M.W. Perry & Co. According to the contract, Koo Yoo Quae was indebted to the same company for over $5,000. Co Choc O Nee, also indebted for several thousand dollars, received only $30.00 for his land, and another Creek man, Coch Che Yo Ho Lo, received just $75.00 for his plot in 1834. Native Gulf southerners were bought out left and right.

For newly arrived migrants, native Gulf southerners increasingly became objects of pity—quaint reminders of a bygone era—before being nearly forgotten altogether. In 1826 Henry Hitchcock left Cahaba, Alabama, and “met on our ride . . . a considerable number of Indians scattered along the road.” Hitchcock related that “they are the most miserable set and for myself I am decidedly of the opinion that the Govt. ought to remove them west of the Miss. and secure to them a country where the whites cannot intercept them.” Hitchcock of course did not note that those very Indians had helped make the settlement of “whites” possible in the first place. He saw them in 1826 as “gradually

105 Sales contract for Alpetter Hadjo, April 11, 1834, Creek Indian Land Sales Collection, W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa Alabama.
106 Contracts for Ko Yoo Quae, Co Choc O Nee, and Coch Che Yo Ho Lo; May 18, 1833, November 5, 1833, and March 1834, respectively, Creek Indian Land Sales Collection, UA Special Collections.
107 Journal of Henry Hitchcock, February 11, 1826, Hitchcock Papers, UA Special Collections.
dwindling off [and] being hemmed in between the white population.” For him, Indians were the victims of “white” civilization, rather than its facilitators and instigators.

Native Gulf southerners were the first Deep Southerners—they were the first to grow cotton and the first to raise livestock in the region; they purchased and employed enslaved black labor; they forged paths and roads and facilitated communication and travel. But Indians’ contributions to regional development—if whites recognized them at all—were summarily forgotten by the late 1820s. Migrants during these decades believed they were reclaiming a “wilderness,” rather than entering the native land of established, agricultural, slaveholding peoples. Despite Adam Hodgson’s extensive travels through Indian country between 1819 and 1821, during which he encountered Creek ranchers, planters, farmers, and slaveholders, he still described Creeks as “straggling hunters” and “half-naked savages.” He expressed sadness for “the poor Indians, whom we had seen on the frontier—corrupted, degraded, and debased by their intercourse with English, Irish, or American traders.” Florida territorial governor William Duval, writing about the general failure of the Plan of Civilization in 1826, averred that southeastern Indians—who not incidentally had been agricultural peoples for centuries—had never been given sufficient instruction in the “usefull arts” of growing cotton. “We seem to forget that the wild and [illegible] habits of these Children of the forest cannot be changed Immediately.”

White immigrants characterized the land they settled on as a place out of time. Writing about his family’s new lands in Alabama in 1826, John Gayle called them “wild and romantic” with a “captivat[ing] appearance.” He finished his dramatic description by

108 Hodgson, Remarks during a Journey, 277; William Duval to McKenney, March 2, 1826, Box 3, Folder 1, Indian Affairs – Florida Seminoles Collection, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.
saying, “I must quit on this subject or I really believe I shall find myself writing poetry.” By 1830 Gayle had apparently gained a (negative) reputation among fellow white immigrants as an Indian sympathizer. His wife, Sarah, wrote that year, asking “what do they charge you with? Pity for those oppressed sons of the forest? Plead guilty, if they do, for if you err, let it be on the side of mercy.” Sarah Gayle, however, was just as sure that native Gulf southerners could not adapt to a “civilized” way of life. “They may extend to them the blessings of civilization. Yes, and they perish under these blessings from off the face of the earth.” The Gayles’ paternalistic pity belied Alabama Creeks’ long, established history of bringing “civilization” to the region. “Poor persecuted wretches,” Sarah continued, “I almost wish their ideas of future happiness were correct, as far as they are concerned, the shades of their fathers, their arms, and their hunting grounds without limit.”

According to Sarah’s letters, John Gayle earned the derogatory nickname of being a “Red Stick” by 1830. Perhaps his opponents bestowed this patronizing moniker due to Gayle’s professed sympathy for the Indians still in their midst or for opposition to heavy-handed Indian Removal. In any event, the use of the name represented the unique ways—ironic in this particular case—that an older, Native South still occasioned meaning and a shared-understanding in the very language and culture of a transformed South.

As Indian Removal drew closer, “Indians” in the white mind were increasingly sentimentalized, already growing wholly detached from reality. Sarah Gayle wrote to her

109 John Gayle to Sarah Gayle, unknown date, 1826, Bayne and Gayle Papers, Folder 2, SHC.
110 Sarah Gayle to John Gayle, unknown date, 1830, Bayne and Gayle Papers, Folder 2, SHC.
111 Sarah Gayle to John Gayle, February 25, 1830, Bayne and Gayle Papers, Folder 2, SHC.
husband in 1831, asking him to purchase books for the children before he returned to
their Alabama home. “Please look into ‘The Tales of an Indian Camp,’ and see if they
will suit Matt, who is curious to see them, and I feel my savage propensities in favor of
the name too,” she joked. For many, Indians became literal, fading features of the wild,
forested landscape itself. Charles Ladd, a native New Englander, described seeing one
Native American man along the trail somewhere in Alabama in 1833. “Our attention was
drawn to a very striking figure: an Indian had just mounted the hill and was approaching
us from the river. He was dressed in the truest Indian costume I ever beheld. . . . His form
was tall, straight, and firmly knit, and . . . he looked as though, had not the white man’s
ax been among his forests, he could have been a brave upon the war path and respected at
the council fires. We stood admiring him a long time, and my heart wept for these simple
children of the forest . . . and the poor Indian – like April snow in the warm noon, they
melt away.” Indians, in the true, literal sense were forgotten. They became the fading
features of a rapidly modernizing landscape. Ladd accurately summed up the results
when he ended simply, “They are about moving beyond the Mississippi and in a few
years all Indians . . . will be a wonder east of the Alleghenies.”

Andrew Jackson, famous for his hatred of Native Americans as much as for his
military victories (many of which he won with the help of Indian military support),
signed the Indian Removal Act into law in 1830. It represented the end of decades of
American policies predicated on the idea that “civilized” Indians might integrate into the
social and economic life of the republic. Between 1830 and 1837, representatives of the

112 Sarah Gayle to John Gayle, December 5, 1831, Bayne and Gayle Papers, Folder 2,
SHC.
113 Charles Ladd to Dear Sister, April 23, 1833, Charles Ladd Letter, UA Special
Collections.
so-called Five Civilized Tribes signed treaties “voluntarily” moving them east of the Mississippi River. 114 Though some remained behind, most native Gulf southerners left their native land, forced out of a society they had helped create. Many were even sent away to Indian Territory, modern Oklahoma, on board steamboats—ironic given steamboats’ status as the most important tools in the joint expansions of Gulf South slavery and cotton, both of which Indians had originated.

Many also perished aboard those vessels, and on the so-called Trail of Tears, due to deplorable conditions and willful disregard on the part of U.S. officials. The United States, finally strong enough to assert its complete hegemony in the region, had conquered the Deep South with an overwhelming invasion of immigrants far more thoroughly than it had with its paltry invasion of token military forces. During the antebellum period, Indian country, with Indian help, became the Cotton Kingdom. During and after the Civil War, with Indians forcibly removed, the Cotton Kingdom became memorialized as the Old South. Non-native Gulf southerners after 1830 were thus free to do what previous generations in the region could never have done—they were free to forget that the Old South had once been the Native South at all.

CONCLUSION:

THE VERY SHORT LIFE OF THE OLD SOUTH

One of the most frequently noted ironies of American history is that the so-called Old South was in fact only a about twenty or thirty years old at the beginning of the American Civil War in 1861. The Old South, defined by a patriarchal, undemocratic power structure and a planter ruling class composed only of white Protestant men, was only barely in place in Alabama and Mississippi before the onset of the sectional crisis in the 1850s. What the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century history of the Gulf South demonstrates, however, is that the American Deep South, as defined by an assumption of black racial inferiority, chattel slavery, and a burgeoning plantation complex founded on the production of cotton for the world market, was several decades older than the Old South. The Deep South’s origins had already taken root along the Tombigbee and Alabama Rivers by the last decade of the eighteenth century. Chattel slavery and cotton were features of the Native South well before a society and economy dominated by white men was even possible in the region.

Inhabitants of the Gulf South between the American Revolution and Indian Removal constructed a Deep South, but they also occupied a racial and social milieu that was not distinctly Indian, African, or European. Nor can it be sufficiently defined by hybridity. Indians and native non-Indians owned ranches and plantations, employed slave labor, and pioneered the infrastructure for cotton production and transportation; Scotsmen and Spaniards married Indians and embraced their matrilineal traditions; Anglo- and Afro-American migrants integrated into an emergent native cotton culture; and racial and cultural identities remained permeable and flexible through the turn into the nineteenth
century, then grew more rigid as that century progressed. The history of the Gulf South thus offers a perfect opportunity to bridge the imagined divide between the colonial and early republic eras. It demonstrates the persistence of colonial and borderland forms of interaction into the nineteenth century, even as the region grew ever more tightly bound to the United States. The native transformation of the Gulf South thus forces historians to reexamine the history and people of an entire American region before the Civil War and to refashion their framework for interpreting the nature of racial and cultural formation over the long course of American history. The Deep South was not simply imposed on the native peoples who were slowly but inevitably crowded out, just as frontiers were never defined lines between white “settlers” and Indian “hunters.” The transformation of the Gulf South was more complex, more nuanced, and far more organic than that portrayal allows.

Native Gulf southerners—of different ethnicities and ancestries—were of course not entirely responsible for the rise of the American Deep South. However, their influence was crucial for helping make its rise so swift. From pioneering the techniques and infrastructure necessary for cotton agriculture, to contributing to developments like river navigation, road construction, regional communication, and the opening of lands for grazing and agriculture—Euro-Americans, Indians, Africans, free men, and slaves initiated the transformation of an entire region. They did so as native-born locals and as a result of their own initiative. Often, their participation was not strictly voluntary, and their living conditions were seldom entirely of their own making. Still, the fundamental seeds of change were well sown before large numbers of Anglo- and forced African American migrants became demographically and culturally dominant in the region.
After the Indian removals, it became easier than ever to forget that Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia had once been Indian country. Though the Seminoles in Florida were sporadically successful at holding the United States at bay for another few, violent decades, Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws became residents of Indian Territory instead of Indian country. Given that many native Gulf southerners throughout the 1820s and 1830s had busied themselves with becoming slave masters and plantation owners, the bald-faced racism and political contingency of Indian Removal appears in even sharper relief than ever. “American” and “southern” increasingly meant white in antebellum America, but the origins of the Deep South demonstrate there was a great deal more complexity and contingency inherent in the evolution of those terms than scholars have yet understood. There is no reason to doubt that more Indians would have closely identified with the southern cause in the sectional crisis had they remained in the Gulf South. Even after the brutal and deadly removals that the United States forced on Native Americans, many Indians actually did remain devoted “southerners.” The Creek, Chickasaw, and Choctaw Nations became some of the largest slaveholders in America in the nineteenth century, despite residing in Oklahoma, far removed from most of the plantation South. Each of those nations supported and fought for the Confederacy between 1861 and 1865.¹

The Gulf South provides researchers with something of a historical laboratory. It teaches that, in any context, local peoples necessarily participated in regional and societal transformations. Even in a region where they were brutally eliminated from the land, natives laid the foundations for revolutionary change. This fundamentally alters the well-

worn narrative that culture change was imposed on Native Americans. In turn, that lesson must be applied to wider studies. Across multiple borderlands—from Texas, to the Plains, to the West and Southwest—native inhabitants played active roles in regional transformations. The same continental and Atlantic forces that buffeted white and black migrants enmeshed Native Americans as well. And their participation always came to more than resistance. Understanding this allows scholars to take seriously the idea that natives, too, were Americans.

Despite Anglo-American rhetoric about the Gulf South, migrants did not arrive in the region to find a trackless wilderness. Newcomers were forced to integrate into an established society, in which colonial governments held little sway, but where external market forces were already exerting a growing influence. What should seem obvious, then, but has been obscured by the way historians subdivide their fields, is that Gulf South natives had a foundational part to play in the evolution and integration of an American borderland into the American nation. Certainly, scholars must not lose sight of the profound wrongs perpetrated against Native Americans by the United States. Make no mistake: to a great extent, Indian peoples were conquered and oppressed by an aggressive, racist, and increasingly hegemonic United States, which constituted the latest and final colonial power that Indians encountered on the continent. Historians of the early national United States consistently refer to this as “national expansion,” but it was colonialism and imperialism all the same. But as other scholars have pointed out, many Native Americans executed their own forms of imperialism, if on smaller scales.  

Excellent examples include Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven, Conn., 2008); Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill, 1992); and Kathleen

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2 Creeks,
Choctaws, and Chickasaws enslaved African Americans by the hundreds and, eventually, by the thousands. They raided rival groups like the Seminoles and others for slaves and plunder. In an Indian country increasingly stratified by race and status, domineering native elites used the new hammer of coercive authority—embodied by the several tribal National Councils—to impose their will on their constituents. We need more research that examines Indians’ role in the creation of America, from 1492 to the present, from this perspective. The work of colonization and acculturation, performed by natives and newcomers alike, continued well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By viewing native Gulf southerners as partners as well as rivals in the Deep South slavery and plantation enterprises, historians stand to better comprehend how Native American spaces and colonial borderlands, in general, transitioned into new American societies.

What it meant to be Choctaw—whether culturally or ethnically—in 1730 was necessarily much different from what it meant in 1830. Scholars from multiple disciplines—history, anthropology, archaeology, sociology, and more—need to remain cognizant that native peoples were never segregated, self-contained, or static categories of people. A number of recent works on colonial America and the North American borderlands have done an excellent job explicating this fundamental truth for other parts of the continent, especially in the Southwest and the Plains. Most of these studies, however, still end their chronologies before the United States colonized the regions they

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examine. A very few extend their analyses into the nineteenth century, with productive results. Native Gulf southerners showed that even in the absence of white rule, a plantation complex could still emerge in a borderland. Sean M. Kelley, for example, demonstrates something similar—that chattel slavery and the antebellum plantation economy could also work quite well in the Texas borderlands. By exploring how plantation slavery worked in a context far removed from the “typical” antebellum slave society that scholars imagine in the nineteenth-century South, Kelley shows the important ways that local and borderlands studies can alter or modify seemingly fundamental understandings of the development and expansion of American slavery writ large. Much the same was true in the Gulf South. However, for unclear reasons, work by scholars on later historical epochs, especially the nineteenth century, reflects much less of the sensitivity to native persistence that is now displayed in research on earlier centuries’ borderlands and frontiers. Slavery and commercial agriculture were not idiosyncratic exceptions in the Native South. If most native Gulf southerners were not slaveholders or cotton planters, all of them, across the entire region, were inescapably entangled in the ligatures that made plantation slavery possible.

The Native South persisted well into the nineteenth century, even though few Indian peoples remained in the Gulf region after 1835. Almost certainly, many native Gulf southerners managed to pass into antebellum white society, ultimately becoming indistinguishable from the rest of the South’s white population. In other cases, however, natives with African heritage (and phenotype) were forced in an entirely different direction. Some were even sold into slavery. There was little room for ambiguity in the

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racial binary that defined the Deep South of the 1840s and 1850s, and those natives who managed to remain resident in their ancestral lands were forcibly shuffled into one group or the other. This racial sorting occurred even within individual families, who provide testimony to just how much arbitrariness and ambiguity existed at the foundations of white southerners’ racial ideology. Robert Grierson, the former deerskin trader who became a planter, a slaveholder, and the progenitor of a large Creek family, died in 1823. But Robert and his wife Sinnugee’s children, who at some point became the Graysons, were compelled by circumstances to walk what Claudio Saunt calls “separate paths.” One branch of the Grayson family had lighter skin and was able to pass into whiteness and general antebellum prosperity in the nineteenth century. A second branch’s darker skin, the result of Grierson’s daughter’s African American partner, compelled the other half of the Grayson family to occupy the lowest rungs in American society. Natives with African ancestry helped build the Deep South. But white Americans in the 1830s and 1840s ensured they had no power to direct the Deep South’s future.

The Native South persists even today, in the very states, towns, and communities southerners still call home. It persists in the names of their rivers, lakes, parks, roads, and streets. The states of Alabama and Mississippi both represent names with native connotations—directly related to the Alibamon Creeks and the Mississippi Choctaws. The site of Alabama’s flagship university is in Tuscaloosa. That town is named after a Muscogee leader named Tuskalooa, or Black Warrior (as is the nearby Black Warrior River), who is traditionally credited with leading a Muscogee attack against Hernando de

5 Claudio Saunt, Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family (New York, 2005), for “separate paths” see 66. For more on this topic, see also Thomas N. Ingersoll, To Intermix with Our White Brothers: Indian Mixed Bloods in the United States from Earliest Times to the Indian Removals (Albuquerque, N.M., 2005).
Soto in the 1540 Battle of Mabila. Near Montgomery, Birmingham, and Columbus rests Wetumpka, Talladega, and Eutaw—all Creek place names. There is Chickasaw State Park, Alabama, and Tombigbee National Forest, Mississippi. Indeed, with so many place names like these, it becomes all the more astonishing that Alabamians and Mississippians managed to forget their home states’ native past—nearly two centuries later, the Native South continues to stare them straight in the face.

Of course, this is only the faintest patina of the Native South. These place names are superficial. In the places where they were bestowed by people in the mid-to-late-twentieth century, they are also paternalistic, nostalgic, and patronizing. But they nonetheless serve as echoes of when the Native South and the Deep South were, however briefly, the same place.
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