

The Natchez War Revisited: Violence, Multinational Settlements, and Indigenous Diplomacy in the Lower Mississippi Valley

By Elizabeth Ellis

The 1729–31 war between the French and the Natchez nearly destroyed the Louisiana colony and stymied the development of France's Gulf Coast empire. The origins of this deadly conflict lay not only in the specific breakdown of relations between the Natchez and Louisiana colonists but also in the Indigenous political practices that structured relations among all the nations of the Lower Mississippi valley. Indigenous southerners regularly hosted migrants and foreign nations for years at a time, and so Natchez people welcomed other petites nations and French settlers to settle in their homelands during the first decades of the eighteenth century. When Louisiana colonists abused Natchez people and lands, the Natchez violently expelled the French as they might have done with an Indigenous nation. This expulsion caused a war that enveloped many other Native nations and created political opportunities for the Choctaws. It also sent Natchez people fleeing across the Southeast and led them to seek refuge with foreign nations themselves. Focusing on political practices and relationships among petites nations, Choctaws, and Natchez, rather than just French and Natchez interactions, makes clear that the real winners of the 1729–31 war were the Choctaws and that this conflict had significant ramifications across the Gulf South.