Company Towns and Tropical Baptisms: From Lorient to Louisiana on a French Atlantic Circuit

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Erin Michelle Greenwald, M.A.
Graduate Program in History

The Ohio State University
2011

Dissertation Committee:
Alan Gallay, Advisor
Kenneth J. Andrien
John Brooke
Abstract

In 1729 the French Company of the Indies (Compagnie des Indes) operated more than two dozen coastal and riverine comptoirs, or trade outposts, along waterways stretching from the upper Mississippi Valley to the West African coast to the Bay of Bengal in Southeast Asia. The Company, administered by an assembly of Paris-centered directors, shareholders, and syndics, stood on the verge of initiating self-directed changes that would simultaneously diminish its functional and geographic scope and place it on firm financial footing for the first time since its mid-seventeenth-century inception. For unlike the Dutch and English monopoly companies, the French Company of the Indies prior to 1731 did not restrict its mission to trade alone; nor did the Company limit its operational sphere to the East Indies. Instead the Company spread its ships, bureaucrats, soldiers, laborers, and cargoes across the Atlantic and Indian oceans.

In Louisiana during the second decade of the eighteenth century, the Company made a last unsuccessful bid in its quest to extract wealth from company-directed agricultural endeavors. As the Company’s focus shifted away from agriculture with the retrocession of the colony to the king in 1731, so too did the life courses of individuals whose fortunes were bound up in the Company’s trade, colonization, and agricultural mission in the Americas.
Through the lens of an unpublished contemporary account penned by Marc Antoine Caillot, a clerk with the Company of the Indies during its last years in Louisiana, “Company Towns and Tropical Baptisms” situates the colony within the French Atlantic circuit that stretched from Paris and the Brittany Coast to Africa’s Senegambian region to the West Indies to Louisiana and back, and examines the Company’s role as colonizer, developer, slave holder, commercial entity, and deal maker between 1717 and 1731.
Dedication

Dedicated to Vasy and Acadia McCoy
Acknowledgments

Dissertations do not write themselves; nor are they written without the many generous
gifts of time, patience, advice, criticism, and love bestowed upon the dissertator. These
gifts do not go unnoticed. I have personally been very fortunate throughout the research
and writing process to include among my supporters a diverse group of advisors,
scholars, friends, colleagues, and family members.

I owe a large debt of gratitude to my dissertation advisor, Alan Gallay, whose
knowledge in the fields of early American, Native American, African American, and
Atlantic history has helped make me a better historian and teacher. Alan’s patience and
his belief in my ability to switch course, as I did partway through writing an unrelated
dissertation, without losing sight of the goal of actually finishing my degree enabled me
to embark upon the type of research and writing adventure many scholars might find
enviable. Thanks to Alan, also, for reminding me of the importance of maintaining
balance in life and scholarship.

Kenneth Andrien, whose insights into Latin America and the Caribbean enabled
me to place Louisiana into the broader context of the Americas, provided much needed
support and advice, as did John Brooke, whose graduate reading seminars in early and
nineteenth-century American history helped make a historian out of someone with a
background in French literature and culture. Thanks also to Dale Van Kley for guidance
on manuscript circulation in eighteenth-century, ancien régime France, Kevin Boyle for insisting on well-written prose, and Joby Abernathy, retired graduate studies coordinator extraordinaire, and her successor Jim Bach for the administrative wonders they made happen on a daily basis.

To the late John Conteh-Morgan, I owe a debt that I can now only repay by honoring his teachings in my scholarship. John’s life was too short. I am forever grateful to him for introducing me to the francophone world and the people and histories of the African Diaspora in the French Atlantic.

For help unraveling the mysteries of the Caillot manuscript and its wily, eighteenth-century author, I thank Gilles-Antoine Langlois; Sœurs Odile and Marie Aimée of the Augustinian community in Malestroit, France; David Mendel; Pierre-Louis Lapointe, archivist of the Bibliothèque et archives nationales de Québec, and François Rousseau, archivist of the Augustinian community in Quebec City; Mark Cave, manuscripts curator at the Historic New Orleans Collection, and Alfred Lemmon, director of the Collection’s Williams Research Center.

New Orleans archivists Sarah-Elizabeth Gundlach of the Louisiana State Museum Historical Center, Lee Leumas of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, and Lee Miller of Tulane University’s Louisiana Research Collection provided gracious assistance with all of my research queries and made helpful suggestions on materials in their collections related to my focus. In the reading room of the Williams Research Center, Siva Blake, Mary Lou Eichhorn, Daniel Hammer, Jennifer Navarre, and Eric Sieferth bore the brunt
of my many requests to use microfilms and reference materials from THNOC’s holdings. Their patience and professionalism will not be forgotten.

In France many thanks to the staffs of the Archives Nationales and Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris; Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer (formerly the Centre des Archives d’Outre-Mer) in Aix-en-Provence; Archives municipales de Lorient; and Archives départementales des Hauts-de-Seine (Nanterre), Morbihan (Vannes), and Seine-Maritime (Rouen). Curator René Estienne, archivist Jy Le Glouahec, and photographer Robert Le Gall of the Service Historique de la Défense, Fonds de la Marine, in Lorient welcomed me to one of France’s best kept archival secrets and made sure I had access to all the record groups I needed to complete my research inquiries.

Emily Clark, Shannon Dawdy, Catherine Desbarats, Heidi Keller-Lapp, Phyllis Martin, George Milne, Larry Powell, Rebecca Scott, and Sophie White sat through various readings of my work and/or helped me flesh out my narrative. Their comments made this a better dissertation. My fellow graduate students from the Ohio State department of history, especially Robert Bennett, Nicole Jackson, John and Molly Maass, Joe Orser, and Christiana Thomas, also deserve credit for listening to me drone on about not one, but two different dissertation topics.

Amy Overmyer and John, Evelyn, and Ryan Landi made me look forward to trips back to Columbus. Thanks to them for providing good laughs, warm meals, and excellent company. Along the same lines, my friend Stephanie Heinen and the unparalleled staff of Antoine’s Restaurant have kept me sane and my stomach happy.
Also in New Orleans my colleagues past and present Teresa Devlin, Sarah Doerries, Mary Mees Garsaud, Rachel Gibbons, John Lawrence, Anne Robichaux, and especially Jessica Dorman helped me believe I could finish and provided time and encouragement with which to do so. THNOC’s Executive Director Priscilla Lawrence has been a patient and faithful supporter throughout the many ups and downs of this project.

Research funding, without which I never could have written this dissertation, was generously provided by the École des chartes in Paris, Historic New Orleans Collection, Ohio State University’s history department, graduate school, and college of Humanities, and United States Naval Academy.

My parents Charles and Sandy Greenwald deserve credit for introducing me to New Orleans and for instilling in me a curiosity about the world and its inhabitants. My brother Chuck makes forever sure I don’t take myself too seriously—a useful contribution for which I thank him. A million thanks also to my grandmother, Victoria Grodevant, who has always been a source of warmth and encouragement.

The contributions of my husband Vasy McCoy and daughter Acadia to this project and my life are immeasurable. I quite literally could not have done it without them. Vasy has been particularly patient in reading, rereading, and even listening to me read various chapter drafts. Acadia has helped just by being herself. They have both lived under the shadow of this project for longer than I care to admit, spending countless Saturdays or Sundays in voluntary exile away from the house to provide me with a quiet writing environment. Thanks to both of them for always believing in me.
Vita

1995..............................................................Pine Forest High School, Pensacola, Florida

1999..............................................................B.A. French and German, Tulane University

2002−2004....................................................Graduate Teaching Associate, Department of
French, The Ohio State University

2005...............................................................M.A. French, The Ohio State University
M.A. History, The Ohio State University

2005−2007.....................................................Graduate Teaching Associate, Department
of History, The Ohio State University

2007−2010.....................................................Editor, The Historic New Orleans Collection

2010 to present...............................................Associate Curator/Historian, The Historic
New Orleans Collection

Publications

“To Strike a Balance: New Orleans’s Free Colored Community and the Diplomacy of
William C. C. Claiborne,” Nexus of Empire: Loyalty and National Identity in the

“Introduction,” In Search of Julien Hudson: Free Artist of Color in Pre−Civil War New
Collection, 2010: ix–xi.

Fields of Study

Major Field: History

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Introduction

In 2006, at an Atlantic World history conference in Paris, Marcel Dorigny debated the existence of a “French Atlantic World.”¹ That same year, Cécile Vidal offered her own views on the “reluctance” of historians, and French historians in particular, to engage with the concept of a French Atlantic.² To Dorigny, the relative weakness of the historiography of the French Atlantic, especially in comparison to the English and Spanish Atlantic historiographies, can be traced to the French empire’s own feeble attempts at New World colonization. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a host of demographic challenges and administrative and financial blunders combined with an unofficial and often selective policy of neglect to create a fragmented French presence in the Americas. Dorigny posits that a true French Atlantic World did not emerge until the second half of the eighteenth century—and that then it was “un espace négrier,” or an Atlantic tied together by France’s burgeoning slave trade, whose human cargo provided the labor necessary to bind together Africa, Europe, and the French Caribbean in an increasingly frenetic trade triangle based largely on coffee, sugar, and slaves.

Vidal, a historian of the ancien régime French colonial world, questions not the existence of a French Atlantic, but rather why more French historians have not followed their American and British counterparts into critically examining it. She offers a more nuanced explanation than Dorigny—one that implicates the compartmentalized nature of present-day history departments in France, where historians often find themselves hemmed in by hardened geographic and chronological boundaries. “The time for vast works covering the entire world,” writes Vidal, “such as the ones written by Fernand Braudel in the 1950s–1970s seems over in France.”

Further complicating the study of Atlantic history is the politicization of topics dealing with colonialism. Given the not-so-distant colonial struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, the French tendency has been to ignore its colonial past, which as Vidal stresses “remains outside the national narrative.”

Perhaps the hesitancy of French historians to engage with Atlantic history helps explain why the historiography of the French Atlantic lags behind those targeting the British, Spanish, and even Dutch Atlantics. Or perhaps historians studying the Atlantic World find it more difficult to make sense of the French Atlantic as an integrated unit. The French Atlantic, admittedly, looks different than the British or Spanish Atlantics, yet its différence should not detract from its value as a field worthy of inquiry.

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3 Ibid., 158.
5 Dubois provides a succinct historiographical overview of the French Atlantic in Atlantic History, 137–161. See also, Silvia Marzagalli, “The French Atlantic,” Itinerario 23 (1999): 70–83. Christopher Hodson and Brett Rushforth are currently working to bring together the fragmented French Atlantic historiography into a coherent synthesis titled “Discovering Empire: France and the Atlantic World from the Age of Columbus to the Rise of Napoleon” (New York: Basic Books, forthcoming).
Even before sugar and coffee production in the Caribbean reached its prodigious pre-revolutionary heights, the outline of a French Atlantic had already emerged. This French Atlantic was in place by the beginning of the eighteenth century, held tenuously together by a web of imperial policies and bureaucratic institutions rooted in both the secular and the sacred. But the sum of its fragmented parts did constitute a French Atlantic World. Philip Boucher, whose *France and the American Tropics to 1700* examines French settlements in the West Indies prior to the solidification of a Caribbean plantation complex, provides an excellent introduction to early French attempts, successes, and failures in creating new worlds linked to the old. These attempts were frequently undertaken by commercial companies—both private and public—and were shaped by their persistent Atlantic connections to each other, as well as to Africa and Europe.  

In *Chasing Empire Across the Sea*, Kenneth Banks defines “the geography of the French Atlantic” and offers a detailed examination of the overarching communication and administrative superstructures therein between the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 and the end of the Seven Years’ War in 1763. Banks examines how imperial

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7 According to Kenneth Banks, the French Atlantic “included the ports and their hinterlands of France’s Atlantic littoral (called the Ponant), Marseille in the Mediterranean, and the center of administration at Paris/Versailles; the French slaving ports of West Africa, from the Senegambia to the Bight of Benin but centered at Fort Louis and later Gorée; North America, with three affiliated settlement colonies of New France (Canada, Louisiana, and Ile Royale), plus ‘British-occupied’ Acadia and the crucial fisheries of Terre Neuve (Newfoundland); the Caribbean, centered on Saint Domingue in the west and Martinique, Guadeloupe and their dependent islands in the eastern arc of the Lesser Antilles; and the anemic colony of Cayenne on the South American mainland.” *Chasing Empire Across the Sea: Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713–1763* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 8–9.
policies forged in France and overseen by the Ministry of the Marine, the administrative unit responsible for overseas colonies, translated, with widely varying degrees of success, into colonial practice. Focused on Canada, Martinique, and Louisiana, Banks’s study provides a much-needed comparative context for the study of the French Atlantic. His top-down approach provides a good sense of how colonial administration was supposed to work, at least according to imperial hopes.

At the opposite end of the historiographic spectrum, a number of recent local studies centered on France’s overseas colonies have helped bring into focus life on the ground during the early years of French colonization in North America.  

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Louisiana, the colony which is also the primary focus of this dissertation, Shannon Dawdy’s *Building the Devil’s Empire* provides a historiographic counterpoint to Banks’s meta-narrative. Dawdy’s work combines archeological findings with document-based research to examine life in Louisiana between 1699 and 1769 from a distinctly bottom up perspective.

Though the scope and focus of their work is quite different, Dawdy and Banks both rely heavily on written correspondence. Banks pieces together the structure of the French Atlantic via a detailed survey of the tens of thousands of letters, official reports, and royal decrees circulating throughout the French Atlantic in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while Dawdy augments her local source base of Louisiana Superior Council and notarial records with a host of “mémoires, letters, and travel accounts,” which composed “a ‘useful’ kit of knowledge called histoire.”  

These histoires documenting newcomer experiences in Louisiana were often a mixed-bag of natural and administrative history, astronomy, fashion and culinary critique, and good old-fashioned storytelling in which the tall tales spun by the writer were at times self-serving aggrandizements, or worse, gross distortions of reality. Yet despite the inherent difficulties in taking these histoires at face value, their viewpoints provide a narrative skeleton upon which scholars can layer the musculature of additional sources to produce a fuller, more balanced account of the past.

While Le Page Du Pratz’s three-volume *Histoire de la Louisiane* is arguably the best known and most frequently cited “histoire-hybrid” from the first half of the

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eighteenth century (at least for Louisiana), dozens of other published and unpublished *histoires, mémoires*, and epistolary musings have helped scholars breathe life into a narrative of French colonial history constructed from relatively drier sources.\(^{10}\) From the epistolary documentation of the young Ursuline novice, Marie-Madeleine Hachard, to the picaresque *mémoire* of Jean-François Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, these sources offer a detailed view of an environment plagued by pernicious insects and scheming colonists.\(^{11}\) On a more functional level, they help students and scholars better understand the political and administrative contours of France’s overseas colonies. But these same sources, when examined not exclusively as eye-witness accounts of life in colonial Louisiana, can serve as testimonies to the creation of—or at least of imperial attempts to create—a French Atlantic World. Though *histoires* flow from individuals, they can be one of the best vehicles for exploring an emergent French Atlantic.

In 2004 the Historic New Orleans Collection acquired an unpublished eighteenth-century manuscript titled, “Relation du Voyage de la Louisiane ou Nouvelle France.”\(^{12}\) Written by Marc Antoine Caillot, a clerk employed by the French Company of the Indies, as an account of his travels from Paris to and residency in New Orleans from 1729–1731, this one hundred and eighty-four-folio-page manuscript provides a detailed—and often

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irreverent—window on an Atlantic World circuit made possible by the trade, military, and administrative networks of the French Company of the Indies.\(^{13}\) Much as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich in *A Midwife’s Tale* and Robert Harms in *The Diligent* respectively employed a midwife’s account book/journal and a ship officer’s log as narrative backbones for much broader historical inquiries, I have woven Caillot’s story through this dissertation.\(^{14}\)

“Company Towns and Tropical Baptisms: From Lorient to Louisiana on a French Atlantic Circuit” examines Louisiana in a new way—as a colony of the French Company

\(^{13}\) Written sometime between 1731 and the author’s death in 1758, the manuscript was inaccessible to the public prior to 2005. In August 1939 Mother Superior Yvonne-Aimée de Jésus and Assistant Superior Marie-Anne de Jésus from the Augustinian community of Vannes-Malestroit, France, traveled to Quebec City to help commemorate the 300th anniversary of the Augustinians’ establishment in Quebec. They brought with them the Caillot manuscript, which had, according to Mother Superior Yvonne-Aimée, come “from an old, noble French family” who bestowed it upon the Augustinian convent at Malestroit. There are no extant records of the transaction or the manuscript’s background at the Malestroit convent, but according to invoices and receipts generated by the Province of Québec in February and March 1940, the manuscript was purchased from the Augustinians under the direction of Curator Pierre-Georges Roy for the Musée de la Province in Quebec City. What happened to the manuscript after its 1940 purchase is unclear, though a typescript version was apparently made and deposited in the Quebec archives. In a letter dated 13 April 1967, then-provincial archivist Bernard Weilbrenner wrote: “The manuscript, I believe, was loaned to the Quebec Archives some years ago by a French Hospitalière Sister for copying.” The original manuscript surfaced again in 2004, when it was sold to The Historic New Orleans Collection by an anonymous seller through Christie’s of New York. Christie’s auction catalog erroneously listed the author’s name as “Pierre Caillot,” though no first name was provided by the author anywhere in the manuscript itself. The manuscript has been available to the public at The Collection’s Williams Research Center since it was reprocessed in 2005. Damase Potvin, “Un intéressant document,” *L’Action Catholique*, Québec, 28 August 1939; copies of invoices and receipts dated 16 and 28 February, and a letter to Pierre-Georges Roy dated 8 March 1940 from the Secrétariat de la Province Québec were provided by the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales de Québec (BAnQ) in 2008; Bernard Weilbrenner to Henry Pitot, 13 April 1967, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Henry Pitot Papers, MSS 724; Lot 299, *Fine Printed Books and Manuscripts Including Americana*, Christie’s New York Auction Catalog, 16 December 2004, 138–41. The description of the typescript listed in the current BAnQ catalogue states that the Archives nationales de Québec “purchased a copy” of the typescript from the Reverend Mother Yvonne-Aimée de Beauvais in 1940, Fonds sieur Caillot, 1730, BAnQ, ZF56.

of the Indies.\textsuperscript{15} The institutional history of the Company and the macroview of the Atlantic context that I provide are brought to ground level through the lived experience of company clerk Caillot. By examining Caillot’s account in its entirety from his departure from Paris in winter 1729 to his travels to the coast to his voyage at sea, rather than concentrating exclusively on his experience in Louisiana, I look beyond the artificial focus on his “destination,” and instead bring the inherent connectivity of various points along the Atlantic circuit to the fore.

Unlike contemporary accounts written by Dumont de Montigny and Le Page du Pratz, Caillot provides an uncensored view of the Atlantic that was not written to impress his superiors or to secure a pension. His is not a propaganda piece, neither is it an effort to convince readers of his heroism in the face of colonial hardships. “Relation” is a unique encapsulation of the curiosity of the times, when the natural and day-to-day history of strange lands and their strange inhabitants—native or otherwise—piqued the interest of an educated metropolitan audience. Unlike many of his better known and published peers, Caillot wrote “Relation” for more intimate circles. Given the nature of Caillot’s writing and the baldness of his observations, he likely intended his account to be circulated among his peers, among fellow clerks, ships’ officers, storekeepers, and the like.

and family members—all of whom he was sure to impress with his cleverness and keen wit.

Through Caillot’s eyes the inherent conflicts between official company aims crafted by administrators in Paris and the difficulties of their execution on the ground in the Americas is made strikingly clear. His manuscript allows for an exploration of how a common clerk of limited means experienced the Atlantic and how such a figure navigated the complicated web of patronage, service, and bureaucracy that stood between him and his own personal advancement.

I situate Louisiana within the confines of the French Atlantic during a critical period in the colony’s history. Between 1717 and 1731 the French Company of the Indies maintained exclusive domain over trade, defense, settlement, and development in Louisiana. As a colony whose output was based not only on trade, but also on hopes for agricultural expansion, Louisiana during this period can be seen as a hybridization of colonial models established the previous century in Canada and the French West Indies.

Louisiana was a rather late addition to France’s colonial portfolio. By the time of the colony’s settlement, France, through the commercial networks established by the Company of the Indies, maintained a presence not only in Canada, the Caribbean, and West Africa, but also in Bengal, India, Mocha (present-day Yemen), and the Mascarenes. Much as the experiences of the Dutch East Indian Company had informed the development of the Dutch West Indian Company in the 1600s, the Indian Ocean models provided by the French experience in Asia shaped the Company’s expectations and behaviors in the Americas. This was particularly true for Louisiana during the second and
third decades of the eighteenth century, when company hopes for the establishment of a hybrid colony based on trade and agricultural extraction ultimately failed.

Though the Company’s presence in the colony was comparatively brief, the Louisiana endeavor provided company officials and administrators with a clear, negative example of a productive trade environment. Whereas its operations in the Indian Ocean, and even in Saint Domingue, relied on the presence of pre-existing supply lines to fulfill trade objectives, its attempt to make Louisiana into a profitable entity was based on the creation and maintenance of a complete agricultural complex. Rather than rely on extant supply lines, such as furs and pelts available in the Indian trade, the Company in Louisiana sought unsuccessfully to create a French version of the Chesapeake. In its attempt to serve not as a trade facilitator but as a colony builder, the Company expended more than 20 million livres, yet never succeeded in turning a profit from Louisiana’s limited output.

Between 1712 and 1729, first Antoine Crozat and then the Company of the Indies promoted the Louisiana colony to French investors as something it was not. For a time commercial companies succeeded in convincing the French public (and themselves) that silver, gold, copper, and finally tobacco, might be extracted from Louisiana’s vast lands. If only Louisiana had access to settlers, labor, and investment funds, some argued, the colony could soon rival its silver- and tobacco-rich counterparts in New Spain and the Chesapeake. Yet for all the metropolitan efforts to convince investors of Louisiana’s potential worth, those who lived in the colony, whether as colonists, soldiers, or administrators, soon realized that Louisiana’s prospects had been grossly overblown. As
for the involvement of the Company of the Indies and its efforts to turn Louisiana into France’s largest tobacco producer, colonists could more easily support themselves through local trade than through large-scale tobacco production, a reality that thwarted company efforts to encourage agricultural expansion.

The example of Louisiana proved the proverbial last straw for a company already operating as the global trade underdog, and prompted a definitive shift in the Company’s mission and geographic focus. Following the Natchez War of 1729–1730 administrators’ finally relinquished their hopes for the colony. Its colony-building mission there was a poor fit for long-term stability, and continued investment in the colony threatened to undermine more profitable lines of trade in the East Indies. Only after the Company retroceded Louisiana to the Crown in 1731 did it become a stable, profitable trading company. By limiting its geographic scope and focusing on pure trade, as opposed to colonization, schemes, the Company of the Indies emerged from its failure in Louisiana as a competitive economic entity in the Indian Ocean.

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While the Caillot manuscript provided a way in to the volatile worlds of the French Company of the Indies during its last years in Louisiana, a host of other archival and printed primary sources bring a multi-layered perspective to my understanding of the French Atlantic circuit that stretched from France to Senegal to the French West Indies to Louisiana and back. For the John Law period, the holdings of the Historic New Orleans Collection are exceptional, given that most records from Law’s Système were burned during the Company’s 1723 reorganization. For the post-1723 period, archival materials
relative to the Company reside in three repositories. The Fonds de la Marine of the Service Historique de la Défense in Lorient house all company outfitting and maritime personnel records. The Archives Nationales in Paris maintain all correspondence and reports between company officials in Lorient or Paris and the Minister of Marine, king, and other royal ministers based in the French capital and Versailles. The Archives nationales d’outre-mer (ANOM, formerly the Centre des archives d’outre-mer) in Aix-en-Provence house internal company correspondence, memoires, and decrees; correspondence between company officials in France and administrators in overseas company comptoirs, or outposts; passenger lists for company ships; personnel records for company bureaucrats; and comptoir-by-comptoir budgets and expense reports.

Also useful for fleshing out Caillot’s identity and the patronage circles in which he and his fellow bureaucrats operated are notarial and sacramental records. For Caillot and his family, the departmental archives of Hautes-de-Seine in Nanterre provide a wealth of information on Caillot’s life and family connections, as do notarial records from his later life in Pondicherry and Bengal housed in the ANOM.

On travel and sightseeing in eighteenth-century France the Bibliothèque nationale de France is a rich source for early travel guides, postal schedules, and visual depictions. The Cassini maps, also housed at the BnF, allowed me to quite literally reconstruct Caillot’s early-1729 voyage from Paris to the Brittany coast. On the slave trade and the role of both the Company and private merchants in its perpetuation, the Trans-Atlantic
Slave Trade database developed by David Eltis et al. is an invaluable resource that helped me understand the volume of human cargo taken from Africa between 1720 and 1731.  

For Louisiana under the Company this dissertation benefited greatly from the voices of Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz, Marie-Madeleine Hachard, Jean-François Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, the Chevalier de Pradel, and many of Caillot’s other contemporaries who were present in the colony during the 1720s–1730s. Records of the Louisiana Superior Council at the Louisiana State Museum helped clarify how conflicts were resolved (or not), and under what circumstances trouble within company ranks, among its employees and bureaucrats, spilled over into a more public arena.

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“Company Towns and Tropical Baptisms” is split into five chronologically ordered chapters that follow the France-Louisiana circuit from company headquarters in France to the last days of company rule in the Louisiana colony. The first chapter, “The Company in France,” situates both the French Company of the Indies and the Louisiana colony in their historical contexts prior to 1717. Also key to this chapter is an exploration of the Company during its management by Scottish finance guru John Law, under whose guidance the Company became a global conglomerate. A third focus of this chapter is the structure of the Company’s headquarters in Paris and the composition of the Company’s metropolitan labor pool. Company clerk Marc Antoine Caillot steps onto the page at the end of this chapter as part of the discussion on patronage within company ranks.

Chapter two, “A Clerk’s Unlikely Journey and an Even Unlikelier Account of His Travels,” follows Caillot on his overland journey from the Company’s Paris headquarters to its outfitting port at Lorient. Caillot’s trek to the coast spanned more than two weeks and included stops in Palaiseau, Chartres, La Flèche, Angers, Ancenis, and Nantes among others. Using contemporary maps and travel narratives/guides, this chapter gives readers both a sense of travel in eighteenth-century France and popular opinion or imaginings of life (and death) in the Louisiana colony. A thorough discussion of Nantes, where Caillot spent several days before continuing on to Lorient, illuminates the Breton capital’s role in the trans-atlantic slave trade and as the site of the Company’s annual merchandise sales until 1734.

Chapter three, “The Company at Sea,” focuses on the Company’s outfitting operations at its home port of Lorient and on life at sea for Louisiana-bound passengers and crews. Upon arrival in Louisiana, passengers-turned-colonists, soldiers, or bureaucrats filtered their initial understanding of the colony and its populace through a lens developed, at least in part, by interactions at sea. This chapter examines how sickness, shared experiences, and rituals such as the Baptism of the Tropics ceremony served as literal and figurative rites of initiation that marked passengers’ journey into the French Atlantic world.

Chapter four, “Louisiana As a Company Colony,” looks at the Company’s presence in Louisiana between the Company’s post-Law reorganization in 1723 and its retrocession of the colony to the Crown in 1731. The Company during this period, acting as colonizer, slave holder, and commercial entity, attempted to develop the colony as a
large-scale tobacco producer, whose output would ultimately satisfy demand throughout the French Atlantic world.

Chapter five, “The Company Retires to the East,” analyzes the Company’s failure to reconcile its desire to transform Louisiana from a frontier-exchange to an agriculture-based economy with its corresponding inability to maintain stable trade relationships with the colony’s numerous Indian groups. Company administrators’ decision to withdraw from North America in 1731 was not a given, but rather resulted from the Company’s failure to adapt the structure of a global trading company to the demands of governing and developing a colony. Only in retroceding Louisiana and shrinking its global presence was the Company able to concentrate on productive trade relationships in the Indian Ocean, where it became for the first time since its 1664 inception a stable, profitable entity.
Chapter 1: The Company in France

In 1729 the French Company of the Indies (Compagnie des Indes) operated more than two dozen coastal and riverine *comptoirs*, or trade outposts, along waterways stretching from the upper Mississippi Valley to the West African coast to the Bay of Bengal in Southeast Asia. The Company, administered by an assembly of Paris-centered directors, shareholders, and syndics, stood on the verge of initiating self-directed changes that would simultaneously diminish its functional and geographic scope and place it on firm financial footing for the first time since its mid-seventeenth-century inception. As the Company’s focus shifted, so too did the life courses of individuals whose fortunes were bound up in the Company’s trade, colonization, and agricultural mission in the Americas. For unlike the Dutch and English monopoly companies, the French Company of the Indies prior to 1731 did not restrict its mission to trade alone; nor did the Company limit its operational sphere to the East Indies. Instead the Company spread its ships, bureaucrats, soldiers, laborers, and cargoes across the Atlantic and Indian oceans, leaving a staggering quantity of paper in the form of decrees, inventories, account books, and eye-witness accounts—both sanctioned and unsanctioned—in its wake.

Two recent studies by historians James Pritchard and Kenneth Banks address the question of why the French empire, particularly in the Atlantic world, “was always in the making but never made,” a question first raised by David Parker in his 1983 book, *The
Making of French Absolutism. A similar query might be made about the French monopoly company charged with facilitating trade in the East and West Indies during the first century of its existence. Indeed, the Company’s own erratic policy- and decision-making, especially with regards to operations in Africa and the Americas, reflected the geographically scattered and financially stretched nature of France’s overseas empire.

From 1642 until 1731, the Company, in its myriad forms, was locked in a perpetual cycle of borrowing, bankruptcy, liquidation, and reorganization. Mismanaged and underfunded, not until the 1730s did the French Company of the Indies achieve a measure of economic and strategic stability.

**Origins**

In the fifteenth through the early seventeenth centuries, significant improvements in maritime technology—and a corresponding increase in hydrographic knowledge—led a core group of Europeans to embark on far-reaching programs of exploration. For the Spanish, these explorations resulted in the colonization and exploitation of much of Central and South America. While Spain’s treasury grew heavy with silver and gold extracted from mines in Peru and Mexico, Portugal—whose initial forays into Atlantic exploration pre-dated all others—continued to pursue an alternative to Spanish-style colonization: global trade. From the time Portugal established its first offshore

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18 On the rise and subsequent decline of the Portuguese trading empire, see Diogo Ramada Curto and Francisco Bethencourt, eds., *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge
settlement in the Madeira Islands in 1419, Portuguese navigators and traders sailed farther down Africa’s coast, depositing feitorias (fortified trading posts or factories), some of which later served as the initiating sites of the Atlantic slave trade, along its shores. Feitorias were typically located alongside extant communities, their presence sanctioned by commercial treaties between Portuguese representatives and local rulers, their success dependent upon pre-existing manufactories or supply lines, such as textiles from India or slaves from Kongo. By the mid sixteenth century, a network of feitorias and occupied zones of influence stretched from Lisbon to São Tomé to Brazil to Nagasaki. These sites, along with the thousands of merchants, country traders, administrators, slaves, servants, and sailors who lived in or frequented them, formed the basis of a sprawling commercial empire fueled by trade in gold, spices, slaves, wine, dyes, textiles, and a host of other commodities.

Over the course of the next two centuries, Spain colonized significant portions of modern-day Central and South America, while other European powers, including England, the United Provinces, and France, looked to and incorporated elements of both the Spanish and Portuguese models of exploration and overseas expansion. Early French blue-water maritime expeditions centered on the New World and sought to replicate

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19 On the role of treaties and diplomatic negotiations in the expansion of Portugal’s commercial empire, see Russell-Wood, *A World on the Move*, 20–22, 43–44.

20 On Lisbon as the redistribution point for the stunningly diverse assortment of commodities that converged there, see Ibid., 124–34.
Spanish successes.21 Those led by Nicholas Durand de Villegaignon (1555) to southeastern Brazil and Jean Ribaut (1562) and René de Laudonnière (1564) to Florida (modern-day Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas) brought an increase in neither wealth nor territory to the French crown.22 In the sixteenth century only the Canadian expeditions of Jacques Cartier (1534, 1535, and 1541) and Jean Roberval (1541) led ultimately to a New World settlement. And even then, more than seventy years passed from the time of Cartier’s initial arrival before a permanent colony, established at Quebec in 1608, took root.

Throughout the seventeenth century settlement- and agriculture-based colonization projects in the Americas in locales such as Brazil, the Chesapeake, and the Caribbean coexisted with trade-focused endeavors in places like New Amsterdam and New France. While Europeans competed for territory in the Americas, the English and Dutch sought to bypass Portuguese trade networks in Africa and the East Indies by establishing competing East Indian trading companies. For the English in particular this was perhaps partly a response to the needs of already settled colonies in the Americas. By increasing access to key commodities, such as slaves from Africa and textiles from India,

21 Although J. H. Elliott leaves France and the French presence in the New World almost entirely out of his Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830, his survey provides the most thorough comparative examination to date of Spanish colonization in the Americas over the longue durée. Because the Spanish example served as a model not only for the British, but also the French, Elliott’s research remains relevant to this study. J. H. Elliott, Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492–1830 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

the English were better positioned to serve their agriculture-based colonies. Textiles purchased in India, for example, bought (and later clothed) African slaves, whose labor in the Americas produced cash crops sold in Europe. The liquidity generated by the sale of these crops was then frequently reinvested in trade goods bound for Asia, thereby completing the global trade circuit.

The Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie), or VOC, a consolidated amalgam of multiple, smaller, specialized companies, was chartered in 1602 in response to England’s creation of its own umbrella company, the English East India Company, or EIC, in 1600. By the mid seventeenth century, the VOC and EIC had broken Portuguese domination of trade in the East. In the first decades of their presence in India (and later China), the English and Dutch companies relied on “existing mechanisms of supply and marketing which were controlled by indigenous brokers and merchants.” Local commercial networks in place prior to the establishment of Portuguese feitorias in the preceding century remained in place at the time of English and Dutch arrival.


By the mid seventeenth century, the VOC had become the model of a successful East Indian trade conglomerate, with multiple trade factories scattered across the Indian Ocean; a central control structure for supply, organization, management, and distribution located in the Indian Ocean at Batavia (est. 1619 in present-day Jakarta, Indonesia); and a well-established network of investors, maritime workers, warehouses, and merchants operating out of Amsterdam. Based in London, the EIC was one of several English joint stock companies engaged in overseas trade. As such, its assembly of twenty-four directors competed for investment funds with companies promoting a variety of New World ventures. Despite the competition, however, the EIC was a financial success, sending out an average of thirteen vessels per season from London to the East Indies between 1658 and 1688.²⁵

The French were late-comers to the trade paradigm established first by Portuguese and later by Dutch and English merchant companies. When the French committed to chartering a company to compete with the VOC and EIC, their entrance into global trade was inauspicious, despite the increased opportunities for trade in Africa and Asia that resulted from the Portuguese empire’s decline.

In the French Atlantic world, several companies backed by small, merchant-financier groups received charters to operate in places such as St. Christophe, Guiana, and Martinique in the Caribbean, and New France. But most of these companies held charters giving them control over very limited geographic areas. The entire island of St. Christophe, overseen by the Compagnie de Saint-Christophe between 1626 and 1635, for

example, took up only 68 sq. miles.\textsuperscript{26} None of the companies in the French Atlantic remotely resembled in scale or administration Dutch or English operations in the East Indies. Nor did they look much like the Puritan-led Massachusetts Bay Company, whose charter insured its colony near-autonomy and whose mission attracted individuals and families who willingly settled in the New World. Attracting settlers who sought permanent relocation to France’s overseas colonies (as opposed to those who sought to make their fortune abroad and then promptly return to the metropole) remained a challenge throughout the colonial period. Yet the French monopoly companies granted charters in the Americas prior to the eighteenth century all faced some sort of settler-importation clause that required them to help populate whichever colony to which they acquired development and rights.

The French Crown insisted that chartered companies play a role in populating its colonies because it shifted the burden of colonization away from the state treasury. But it was also due to the fact that one of France’s professed objectives for colonization was to proselytize and convert the natives, a mission requiring the presence of both priests and Catholics, who might serve as examples for potential converts. In terms of trade, the settler clause was necessary for the development of agriculture-based settlements, a category that included all of France’s New World colonies outside of New France, where the focus was on the fur trade.

In settlements lacking supply lines to pre-existing commodities, such as furs in New France or silver in Peru, colonists and colonial administrators, including company

\textsuperscript{26} Boucher, \textit{France and the American Tropics}, 17.
representatives, often turned to agriculture as a means of extracting wealth. But in addition to land and a stable political environment, agricultural production requires knowledge of the given crop; manpower to oversee and carry out clearing, cultivation, and processing; and an established shipping network to bring the commodity to market. Perhaps most importantly, agricultural production requires sustained investment and a willingness to wait it out. Significant profit realization from new agricultural ventures could take years. Unlike the VOC and EIC whose operations in the East Indies relied primarily on pre-existing supply lines and trade in finished or partially finished goods, such as textiles from India or porcelain and silk from China, French companies in the Americas often faced the daunting task of creating exportable agricultural commodities from scratch.

In the Indian Ocean the first serious French attempt to establish a large-scale, monopoly trading company occurred in June 1642, when Louis XIII granted exclusive rights to East Indian trade to the Compagnie française de l’Orient.\(^\text{27}\) To compete with the Dutch and English companies and to avoid being preyed upon by them and private traders on voyages around the Cape of Good Hope, cargo ships were often accompanied by one or more well-armed naval vessels. Adequate seaborne defenses were critical to the success of long-haul trading voyages. Yet in spite of a recent buildup in the French naval

\(^{27}\) Richelieu’s company was not the first East Indian venture chartered by the Crown, but it was the first intended as a state-sponsored monopoly company to actually send out an expedition. Several smaller companies run by merchant collectives from Atlantic ports, including Rouen, Dieppe, and St. Malo, had been chartered prior to the Compagnie française de l’Orient. There were also a number of short-lived, narrowly focused charters granted to companies active in Canada and the Caribbean. For more on these French “pre-companies,” both those that sent expeditions and those that existed only on paper, see J. Barbier, “La Compagnie Française des Indes,” Revue Historique de l’Inde Française 3 (1919), 6–8; Furber, Rival Empires of Trade, 201–202; Carl H. Sobocinski, “Some God, Little Glory, No Gold: The French on Madagascar in the Seventeenth Century” (PhD Diss: University of Toledo, 2001), 39–61; Banks, Chasing Empire Across the Sea, 15, 17–18, 20–22; and Boucher, France and the American Tropics.
fleet, the Compagnie française failed to establish a single productive trading outpost, in large part because Cardinal Richelieu, Louis XIII’s chief minister and the Company’s greatest advocate, directed all of the Company’s meager resources into poorly-executed colonization schemes in Madagascar. Richelieu ignored evidence of the successive failures of each of the three competing European trade entities active in the Indian Ocean to make any inroads in Madagascar since a Portuguese fleet in 1500 found itself blown off course and upon the island’s shores. Instead of attempting to establish a multi-site network of comptoirs in the Indian Ocean, Richelieu hoped to first create an operational and provisioning base in Madagascar modeled after the VOC’s base in Batavia.

Richelieu died within six months of the Company’s official birth, but company-funded attempts to colonize the island continued until the mid-1650s. By then company coffers were empty, tropical diseases and hunger had ravaged the small colonial population, and relations between the French and native Malagasy peoples were openly hostile. The company charter was renewed in 1652 in the midst of the Fronde, but shareholders distracted by civil unrest in Paris had little interest in stabilizing the Company or its Madagascar-base at Fort Dauphin.

Within a dozen years of the failure of Richelieu’s company, another Paris-based strong man in the service of a new king devised a plan to create a series of monopoly companies intended to set the French on equal trade footing with England and the United Provinces. Jean-Baptiste Colbert came to power as intendant of finances and advisor to

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Louis XIV in 1661 at a time when more textiles and spices from the East Indies were consumed by France than any other European power.\(^{30}\) Hoping to turn the trade table to France’s advantage, Colbert attempted to gain merchant support for the creation of a new French East India company. But most French merchants seemed content to limit their economic engagement to the internal distribution of domestic goods or foreign imports, which arrived in port cities along France’s Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts on foreign ships. Dutch merchants, in particular, capitalized on French demand for foreign goods—and a corresponding lack of French overseas traders—by setting up shop in French Atlantic ports. They even infiltrated the domestic scene, making significant inroads in cities such as Bordeaux, where they acted as the primary distributors of one of France’s most lucrative commodities: wine.\(^{31}\)

For Colbert, self-sufficiency in trade was essential to stabilizing and eventually improving France’s economy. Louis XIV employed traditional methods—namely warfare—in his quest to expand French territory and consolidate his power. But Colbert recognized that economic warfare could prove equally productive. In August 1664 he organized the leading merchants of Paris into a Council of Commerce, in part to help generate interest in his proposed company. He hired academician François Charpentier to pen a pamphlet touting the benefits of French trade with the East Indies. Charpentier

\(^{30}\) Two recent monographs by Daniel Dessert and Jacob Soll examine Colbert’s administration of the French state in detail. Though the two authors are at odds in their interpretation of Colbert as an effective administrator, taken together these monographs provide a useful starting point for understanding the bureaucratization of the French state during the second half of the seventeenth century. Daniel Dessert, *Le Royaume de Monsieur Colbert, 1661–1683* (Paris: Perrin, 2007) and Jacob Soll, *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert’s Secret State Intelligence System* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

stressed that the French consumed at least a third of “the goods brought out of the Indies” by the Dutch, English, and even the smaller Danish and Swedish companies, and argued that the French would pay at least 12 percent less for the same Indian goods “if we fetched it ourselves.”

But the minister’s promotional efforts brought in only eight of the fifteen million livres needed to start the new company. Three of those eight were provided by the king and much of the balance flowed in only as a result of political pressure applied on less-than-willing members of France’s merchant class. By comparison, Louis XIV drained 46 million livres from the treasury for the design, construction, and appointment of Versailles, with over 1,617,000 livres tournois (livres) spent on the main palace in 1664–65 alone. The Company of the East Indies (officially chartered as the Compagnie des Indes Orientales on September 1, 1664), was persistently underfinanced and entangled with the state. It was dependant on the state treasury for much of the funds its directors managed to secure throughout the seventeenth century. Unlike Richelieu’s company, however, the new company went beyond limited colonization schemes in Madagascar (although it continued attempts to create a provisioning base there) to form a basic model for trade in the East Indies that relied upon a network of strategically placed comptoirs scattered along the Indian coast from Surat to Bengal.

François Charpentier, *Discours d’un fidèle sujet du Roy touchant l’établissement d’une compagnie française pour le commerce des Indes Orientales, adressé à tous les François* (Paris: 1665), 26, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF). To Charpentier’s discredit, he also tried to sell potential subscribers on the wonders of Madagascar and the benefits of colonizing the island, 18–21.


The Company was but one aspect of Colbert’s attempt to pry French trading interests from the hands of the Dutch, and to a lesser extent, the English. His approach was multifaceted and required a tremendous expenditure of resources. When Colbert came to power, the French naval fleet consisted of three dozen vessels, including four cargo ships and six galleys. In 1664, the minister counted only “200 seaworthy ships” in the entire merchant marine, while English and Dutch merchant ships numbered in the thousands. Colbert oversaw a massive build-up of naval forces. Ships were purchased from the Dutch. Raw materials were amassed from northern Europe. Shipyards were established along the Atlantic coast, and funds and manpower were dedicated to improving port facilities. Colbert also directed state finances into hydrographic explorations that resulted in the 1693 publication of *Le Neptune français*. The atlas, published simultaneously in Paris and Amsterdam, included more than seventy charts depicting Europe’s Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts. Increases in cartographic knowledge and maritime resources were essential to Colbert’s master plan to establish a seaborne commercial enterprise to help shore up France’s weak financial system.

Colbert allotted some of the ships acquired during this period to the recovery of the carrying trade between France and her Caribbean colonies—a trade then largely controlled by the Dutch West India Company (Geoctroyeerde Westindische Compagnie).

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35 This remark, made by Colbert 3 August 1664, at the first meeting of the Council of Trade, is quoted in Murat, *Colbert*, 184. See also 173–74.
or WIC.\textsuperscript{37} Chartered in 1621 to undermine Spanish power in the Atlantic world through trade and charter-authorized seizure (privateering) of Spanish cargo ships, the WIC was meant to achieve in the Atlantic what the VOC had in the Indian Ocean. Their spheres of influence converged at the Cape of Good Hope, with the VOC charged with trade to the east and the WIC with trade to the west. By the 1660s, Colbert estimated that WIC ships carried 3 million livres worth of sugar, tobacco, indigo, and cotton away from France’s Caribbean colonies each year. In establishing a French West India Company (Compagnie des Indes occidentales) endowed with an exclusive monopoly on all Atlantic trade (including the slave trade), Colbert hoped to realize his mercantilist dream of a full-circle colonial trading empire of French raw materials grown in the colonies carried to French ports by French ships.\textsuperscript{38} In exchange, the colonies would become a primary market for finished goods produced by local industries in France.\textsuperscript{39}

The mercantilist approach looked good on paper, but the reality was far from perfect. French industries were insufficiently developed to furnish the colonies with the variety of goods required to sustain the population or their agricultural ventures, and France was not yet in a position to supplement local goods with those procured from the East Indies.\textsuperscript{40} Despite efforts to improve roads and reform France’s archaic system of

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38 Boucher, France and the American Tropics, 173–85.


40 Boucher, France and the American Tropics, 179.
interregional tolls and customs, moving trade goods within France, as well as from the interior to the coast, remained difficult. Worse, mercantilist policy mandated that only raw goods be produced and exported by the colonies. For French sugar producers sending their crop to France from Saint Domingue and Martinique, this was highly problematic.

French refineries, accustomed to processing only limited quantities of sugar because Dutch processors had previously handled the bulk of refinement, were flooded with unprocessed sugar. To offset plummeting sugar prices, Colbert issued orders demanding that West Indian producers dedicate less land to sugar cultivation. Colbert’s directive left some planters with the difficult choice of either transitioning their fields and laborers from sugar to tobacco cultivation or continuing to grow the same quantities of sugar as before the directive in hopes of selling illicitly to foreign merchants.

Shifting land from sugar to tobacco cultivation posed its own set of problems. Demand for tobacco within France was low. In the second half of the seventeenth century domestic producers were already growing and processing enough to satisfy domestic demand. Outside of France particularly in Holland and England, where merchants consolidated imported tobacco from the Chesapeake and West Indies for reexportation and sale to northern Europe and the Baltics, demand was higher. Even in high-demand regions (and eventually, even in France), however, the rolled style of tobacco produced by French growers, which was better suited to chewing than smoking, was largely eschewed in favor of that grown in the Chesapeake style. Fully dried leaf tobacco, like that produced in the English colonies, weighed far less than the rolled variety and was therefore less expensive to import than French West Indian tobacco, even after factoring
in the added costs of trade tariffs and shipping.\textsuperscript{41} Conversely, French colonial planters were paid by the pound for their tobacco rolls, which discouraged them from adopting English processing methods that resulted in a far lighter product. Rather than stimulate trade then, the French West India Company and Colbert’s monopsonistic policies stifled sugar production and moreover failed to convince colonial planters of the benefits of shifting from sugar to tobacco. By the close of the seventeenth century, the French West India Company had collapsed.

Colbert’s desire to wage economic warfare through trade was undercut by Louis XIV’s thirst for continental territory. Within just eight years of the founding of the Company of the East Indies, war—instigated against the Dutch by Louis XIV—had broken out across the continent, drawing much of France’s already meager resources away from investment at sea and crippling the Company in its infancy.\textsuperscript{42} The 1678 Treaty of Nijmegen ended the war with the Dutch, but the damage had been done. Financial difficulties incurred during the war continued; between 1675 and 1706 the Company experienced a series of bankruptcies and reorganizations. Unable to piece together enough funds to keep the company fleet afloat, company shareholders leased their monopoly privileges to private merchants in 1706.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{41} Price, \textit{France and the Chesapeake}, 1: 5, 78–80, 112–113.


\textsuperscript{43} Furber, \textit{Rival Empires of Trade}, 105, 113–24, 203–207.
By the beginning of the eighteenth company, there were five monopoly trading companies operating under French charters; none of them were especially effective. In the Far East, Colbert’s floundering company was joined by the Royal China Company (Compagnie Royale de la Chine), and in Africa the French Atlantic slave trade fell to the Senegal, Guinea, and Saint-Domingue companies, which had taken over the trade in the Caribbean from the defunct French West Indian Company. In Louisiana, the Crown granted a single financier, Antoine Crozat, monopoly rights to the entire colony in 1712, guaranteeing his domain over mining, the fur and pelt trade, and the cultivation and processing of silk, indigo, wool, and leather. The terms of the monopoly also established Crozat as the exclusive supplier of French goods to the colonial population, which by contemporary estimates appears not to have exceeded 360 settled individuals, including no more than 200 French soldiers, civilians, and sailors; between 100 and 150 Indian slaves; and a handful of African slaves.

In 1682 explorer-fur traders René-Robert Cavelier de La Salle, Henri de Tonty, and an expeditionary team of twenty-three Frenchmen and eighteen Indians had sailed from New France through the Great Lakes drainage system into the Mississippi River, reaching the river’s mouth in the Gulf of Mexico on April 9, 1682. Aware of the strategic benefits to be gained by controlling the river system connecting France’s territories in Canada and the Illinois country to their tropical counterparts in the circum-Carribean


basin, and hopeful that the territory’s proximity to Spanish Mexico might afford opportunities for mineral extraction (whether mined or plundered), La Salle claimed the river and the vast swath of territory that bounded it in the name of Louis XIV.46

Yet in the nearly thirty years before Louis XIV awarded monopoly control of the colony to Crozat, the addition of Louisiana to France’s overseas empire yielded few tangible benefits. After La Salle’s initial descent of the Mississippi River and a brief sojourn in Quebec, he returned to France, where he rounded up a group of some two hundred soldiers and laborers. In 1684 this expeditionary force set sail for the mouth of the Mississippi, where the king and Colbert hoped they would erect a fortified base from which French ships could harass the Spanish. Unfortunately for the French, La Salle’s ship the Belle overshot the target and landed at Matagorda Bay, along the present-day Texas coast near Galveston. The mission did not end well: only a handful of the Belle’s passengers survived the failed settlement experience, eventually making their way to the Illinois country. La Salle was murdered by his own men in 1687.47

Twelve years passed before another attempt was made to secure French claims on Louisiana. Aware of the territory’s strategic importance in preventing unchecked English expansion westward from the Carolinas, French minister of the Marine Louis Phélypeaux, comte de Pontchartrain, renewed plans to occupy Louisiana following the 1697 Treaty of Rijswijk. Between 1698 and 1702, Pontchartrain and his successor and son, Jérôme Phélypeaux, comte de Pontchartrain, authorized and funded the outfitting of

46 A concise overview of La Salle’s expeditions can be found in Gilles Havard and Cécile Vidal, Histoire de l’Amérique française (Paris: Flammarion, 2003), 70–72 and Boucher, Les Nouvelles Francas, 57–60.

47 Ibid. See also James E. Bruseth and Toni S. Turner, From a Watery Grave: The Discovery and Excavation of La Salle’s Shipwreck, La Belle (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2005).
three expeditions led by Canadian adventurer Pierre Le Moyne d’Iberville. The first departed from Brest on October 24, 1698. After a stopover in Saint Domingue and a brief anchorage off Mobile Bay, the expedition’s three ships sailed into Biloxi Bay early February 1699. By the end of 1702, Iberville, along with his brothers Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville and Joseph Le Moyne de Sérigny and contingents of soldier-laborers from Canada and France, had established three fortified outposts along the Gulf Coast: Fort Maurepas (est. 1699, reinforced in 1700) on Biloxi Bay; Fort de La Boulaye (1700) on the east bank of the Mississippi River, approximately 18 leagues from the river’s mouth; and Fort St. Louis (1702) on Mobile Bay.48

As the French struggled against climate, disease, and hunger to maintain their hold on the three forts and explore the territory’s interior, France found itself caught up in yet another continental war: the War of Spanish Succession (1701–1714). For the barely established Louisiana outposts, France’s entrance into the war meant that ships intended to supply the fledgling colony with provisions, laborers, and soldiers were diverted to naval campaigns. For the Le Moyne brothers, prospects in Louisiana looked bleak. As early as spring 1700, Iberville recounted his disappointment to Rochefort’s intendant Michel Bégon. He lamented the poor quality of the soil surrounding Fort Maurepas, the “miserable” nature of a native population that was “incapable of making any valuable contribution to the development of the land,” and the generally “uninteresting” local

produce that would be of no “great use” in trade.\textsuperscript{49} Pontchartrain, aware of the Marine’s inability to support the colony while its ships, manpower, and finances were otherwise engaged, used the occasion of Iberville’s death in 1705 to begin casting about for investors to form a merchant company (modeled after those active the previous century in the French Caribbean) to take over management of Louisiana.

Pontchartrain spent more than half a decade attempting to broker such a deal. One by one, negotiations with merchant Antoine Alexandre de Rémonville, naval supplies director Jean-Baptiste Duché, and Rochefort port official Paul Bigot fell apart.\textsuperscript{50} By the time Crozat was persuaded to accept monopoly control over the struggling Louisiana colony, four years had passed since a French ship had appeared upon its shores. Lacking provisions colonists turned to local villages surrounding Fort St. Louis, which were home to bands of Mobilian and Tohomé Indians, for sustenance. Some fifty men stationed at Fort St. Louis, including ship carpenter André Pénicaut, left the post entirely, choosing to live and trade among the coastal Indians until supplies arrived from France.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{49} Cited in Giraud, \textit{A History of French Louisiana}, 1: 42.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 131–40.

Crozat, who by 1712 had garnered more than twenty years of experience financing and promoting commercial schemes around the globe, began his career as a clerk in the offices of Languedoc’s treasurer-general of estates Pierre Louis de Reich de Pennautier. From that clerkship, Crozat rose through the ranks of public finance via his service in a series of purchased offices. Well established in France’s financial circles, Crozat invested in wide-ranging commercial ventures with an international scope.\(^{52}\) Much like the Lords Proprietors to whom England’s Charles II awarded the Charter of Carolina in 1663, Crozat, at the time of his receipt of the Louisiana monopoly, had followed potential profits wherever they appeared, regardless of locale. From 1697, when Crozat became one of nine partners granted the French tobacco monopoly, to 1712 the former clerk from Languedoc was, as historian Jacob Price notes, “mixed up in virtually every risky commercial venture from South America to China.”\(^{53}\)

In Louisiana, Crozat—through the company set up in his name—intended to reap maximum profits with minimal investment. His primary focus was mineral extraction. Rumors of copper and silver deposits in the upper Mississippi Valley had been circulating in France since around 1695, when Pierre-Charles Le Sueur first recorded the

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\(^{52}\) In 1697 Crozat was one of nine partners granted France’s tobacco monopoly. The same year, Crozat served briefly as a director of the largely bankrupt Compagnie des Indes Orientales. Crozat was also a founding director of the St. Domingue and Guinea companies. For more on Crozat’s early career and the financial networks in which he operated, see Price, *France and the Chesapeake*, 1: 55–57 and Daniel Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au Grand Siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1984), 82–107; Fernand Braudel, *L’Identité de la France* (Paris: Arthaud & Flammarion, 1986), 3: 401–404.

\(^{53}\) Price, *France and the Chesapeake*, 1: 57. Peter Coclanis, in a recent critique of what he sees as the artificial boundaries drawn by historians of Atlantic history, echoes Price’s depiction of early colonial financiers as a cosmopolitan bunch. Coclanis points specifically to the Lords Proprietors of the Carolina colony who “were nothing if not worldly, involved in financial ventures, adventures, and misadventures stretching from the Indian Ocean to West Africa to the West Indies to the Hudson Bay. Their investments included interests in Tangier, the Northwest Passage, and the Royal Africa Company, whatever and wherever profits seemed possible.” Peter Coclanis, “Atlantic World or Atlantic/World?” *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2006): 729.
presence of copper and lead traces along the Green River. \textsuperscript{54} The rumors persisted through the first decades of the eighteenth century. In 1710 Pontchartrain received further confirmation of Louisiana’s mineral wealth from then governor Bienville and commissioner Diron D’Artaguette, who had in turn heard repeated reports of deposits from Indians in the Missouri and upper Mississippi valleys. \textsuperscript{55} To persuade Crozat to invest hundreds of thousands of livres in Louisiana, Pontchartrain had enlisted the aid of Antoine de La Mothe de Cadillac. Time spent in the Great Lakes region and as governor of the Detroit settlement was intended to give weight to Cadillac’s observations. He dispatched a memoire to Crozat outlining “Louisiana’s vast riches,” which included “mines of gold and silver,” and a wealth of “fine pearls.” \textsuperscript{56} Cadillac’s memoire alone was unlikely to have persuaded Crozat to accept the Louisiana monopoly—though his persistent boasting about his role to Pontchartrain suggests he personally thought otherwise—but it did contribute to Crozat’s flawed perception of the colony’s potential.

Crozat’s charter guaranteed him the right to explore, extract, and sell any mineral deposits found between the borders of New France to the north and New Mexico to the west. The colony’s mining prospects were thought to include silver, copper, and possibly

\textsuperscript{54} On the Le Sueur expeditions and Le Sueur’s quest to locate and extract sources of copper and lead, see Giraud, \textit{A History of French Louisiana}, 1: 6, 36, 48–50.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 358–66.

\textsuperscript{56} Antoine de La Mothe de Cadillac to Minister of Marine Jérôme Phélypeaux, comte de Pontchartrain, 14 August 1712, ANOM, C 13 A 2, fo. 687–89. In the same series, see also Cadillac to Pontchartrain, 29 June 1712, fo. 675–76.
gold, and the Crown also held out hope that Crozat’s company might find precious stones buried deep within the uncharted territory between the Missouri and Mississippi rivers.\(^{57}\)

For all the high hopes and persistent rumors of Louisiana’s vast untapped mineral wealth, by the end of his five-year tenure Crozat had almost nothing to show for his efforts to ascertain the precise location of rumored deposits. Exploratory mining confirmed the existence of significant lead deposits in the Kaskaskia region, but no serious attempts at either extraction or smelting took place until 1719. The remaking of Louisiana into a “French Mexico” remained an elusive dream.\(^{58}\)

Attracting willing settlers and supplying the colony’s inhabitants with much-needed provisions and supplies proved an insurmountable obstacle for Crozat. The financier was not obligated to send more than twenty “garçons ou filles à son choix” to the colony each year.\(^{59}\) He saw the necessity of increasing Louisiana’s population, but was unwilling to pay the costs of transporting settlers from France. He turned instead to

\(^{57}\) On early Indian reports to traders of mineral deposits in the upper reaches of the Louisiana colony, see Ibid., 360. Article 3 of Crozat’s charter dealt with mining privileges, see “Concession de la Louisiane à M. Crosat pour 10 années” in Recueil d’Arrests, THNOC.

\(^{58}\) Baron, Mémoire des observations, 1714, cited in Giraud, A History of French Louisiana, 1: 359. Alan Gallay argues that the failure to find and extract mineral wealth in Louisiana’s early years represented a turning point for French designs in the Louisiana colony. Instead of pursuing extraction, officials in Louisiana looked increasingly to the plantation system established in South Carolina as a more “viable model.” The two shared similarities in climate and latitude, and both had experimented locally with high-value crops, such as tobacco. But plantation agriculture required laborers, and in the colonial south the preferred laborers were African slaves. As dreams of finding gold and silver faded, stresses Gallay, French colonists and administrators increasingly “eyed Carolina’s method of obtaining labor—capture Indians to sell in the West Indies.” With profits realized in the Indian slave trade, the French could generate the capital needed to purchase African slaves. Thus commenced Bienville’s now notorious two-for-one deal, whereby Governor Bienville procured Indian slaves (often through his network of Indian allies) to be sold to the French West Indies at a rate of two Indians in exchange for one African. Alan Gallay, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670–1717* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 308–10. See also Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 56–59 and Barnett, *The Natchez Indians*, 28–32.

\(^{59}\) Trans. “young men or women of his choosing.” Article 8, “Concession de la Louisiane à M. Crosat pour 10 années” in Recueil d’Arrests, THNOC.
the Crown with the view that France might use forced emigration to rid itself of the poor and debauched to Louisiana’s advantage. Louis XIV refused to endorse Crozat’s scheme. Moreover, the king’s comptroller rejected payment of passage even for prospective colonists and their families who desired to willingly make the Atlantic crossing. In granting the Louisiana monopoly to Crozat, the Crown believed it had discharged its financial responsibility for the colony; royal officials remained reluctant to help.

A dearth of colonists, particularly skilled laborers, contributed to Louisiana’s failure to thrive and undermined efforts to develop infrastructure that might support mining, or even agricultural, endeavors. The years of Crozat’s monopoly were some of the most desperate for colonists in early Louisiana. Extreme poverty and hunger plagued the French population at the Mobile and Dauphin Island settlements, forcing colonists and soldiers to depend on aid from neighboring Indians. In cases of extreme deprivation, some Frenchmen sought refuge among the Indians, who fed and clothed them. The terms of Crozat’s charter mandated he send to Louisiana two ships per year carrying twenty-five tons of provisions, munitions, and other necessities. But the needs of a colony unable to produce even the most basic provisions, such as flour, were so great that even when Crozat sent the required supplies (as he did each of the first two years of his charter) the quantity proved insufficient. Worse, Crozat stopped sending ships with any regularity after 1714, aggravating colonists’ already fragile hold on life in Louisiana.

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61 Galley, The Indian Slave Trade, 289.

62 Article 8, “Concession de la Louisiane à M. Crosat pour 10 années” in Recueil d'Arrests, THNOC.
Crozat ultimately failed to make a spectacular fortune in Louisiana. When the newly formed French Chamber of Justice (1716) levied a retroactive profits tax on individuals who had profited personally from French colonial expansion projects during the reign of Louis XIV, Crozat was assessed 6.6 million livres\textsuperscript{63} Furious at being taxed for his role in expanding France’s commercial empire and uninterested in investing the capital necessary to develop Louisiana, he ceded his monopoly to a company recently resurrected by France’s rising star—a Scotsman—as partial payment against his debt.\textsuperscript{64}

\textit{John Law and the Consolidated Company}

Since the late 1680s efforts to resurrect Colbert’s vision of an overseas trading empire had been limited primarily to false starts in Louisiana and expansion of the number of comptoirs operating in Bengal and southwest India. The port facilities of the defunct Company of the East Indies in Lorient had been requisitioned by the French navy at the start of the War of Spanish Succession in 1701, as had most of what remained of its fleet, but a contingent of company bureaucrats and administrators remained in Bengal and Pondicherry.\textsuperscript{65} In 1689 André Bourreau Deslandes oversaw the establishment of French comptoirs along the Ganges and its tributaries at Hugli (a former Portuguese enclave across the Hugli River from the EIC base at Calcutta), Casimbazar, and Patna, as

\textsuperscript{63} Price, \textit{France and the Chesapeake}, 1: 203–204.

\textsuperscript{64} “Lettres patentes sur l’arrest concernant le Commerce de la Nouvelle Colonie de la Louisiane,” 26 August 1718, \textit{Recueil d'Arrests}, THNOC.

well as a way station in Balassor along the Bay of Bengal.\textsuperscript{66} The following year Deslandes embarked on a successful campaign to court favor with Mughal officials and the local nawab in Dacca. As a result he was able to resuscitate land and trading rights, granted in 1674, but not claimed and implemented until his intervention in 1690, to Chandernagore, a village north of Calcutta.\textsuperscript{67}

In India Deslandes’s father-in-law François Martin reestablished the Company’s presence in Pondicherry, which had been regained from the Dutch following the signing of the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697. When the Dutch decamped, Pondicherry quickly became the capital of France’s Indian Ocean trading network, a position it held until the late 1750s. As French comptoirs multiplied and became more established, opportunities for country trade—the port-to-port trade that occurred within the confines of the northern Indian Ocean—increased. In spite of a strengthened country trade, however, there was no corresponding increase in maritime support—no new ships, no dedicated crews or outfitting ports—from France. Trade stayed within Asia, with little benefit to the metropole. With no company ships making the East Indian circuit, there was no profit to be made from the circulation of the region’s high-demand trade goods in France. That was soon to change.

John Law arrived in Paris the summer of 1714. A Scotsman with a reputation for gambling and worse—he had escaped from London’s King’s Bench prison, where he had


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{67} Furber, \textit{Rival Empires of Trade}, 116–23; Kaeppelin, \textit{La Compagnie des Indes}, 320–22.}
been incarcerated and sentenced to death for killing a man in a duel some nine years earlier—Law set out to remake himself in France’s capital. He took up residence with his common-law wife Katherine (Knowles) Seigneur in a lavishly furnished house on the exclusive Place Louis-le-Grand (now Place Vendôme). He likely chose the newly constructed square because the residences lining it were home to some of the most influential financiers in Paris. Crozat lived just down the square from Law, as did Poisson de Bourvalais, secretary of the Council of Finances, and Claude-François Paparel, treasurer-general for the war ministry. For a man intent on wheeling and dealing his way into Parisian society, a residence on the Place Louis-le-Grand afforded Law a prime location from which to entertain.

Law had a reputation as a gambler but, as economic historian Antoin E. Murphy has shown, that appellation is misleading. Law was more statistician than gambler. In his time at the tables in Amsterdam, Paris, Venice, and Genoa, Law played the role of banker, who was “in modern terms the equivalent of bookkeeper, able to exploit the gambling weaknesses of those who played against him.” He used his mathematical genius to his advantage, amassing a substantial fortune by the time he took up permanent residence in Paris. But Law had accumulated more than monetary wealth during his time

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69 Murphy, John Law, 37–41.

70 Ibid., 41.
spent in Europe’s urban centers. He had gained an understanding of financial systems and banking, as well as of how they might be used to stabilize economies on a large scale.

By the time he settled in Paris the Scotsman was on his way to establishing himself as one of the period’s most influential economic theorists. In 1705 he published *Money and Trade Considered with a Proposal for Supplying the Nation with Money*, a treatise Law hoped would cure his native country’s economic ills.71 Law’s proposal centered on the creation of a land-bank, which would by design alleviate the country’s specie shortage through the issuance of paper money backed by the value of land. Though Law published the treatise anonymously, his authorship was well known by the time it was considered—and ultimately rejected—by the Scottish Parliament in the summer of 1705. His reputation as a gambler and escaped convict preceded him.

The following year Law sought an audience with Louis XIV in France, where a severe specie shortage, repeated military engagements, and a mounting state debt combined to put Europe’s most populous nation on increasingly precarious financial footing.72 In “Mémoire touchant les monnoies et le commerce” Law proposed the creation of a French national bank that would issue paper money, increase available credit, and promote trade (objectives known collectively as Law’s “System”), but he failed to get the

71 John Law, *Money and Trade Considered with a Proposal for Supplying the Nation with Money* (Edinburgh: Andrew Anderson, 1705). Law was not alone in the effort to right Scotland’s economy, which had fallen to pieces in the wake of the collapse of the Company of Scotland, or the Darien Company, whose primary mission had been to establish a colony on the isthmus of Panama that would act as a base for trade. The colonization attempt failed spectacularly, and the trading company’s demise created a severe shortage of specie in Scotland. For an overview of the Darien scheme and the various proposals intended to correct Scotland’s economy submitted to the nation’s Parliament after the scheme collapsed in 1704, see Murphy, *John Law*, 69–75; Gleeson, *Millionaire*, 82–87; and Charles W. J. Withers, *Geography, Science, and National Identity: Scotland Since 1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 104–108.

72 For a detailed overview of France’s monetary system and financial dilemmas—including the state’s reliance on a handful of powerful financiers like Crozat to keep the treasury afloat—during the reign of Louis XIV, see Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société*. 

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proposal past the king’s controller-general. In 1707 Law’s second and third submissions—both variations on the first—seem to have reached the king, but these were also rejected. Not until Law took up permanent residence in Paris were any of his proposals entertained in earnest by the French king and his ministers. But just as Law faced the unfamiliar prospect of seeing his financial plans adopted by a European ruler, Louis XIV died on September 1, 1715.

Louis’s death left France in the hands of his five-year-old great-grandson whose reign would be overseen by the Regent, Philippe, duc d’Orléans, until he reached the age of majority at thirteen. The Regent inherited a financial crisis of epic proportions. France’s treasury was bankrupt; state debt topped 2 billion livres, not including annual interest payments to its creditors of 90 million livres; and the treasury had borrowed against future tax revenues through 1718. The entire financial system was on the verge of collapse, a situation that left the Regent predisposed to consider Law’s proffered solutions.

Law’s ascent in the months and years following the death of Louis XIV was meteoric. Within two months his proposal to create a national bank was heard before the

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73 Murphy, John Law, 112–115.

74 There is disagreement among Law’s biographers as to whether or not Law met the duc d’Orléans at some point between these submissions. Gleeson, who tends toward a rather romantic portrayal of Law, contends that the two bons vivants met following the 1706 submission and became fast friends, but Cellard maintains that the duc d’Orléans was engaged in a military campaign in Spain during the time of Law’s 1706–1707 Paris stay. Gleeson, Millionare, 92–94, and Cellard, John Law, 40.

75 Murphy, John Law, 128.

finance council. By the following summer the Banque Générale had become a reality.\textsuperscript{77} The establishment and legitimization of the bank was the first phase of Law’s ambitious financial reform program. The second required the creation of a powerful—and ultimately successful—trading company.

Crozat’s relinquishment of the Louisiana charter, following his penalization by the Chamber of Justice in November 1716, proved propitious. It allowed Law an opportunity to form his own company, one whose financial backers, according to Law, would be quickly rewarded for their support by a healthy return on their investment. Crozat, like Pontchartrain and Cadillac before him, spun a fantasy tale for the prospective charter holder, expounding on the glories of Louisiana and the ripeness of the colony’s soil for tobacco cultivation. Crozat blamed much of his own failure in Louisiana on the impossibility of securing colonists and slave laborers to clear and work the land. He faulted the slave trading companies for inadequate supplies and colonists in the more successful French Caribbean colonies for snatching up Louisiana-bound slaves before they could reach the mouth of the Mississippi. That Crozat had failed to establish a single tobacco plantation anywhere in the colony during his tenure seems to have been left out of his sales pitch.\textsuperscript{78}

It is unclear just how much of Crozat’s tale Law swallowed unquestioningly; he may simply have recognized the wider salability of the financier’s claims, choosing to

\textsuperscript{77} Lettres patentes du Roi portant privilege en faveur du Sr Law & sa compagnie, d’establir une banque générale, 2 May 1716, (Paris: Imprimerie Royal, 1716), John Law Collection, MSS 606, folder 144, THNOC.

\textsuperscript{78} Tobacco was grown in Louisiana during Crozat’s tenure but only in quantities fit for private consumption and local trade. Crozat’s propaganda campaign to sell Louisiana as a future tobacco-growing powerhouse whose produce would rival Virginia’s is described in detail in Jacob Price, \textit{France and the Chesapeake}, 1: 208, 304–307.
embrace the picture of a Louisiana blanketed with tobacco fields as a promising promotional device. Or he may have seen tobacco as the perfect commodity through which he might justify the consolidation of other pre-existing trading companies (and trade monopolies) into his own. However Law understood the colony’s actual tobacco prospects, in August 1717 his newly formed Company of the West (Compagnie d’Occident, also known as the Mississippi Company) received a twenty-five year monopoly over fur trading, mineral rights, and the distribution of goods in Louisiana. A year later, in September 1718, the Regent awarded the Company a nine-year monopoly of the coveted, and lucrative, tobacco farm. In December Law’s bank became a royal entity as the Banque Royale, bringing Law and the Company of the West closer to the state. At the same time, Law’s company took over the ailing Senegal Company, which itself had absorbed some years earlier the Saint-Domingue and Guinea companies, with the professed objective of using the Senegal Company’s ships and trading network to carry slave laborers from Africa to Louisiana’s yet-to-be-established tobacco fields.

79 Articles 2, 4, 7, Lettres patentes en forme d’edit, pourtant établissement d’une Compagnie de Commerce sous le nom de Compagnie d’Occident, August 1717, (Paris: Chez la Veuve de François Muguet, Hubert Muguet, Premier Imprimeur du Roy, & Lóuis-Denis de la Tour Libraire, 1717), Acts of the Royal French Administration Concerning the Company of the Indies in Louisiana, 1717-1771, MSS 268, folder 1, THNOC.

80 On 27 September 1674 Louis XIV established a state tobacco monopoly. Known popularly as the tobacco farm, the holder(s) of the monopoly held the exclusive right to distribute any and all tobacco—regardless of the crop’s origin—within France. Prior to Law’s receipt of the tobacco farm it had been held by a group of prominent financiers, Antoine Crozat among them. Rights to the tobacco farm came with a guaranteed annual revenue of 4 million livres. Price, France and the Chesapeake, 1: 21–22, 55, 245–51; “Edit Concernant la Ferme Générale du Tabac,” September 1718, and “Arrest du Conseil d’Estat du Roi,” 4 September 1718, in Recueil d’Arrests, THNOC.

81 Murphy, John Law, 185–86.

82 With the acquisition of the Senegal Company came eleven seaworthy ships. Haudrère, La Compagnie française des Indes, 1: 45.
To raise working capital and fund the acquisition and absorption of smaller companies, the Company issued a series of shares.\footnote{For a detailed discussion of the hierarchically based issuance of company shares during this period, see Murphy, \textit{John Law}, 165–66. On the historiography of Law’s System, see Melinda Caroline Rice, “A Fool and His Money: Culture and Financial Choice during the John Law Affair of 1720” (PhD diss, University of California, Los Angeles, 2007), 2–7.} The proceeds from each issuance were intended to create greater solvency. They allowed the seven newly appointed company directors to invest in improving long-neglected infrastructure in Paris and Lorient, as well as in the surviving comptoirs.\footnote{The seven directors named on 12 September 1717 were Jean-Baptiste d’Artaguiette, François Castanier, Jean-Baptiste Duché, John Law (who served as director in chief), René Moreau, François Mouchard, and Jean Piou. Three more, Antoine Raudot, Simon Gilly, and Louis Boyvin d’Hardancourt, were named in February 1718.} This money-raising scheme was authorized by the state, which benefited from the arrangement by the elimination of some of its floating debt. The initial 1717 offering of 200,000 shares (called \textit{mères}) could only be purchased with \textit{billets d’état}—the paper notes of credit issued by the Crown whose valuation was prone to violent fluctuations. The intent was to decrease the number of unstable billets in circulation, while promoting the sale of shares in what Law and the Crown viewed as a more stable alternative. In exchange, the Company charged 4 percent interest on the billets d’état, a lower rate than what the Crown paid to most of its creditors.

To Law’s disappointment, however, sales of the first issuance were sluggish; more than a year passed before all of the subscriptions were filled. Part of the difficulty stemmed from the stipulation that shares be purchased exclusively with billets d’état. Sales were also slowed by rumors that the Regent (who had in fact bought up 40 percent of the first issuance) was helping artificially prop up the scheme by purchasing a
significant number of shares on behalf of the king. For Law to realize his dream of creating a powerful trading company, while at the same time providing a measure of financial stability to the French state, it was imperative that he find a way to create enthusiasm and trust among prospective subscribers.

By the summer of 1719 Law’s company had absorbed the remnants of Colbert’s Company of the East Indies, the Royal China Company, and the Africa Company (Compagnie d’Afrique).\(^{85}\) The resulting conglomerate, the Company of the Indies (Compagnie des Indes), had the most far-reaching geographic scope in the history of European trading companies and the least financial and administrative ability to sustain such an expansion. To finance the acquisitions Law released two share issuances totaling 100,000 shares in June (*filles* and *petites filles*) and eliminated the stipulation that they be purchased with billets d’état. At the same time the Banque Royale issued 50 million livres of banknotes to ensure that there was enough cash in circulation to cover new share purchases, and Law pledged to personally underwrite the new share issue.\(^{86}\) Loosened subscription requirements, an increased money supply, and Law’s personal investment of 25 million livres bolstered public confidence.

Law also needed to convince the public that Louisiana was worthy of investment. To do so the Company engaged in a propaganda campaign whose mission was not only

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\(^{85}\) The acquisition of the China Company gave the Company of the Indies exclusive domain over French trade and trading activities “from the Cape of Good Hope to all the seas of the East Indies, the islands of Madagascar, Bourbon, and France, Africa’s coast of Sofala [Mozambique], the Red Sea, Persia, Mongolia, Siam, China, and Japan.” See Article 2, “Arrest du Conseil d’estat du Roy concernant la Reunion des Compagnies des Indes orientales et de la Chine à la Compagnie d’occident,” 17 June 1719, and “Edit par lequel S. M. fait fournir 25 Millions de sa Banque à la Compagnie d’Occident,” in *Recueil d’Arrests*, THNOC. The Africa Company was engaged in North African trade and maintained comptoirs in Algeria and Tunisia. See Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 1: 48–49.

\(^{86}\) The Banque Royale released an additional 240 million livres in banknotes on 25 July 1719.
to promote the sale of shares, but to encourage immigration to Louisiana. By mid-June 1719 the value of first-issue shares had risen 30 percent and shareholders began to reap dividends on their investments, prompting a rapid rise in the sale of new subscriptions. With the supply of filles and petites filles exhausted and their corresponding valuations on the rise, demand for more shares and speculation on those already in circulation soared. On September 4, 1719, first-issue shares were valued at 5,000 livres, an increase of 900 percent over the original purchase price.

The public’s appetite for company shares in the fall of 1719 seemed insatiable. In the two-week span between September 26 and October 4, 1719, Law released four additional issuances (the first of petites filles, the next three of cinq cents) totaling 324,000 shares. Trade along the rue Quincampoix spilled over from the Company’s share-sales office into the street where the frenzied throng of investors and speculators was so thick that the city had to issue a ban on horses and carriages to prevent them from

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88 Murphy, *John Law*, 200.

89 Between the summer and fall issuances, Law managed to gain even more control over the direction of France’s finances. In July the Company acquired rights to the mint’s profits for the following nine years. Weeks later the Regent canceled the existing lease of the United Farms (France’s tax-collecting entity), then held by prominent financier-brothers Antoine, Claude, Jean, and Joseph Pâris, and transferred it to the Company. Law hoped to streamline France’s tax-collection system and eliminate the myriad middlemen (who reaped personal profit at the Crown’s expense) from the United Farms’s rolls of tax collectors.
Figure 1. Jean Hubert and Jean Langlois, “Monsieur Law Conseiller du Roy en tous ses Conseils, Controller Général des Finances, Inspecteur Général de la Banque et de la Compagnie des Indes,” Paris: Chez Maillot, 1720. (Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France)
being trampled. The speculative fever took hold of men and women from all walks of life. Through the beginning of 1720 share values continued to rise, peaking at over 10,000 livres per share just days after Law’s January 5 appointment as controller-general of France (figure 1).  

Rather than ensuring the success of his System, Law’s appointment to France’s highest administrative office represented the beginning of its demise. Big investors, sensing an impending fall in stock prices, began to cash in their shares shortly before his appointment. In refusing to accept banknotes in return for their shares, they nearly emptied the Banque Royale of specie. At the same time, rumors of the discouraging state of affairs in Louisiana—which had produced neither minerals nor tobacco—swirled, bringing the already pitiful stream of immigration to the colony to a halt. Distrust of Law grew; public confidence in his System waivered. As company stock plummeted, shareholders rushed to cash in shares, and the mint printed more banknotes to meet demand, causing widespread inflation (figure 2). On November 27 the bank closed its doors. By December, the System had collapsed, despite Law’s efforts to stabilize the credit markets and restore public confidence.  

Law’s Legacy

Law’s fall from favor over the course of 1720 was as striking for its speed as his rise had been some five years earlier. By late December 1720 he had fled France, the nation’s economic apparatus was in shambles, and thousands were left holding worthless

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[91] Ibid., 218–87.
Figure 2. “Arlequyn Actionist” from *Het Groote Tafereel der Dwaasheid*, Amsterdam, 1720. Following the collapse of John Law’s financial scheme, satirical engravings like this one targeting (among other themes) the Banque Royale’s money printing scheme, abounded. (Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection, MSS 606, fo. 231.)
paper notes. For the trading arm of the Company of the Indies, however, Law’s tenure brought about an unprecedented level of financial and operational stability. The collapse of the System, though spectacular in its speed and magnitude, did not spell an end to company operations. Instead, in 1723 the Company emerged from the chaotic, three-year reorganization period following Law’s expulsion as a largely profitable entity.

During the period of the System, Company directors oversaw the acquisition and outfitting of dozens of vessels for use in overseas trade. Between 1717 and 1720 the Company purchased existing ships from Brest, Hamburg, and Nantes, and initiated construction of at least nineteen new ones from shipyards in Bayonne, Hamburg, La Rochelle, London, Marseille, and Nantes. Directors also invested heavily in new masts, rigging, hardware, and naval stores. During that same period, ninety company vessels departed French Atlantic ports: nine for Peru; ten for the East Indies; three for China; twenty for the West African coast; five for the West Indies; and forty-three for Louisiana.

By June 1720, the Company had amassed a fleet of approximately seventy-five deep-draft sailing ships. Outfitting continued during the reorganization as ships sent out

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92 17 December 1720 Law fled France for Venice, where he spent the remainder of his days. On Law’s life after France, see Ibid., 310–26, and Janet Gleeson, Millionaire, 235–68.
93 Haudrère, La Compagnie française des Indes, 1: 41–42, 52–53.
94 Of the ninety company ships that departed French ports between 1717 and 1720, eighteen had a carrying capacity of less than 150 tons. These smaller vessels can be classified either as supply (as opposed to trade) ships or as coastal/intra-waterway vessels. At least three from the latter category were brigantines commissioned specifically for use in Louisiana. The number of company ships that dropped anchor along the Gulf of Mexico’s northern coast between May 1719 and March 1721 far exceeded ships arriving in all previous years combined. René Estienne, Les armements au long cours de la deuxième Compagnie des Indes, 1717–1773 (Lorient: Service historique de la Marine, 1996), 15–18
95 In an arrêt dated 3 June 1720, the directors claimed to have put together a fleet of 105 ships, not counting brigantines and frigates, but historians Marcel Giraud and Philippe Haudrère find that number implausible.
in preceding years returned to Lorient laden with valuable cargoes. Increased cash on hand from the sale of cargoes like those of the *Solide, Vierge de Grâce*, and *Amphitrite*, which collectively generated over 6 million livres, facilitated the purchase of additional trade goods and prompted directors to expand the network of company bureaucrats in France and abroad. By 1723, new comptoirs had come online on the islands of Bourbon, France (now Réunion and Mauritius), Madagascar, and Poulo Condore, as well as in Mahé and Mocha, bringing the total number of comptoirs operating in the Indian Ocean to nine (figure 3).

Investments in the nuts and bolts of trade—ships, trade goods, port facilities, and people—left the Company in a better position to weather the tumultuous reorganization than other entities (like the bank and mint) drawn into the System. When the Company emerged from reorganization in 1723, it did so under the direction of the newly formed Council of the Indies. The Council reported to the new controller-general, Charles-Gaspard Dodun, and comprised six councilors of state, four high-ranking naval officers, twelve syndics (to represent shareholders’ interests), and ten professionals drawn primarily from the merchant class. Day-to-day departmental operations were managed by twelve *négociants-directeurs* who reported to the Council of the Indies. Both groups

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Giraud, based on an inventory taken in 1724, estimates the number of ships to have been no greater than seventy-five. See Giraud, *Histoire de la Louisiane française*, 3: 104. Haudrère, *La Compagnie française des Indes*, 1: 52.

96 Between 1 January 1721 and 23 March 1723, forty-eight company ships departed French ports, including twenty bound for Louisiana, sixteen for the West African coast, seven for the East Indies, two for the West Indies, and one each for Canada, China, and Peru. Estienne, *Les armements*, 18-21.


98 “Arrêt qui forme le Conseil de la Compagnie des Indes, & fixe le dividende des actions,” 24 March 1723, and “Arrêt qui nomme des Commissaires pour juger les demandes & contestations où la Compagnie des Indes sera partie,” 3 May 1723, Dernis, *Recueil, ou Collection des titres, édits, déclarations, arrêts,*
were overseen by a team of four inspectors general from the king’s council. Such a diffusion of administrative power was meant to ensure that no single interest group or individual could initiate unilateral policy changes.

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règlements et autres pièces concernant la Compagnie des Indes établie au mois d'août 1664, vol. 3 (Paris: Antoine Boudet, 1755–56), 528–32 and 533–34, BnF.

In Paris the Council of the Indies met in the u-shaped structure acquired by Law in 1719 that had served as the Company’s headquarters since 1720. Situated at the corner of rues Vivienne and Neuve-des-Petits-Champs, the offices were bounded by the king’s library and the Paris stock exchange. Two storehouses—one housing merchandise collected from points across France and destined for outbound company ships, another storing (and selling) beaver pelts from North America—ran along the rue Vivienne. Cashiers’ offices open to the public were also at street level, as was the Company’s central counting house.

The next level up, the mezzanine, or entresol, was home to a crowded tangle of offices. Confiscated Indian textiles and piece goods smuggled into France in direct violation of the Company’s monopoly filled the space above the ground-floor warehouses. Purchasing offices, whose agents were charged with procuring goods and specie in France that would allow company representatives abroad to fill ships’ holds with high-demand trade goods, overlooked the central courtyard. Agents had to keep up not only with trends within France, but with the nuances of supply and demand in its web of interconnected comptoirs. Consumers—and trading partners—were fickle. Their shifting tastes had to be anticipated and monitored lest the Company find itself stuck with

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100 In the seventeenth century the building was part of the Palais Mazarin. It is now part of the Bibliothèque nationale de France’s site Richelieu. Simon Balayé, La Bibliothèque Nationale des origines à 1800 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1988), 184–85.

101 Haudrère, La Compagnie française des Indes, 1: 153–54, 156.

102 In an arrêt dated 14 December 1723 the Company reiterated the general prohibition (issued in July 1717) on the importation of silk and cotton textiles and piece goods by any individual or entity outside of the Company of the Indies. The presence of a dedicated confiscation office attests to the frequent violation of this prohibition. See “Arrêt qui ordonne que les Commis & Employés de la Compagnie pour l’exploitation du tabac & du caffé procéderont aux visites & exécutions au sujet des toiles peintes, &c,” Dernis, Recueil, 596–99.

103 Haudrère, La Compagnie française des Indes, 1: 155.
a five-year supply of striped calicoes, when floral prints were all the rage. Striking a balance between supply and demand was particularly difficult—and critical—in Africa, where textiles procured in Europe and India served as one of the primary commodities in the slave trade.\(^\text{104}\) Purchasing agents kept tabs on which goods or combination of goods gave the Company a trade advantage, and which might be written off as a waste of valuable cargo space.

Also overlooking the courtyard from the mezzanine were the company bookkeeping and copying offices. Bookkeepers and their clerks balanced the Company’s trade, administrative, and outfitting accounts and directed bookkeeping and auditing of company comptoirs around the globe. Next door, dozens of young clerks, or commis, whose only qualification was that they wrote neatly, passed their time copying out the hundreds of letters and memorandum in constant circulation between company directors, administrators, and shareholders in Paris; outfitters and ship personnel in Lorient; and bureaucrats scattered throughout the comptoirs. The same letter might be copied three times or more depending on its intended recipient and destination, while a single memo relative to company procedures might be reproduced by hand more than thirty times if it were to reach, for example, representatives in all of the company outposts along the Indian Ocean.

To serve as copy clerk in the Company’s Paris offices was to hold the lowest available clerical position, requiring the least amount of knowledge. Yet the Paris copying offices were also a gateway to opportunity for the dozens of literate and often well-connected (but cash-poor) young men who cycled through, quill in hand, each year. From this labor pool copy clerks moved on to more specialized departments within the Paris headquarters. Some went next door to the bookkeeping wing, others upstairs to one of the half-dozen offices charged with site-specific correspondence. These work spaces, divided by region, served India, the Americas, Senegal, China, and Lorient, and were likely the last stop for clerks before they were sent to a comptoir.\footnote{French historian Philippe Haudrère has determined that for its Parisian offices, the Company typically drew personnel from among one of three general sources: “the Parisian financial sector”; “the families of influential individuals involved in company policy-making”; and “the children or nephews of pre-existing personnel.” In the 1720s, however, the Company had not yet achieved the multi-generational stability in its comptoirs that later made clerks from the latter group numerically significant. Haudrère’s assessment holds true for personnel in overseas comptoirs as well, given that most cycled through the Paris offices before receiving new commissions. Paris was the training ground for clerks and administrators alike, but comptoir-service was often the ultimate goal for those in the Company’s employ. Service abroad, especially in the more lucrative...}

105 “Regie du Commerce à Paris” and fo. 22, “Tableau de la Direction générale de la Comp. des Indes à Paris,” CAOM, C 2 284, fo. 14,

106 Haudrère, La Compagnie française des Indes, 1: 157.
trade zones in India and China, brought opportunities for advancement and increased wealth.

A company clerk, regardless of kinship or patronage ties, was unlikely to advance beyond his clerkship without the benefit of gaining first-hand experience in at least one, and often several, comptoirs. The path was relatively well defined: two years as a commis in Paris usually led to a commission, perhaps in an outpost the clerk had corresponded with in the course of time spent in the central offices. Professional advancement within the company hierarchy was not the only motivation for clerks to seek overseas commissions. Indeed, it may not even have been the primary one. A clerk in Paris might have access to a vibrant social and cultural scene after leaving the office, but a clerk in Pondicherry might use his professional connections and access to trade goods to his personal advantage in the country trade. Not all comptoirs, however, were created equal.

Sometime in the autumn of 1728 Marc Antoine Caillot, a clerk in the Company’s Paris offices, received his first overseas commission. The following February he would be Louisiana bound. It was the sort of commission more likely to fill a twenty-one-year-old clerk with mild disappointment than smug satisfaction. Compared to comptoirs in the East Indies, most of which were by the late-1720s stable, lucrative sites, those in Louisiana offered few rewards for company bureaucrats hoping to achieve personal gains through trade. Despite the sizeable injections of capital and colonists that had taken place during Law’s tenure, Louisiana remained largely unprofitable. The colony’s capital, which had been moved from Biloxi to New Orleans in 1722, was unfortified and sparsely settled. Mortality rates were horrific for newly arrived colonists, company employees,
and slaves alike. And neither company nor colonists had yet realized a profit from the
crop touted first by Antoine Crozat and then by John Law as the solution to Louisiana’s
long-term viability.

But Caillot was young and relatively well connected. Barring any number of
sicknesses or accidents that might reasonably result in his death at sea or on land, he
faced a career in the service of the Company that was likely to later offer more attractive
prospects. His mémoire, written sometime after 1731, provides a rare glimpse of the life
of a low-level clerk employed by one of the eighteenth century’s most powerful global
trading companies.¹⁰⁷

The eldest surviving son of the footman of the eldest son of Louis XIV, this
particular Louisiana-bound clerk was born Marc Antoine Caillot in Meudon, France on
June 4, 1707, to Pierre Caillot and Marie Catherine Blanche.¹⁰⁸ Named for his godfather
Marc Antoine Balligant, an officier de la bouche at the château de Meudon (figure 4),
Marc Antoine spent his early years in a royal household in turmoil. The head of the
château, the Dauphin of France (known most commonly as Louis de France, or

¹⁰⁷ “Relation de la Voyage de la Louisianne ou Nouv’le France fait par le S’ Caillot en l’année 1730,” fo. 15,
The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2005.011. Two recent studies explore the lives of clerks and the
prospects for money and standing that have historically motivated them. Both focus on the nineteenth
century and both are primarily concerned with stationary clerks—i.e. young men working in urban
environments—in the northeastern, industrializing United States. To date no analogue to earlier centuries
has been published. See Thomas Augst, The Clerk’s Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-
Century America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) and Brian Luskey, On the Make: Clerks
and the Quest for Capital in Nineteenth-Century America (New York: NYU Press, 2010). Also useful for
the nineteenth century is Michael Zakim, “The Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary; or, a Labor History

¹⁰⁸ Two children preceded Marc Antoine in order of birth: a sister, Catherine Jeanne, in 1705 and a brother,
Pierre Caillot, in 1706. The brother died at the age of ten months, two and a half months prior to Marc
Antoine’s birth. All birth and death data on the Caillot family comes from the Archives départementales de
Haute-de-Seine (ADHS), Parish registers of Meudon, Mi/MEU_7.
Monseigneur le Dauphin), died of smallpox at age fifty-three on April 14, 1711. His eldest son, Louis, Duc de Bourgogne, then stood to inherit the Crown, but he died just over a year later at age thirty. The deaths of two dauphins in short succession were followed by tragedy within the Caillot family. Marc Antoine’s youngest siblings—infant twin brothers—died in 1713. The series of deaths visited upon the royal family continued in 1714, with the death of Monseigneur le Dauphin’s youngest son, Charles, Duc de Bourgogne, and in 1715, with the death of the Sun King himself at the age of seventy-seven. At the time of Louis XIV’s death, Marc Antoine was eight years old, three years older than the heir to the French crown.

Located a short carriage ride from Versailles, the château de Meudon was one of dozens in the network of royal households whose entourage of religious, military, and domestic
personnel was known collectively as the Maison du Roi.\textsuperscript{109} Sharon Kettering, in her work on the development and maintenance of patron-client networks in seventeenth- and early-eighteenth century France, has shown that service in noble households provided an exceptional opportunity for kin patronage. This was especially true for those in the service of the Maison du Roi, where multiple generations and branches of the same family often held a variety of appointed positions (figure 5).\textsuperscript{110} Kettering asserts that “household members frequently became clients of the household head because of their proximity and positions of trust as companion-attendants and household officials, which encouraged the development of patron-client relationships.” In turn, attendants “received gifts in cash and in kind and patronage opportunities for themselves and their families in addition to room, board, and an annual salary.”\textsuperscript{111}

The extended kinship network that Marc Antoine Caillot’s father and uncle joined (“joined” because the brothers married into families whose heads of household were already members of the Maison du Roi) during the first decade of the eighteenth century

\textsuperscript{109} Included among the sites in the network of royal households were Bellevue, Choisy, Compiègne, Fontainebleau, Madrid, Marly, Meudon, Montreuil, La Muette, Paris (including the Louvre, Luxembourg, and Tuileries), Rambouillet, Saint-Cloud, Saint-Denis, Saint-Germain, Saint-Hubert, Trianon, and Versailles. Louis XIV purchased a château at Meudon from the Marquise de Louvois, widow of Louis XIV’s war minister, François Michel Le Tellier, in 1695, but the pre-existing structure was eclipsed by construction of the Château Neuf in 1706. Sacramental records from the parish of Saint Roch in Paris and from Meudon indicate that the Caillot family moved from Paris to Meudon during construction of the improved château and had settled in Meudon by early 1707. On the château de Meudon, see Paul Biver, \textit{Histoire du Château de Meudon} (Paris: Jouve et Cie, 1923).


\textsuperscript{111} Kettering, “Patronage and Kinship,” 418. During the Regency the purchase price of a footman’s post in the household of the Duchesse de Barry, the Regent’s daughter who resided at the château de Meudon from 1718–19, was 3,000 livres. In return the footman received a stipend covering food and wardrobe costs and the “droit de manteau,” or wages provided to individuals clothed by the king. AN O\textsuperscript{1} 3715, fo. 154.
Figure 5. Caillot Family Tree
offered precisely these types of patronage opportunities.\textsuperscript{112} With the exception of the highest ranking posts, which were filled directly by the king, positions in the Maison du Roi were purchased offices held by members of the nobility. Office holders reported to the Grand Master of France and were known collectively as \textit{domestiques commensaux}, or the live-in nobility.\textsuperscript{113} Among those in support positions were the valets, table attendants, stablemen, footmen, and many others who attended to every detail of the household’s inner workings, from supervision of the king’s or dauphin’s \textit{toilette} each morning to care of the household’s horses, carriages, and hunting dogs. Through the first decade of the eighteenth century, offices within the Maison du Roi were frequently passed down within families, creating familial dynasties that ran parallel to those of the royal family.

The generation in which Marc Antoine and his siblings came of age, however, was a time in which multi-generational service in the Maison du Roi (and in large noble households in general) was coming to a close.\textsuperscript{114} When Louis XIV’s five-year-old great-grandson and his Paris-based Regent succeeded to the throne, Meudon’s role in the hierarchy of royal households was considerably diminished. It remained one of many

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item For an overview of the privileges and protections accorded to the various ranks of \textit{domestiques commensaux}, including exemption from direct, royal, and local taxation, as well as legal protection from creditors, and exemption from wartime military service, see Laverny, \textit{Les Domestiques commensaux}, 84–88, 105–35.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
châteaux owned by the king, and later became a popular hunting lodge for members of the royal family, but it was no longer the primary residence of anyone in the line of succession.\(^\text{115}\) Thus its staff was no longer in the service of the Maison du Roi. For Marc Antoine, his brothers, and cousins, this shift meant that they were less likely to move into apprenticeship positions within the household as pages or members of the chapel choir. Instead, brothers Pierre and François Caillot used their standing to secure positions (and livelihoods) for their offspring outside the Maison du Roi. Among the immediate offspring of these two brothers, Marc Antoine, the eldest surviving male, received a clerical appointment in the Company of the Indies’s Paris offices, two sought their fortune in Saint Domingue, and four were awarded lifelong pensions in the name of their fathers’ service.\(^\text{116}\) For Marc Antoine, his father’s service in the Maison du Roi opened the door to a more than thirty year career with the Company of the Indies that began in Paris and ultimately spanned three continents.

\(^{115}\) On the status of the château de Meudon between the time of the dauphin’s 1711 death and Marc Antoine’s mid-1720s departure for Paris, see Biver, *Histoire du château de Meudon*, 244–90.

\(^{116}\) Archives départementales des Hauts-de-Seine (ADHS), Série 4 E, Régistres paroissiaux, Meudon; Hyacinthe and Louis Christophe Caillot, Marc Antoine’s cousins, are each listed as “employé aux Isles de St. Domingue” in the inventory taken after their father’s death. The nature of their employment is unclear, but it seems likely they were employed in some sort of clerical capacity. AN, Minutier central des notaires, Inventory of François Caillot, 30 March 1751, étude LXVIII, liasse 442; ARNO 1761, Quittance, Marc Antoine Caillot, Cote ET XXXV 708; and Série O\(^1\) Maison du Roi, carton 670, Pensions de la Maison du roi.
In the winter of 1729, Marc Antoine Caillot left the relative comforts of the Company of the Indies’ Paris offices and set out on the first leg of a lengthy journey. His destination was a decidedly less hospitable outpost along the banks of the Mississippi River. By leaving France, he became one of the thousands of young men who left the Continent from France, Spain, the Netherlands, and most notably England, for the Americas in hopes of bettering his economic standing. It is important to note, however, that Caillot was not one of thousands of young men who left exclusively from France, because in comparison to other European powers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, France’s colonizing impulse was decidedly weak. At the height of the continental race to colonize and settle the New World, France was the most populous nation in Europe. But France’s own teeming population did not translate into significant numbers of willing colonists eager to brave the climatic and cultural extremes of Canada and the circum-Caribbean colonies. In Louisiana, for example, a series of ill-fated colonization schemes drawing from some of the metropole’s least-desirable pools of citizens, including tobacco and salt cheaters, smugglers, petty thieves, women of

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questionable repute, and a host of young men exiled to the colony under *lettres de cachet*, contributed to the struggling colony’s metropolitan image of debauchery.\textsuperscript{118}

For Caillot, however, employment as a bookkeeping and copying clerk in the Company of the Indies’ Louisiana offices did not result from any odious prior act, but rather from simple economic necessity and a desire to secure a post where his service would likely result in future advancement.\textsuperscript{119} As a clerk, Caillot was among the hundreds of administrative representatives scattered across the globe whose collective charge was to advance the mercantilist (and bureaucratic) policies of the French state. Caillot set out for Lorient, the home port of the Company of the Indies, from Paris on February 19, 1729. From Lorient he would board a company ship that would carry him across the Atlantic to Louisiana. During the overland leg of the journey, he traveled with two companions, one of whom, Sieur De Troyes, was also headed to Louisiana as a company clerk. Caillot did not name the third traveler, but it may have been Sieur De Bussy.


\textsuperscript{119} Throughout his mémoire, Caillot made repeated references to his lack of funds. Marc Antoine Caillot, “Relation de la Voyage de la Louisianne ou Nouv[â]le France fait par le S’ Caillot en l’année 1730,” fo. 15, The Historic New Orleans Collection (THNOC), 2005.011; Ship Register for the *Durance*, 15 March 1729, Archives nationales d’outre-mer (hereafter ANOM), F5B 49.
another company employee who received a commission as bookkeeper some two weeks earlier. The trio traveled primarily on horseback, following the network of grands chemins, or royal roads, that radiated outward across France from Paris to the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts and the southern, northern, and eastern frontiers. These grands chemins served as complimentary appendages to the web of waterways that had long conducted goods, people, and information between the communities lining their banks.

Begun in the 15th century during the reign of Louis XI, the royal road system was expanded and improved upon in the seventeenth century as part of Louis XIV’s efforts to centralize governmental power and authority. The importance of the road system in maintaining ties between Paris and the commercial port cities along the Atlantic coast grew under the watchful eyes of Colbert. This was especially applicable to those ports that served as operational bases for chartered monopoly companies, whose growth in the late seventeenth through early eighteenth centuries encouraged the expansion and regulation of the royal road system, as thousands of letters, reports, and decrees—not to mention trade goods—traveled back and forth between the king and his ministers,

120 The ship register for the Durancé, the ship which would carry the clerks across the Atlantic from Lorient to Louisiana, indicates that three company employees received travel allowances from Paris: Caillot, De Troyes, and De Bussy. De Bussy received his commission from the Company’s Paris offices on 27 January 1729, but Caillot mentions only De Troyes by name in the portion of his mémoire that takes place in France. “Etat des passagers embarqués sur le vaisseau la Durancé,” 15 March 1729, ANOM, F5B 49, fo. 38; “Commission, Teneur de Livres à la Louisienne [sic] pour le Sr. de Bussy,” 27 January 1729, ANOM, B43b, fo. 845. 27.


provincial governors, port administrators, merchants, company officers, stockholders, and the like.\textsuperscript{123}

The first two days of the journey to the coast proved difficult for Caillot; recollections recorded in his mémoire are filled with regret at leaving behind friends and

family who had “shown him nothing but goodness.” Despondent and depressed, Caillot provided little detail on the passing countryside or meals taken during stops in Palaiseau, Bonelle, and Lauray Ford, choosing instead to wallow in the fear that he might never see his family again. But Caillot’s melancholy was short lived. At the urging of his travel companions, he soon turned to the task of “erasing for a while thoughts of parents and friends” by availing himself of what he described as “Bacchic liqueur.” The alcohol brought a welcome change to Caillot’s spirits, but its effects on his judgment and physical coordination were less desirable. Driven to leave behind his sorrows in body as well as mind, Caillot pushed his “horse with such violence that one of its front feet slipped,” sending Caillot flying “over his head” in a tangle of harness straps and stirrups, damaging his hunting horn and breaking his gun in half. Fortunately for the young clerk, however, there was little chance that his behavior would lead him far astray of his charted path. For one, he had the company of De Troyes and the other unnamed traveler to help him keep course. But more importantly, Caillot traveled on a network of royal roads that had by 1729 become synonymous with the royal courier or mail system.

Royal mail couriers and travelers alike followed these grands chemins, traveling by coach or horseback from one postal exchange (relais de poste or simply poste) to the next at set intervals. Coaches carried not only royal mail, but correspondence generated by individuals and institutional entities, such as France’s religious and university communities whose once separate mail services had by 1715 been absorbed by the royal

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125 Ibid, fo. 3.
126 Caillot’s hunting horn (cor or trompe de chasse) was likely an early, valve-free example of what is generally known as a French horn. Ibid.
courier system.\textsuperscript{127} 

*Messageries* also operated on the grands chemins, transporting travelers and merchandise between postal exchanges. Because traveling with the mail coaches and messageries offered some protection against roadside attack and further ensured the timely arrival of the directionally challenged at their destinations, independent travelers often accompanied the coach, following timetables and stopover patterns dictated by postal schedules and established exchanges. Caillot and his traveling companions were no exception. The trio took full advantage of the itinerary published by the royal postal bureau. Each stop along their route corresponded with postes listed in the guide to royal mail service published annually by royal authority as *Liste générale des postes de France*.*\textsuperscript{128}

Postes served as a sort of eighteenth-century precursor to travel plazas or rest stops, where travelers refreshed themselves and their horses, changed horses altogether, and gathered news of the road ahead. At postes there were travel amenities, including inns, taverns, stables, and churches. If travelers were unable or unwilling to keep pace with the mail coaches, they could use passing coaches to relay messages to postes down the line. In this way travelers announced their imminent arrival and often sent ahead word of their travel or lodging needs, so that innkeepers and stablemen might prepare rooms, meals, and stalls in advance. Coaches also relayed more specific needs: When Caillot and his companions reached the small village of Durtal the first Sunday of their trek, they found the village priest waiting for their arrival to say Mass, having heard of their

\textsuperscript{127} Livet, *Les Routes de France*, 71.

proximity from the morning courier.\textsuperscript{129} With the distance between postes averaging some 4.1 leagues (roughly ten miles), travelers who covered between eight and twelve leagues per day could depend on the presence of two postes en route each day.\textsuperscript{130} Passing postes was one way travelers—and early travel writers like Claude-Marin Saugrain—marked distance traveled.\textsuperscript{131}

After two days on the road, Caillot and his companions had passed three postes, and by late-afternoon of the second day, the trio had reached the fourth at Chartres, passing into the town through one of its nine gates. Split in two by the river Eure, Chartres was the capital of the duchy of Beauce, a region stretching from Paris southwest toward the Forêt d’Orléans, and the largest town the travelers encountered since leaving the capital. Though Beauce’s natural landscape was dominated by flat plains strewn with fields of wheat, the western (left bank) portion of Chartres was situated atop a steep embankment or knoll. Its approaches were notoriously steep; its roads narrow and winding. Caillot complained bitterly of the “appalling paths” (made worse by winter conditions) that made up the town’s approaches.\textsuperscript{132} He made no mention of the town’s

\textsuperscript{129} Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 10.

\textsuperscript{130} Overland distances were measured in lieues or leagues, a unit of measurement whose parameters vary depending on time and space. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the length of a French lieu, also called a lieue de poste, was set by the Crown under the direction of the general office of couriers, postes et relais at 2,000 toises, or 2 milles (2.4221 miles). Conversions of eighteenth-century units of measurement into their modern equivalents are derived from Russell Rowlett and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s online resource, “How Many: A Dictionary of Units of Measurement,” © 2004, http://www.unc.edu/~rowlett/units/index.html (accessed 2009–2011).

\textsuperscript{131} Claude-Marin Saugrain’s 1720 Nouveau voyage de France is one of the first descriptive travel guides to France written with business- (merchants, administrators, farmers, etc.) as well as leisure-travelers in mind. Saugrain provides distances between notable towns, villages, and cities, not in lieues, but postes. See Saugrain, Nouveau voyage de France, géographique, historique et curieux, disposé par différentes routes, à l’usage des étrangers et des Français, contenant une exacte explication de tout ce qu’il y a de singulier et de rare à voir dans ce royaume (Paris: Saugrain l’aîné, 1720), BnF.

\textsuperscript{132} Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 3.
massive cathedral, whose hulking presence dominated the skyline, but perhaps traveling twelve leagues (29.1 miles) by horseback in a single day had dampened Caillot’s interest in the city’s sights. The travelers left the town at daybreak and rode hard the third day, covering thirteen leagues (31.49 miles) between Chartres and Nogent-le-Rotrou, a prosperous hamlet on the Huisne River, known for its manufacture of leather goods and textiles.133

The fourth day brought a slower pace. With stops in La Ferté-Bernard at mid-day and Saint-Marc in the afternoon, the travelers covered only seven leagues (16.96 miles), a pace which offered riders and horses much needed rest.134 At Saint-Marc the three sought respite at an inn, where they were greeted by a servant, whom Caillot described as a “big, fat, strapping woman” who “made sure we were lacking in nothing and took very good care of [us].” The inn sat at the “edge of a beautiful wood” and after days of jarring, body-numbing riding, the forest’s sound-dampening canopy and “clusters of tall trees” proved irresistible.135 Hunting horn in hand, Caillot left his companions and entered the

133 Saugrain, Nouveau voyage de France, 341–42. Descriptions of the route (on land and water) found throughout this chapter benefited greatly from consultation of La Carte générale de la France, better known as La Carte de Cassini. La Carte de Cassini consists of 180 sheets of extraordinarily detailed maps of France, with each sheet acting as one quadrant in the larger map. The Cassini maps, published beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, include the standard topographical and location details, but they also identify roads by type, windmills, parishes, churches, homes of nobles, courthouses, postes, and many other notable features of a given region. The Cassini maps can be accessed online through “Des villages de Cassini aux communes d’aujourd’hui,” a website developed in institutional partnership with the Bibliothèque nationale de France (where the originals are deposited), Ecole des Hautes études en sciences sociales, Centre national de la recherche scientifique, and Institut national d’études démographiques. http://cassini.ehess.fr/cassini/fr/html/index.htm. For more on the Cassini family and their eighteenth-century maps, see Monique Pelletier, La Carte de Cassini: L’Extraordinaire aventure de la Carte de France (Paris: Presses de l’Ecole nationale des ponts et chaussées, 1990).

134 The town Caillot referred to as Saint Marc was Saint-Mars-la Brière, often abbreviated Saint-Mars (S'Mars) and less frequently Saint-Marc (S'Marc), as seen in the route-map drawn by Marie de Bailliard (figure 6).

135 Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 3.
woods to take a stroll and test the forest’s acoustics. He soon encountered three locals of his age. All greeted him kindly—especially the two young women—and all welcomed the occasion Caillot’s presence afforded them to hear news from Paris. Two of them were brother and sister who shared their name, St. Marc, with the village. Caillot’s status as a Parisian gentleman with clear connections to the court and a commission to the Company of the Indies’ Louisiana comptoir apparently overrode any concerns the siblings may have had about Caillot’s bedraggled appearance. For despite Caillot’s own embarrassment at being “only a horseman who had just set foot upon the ground” who was boot-clad and “not at all as clean as [he] would have wished,” he accepted the brother’s invitation (extended in the name of his father) to join the St. Marc family for dinner.136

Caillot’s dinner engagement at the St. Marc château is the first of several occasions during his journey to the Atlantic coast when his status garnered him invitations into people’s homes or to semi-private cultural events.137 In each instance, Caillot’s observations reflect a Paris-centric outlook on life lived outside the Ile de France. His attendance at dinners, theater performances, and musical spectacles en route afforded him an opportunity to compare his past experiences in Paris against preconceived expectations of life in France’s villages, towns, and rural locales. During dinner with the St. Marc family, he found his notions about dining outside Paris

136 Ibid., fo. 4.
137 Ibid., fo. 16.
challenged, when he sat down at the table and was “attended to not like in the countryside but in the Parisian fashion, that is to say, very properly.”

His commentary on fashion, food, social customs, romance, and etiquette reveal a clear self-identification with the urban nobility in general, and with Parisian nobility in particular. His writings also reveal a persistent undercurrent of anxiety over leaving the known world of Paris for the unknown world of Louisiana. For despite the fact that the colony was an oft-discussed topic at court and table, especially in the wake of the Mississippi Bubble’s collapse, knowledge of the colony was often superficial and nearly always second-hand. Whatever else the French populace had heard about Louisiana, however, one detail seems to have struck a chord in their collective imaginings of the colony: Louisiana was an inhospitable and often deadly place.

Dinner with the St. Marc family had ended with a further extension of hospitality; Monsieur and Madame insisted that their Parisian guest make himself comfortable in their home for the night. At daybreak, following a breakfast of “soup and a selection of cold meats” in Monsieur de St. Marc’s bedchamber, Caillot took leave to rejoin his companions. Madame lamented his departure, finding herself at a loss for reassuring words. She regretted that Caillot might “perhaps lose France forever, since [he] was going to a very dangerous environment.” With this bleak insinuation ringing in his ears, Caillot headed for the nearest poste, where he met his fellow travelers. They continued on to La Flèche, riding thirteen leagues before passing through its northern gate.

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138 Ibid, fo. 6.
139 Ibid., fo. 7 and 16.
By the time the trio arrived in La Flèche (figure 7), Caillot seems to have hit his stride, putting aside his melancholy at leaving France in favor of enjoying the pleasures of his homeland while he still could. Nestled into a deep valley on the banks of the Loir (a smallish river, not to be confused with the Loire), La Flèche was an established town of approximately six thousand souls, “filled with young people,” “straight, expansive” roads, and “well-built houses.” According to Saugrain in his *Nouveau Voyage de France*, the town’s men were “spirited,” the women “beautiful;” members of both sexes

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140 Ibid., fo. 9; Saugrain, *Nouveau voyage de France*, 318.
were “very sociable and well disposed to strangers.” Piganiol de la Force, not surprisingly, painted a more conservative portrait of the town in his 1724 travel guide of the same name, restricting his descriptions of notable landmarks to the town’s seigneurial château and its government and religious buildings. But even Piganiol de la Force admitted that La Flèche was a “very agreeable town.” Indeed, by the end of their one-night stay, the travelers from Paris might have endorsed both accounts.

They arrived after dark, muddy, wet, and half frozen. Five leagues from the town walls, Caillot’s horse had stumbled on the rutted road, sending horse and rider into a “hole which had at least five to six feet of water in it.” Shortly after, De Troyes’ horse threw him “quite hard” into one of the deep, muck-filled ditches that lined the road. De Troyes managed to pull himself out, but “was constrained to get out bare-legged,” having been unable to pull his boots intact from the mud. They continued on, however, with Caillot “frozen in [his] boots” and De Troyes barefoot. Both were such a mess when they arrived at the northern gate that Caillot was grateful for cover of darkness, without which “we would have been greeted with catcalls by the children because we were so dreadfully covered in mud.”


142 While Saugrain aimed to avoid giving “lengthy dissertations on each town’s antiquities,” focusing instead on the traits that made each stop in his guide “singular,” “noteworthy,” or “curious,” Piganiol de la Force chose a more erudite, if sometimes less practical, tack. Piganiol de la Force began each entry with a discussion of the origins of a town’s, village’s, or hamlet’s name, followed by an exploration of the site’s ties to ancient Gaul or Rome, when applicable. Most entries resemble a sort of textual atlas or encyclopedia entry, detailing topography, population figures, local industry and agriculture, religious or educational structures, etc. Saugrain, unpaginated preface and Jean Aymar Piganiol de la Force, *Nouveau voyage de France avec un itinéraire et des cartes faites exprès qui marquent exactement les routes qu'il faut suivre pour voyager dans toutes les provinces de ce royaume* (Paris: T. Le Gras, 1724), 116, BnF.

143 Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 8–9.
Once they reached the inn, the travelers made a quick recovery, washing up, changing clothes “from head to foot,” resting briefly, and then heading out for a night on the town. They went first to the theater, where the performance of Molière’s comedy *The Imaginary Invalid* “was performed as well as could be expected.” They returned to the inn accompanied by a well-heeled young man they had met outside the theater who insisted on ordering “a huge quantity of extraordinary fare,” including a full range of desserts, wines, and liqueurs. Suspicious of the generosity of their new-found friend, Caillot consulted the innkeeper, who warned him that the man was “of a good family, but that he was a brawler and gambler” who “would do everything possible to lay traps for us so he could get our money.”

In the wake of Louis XIV’s 1715 death, the notion of gambling as a form of aristocratic sociability had gained increasing traction. The culture of gambling and chance that emerged during the Regency stood in stark contrast to the somber religious climate that dominated the last years of Louis XIV’s reign. Seen as a way of

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144 *The Imaginary Invalid (Le Malade Imaginaire)*, first performed in 1673, was the last play written by Molière (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin). Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 9.

145 Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 9. Unlike many of Caillot’s mémoire-writing contemporaries, he does not provide lengthy descriptions of the specific types of food and wine served at each meal, choosing instead to offer more general sketches of meals as social scenes. Robert Challe, whose anonymously published *Journal d’un voyage fait aux Indes orientales* first appeared in 1721, set the standard for food-writing within eighteenth-century French travel mémoires by recounting in detail the type, temperature, region of origin, comparative quality, etc. of wine consumed at each meal. While Challe and later mémoire writers, such as Le Page du Pratz and Dumont de Montigny, might devote pages of text to meals eaten, Caillot provides only offhanded references to food and drink, unless the foodstuffs in question were of exceptionally bad quality. For Louisiana-specific examples of early food-writing, see Shannon Lee Dawdy’s survey of mémoires by Dumont de Montigny, Jean Bernard Bossu, Caillot, Marie Madeleine Hachard, and Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz in “‘A Wild Taste’: Food and Colonialism in Eighteenth-Century Louisiana,” *Ethnohistory* 57 (2010): 389–413.

146 Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 9.

developing mental acuity, gambling, especially at cards, also offered its proponents an opportunity to exhibit cunning in a socially acceptable fashion (i.e. without fear of appearing inappropriately boastful or clever). Despite laws outlawing games of chance, they remained one of the “favorite distractions among the high society.”\textsuperscript{148} Lavish desserts, cheeses, and fine wines or liqueurs were at stake as often as money, with games ranging from billiards and roulette to card games with hundreds of variations. Outside of Paris, taverns and inns served as the primary sites for gambling. Proprietors hoping to keep local authorities at bay insisted that without the ability to offer patrons on-site gaming tables and cards, their businesses stood no chance of survival.\textsuperscript{149}

Having grown up in the midst of the courtly life at Meudon, whose boundaries touched those of Versailles and Saint-Cloud, Caillot was no stranger to card games.\textsuperscript{150} Time spent among members of Parisian high society only served to reinforce his familiarity with popular games of chance. He fancied himself a capable gambler, but took even greater pleasure in bluffing of a different sort. Caillot derived extreme satisfaction from outsmarting friends, associates, and strangers (and later in his voyage, ship captains and gullible, desperate young women).

Like other mémoire writers of this period, Caillot saw himself as a sort of knight-errant, sallying forth on episodic adventures much in the same manner as characters in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[149] Ibid., 72–73. For more on gambling in eighteenth-century France, see Francis Freundlich, \textit{Le Monde de jeu à Paris} (Paris: A. Michel, 1995) and Olivier Grussi, \textit{La Vie quotidienne des joueurs sous l’Ancien Régime à Paris et à la Cour} (Paris: Hachette, 1985).
\item[150] On games of chance and their popularity at Meudon during the residency of Monseigneur le Dauphin, see Paul Biver, \textit{Histoire du Château de Meudon} (Jouve & Co., 1923), 216–18.
\end{footnotes}
contemporary picaresque novels. While Dumont de Montigny, writing of his experiences in Louisiana during the 1720s and 1730s, viewed himself as a sort of Robinson Crusoe, Caillot drew repeated comparisons between himself and Don Quixote, and sometimes Quixote’s sidekick, Sancho Panza. Women—from the “fat, strapping” servant woman who “took very good care” of Caillot at the inn in Saint-Marc to the party-throwing sophisticate Madame la Chenechal in the town of Pontchâteau—received special attention (of both the personal and literary varieties) from this self-styled Don Quixote. As for those individuals not belonging to the fairer sex, Caillot often took note if the man was a gambler or a man of means who might be in some way taken advantage of. One of the most striking qualities of Caillot’s observations is that he does not appear to have had any self-aggrandizing political or economic motives in writing his account (which may help explain why his account remained unpublished). Rather, Caillot’s interests seem to have been more immediate, in that he was often more concerned with duping someone into paying for his supper or bar tab, than in painting flattering portraits of powerful men to whom he might have appealed for patronage. In his day-to-day interactions, his preference for cleverness over wealth or standing prevailed.

The “brawler and gambler” he encountered at the inn may have been a native of La Flèche, but it is also possible that he was an exiled gambler from Paris. Hundreds of notorious gamblers were banished from the capital to the provinces during the first half of


152 For Caillot’s references to Don Quixote (“Don Guichot”) and Sancho Panza, see Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 3, 33, and 99.
the eighteenth century. Whatever his origins, Caillot pegged him an easy mark. After confirming his suspicions about the young man’s character with the innkeeper, Caillot “took it upon [himself] to make him play, not at cards, but the role of the dupe.” At the gambler’s urgings, Caillot “ordered anything I wanted to drink and eat,” while cordially refusing to engage in any number of card games the gambler suggested. Finally, after the detritus of their feast had been cleared away and the bill settled with the innkeeper’s wife (by the gambler), Caillot “told him that as far as games went, I did not know any at all, except for ‘brisquambille’ [sic].” The two played until 3:30 in the morning, when Caillot excused himself with a full belly and pockets heavier by “about twenty écus.” At daybreak, the trio mounted their horses and departed from La Flèche with the courier, stopping mid-morning for Mass in Durtal, then continuing on to the poste at Suette, where they slept.

From Suette they headed southwest toward Angers, where the utility of traveling on the unpaved grands chemins was supplanted by the mobility afforded by the Loire

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153 Olivier Grussi identifies more than two hundred such exiles in La Vie quotidienne des joueurs sous l’Ancien Régime, 210–12. Favier attributes the spread of gambling to the provinces, at least in part, to these exiled men. Favier, “Jouer dans les villes,” 66.

154 Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 11. Brusquembille can be played with between two and five players, with two-on-two play in effect for groups of four. Each player receives three cards from the dealer. The next card from the deck is placed face up; its suit (hearts, diamonds, etc.) acts as the trump suit for the round. The remaining cards are placed face down as the draw pile. Each round of play is called a “trick,” with the winner of a “trick” determined by the value of his or her card in relation to the trump suit and trump cards (usually aces and tens). Play continues with the winner of a trick leading the next hand. After all hands are played, players add up points accumulated at each trick. The player with the most points wins the game. For wager-based games, wagers are typically made prior to the initial card distribution. Descriptions of brusquembille and any other card games discussed by Caillot derive from Dictionnaire des jeux, which appeared as an appendix to volume 3, Mathématiques, of the series Encyclopédie Méthodique (Paris: Chez Panckoucke, 1792). For a better understanding of how some eighteenth-century games relate to their twentieth and twenty-first-century derivations, see David Parlett, The Oxford Dictionary of Card Games (Oxford University Press, 1996).

155 Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 11.
River. The road into Angers was lined on either side with dozens of wood and stone windmills. Quarries on the outskirts of town supplied slate in abundance. The prevalence of slate-roofed houses, churches, and other buildings earned the capital of the Anjou region the nickname “la ville noire.” Caillot felt right at home there, describing the bustling city of more than 20,000 inhabitants as “a second little Paris where there is a thriving high society and where people are very well attended to.” Caillot had little time to enjoy the pleasures of Angers. He and his traveling companions left the morning after their arrival via a small, covered passenger barge, known as a “cabanne.” Like Chartres, Nantes, and many other mercantile cities in the eighteenth century, Angers was strategically located on one of the country’s principle waterways. Split in two by the Mayenne (Maine) River, which flows directly into the Loire about 2.41 leagues (5.84 miles) southwest of the city, Angers’s growth and prosperity was connected to its merchants’ ability to float cargoes—especially heavy ones, like slate tiles, whose weight made overland transport impractical—downriver to other commercial centers.

Their eighth day of travel was spent on the Loire. As they made the 9.5-league passage from Angers to Ingrande, they followed the river’s course past small villages, fields of wheat, and expansive châteaux. The river split just before the town of Savennières to make way for the dozens of small islands that dominate the lower Loire. They passed the marshland flanking the river’s northern bank and came upon the port and village of Ingrande in a bend approximately ten leagues upriver from Nantes. Their arrival marked the travelers’ entry into Brittany, then one of the most commercial regions

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156 Ibid., fo.12
in all of France. Jutting out into the Atlantic, Brittany was the nexus of France’s maritime operations. Shipyards, warehouse complexes, and fortified harbors in the region’s coastal and riverine towns helped sustain France’s continental and global trade empire, as did the thousands of Breton men who manned the ships that made both trade and defense possible on the open seas.

To Caillot, rural Brittany and its people were objects of curiosity and sometimes scorn. The sights and sounds of the region seemed truly foreign. Breton, a Brythonic Celtic language related closely to Welsh and Cornish, was spoken throughout Lower Brittany. Breton is so unlike the French dominant in the Ile de France that it must have seemed impenetrable to Caillot’s ears. 157 Women were dressed “handsomely enough;” on their heads, most wore “a type of mantilla . . . full of folds.” 158 In a pattern of analysis similar to his later descriptions of Indian tribes in Louisiana, Caillot equated many of the cultural practices he witnessed in Brittany with “backwardness.” In Ingrande, after settling into his lodgings at the “Trois Morts” (Three Dead Men) inn, the sound of violins outside drew Caillot to the window, where he was “surprised to see that there were people of high society dancing Breton dances outside.” Caillot cringed to find his social peers engaged in what he termed “the most grotesque dancing one could ever see.” 159

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157 Caillot was not alone in his Paris-centric interpretations of Brittany’s people and customs. Nearly 200 years later, French composer Charles Quef stressed the foreignness of Brittany, “which has preserved its ancient fashions, costumes, language and customs.” His 1918 article on Breton music reads like an anthropologist’s field notes. Of the language spoken in Brittany, he wrote, “But hearken to their speech! It is impossible to understand them, for the Bretons speak a language of their own, which has nothing in common with French.” Charles Quef, “Breton Music,” The Musical Quarterly 4 (July, 1918), 402. For an examination of Breton’s rural nobility, see Jean Meyer, “Un problème mal posé: La noblesse pauvre. L’exemple breton au XVIIe siècle,” Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine 18.2 (1971): 161–88.


159 Ibid., fo. 13.
At dawn the travelers re-boarded the passenger barge. The vessel took them as far as Ancenis, where Caillot noted that a gentleman whose acquaintance they had made in Angers “very kindly hosted us.” From Ancenis they returned to the road, passing through the old-growth forests (long a source of shipbuilding timber) that lined the town’s perimeter, as they made their way to Nantes. The closer they got to the Atlantic, the more explicitly and visibly tied the cities and their industries were to the global trade system. By the time Caillot reached Nantes, he had traveled seventy-eight of the approximately one hundred and ten leagues between Paris and Lorient.

The travelers passed into Nantes via the city’s northeastern gate. Surrounded by ditch-lined ramparts from the southwestern to northeastern boundaries, with its remaining flanks bounded by the Loire River, Nantes had the deserved reputation as one of France’s most commercial and fastest growing cities. Its four faubourgs (or suburbs)—Saint-Clément, le Marché, la Fosse, and Pirmil—were, according to Piganiol de la Force, “much more substantial than the city itself.” The fashionable “la Fosse” district (figure 8), home to the city’s leading merchants, whose recently constructed mansions afforded them a view overlooking the port, lay nestled against the city’s western ramparts just outside the Porte au vin. The Quai de la Fosse ran the length of this district; ships lined up along the docks connected Nantes and its merchant community to points across the Atlantic. To the Quai “the Spanish bring wine, fine wool, iron, silk, oils, oranges and lemons; they leave with woven linen cloth, lightweight fabrics, hardware, and wheat.”

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160 Ibid.

Saugrain wrote. “The Dutch bring salted fish, along with all sorts of spices; the Swedish their copper ware; the English their lead shot, pewter ware, coal, etc.”\textsuperscript{162} Saugrain’s brief description offers a glimpse of the global trade networks that fueled the success of many Nantais merchants and propelled the Company of the Indies’s ships—and with them clerks such as Caillot—across the seas.

When Caillot arrived in 1729, Nantes was in the midst of an unparalleled construction boom. Work on the new Pont de Pirmil, which ran from Nantes-proper across the Loire and the île Beaulieu to the faubourg Pirmil, was completed in 1727. The new stock exchange was nearly complete. And some twenty-four nearly identical townhouses (hôtels particuliers) were in various stages of completion on the île Feydeau.\textsuperscript{163} Caillot found the city filled with a “great quantity of merchants” and “good-looking young people” who followed “the same fashions as in Paris.” He was impressed by the Quai de la Fosse, “where the people of Nantes go walking along the Loire.”\textsuperscript{164} The money he had won from the gambler in La Flèche by “playing the fool” helped him take full advantage of the city’s cultural and social scene.\textsuperscript{165} During his five- to six-day sojourn he attended two plays: \textit{Don Juan, or, The Feast with the Statue}, which was “not badly acted,” and \textit{The Married Philosopher}, which was “in general applauded by

\textsuperscript{162} Saugrain, \textit{Nouveau Voyage}, 326.

\textsuperscript{163} Martin, “Nantes et la Compagnie des Indes,” 64.


\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., fo. 14–15.
everyone.” He also attended the weekly concerts “given two times a week at the home of
Mr. Montodoin [sic], a leading merchant of that city.”166

René Montaudoin could well afford to host twice-weekly concerts for visiting
members of the social elite and members of Nantais society at his expansive property
near the Quai de la Fosse. In the early eighteenth century, Montaudoin helped establish

166 Ibid., fo. 15. Don Juan, or, The Feast with the Statue (Dom Juan, ou, Le Festin de Pierre) was a five-act
comedy by Molière first performed in Paris in 1685. Philippe Néricault Destouches’s comedy The Married
Philosopher (Le Philosophe Marié) was more recent, having debuted in Paris just two years earlier.

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Nantes as France’s largest and most lucrative slaving port. Son of a prominent merchant by the same name who had financed his first trade expedition to the French Caribbean in 1676, he was the largest outfitter of slave ships in France, sending out an estimated forty-five ships between 1706 and his death in 1731. A 1726 tax audit of 230 Nantais merchants estimated their collective wealth at 18,842,000 livres. A closer look at the audit results shows that an oligarchy of just sixty-three merchants from fifty-six Nantais families controlled the bulk of that wealth at more than eleven million livres (58 percent). René Montaudoin led the pack, with a personal fortune that topped 600,000 livres (3 percent of the total wealth reflected in the 1726 survey).

The active and regular participation of Nantais merchants in the slave trade began in 1716, when lettres patentes issued by the Crown opened the trade to private merchants from a handful of ports along France’s Atlantic coast. Prior to 1716 the trade was controlled primarily by the Guinea Company, charged with the trade from Sierra Leone south to the Cape of Good Hope, and the Senegal Company, operating in West Africa.


north of the Sierra Leone River. But merchants in Nantes had begun openly agitating for
the entrance of privately funded outfitters to the trade in 1700, when trade representative
Joachim Descasaux appeared before the newly reorganized Council of Commerce in
Paris and accused the Guinea Company of limiting the success of French ventures in the
Caribbean by failing to supply adequate numbers of slaves. Descasaux’s lobbying met
initially with limited success. In 1701 the Guinea Company received the coveted Spanish
asiento, granting the monopoly company the lucrative privilege of supplying slaves to
Spain’s New World colonies. A provision of the Guinea Company’s asiento-related
reorganization allowed two privately funded slavers per year to supply France’s

Under that provision, in 1703, Nantais traders outfitted the first of the more than
1,400 slave ships that sailed from the city’s port in the eighteenth century.\footnote{Robert Harms, \textit{The Diligent: A Voyage Through the Worlds of the Slave Trade} (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 33–35. The precedent for leasing out company privileges to private merchants was established during Colbert’s administration of the first Company of the East Indies in 1681. Unable to meet the demands of the East Indian carrying trade, Colbert authorized private merchants, first on company ships, then on privately owned ships, to engage in trade. Holden Furber, \textit{Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600–1800} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 203–204.

Just as the

Guinea Company had failed to meet the demand for slaves in France’s own colonies in

\textit{Répertoire des expeditions négrières françaises au XVIIIe siècle}, vol. 1. eds. Serge Daget and Michèle Daget (Paris: Société française d’histoire d’outre mer, 1978 and 1984). The Mettas database fails to capture data on Nantais slavers departing prior to 1707. The online version of the \textit{TASTDB} (Emory University, 2008–2009) includes an additional seven voyages that departed between 1702 and 1706.\footnote{Harms, \textit{The Diligent}, 35. Analytical data on the Nantais slave trade is based on voyage stats provided by \textit{The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM} (hereafter Eltis, \textit{TASTDB}), compiled and edited by David Eltis, Steven D. Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert S. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Much of the research on the French slave trade that appears in the \textit{TASTDB} was originally compiled by Jean Mettas and published as \textit{Répertoire des expeditions négrières françaises au XVIIIe siècle}, vol. 1. eds. Serge Daget and Michèle Daget (Paris: Société française d’histoire d’outre mer, 1978 and 1984). The Mettas database fails to capture data on Nantais slavers departing prior to 1707. The online version of the \textit{TASTDB} (Emory University, 2008–2009) includes an additional seven voyages that departed between 1702 and 1706.}
the last decades of the seventeenth century, it also failed to maintain supply to those operating under the Spanish crown. The Guinea Company’s inability to meet demand resulted in France’s loss of the asiento in 1713 and its own liquidation. For Nantais merchants, however, the Company’s loss of the asiento further fueled their argument that chartered monopoly companies lacked the ships, crews, and efficiency needed to satisfy the growing demand for slave labor. Only by allowing private traders unfettered access to the slave trade would demand be met. The monopoly company’s weaknesses, they stressed, undermined the profitability of France’s colonies, and in turn, France’s own treasury.172 Their rationale rested on the assumption that colonies such as Saint Domingue, Martinique, and Louisiana would prove wildly profitable to Crown and colonists if only planters had access to a steady supply of slave laborers to work (actual and imagined) fields of indigo, tobacco, and especially, sugar.

Their arguments did not fall on deaf ears. In 1713 Minister of Marine Pontchartrain, authorized the outfitting of twelve privately funded slave ships per year. Just over two years later, faced with mounting pressure from Caribbean colonists and Nantais merchants, the French government issued lettres patentes that allowed merchants in Bordeaux, La Rochelle, Nantes, and Rouen to engage in the unlimited outfitting of slave ships bound for the Guinea Company’s former trading posts in Africa.173 Between 1716 and 1720 Nantais merchants outfitted sixty-eight slavers. Most sailed for the French

172 Harms, The Diligent, 37.
173 Lettres patentes du roy pour la liberté du commerce de la coste de Guinée, January 1716, Archives Départementales de Loire-Atlantique (ADLA), série C 740.
fort at Ouidah (or Whydah). The Montaudoin family financed all or part of thirty-one (46 percent) of the sixty-eight, with René Montaudoin acting as the primary outfitter of twenty-one (31 percent) slave ships. In those four years, slavers financed by the Montaudoin family carried off more than 7,800 men, women, and children from the west coast of Africa. Those who survived the crossing were deposited on French-controlled Caribbean islands or in Guiana. In exchange, Montaudoin ships returned to Nantes laden with cargoes of indigo, cocoa, tanned leather and hides, exotic woods, and sugar.

By September 1720, however, John Law’s successful consolidation of several ailing chartered monopoly companies into a reorganized, reinvigorated Company of the Indies prompted the Royal Council of State to revoke the 1716 lettres patentes. Council orders issued September 27, 1720, required that all slaving activities along the African coast be turned over to the Company, provided that the Company guaranteed delivery of a minimum of 3,000 slaves per year to France’s Caribbean colonies. Once again, the company monopoly on the slave trade was short-lived. Only in the years immediately following the Company’s post-Law reorganization in 1723–1724 was it able to meet demand without the help of private traders. By August 1725, company directors caved under pressure from its own shareholders and Minister of Marine Jean Frédéric Phélypeaux (son of Jérôme), comte de Maurepas. The shareholders suspected that the investment needed to bulk up the Company’s slaving fleet in order to meet new Ministry of Marine demands of 9,300 slaves delivered (11,000 embarked) to the islands per year might bankrupt it. Maurepas, whose seat on the Council of Commerce subjected him to

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175 Eltis, *TASTDB*. 89
the incessant lobbying of Nantais merchants eager to break the company monopoly, shared their suspicion and sought to open the trade. His proposed scheme, which would generate for the Company a profit of twenty livres for each slave carried by private traders, made the dissolution of the Company’s monopoly over the slave trade more attractive to its shareholders.176

The years 1723–1725 represent the zenith of the French Company of the Indies’ participation in the African trade. The next six years saw the Company drastically curtail slaving expenditures. They were not alone. Over the course of the first half of the eighteenth century, as government-chartered monopoly companies failed to keep pace with the seemingly insatiable demand for slave labor in the Americas, the trade shifted increasingly to a host of privately funded slave outfitters and traders. By mid-century private traders had eclipsed not only the French monopoly companies, but their English and Dutch counterparts as well.177 Merchants in Nantes were well positioned to accomplish what the Company could not. Of the ninety-nine slave ships that departed from France in the second half of the 1720s, fifty-one of them (52 percent) departed from Nantes.178

Though the outfitting of slave ships continued to be a primary source of Nantes’s wealth throughout the eighteenth century, it was not the city’s sole source of commercial

178 Eltis, *TASTDB*. Of the remaining forty-eight slave ships departing from France between 1726 and 1729, fifteen (15.2 percent) were company ships sailing from Lorient; the rest were privately funded ventures sailing from Saint-Malo (fifteen), La Rochelle (ten), Le Havre (four), Marseille (two), Bordeaux (one) and Dunkerque (one).
prosperity. Nor was the slave trade the only significant commercial connection between Nantes and the Company of the Indies. In 1729, Nantes was still home to the Company’s warehouses (and would remain so until 1734). At least some of the development Caillot noted in his mémoire was connected to Nantes’s position as the exclusive site for company sales. Ships returning from comptoirs along the Indian and Atlantic oceans, Caribbean Sea, and Gulf of Mexico docked in Lorient, where their cargoes were unloaded, inspected, inventoried, and packed off to warehouses in Nantes. Each year merchants and factors flocked to the city from across the Continent to attend the annual sales of company goods. The principal sale was held each fall in stages, with the grande vente, featuring the most saleable items, preceding the petite vente, which showcased numerous goods damaged in whole or part en route either at sea or during transport from Lorient to Nantes.\textsuperscript{179} The city also hosted company sales of specific agricultural products, such as monopoly-controlled coffee or tobacco, at specified dates throughout the year.

\textsuperscript{179} The road between Nantes and Lorient was critical to commerce, but the stretch running from Hennebont to Lorient via Port-Louis, was in disrepair. Improvements were made between 1724 and 1730 in an attempt to cut company losses resulting from damage incurred between the time trade goods left Lorient on carts or boats and their arrival at the warehouses in Nantes. Even after goods arrived in Nantes, the pitiful condition of the warehouse complex’s roofs sometimes exposed goods—especially textiles—to less than ideal conditions. Moldy, water stained textiles were among the most frequently sold items at the petites ventes. Claude Nières, \textit{Histoire de Lorient} (Toulouse: Privat, 1988), 66; Léon Vignols and Henri Sée, “Les Ventes de la Compagnie des Indes à Nantes, 1723–1733,” \textit{Revue de l’histoire des colonies françaises} 13 (1925), 494, 527; and Martin, “Nantes et la Compagnie des Indes,” 49–50.
These sales generally coincided with the seasonal arrival of company ships from Mocha (in present-day Yemen) or the circum-Caribbean. Printed notices, such as the one pictured in figure 9, announced the sale of an astonishing array of textiles—especially printed and specialty piece goods (*petites étoffes*), spices, agricultural products, and durable goods recently arrived from overseas comptoirs.

180 Items sold at the company sales in Nantes also included trade goods brought back to France by ships’ officers and crew through the use of the *port-permis*, as well as any goods taken from vessels seized by the French navy. Vignols and Sée, “Les Ventes de la Compagnie,” 525–26; and Martin, “Nantes et la Compagnie des Indes,” 45, 47. The most thorough study of the French tobacco-monopoly and its governing policies is Jacob Price’s *France and the Chesapeake*. For more detail on the company monopoly on the sale of coffee throughout France, see Philippe Haudrère, “Les ventes,” in *Les Compagnies des Indes* (Rennes: Editions Ouest-France, 2005), 80–82.
For Nantes-based merchants, company sales held locally were a boon. Unlike merchants from Le Havre, Saint-Malo, and beyond, who had to pay the freight costs associated with shipping their goods from Nantes to their home ports before outfitting could begin, merchants from in and around Nantes could outfit their ships on the spot. The elimination of freight charges and the ease of procuring trade items such as cowry shells and high-demand textiles directly from the Company also help explain the early dominance of Nantais merchants in the African slave trade. The quantity and variety of goods available in Nantes made it one of Europe’s leading trade cities. Annual sales, according to Nantes mayor Gérard Mellier, attracted between “five and six hundred merchants” from outside the region, who were accompanied by their servants and families, to the city each year.\(^{181}\) Their numbers swelled the city’s population of roughly 45,000; their need for lodging, food, entertainment, and business services during their stay—which often spanned several weeks—accelerated the development of Nantes’s hospitality sector.

Unlike Lorient, which was described during a 1719 company debate over where to house and sell company goods as a town “at the end of the world” with “no lodgings for even a dozen merchants,” Nantes was home to a bevy of hotels, inns, and apartments or rooms for rent, as well as an array of financial services and agents that facilitated international trade.\(^{182}\) A growing number of entertainment venues featuring theatre, opera, and musical performances, complemented the city’s expansive hospitality and

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\(^{181}\) Quoted in Martin, “Nantes et la Compagnie des Indes,” 53.

financial services industries. Merchants whose business kept them in the city for weeks or even months at a stretch could join their local counterparts in the enjoyment of various evening spectacles. But for Caillot, who after exhausting his brusquembille winnings “had only just what was necessary to complete [his] voyage,” the presence of so many entertainment options served as a reminder of his meager finances.\footnote{Caillot, “Relation,” fo.15.}

After five or six days in Nantes, Caillot and his fellow travelers returned to the road, traveling by courier through Pontchâteau, La Roche-Bernard, Vannes, and Auray as they pushed on toward the coast.\footnote{As the seat of the Morbihan region’s admiralty courts, Vannes was also intimately connected to the Company of the Indies. All seaborne personnel attached to the Company received a three-month salary advance at the beginning of a sailing. To collect the balance due, personnel were required to appear in Vannes’s admiralty courts once disarmament papers had been filed in Lorient at the end of a voyage. Admiralty courts also settled disputes between crewmembers and investigated charges of officer-wrongdoing. For crewmembers who did not survive a given voyage, admiralty courts settled debts and disbursed monies or personal belongings due to families of the deceased. Registers listing monies processed through the admiralty on behalf of deceased company crewmen can be found in sous-série 9 B, Amirauté de Vannes, Archives Départementales du Morbihan (ADMV).} At Hennebont they left the horses they had leased and chartered a dingy to take them two leagues down the Blavet River to Lorient. Their journey from Paris spanned 109 leagues and nine days of active travel. They had traveled over mud-lined roads, through Brittany’s wheat-filled countryside, and down rivers to reach the town whose unexpected and untidy growth had taken France’s coastal and Breton communities by surprise: Lorient.

Established as the home base of the first French Company of the Indies (Compagnie française des Indes Orientales) in 1666, Lorient had grown in stops and starts between the late 1660s and the creation of the second Company of the Indies in 1720. The site at the confluence of the Scorff and Blavet rivers had not been Colbert’s
first choice for company headquarters. Company ships operated briefly out of Le Havre in 1664, but difficulty securing a parcel of waterfront property large enough to accommodate the necessary shipbuilding and outfitting facilities, offices, and warehouses forced Colbert to consider alternative Atlantic ports. Le Havre’s location also posed a security risk: English ships preyed on company vessels laden with valuable cargo in the narrow confines of the Channel. Colbert then looked to Bayonne, but it too was ill-suited as an operational base.

As the possibility of setting up base at an established port faded, Colbert sent Guillaume de La Motte, a king’s lieutenant based in Hennebont, to survey an alternate site along the Brittany coast near the Gulf of Morbihan. Four navigational pilots from Hennebont and three from Port-Louis accompanied La Motte to an unnamed expanse of scruffy, uninhabited land on the right bank of the Scorff. From there they surveyed the convergence of waterways and land that created a natural harbor long used as a place of refuge for ships engaged in the coastal trade. Within six months of La Motte’s initial survey, Colbert sent three additional teams of bureaucrats, engineers, and naval officers to the site. By the summer of 1666 company director Denis Langlois had arranged the purchase of seven hectares of land from Breton noble Louis XII de Rohan, Prince de Guéméné.¹⁸⁵

These seven acres formed the original footprint of the company enclosure that had by the time of the 1721 company reorganization grown to include warehouses (1669), forges (1671), a chapel (1675), a rope works, bakery and windmill (1677), a 400-bed

barracks (1691–1692), a hospital and rationing facilities (1720), and numerous offices charged with outfitting, bookkeeping, and personnel management. Outside the enclosure, a hodgepodge of more than three hundred mud-and-straw huts, housing

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186 The company settlement across from Port-Louis quickly became known as L’Orient—a name synonymous with the geographic location of the Company’s primary trading hubs in the Far East. Company goods arriving in Paris, Nantes, or elsewhere in France were said to be from “l’Orient,” an ambiguous statement providing no clear distinction between the use of “l’Orient” as a geographic designation for the Far East and a town along the Brittany coast. For consumers of these goods, perhaps there was no distinction. It is not clear whether the town name L’Orient was popularized by the company or by the consumers of its trade goods, though some historians posit that the name derives from an abbreviation of Le Soleil d’Orient, the name of the first ship built on site (completed in 1671). Whatever its origins, the town name L’Orient was adopted quickly by residents and company administrators alike. Within four years of the Company’s 1666 land purchase, L’Orient was used as the location of birth in the settlement’s baptismal registers. The elision of the town-name from L’Orient to Lorient occurs throughout the eighteenth century, depending on the source, but the permanent name change took place sometime in the late eighteenth century.
workers and their families, stood alongside a handful of more solidly constructed stone structures.  

Though the land upon which the Company built its operations had been previously uninhabited, it was not isolated from Brittany’s well-developed port complex. Just across the bay from the enclosure sat Port-Louis (see figure 10), a small fortified settlement that was itself home to shipbuilding and food processing facilities and, in the late seventeenth through early eighteenth century, to a series of monopoly companies, including the slave trading Senegal and Saint-Domingue companies. Hennebont, located two leagues up the Blavet River, housed a busy commercial port and served as a hub for overland transportation. Goods flowing through Hennebont were often disbursed via one of the six major roads that intersected there—a positional benefit that allowed the Company to tap into an already established supply and distribution network. And the presence of Pont-Scorff, a village located less than two leagues up the Scorff River devoted primarily to wheat processing and bread production, helped ensure Lorient’s sustenance in its early years.

After a two-decade-long hiatus, the reorganized Company of the Indies resumed its Lorient operations in 1720. Between 1720 and 1740 the town’s growth far outpaced any similar expansion of infrastructure. The Company went from outfitting zero ships in Lorient in 1719, to outfitting an average of twenty-two ships in each of the next five

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188 Nières provides a thorough overview of the first Company of the Indies’s decline and its effects on Lorient. The site was partially shared by the Navy beginning in 1685 and by 1701 was fully requisitioned as a naval base during the War of Spanish Succession. Naval authorities recognized Lorient’s value as a secure port and used the site for both outfitting and shipbuilding throughout the war. When the Company reemerged in its reorganized, consolidated form in 1720, the Company took the site and its improvements back from the Navy. Nières, Histoire de Lorient, 26–28.
years. Laborers, craftsmen, seamen, and their families poured into the town, filling in the land surrounding the enclosure with makeshift tents and poorly constructed huts, as they scrambled to secure their footing in an environment filled with labor opportunities. The presence of company and royal officials, administrators, and low-level bureaucrats rose apace. In 1706 Lorient was home to no more than six thousand individuals. Some thirty years later, its population was estimated at fourteen thousand.

But urban development was slow to arrive in Lorient, despite attempts by royal engineers to bring order to the chaos. There was little company willpower to address the needs of a town that had sprung up seemingly overnight alongside the enclosure. Complicating the systematic management of the company town was a lack of clear jurisdiction: The Company controlled what took place within the enclosure’s walls, but it was less clear who had authority over the town, especially since the Rohan-Guéméné family maintained seigneurial rights over the land it had sold to the Company. The Rohan-Guéménés held baking and bread-making monopolies, oversaw the courts and policing of the town, and collected duties on a variety of supplies passing through Lorient. It took a series of fires that consumed dozens of residences near the enclosure in the early 1720s to prompt the Company to issue building regulations. In 1724 the

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191 Ibid., 90–103; Le Bouëdec, “Du chantier à la ville nouvelle,” 105.
Company issued the first of several ordinances intended to regulate construction materials and thereby reduce the risk of fire.\textsuperscript{192}

Outside the enclosure, Lorient’s streets remained unpaved and crowded. The population had expanded so quickly in the first decades of the eighteenth century, that the town lacked an established grid. Royal engineers failed in their early efforts to bring order to the streets; the influx of people was simply too great. Even the road leading into neighboring Port-Louis from Hennebont was in disrepair, which may help explain why Caillot traveled by dinghy from Hennebont to Lorient, rather than by horse.

By the winter of 1729, company ships sailing from Lorient called at dozens of ports spread across five continents. Some ports of call served exclusively as provisioning stopovers, like the Spanish-controlled Canary Islands off of Africa’s northwest coast. Others served as trading ports run principally by local interests (as was the case with the Canton post in China), where company ships dropped anchor to conduct trade directly with local populations. But many of the ports called on by company ships were home to permanent company comptoirs. The scale of these comptoirs and the number of resident company laborers and bureaucrats in each depended largely on the volume and type of trade or agricultural goods that passed through a given port.

In a handful of locales, a type of über-comptoir served as on-the-ground headquarters for multiple trading establishments or outposts in a region. This was true of

\textsuperscript{192} After 1724 the building code required all new structures to be of stone or slate. By 1731 the company had also issued a general prohibition against thatched roofs and had come up with a preliminary plan to pave some of the town’s streets. Nières, \textit{Histoire de Lorient}, 64–66; Commandant Vernay (Lorient) to the Marine de Ponant, 1731, AN, B3 344, on the use of proper roofing materials, see fo. 166, on paving, see fo.153, 155, 159, and 166.
both Pondicherry, a company settlement on the eastern coast of India, and New Orleans, the chief port and capital city of the company-controlled Louisiana colony. Each served as operational capitals for company affairs, and was charged with the administrative and financial oversight of lesser comptoirs located throughout the region at key trade and agricultural sites. For comptoirs in India or Louisiana, official company-controlled correspondence traveled by courier from Paris to Lorient, and was then loaded onto ships bound for a given region’s über-comptoir. From there councilors and clerks oversaw the conveyance of relevant news, correspondence, and directives to outlying comptoirs. Overseas comptoirs generally followed the same communication chain in reverse.\textsuperscript{193} In order to fulfill their operational mandates, über-comptoirs required the presence of a good number of competent bureaucrats and clerks to carry out bookkeeping, copying, and cashier’s duties.

Caillot’s own appointment to a clerking position in New Orleans took place against a backdrop of failed efforts to maintain a reliable cadre of low-level administrative workers in the Louisiana colony. Between 1723 and 1730 company directors in Paris received incessant complaints from Jacques de La Chaise, the Company’s chief financial officer in Louisiana, on both the degenerate quality and insufficient quantity of clerks working in the Louisiana offices. La Chaise arrived in 1723, in the wake of John Law’s collapsed financial scheme, with the mandate to clean up the colony’s administrative affairs and set the Company’s finances in order. The previous year, the capital of Louisiana had moved from New Biloxi to New Orleans, after

\textsuperscript{193} Kenneth Banks provides a useful survey of the French paper-pushing empire in \textit{Chasing Empire across the Sea}.  

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work begun in 1718 to establish the latter settlement had progressed far enough to provide shelter to the goods and people necessary to the Company’s commercial activities. When La Chaise arrived in New Orleans, he faced the near impossible task of rectifying warehouse inventories against long neglected account books and reigning in endemic corruption among company administrators, warehouse keepers, and council members. The challenge was made more difficult by a perpetual shortage of specie, which encouraged colonists and company personnel alike to take what they could, when they could from company stores or to bypass financial interaction with the Company altogether in favor of trade with local Indians.\(^{194}\)

One of La Chaise’s first efforts to bring order to the bureaucratic chaos of the Company’s Louisiana offices centered on the creation of a workable administrative structure that connected the colony’s central offices in New Orleans to its coastal and riverine outposts at Mobile, Natchez, and Natchitoches, among others. To La Chaise, staffing the bookkeeping, storehouse, and inspection offices in the capital with capable personnel was critical to the Company’s success. His goal was to standardize bookkeeping and inventory practices and establish clear administrative and financial boundaries between offices. In La Chaise’s view, this objective could be met only through the appointment of bureaucrats and clerks with training specific to a given office’s function. La Chaise’s approach to Louisiana’s administrative reorganization might be traced to his own past work experiences in Lorient. In the years prior to his

arrival in Louisiana, La Chaise had served as chief clerk to Gilles Le Brun de La Franqueri in the Company’s outfitting storehouse in Lorient, where he had participated in a similar administrative clean-up that targeted questionable port management and storekeeping/inventory practices. His successes in Lorient recommended him to company directors eager to see the mismanaged Louisiana colony turn a profit.  

Within weeks of arriving in New Orleans, La Chaise wrote company directors in Paris, “Gentlemen, be so good as to send at once, if you please, a bookkeeper, an assistant bookkeeper, and five or six clerks who know how to work. There is not one here who can be used.” He further urged them to provide incoming clerical workers with “reasonable salaries for if they are mediocre they will not have enough to live on and will perish here as the others have done.” La Chaise repeatedly echoed his request that the company send qualified, adequately compensated personnel to Louisiana. He also encouraged the directors to take care to supply the colony’s treasury with copper or silver money with which to pay those bureaucrats already serving there.

The colony’s chronic specie shortage left La Chaise—and the Company—in a difficult position. In April 1727 La Chaise and Governor Etienne Périer (a former captain in the Company’s fleet) reported to the directors on the “sad condition” of the colony’s

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196 Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 6 September 1723, Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion (hereafter MPA), edit. and trans. by Dunbar Rowland and A. G. Sanders (Jackson, MS: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1929), 2: 327–28.
treasury, which had “been without one sou for some time.”197 Company warehouses
stocked with goods and provisions from France saw little trade with colonists because the
specie shortage meant that the Company was unable to pay colonists for crops, livestock,
and provisions raised and produced locally. Only debtors were able to turn over their rice
crops to company storehouses; those who expected payment for their crops looked
elsewhere for trade opportunities.198 The inability of colonists to sell their produce to the
Company made French mercantile policies, which required that colonists purchase (in
cash or trade) all nonlocal supplies, including tools, agricultural implements, and slave
laborers, directly from the Company at predetermined prices, rather difficult to
enforce.199

For company employees, the empty treasury sometimes led workers to choose
between starvation and graft. The Company owed back wages “to clerks, workmen, and
sailors” and was repeatedly forced to borrow money from passengers arriving from
France to avert an uprising of the colony’s soldiers stationed in New Orleans.200 With no
cash to pay wages, there was little incentive for employees to remain loyal to company
objectives, and great temptation to skim off what they could from incoming receipts. In
1728, three clerks working in the Company’s cashier office were involved in a scheme to
circulate forged paper bank notes among the colonists. The ringleader, a clerk named

197 Etienne Périer and Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 22 April 1727, MPA, 2: 538.
198 Etienne Périer and Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 24 November 1727, MPA, 2: 579.
200 Etienne Périer and Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 22 April 1727, MPA, 2: 538.
Maisonneuve, confessed under torture to forging La Chaise’s signature and was sentenced to “imprisonment for life.” But rather than dismissing the affair as the work of dishonest clerks, La Chaise laid the blame for Maisonneuve’s actions on the Company for not sending specie as promised. “If you had sent us the 50,000 livres in silver money that you have been promising us for two years,” wrote La Chaise, the forgery “would not have happened.”

La Chaise achieved some success in expanding the colony’s clerical labor pool. Between 1722 and 1728, staffing levels in the Company’s New Orleans offices grew 21 percent, with the overall number of clerical positions increasing from nineteen to twenty-three, and that of clerks assigned to bookkeeping, council, storehouse, and inspection offices from nine to thirteen. During the same period, the annual budget allotted to payroll expenses for clerks rose from 7,200 to 12,800 livres. By 1729 staffing levels in the New Orleans and Balize offices were roughly equal to levels found in Lorient and Pondicherry.

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201 Etienne Périer and Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 31 July 1728, MPA, 2: 578–79.

202 Appointed positions included in the numbers used to calculate the increase in staffing levels between 1722 and 1728 included company bookkeepers, warehouse or store keepers, inspectors, and clerks regardless of specialization. For 1722, the year the colonial capital was officially moved from New Biloxi to New Orleans, both posts and Ship Island were included in the totals. For 1728, the numbers reflect employees assigned to New Orleans and the Balize. Minutes of the Louisiana Superior Council, 21 April 1722, MPA, 2: 268–71; “Etat general des Dépenses qui doivent se faire à la Louisianne pendant l'année 1728,” ANOM, B 43b, fo. 770.

But staffing the offices with well trained, diligent employees remained an unrealized dream. In the seven years of his tenure in Louisiana, La Chaise described various members of the colony’s clerical staff as fraudulent, thieving, “disorderly,” “lazy,” “incorrigible,” and “dissipated,” stressing to company directors in Paris that “the indulgence we show to the clerks [in Louisiana] comes from the necessity of our keeping the least bad for want of persons to replace them.” After firing three wayward clerks in the summer of 1728, he wrote, “it is not here as in France. It is rare that one finds one of them by chance who is good.”

When company directors in Paris received word of the clerks’ dismissal in October 1728, it is likely that they looked first to the pool of individuals employed in the Company’s Paris offices for replacements. The timing of Caillot and De Troyes’ February 1729 departure from Paris suggests that they were two of the young men selected to fill the void.

Within three months of their appointments, then, Caillot and De Troyes found themselves at the end of their mostly overland journey from Paris to the coast, arriving in Lorient around the first week in March. Lorient had grown considerably in the ten years since one observer had labeled it “a town at the end of the earth,” but lodgings and food were still at a premium.

After making an appearance at the company outfitting offices, where they collected a two-month salary advance, Caillot and De Troyes ventured outside the

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204 Etienne Périer and Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 24 November 1727; 31 July and 3 November 1728; and 26 August 1729, MPA, 2: 578, 594–95, 665–66.

205 Quoted in Haudrère, La Compagnie française des Indes au XVIIIe siècle 1: 176.
enclosure to secure rooms at “one of Lorient’s best inns.” They lodged at the inn run by gentleman-proprietor André Bachelier. Bachelier’s establishment was popular among visiting officials from both the Company of the Indies and the Marine. But within two weeks, the impracticality of lodging with high-level officials on a clerk’s salary became apparent. Caillot had exhausted the three-hundred-livre company allowance meant to cover his travel expenses between Paris and Lorient. At six livres per night, paying for lodging at Bachelier’s inn proved unsustainable. The stay at Bachelier’s cost Caillot nearly seventy livres. His clerk’s salary stood at 600. In the span of less than two weeks, he had spent more than 11 percent of his annual company earnings, and 70 percent of the salary advance he had received upon his arrival in Lorient. Homesick and nearing financial embarrassment, he packed his bags, bid his fellow lodgers adieu, and stepped out into the mud-lined streets of Lorient.

Individuals awaiting passage on outbound trade vessels—including those directly in the employ of the Company of the Indies—often had to wait weeks or even months to depart. Three years earlier, in November 1726, Jesuit Father Nicole-Ignace de Beaubois

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207 André Bachelier, “noble home,” was the proprietor of an inn frequented by company administrators and clerical employees, “Extrait du debis et des octrois deues pour Roi par les hotes et Cabaretiers du department de Lorient pendant May et Juin 1740,” Archives de la ville de Lorient.
208 The amount of Caillot’s clerk’s salary is based on two sources: the average annual salary paid to bookkeeping and warehouse clerks in the Louisiana colony for the years 1728 and 1729 and a 1:2.5 ratio between the salaries paid to Caillot, a clerk, vs. that paid to Debussy, a commissioned bookkeeper, whose annual salary totaled 1,500 livres. Upon arrival in Lorient, company employees bound for Louisiana received a two-month salary advance from the outfitting office. Debussy received 250 livres, Caillot 100. “Etat général des Dépenses qui doivent se faire à la Louisiane [sic] pendant l’année 1728” and “Etat général des Dépenses qui doivent se faire à la Louisiane [sic] pendant l’année 1729,” ANOM, B 43b, fo. 770 and fo. 821; “Commission, Teneur de Livres à la Louisianne [sic] pour le Sr. de Bussy” 27 January 1729, fo. 845; “Etat des passagers embarqués sur le vaisseau la Durance,” 15 March 1729, ANOM, F5B 49, fo. 38.
pleaded with company secretary, Monsieur de La Loë, for “an advance” after weeks of waiting in Lorient for the departure of his Louisiana-bound ship. Beaubois complained that each day he remained in port the delay wrought havoc on his “modest purse” and made “the blood boil in [his] veins at every quarter of an hour.”

For Caillot, a young man seemingly unaccustomed to solitude, the waiting period proved a disconsolate time. He wrote, “the anxiety of knowing the day of our departure, the sorrow from being away from my parents,” coupled with “the sorrow of seeing my funds diminished . . . without being able to do anything about it . . . made me feel an unparalleled commotion in my mind.”

With his wallet thinning, Caillot sought out a dinghy that could carry him and his baggage to Penmanec, a small company-run harbor just south of Lorient at the confluence of the Scorff and Blavet rivers. There, preparations on board the Durance were well underway. Boarding on the ship, rather than in town, afforded Caillot the chance to save what little money he had left. His passage and meals on the Durance were underwritten by the Company; his early arrival ensured a preview of the orchestrated chaos required to outfit a ship.

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210 Caillot, “Relation,” fo.18–19.
Outfitting a transatlantic vessel was an arduous and often dangerous process for the dozens of sailors, skilled laborers, and suppliers involved. Depending on the ship’s size, purpose and destination, outfitting took on average between three and six weeks to complete. In March 1729, three ships, the *Duc de Chartres*, *Espérance*, and *Durance*, lay in wait at Penmanec as each underwent preparations for lengthy sailings. Though all were company ships, their pending expeditions differed greatly. The 180-member crew of the *Duc de Chartres* faced the most arduous and complex outfitting. Crewmembers under the direction of Captain Jacques de Marquaysne scrambled to prepare the 800-ton ship for embarkation to the East Indies. At an average time to completion of twenty-one months, the East Indian circuit was the lengthiest, but also the most lucrative of the Company’s routes.

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212 *Duc de Chartres* armement, 1729, Fonds de la Marine à Lorient (FML), 1 P 168; Comte de Volvire to the Marine de Ponant, 18 March 1729, Archives nationales de France (AN), Marine, B 3 330, fo. 17–20.

213 This figure is based on a survey of the circuits completed by the eighteen ships that left France for the East Indies between 1 January 1725 and 31 December 1730. Of the eighteen ships surveyed, six ships (33 percent) completed the circuit in eighteen months, two (11 percent) each in nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, or twenty-five months, and one (5.5 percent) each in fourteen, sixteen, twenty-eight, or forty-two months. The 1729 expedition of the *Duc de Chartres* (included in above survey) took twenty-five months. The ship returned to Lorient on 25 May 1731. René Estienne, *Les armements au long cours de la deuxième*
Laden with casks of wine and brandy, bricks or pieces of iron, copper, lead, and gold, and crates of glassware and woven woolen cloth, company ships bound for the East Indies drew their cargoes from across France and, as was the case with commodities such as Canadian ginseng, her colonies.\textsuperscript{214} In exchange, trade goods purchased from comptoirs in Chandernagore, Pondicherry, and other sites throughout the Indian Ocean circulated within the Company’s trade network. Porcelain, herbs (medicinal and culinary), all manner of petites éttofes, coffee, tea, red wood, rattan, saltpeter for gunpowder, and cowrie-shell ballast flowed from the East Indian ports to company warehouses in France. From these warehouses (located in Nantes until 1734, when company warehouse operations moved to Lorient), the Company redistributed East Indian trade goods to the holds of ships bound for European, African, Caribbean, and North American ports.\textsuperscript{215} The East Indian trade allowed the Company a symbiotic relationship with comptoirs around the globe. Trade goods from the East Indies underwrote nearly all of the Company’s slaving activities along Africa’s Senegambian coast, and fueled much of the trade with Native Americans in the Louisiana colony.

The Espérance, a half-galley bound for Senegal, stood in stark contrast to the hulking shadows cast by the Duc de Chartres. At only 120 tons, the double-masted Espérance measured just over 120-feet long and 18-feet wide. Intended primarily as a coastal vessel (half-galleys were employed most frequently in the Mediterranean), the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Compagnie des Indes, 1717–1773 (Lorient: Service historique de la Marine, 1996), 25–30; Duc de Chartres disarmament, 1731, FML, 1 P 168.
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half-galley was ill equipped for carrying substantial cargoes across open ocean. But though some features made galleys unlikely trade vessels—namely their small size and relative lack of cargo space, others made them ideal for maneuvering becalmed seas or shallow, narrow bodies of water. On the Espérance, banks of oars worked by an eighteen-man crew of galériens, or galley slaves, lined each side. When conditions allowed, two large lateen sails could be struck to supplement manpower with wind.

Given its size, and the corresponding lack of space for provisions, the Espérance likely called on multiple ports as it made its way to the company-run slave outposts along the Senegal River.

The Company’s concession in Senegambia included three major slave-trading outposts: Fort St. Louis (the concession headquarters), near the mouth of the Senegal River, Gorée Island (site of the largest French captiverie, or slave collection point), just off the coast of Senegal to the south of Cape Verde, and Fort St. Joseph, an inland post in Galam accessible via the Senegal River. It was likely to this last post—which could be reached via a 40-day voyage upriver—that the Espérance set sail. Fort St. Joseph was of strategic importance to the Company because it lay at the confluence of the Senegal and Feleme rivers. This interior location allowed French traders to intercept slave caravans

216 Espérance armement, 1729, FML, 1 P 168.

217 The Company first employed the Espérance on the Senegambian circuit in 1723. Between 1723 and 1729, the half-galley was in near constant service, shuttling back and forth between Lorient and Senegambia seven times. The Espérance’s 1729 voyage was its eighth and last. The vessel never returned to Lorient; it was condemned in Martinique, following the death of most of its crew, 28 December 1730. Estienne, Les armements, 21–30; “États par vaisseaux des officiers, officiers mariniers, et matelots décedés ou noyés de 1721 à 1770,” Espérance, 1730, FML 1 P 246, liasse 2.

218 For an overview of transitions in France’s monopoly-controlled slave trade companies and the status of private competition prior to 1720 and then again throughout the ’20s, see Robert Harms, The Diligent: A Voyage through the Worlds of the Slave Trade (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 32–41, 48–54.
coming from eastern Senegambia and funnel them into the Senegal River, (which flowed into a French-controlled captiverie at Fort St. Louis), thereby reducing the number of slave caravans bound for the English-operated Fort St. James at the mouth of the Gambia River. But reaching Fort St. Joseph from the Atlantic coast was tricky. Low water levels in the Senegal River limited access to a short window that ran from late spring to early fall. Each year, when the waters of the Senegal River crested, the French sent small boats,
like the Espérance, inland. These support vessels shuttled captives, company employees, laborers, provisions, trade goods, and supplies to or between forts St. Joseph and St. Louis.

The Espérance was not a slaver in the usual sense. Unlike many of the ships bound for Senegal from Lorient, it was not engaged in the transatlantic transport of human cargo. But its service, like that of countless other longboats, canoes, and dinghies employed by the Company on both sides of the Atlantic, facilitated the continued success and expansion of the transatlantic slave trade.

In 1729, the Company increased its slaving activities along the Senegambian coast, sending more slavers to company-controlled trading posts that year than it had since the peak of the Company’s African trade in 1723–1725. Between 1723 and 1725, the Company sent out a total of sixty-three ships to Africa’s west coast—twenty-six to Senegal, seventeen to Guinea, fourteen to Ouidah, and six to Angola—at an average of twenty-one per year. The number of Africa-bound company ships to sail during this three-year period was 44 percent of the total number sent by the Company between 1720, the year following the Company’s absorption of the Senegal Company, and 1731, the year directors returned Louisiana to the Crown. By ramping up its slave trading activities from 1723–1725, the Company hoped to prove to the Crown and Minister of Marine

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Maurepas that they could meet the colonies’ need for slaves without opening up the African trade to private competitors. The company failed both in its effort to meet Maurepas’s projection of a needed 11,000 slaves embarked per year on company ships and in the fight to keep their monopoly over the African trade.\(^{220}\) Shipwrecked slave ships, elevated mortality among slaves at sea and on arrival in the circum-Caribbean, and reluctance on the part of colonists to pay for slave purchases at the point of sale resulted in severe financial losses for the Company.\(^{221}\) Having failed to meet the demand for slaves with their own ships, the Company agreed to reopen the trade south of the Sierra Leone River to private merchants in August 1725. The decision was financially sound. Private merchants paid a commission of 10 to 20 livres per slave for the privilege of helping the Company meet its quota. By 1727, some 350,000 livres per year flowed into company coffers from those commissions.\(^{222}\)

Though the Company was unable to maintain its monopoly over the slave trade, the readmission of private slave traders south of the Sierra Leone River did not result in the elimination of company-led expeditions. The Company maintained exclusive control

\(^{220}\) Estienne, Les arremens, 28; The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM (hereafter Eltis, TASTDB), compiled and edited by David Eltis, Steven D. Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert S. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Maurepas’s recommendations and company responses found in “Commerce de Guinée;” “Extrait de deux memoires presents au nom des actionnaires sur le commerce de Guinée et des reponses des directeurs de la compagnie article par article à ces deux memoires;” “Extrait du 1ère et 2e memoires des actionnaires” and “Mémoire sur la manière dont la Compagnie des Indes peut exercer son privilege en Guinée, en cas qu’elle ne continue pas à le faire en entier par elle-même,” AN, M 1026, cited in Harms, The Diligent, 423n5.

\(^{221}\) Colonists in Saint Domingue, for example, owed so much money—over two million livres—to the Company for unpaid debts related to previous purchases of slaves and supplies that the Company ceased commerce with the colony in 1728. For a letter from Maurepas urging action from Governor de LaRochelar and Intendant DuClos, see Archives nationales d’outre-mer (ANOM), C2 20, fo. 14, Maurepas to Robin, 15 March 1728.

\(^{222}\) The ordinance passed 8 August 1725 required private merchants to pay a 20-livre per head commission, but a revised ordinance issued 3 July 1726 lowered the sum to 10 livres per head. ANOM, F2a 12, fo. 397–400 and C6 23; Haudrère, La Compagnie française des Indes, 1: 265; Harms, The Diligent, 55–61.
over trade in the Senegambian region, and of their fort at Ouidah. Out of the twenty-one company vessels that sailed from France the year of Caillot’s departure, twelve (60 percent) were bound for the west coast of Africa—eleven for the Company’s Senegal concession, the twelfth for Ouidah. But only five were directly engaged in the transatlantic trade. These five were destined to carry their slave cargoes across the Atlantic to the Louisiana colony. The slavers were joined in their 1729 crossings of the Atlantic by four company ships engaged in the direct carrying trade. Direct trade ships ferried all manner of goods, company employees, soldiers, colonists, and correspondence between France and her American colonies. For all company ships (slavers or not) on the Atlantic circuit in 1729, Louisiana was the primary and final port of call.

The ship destined to bear Caillot across the Atlantic to a post of questionable importance in a colony known—at least in Parisian circles—primarily for its large and diverse Indian population, rudimentary settlements, inhospitable environment, and of course its association with John Law’s failed financial scheme, was the Durance.

87th such carrier of goods and peoples sent directly from France since the Company of

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223 Slavers also drew from ports across the Atlantic world to provision their ships. As slave ship captains stocked provisions at each port of call, they loaded items such as salted beef from Ireland; beans, rice, and oatmeal from France; peppers, yams, millet, and livestock from the west coast of Africa; and manioc and corn from the Americas. For an interesting look at the diversity of foodstuffs used to provision captives, see Bertie R. Mandelblatt, “‘Beans from Rochel and Manioc from Prince’s Island’: West Africa, French Atlantic Commodity Circuits, and the Provisioning of the French Middle Passage,” History of European Ideas 34 (2008): 411–23.

224 The remaining five ships that sailed from France in 1729 were bound for the East Indies, with two destined for India and three for China. “Armements des vaisseaux et autres Batiments de la Compagnie des Indes,” 1729, FML, 2 P 2, III.

the West gained control of Louisiana in 1717, and the 24th since the Company’s 1723 reorganization, the *Durance* was a flute, or *fluitschip*. A Dutch-created vessel, the flute’s design maximized cargo carrying capacity and minimized the number of necessary crew members. Its design also made it an ideal freighter during times of relative peace: to

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provide maximum cargo space, flutes were relatively lightly armed, a design aspect that made them attractive prey for pirates.  

A 500-ton, triple-masted ship, the flute _Durance_ was the largest—at least in terms of tonnage—of the four company vessels bound directly for the Americas in 1729. The Company of the Indies measured tonnage by a ship’s stowage capacity, rather than by the total weight a ship could bear without exceeding its maximum draft. A 1681 ordinance set the cubic tonnage measurement at 1.44m² (42ft²) and assigned a corresponding weight of 2,000 lbs per ton. Tonnage measured by volume was an imperfect indicator of a ship’s actual carrying capacity, as ships often bore lesser or greater burdens than the tonnage advertised by their builders. Ships like the _Duc de Chartres_ with higher carrying capacities of up to a maximum of 850 tons were engaged almost exclusively in trade with the Company’s most distant comptoirs—those in the East Indies, while those with minimal capacities of between 50 and 300 tons operated as slavers shuttling human cargo from Africa to the Americas or as slave trade support. Mid-range ships like the _Durance_ were the most likely to be found in the carrying trade.

Constructed in Holland in 1718, the _Durance_ had completed two full navigations prior to the 1729 sailing. The ship had sailed the circuits between Lorient and Louisiana

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228 All four company ships bound directly for the Americas in 1729 sailed for the Louisiana colony. They were the _Durance, Saint-Michel_ (300 tons and sailing from Nantes, not Lorient), _Alexandre_ (320 tons), and _Baleine_ (390 tons). An additional five company slavers sailed first to the Senegambian coast before carrying their human cargo to the Caribbean and Louisiana. They were the _Annibal_ (200 tons), _Vénus_ (300 tons), _Duc de Bourbon_ (200 tons), _Saint Louis_ (250 tons), and _Nereide_ (200 tons). All but the _Nereide_ visited multiple ports of call in the Americas, selling slaves in Saint Domingue, Martinique, and Louisiana before returning to Lorient. Estienne, _Les armements_, 28; Eltis, _TASTDB_.

229 Haudrère, _La Compagnie française des Indes_, 1: 331–32.
in 1721 and between Lorient and Saint Domingue in 1725; both were direct-trade voyages.\textsuperscript{230} Double rows of cannon lined each side. During the outfitting, each cannon and its seating was inspected by Jacques Gouriou, a master gunner and one of the ship’s nine non-commissioned officers. A native of Port Louis, the twenty-one year old Gouriou also oversaw the stocking of \textit{la Sainte Barbe}, or powder magazine, where kegs of gunpowder and crates of cannon shot were stacked from floor to ceiling. Above deck, barefooted sailors shimmied up and down the masts and out onto the booms, checking to be sure the maze of rope and cording was properly threaded through the countless blocks, hooks, and rings. Others readied the ship’s sails to be unfurled the moment the captain gave the order to raise anchor.\textsuperscript{231}

Dinghies or longboats ferried trade goods and supplies from shore to ship where they were then loaded through the ship’s hatch via a system of ropes and pulleys. In the hold, casks of water, brandy, olive oil, cured meats, and wine joined crates of cheese, rice, and dried vegetables that would sustain passengers and crew alike in the weeks and months ahead. Hard-tack biscuit, baked at the company-run bakery in Lorient, was loaded into tin-lined storerooms intended to prevent infestation and deter rodents. With a view toward making Louisiana less dependent on imported provisions, the Company

\textsuperscript{230} The \textit{Durance}’s maiden voyage in 1721 took place under the guidance of Captain Gaultier, a maritime officer who had the very rare distinction of being removed from his duties by the Company in 1725 due to his inability to properly control his crew. In 1725, Captain Pierre de Brossy oversaw the \textit{Durance}’s second voyage. Brossy successfully completed the Lorient—Saint Domingue circuit between 1725 and 1727, but succumbed to a deadly tropical fever on his next sailing. “\textit{Etats par vaisseaux des officiers, officiers mariniers, et matelots décédés ou noyés de 1721 à 1770},” \textit{Duc de Bourbon}, 1731, FML, 2 P 20, 1 P 45–166, 1 P 246, liasse 2; ANOM, C2 277, fo. 20.

\textsuperscript{231} ANOM, F5B 49, fo. 38; \textit{Durance armement}, 1729, FML, 1 P 244.
entrusted a number of New Orleans-bound citrus plants to the *Durance*’s captain.\(^{232}\) More mundane supplies for everyday use were also brought on board. Bales of Genoa paper went in the hold to satisfy the great demand among company officials and private citizens for writing paper, as did 2,657 ells of cloth intended to help clothe Louisiana’s slaves.\(^{233}\)

High-demand trade goods destined for the Indian trade along the Gulf Coast and throughout the Mississippi Valley were also loaded into the hold. Black and gun powder, cannons, bullets, hatchets, guns, “trading shirts for men and women,” and sewing implements were among the most saleable items employed in the Indian trade. But traders also peddled vanity items such as hand-held mirrors “lacquered in the Chinese style,” dyed red and blue socks, feathers in every possible color, and hats trimmed with fake gold or silver braid. In exchange, company traders would likely receive one of French Louisiana’s only consistently available commodities: furs and pelts.\(^{234}\)

In addition to space for the Company’s trade goods, each of the *Durance*’s officers received an allotment in the hold to be used on the return leg for his own personal stash of trade goods. Commissioned officer pay, though considerably higher


\(^{233}\) The Genoa paper loaded onto the *Durance* never reached the desks of Louisiana’s inhabitants. By the time the ship was unloaded at New Orleans, the paper was “completely spoiled and ruined by the green wood put on this vessel, which sweated during the voyage.” The amount of cloth sent was not nearly sufficient for the number of slaves resident in Louisiana. “There is no cloth for a third of them,” wrote Périer and La Chaise, “the inhabitants are going to complain ... if some other vessel does not bring us more, for this part is going to be used to make coats for those who arrived this year,” Etienne Périer and Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 26 August 1729, ANOM, C13 11, fo. 351–365. A French ell, or *aune*, is equal to approximately 45 inches, a length derived from the act of stretching a piece of cloth from fingertip to shoulder.

\(^{234}\) “Etat de marchandises propres pour la traite à presens des sauvages de la province de la Louisianne à envoyer de France,” 1731, ANOM, F 1A 30.
than that of noncommissioned officers and sailors, did not represent the bulk of an officer’s potential earnings. Rather, maritime officers—and especially ship captains, tended to enrich themselves primarily through the use of a benefit that entitled them to company-sanctioned space on board ship. Known as the port-permis, this benefit allowed officers to bring on board a set amount of specie to be used in the colonies to purchase goods that could later be sold for personal gain in France. The financial allotment, along with a corresponding amount of cargo space on the return voyage, varied according to rank. Captains could board 3,000 piastres, invest them across the Atlantic in goods available through colonial comptoirs, and—barring shipwreck or takeover by pirates, in which case the port-permis was invalidated—carry the goods back to France free of charge on company ships. First Lieutenants could do the same with 1,100 piastres, Second Lieutenants with 660 piastres, and so on.

While use of the port-permis to carry goods from the colonies to France on the return voyage was permissible, use of company ships to carry personal stashes of trade goods from France to the colonies was explicitly prohibited. In the 1720s, trade in French

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235 A survey of salaries paid to commissioned officers on company ships in 1728–1729 shows that captains received 150 livres per month; first lieutenants, 120; second lieutenants, 75; ensigns/scribes, 60; surgeons, between 30 and 45; and chaplains, between 25 and 40. FML, 1 P 168, 1728–1729.

236 Items carried on board through the use of the port-permis were later sold in Nantes, alongside official company trade goods, at the annual company warehouse sales. Though officers realized significant profit from the port-permis, the greatest potential for increased income outside of an officer’s salary was to be found on slave ships, where captains received a thirteen-livre per head bonus for slaves delivered alive to the Americas. This per head bonus averaged between 250 and 300 livres, a sum that surpassed company captains’ 200 livres per month salary. See for example a 1728 company request for funds from the Royal Treasury to pay sixteen eligible slaver captains a total of 4,037 livres, ANOM, C2 19 fo. 97–98. Gaston Martin, “Nantes et la Compagnie des Indes,” Revue d’histoire économique et sociale 15 (1927), 45–47; Chevalier de Pradel, Le Chevalier de Pradel: Vie d’un colon français en Louisiane au XVIII siècle, d’après sa correspondance et celle de sa famille, ed. A. Baillarde and A. Prioult (Paris: Maisononneuve Frères, 1928), 51–52.

237 Haudrère, La Compagnie française des Indes, 1: 392–93.
Louisiana was officially restricted to transactions and goods that flowed through the Company. Mercantile policies embodied by the Company’s right to complete control over imports and exports rendered any alternative trading systems illegal, but as a number of historians have shown, actual enforcement of those policies in Louisiana proved difficult.\textsuperscript{238} Not all of the goods loaded onto the \textit{Durance} (or any other trade ship, for that matter) could be considered legitimate. Before stepping foot in the colony, Louisiana-bound passengers (not to mention ships’ officers) ranging from high-level administrators to soldiers destined for the lowest ranks of a comptoir’s workforce took every opportunity to fill their trunks with contraband trade items that might help them sustain or further themselves once they traversed the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{239} Even Caillot, whose meager allowance ran out before the \textit{Durance} left France, managed to smuggle a small quantity of ribbons and lace onto the ship for future employ in the petty trade.\textsuperscript{240}

Once crewmembers had finished loading all provisions and cargo (legitimate or otherwise), they then had to organize and reorganize the goods onboard so that the cargo’s weight was evenly balanced throughout the hold. Uncooperative weather conditions during the loading could delay a ship’s departure for days, or even weeks at a time, while the combination of choppy seas and precariously balanced cargo being

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\textsuperscript{239} Giraud offers the example of Jean-Daniel Kolly who carried 80,000 livres worth of goods with him on his 1727 crossing. Giraud, \textit{Histoire de la Louisiane}, 5: 149.
\textsuperscript{240} Caillot smuggled ribbons and lace on board the \textit{Durance} but regretted not having brought any fully-assembled panniers, the oblong dress hoops fashionable in France during the first half of the eighteenth century, to supply to women in Caye St. Louis, St. Domingue. Demand for certain metropolitan fashion accessories was high in the island’s port cities. It seems that panniers, given their fragility and awkward size, were not suitable for smuggling onto company ships. No one else on board the \textit{Durance} was able to fill the request for panniers in St. Domingue either. Caillot, “Relation,” 81–82.
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hoisted on board sometimes produced fatal results and further delays for captains who scrambled to replace injured crewmembers. Interment records for the parish of Saint-Louis in Lorient tell the tale of many a sailor knocked into the frigid waters during outfitting who never rejoined their crews.241

Even Caillot found himself floundering about in the Atlantic after being thrown from a dinghy a few days before the *Durance*’s departure. Once he had boarded the *Durance*, boredom struck, motivating the young clerk to seek diversion. While the crews prepared the ships, Caillot and three officers from the *Duc de Chartres* set out on what might best be described as a pleasure excursion—a day trip—on a dinghy. The four young men left the harbor at Penmanec, sailing past the fortifications at Port-Louis and into the open Atlantic. They intended to sail south-southwest along the coast toward the small island of Belle-Ile, but a violent storm overtook them. A series of waves broadsided the dinghy, knocking the four men into the water. All four made it back to the boat and rode out the storm. It was Caillot’s last dinghy excursion, though not his last unintended fall into the sea.242 Two days later, while helping the crew load livestock from longboats onto the *Durance*, Caillot was again plunged into the sea when the loading plank swung around and threw him overboard. The waters below were calm; the crew quickly hauled Caillot back onto the loading deck.

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241 Evidence of numerous armament-related deaths can be found in the sacramental records for the parish of Saint-Louis (Lorient) and Riantec (Port-Louis) housed at Lorient’s city archives. See for example the interment record of François Guenic, a sailor who fell from his ship and drowned in the harbor at Penmanec. His body was recovered on the shore behind the company hospital in Lorient on 9 July 1729, Archives de la ville de Lorient (AVL), GC5 1727–1730.

At the *Durance*’s helm stood the relatively inexperienced twenty-nine-year-old Louis Laurent Aubin, Sieur Du Plessis of Le Havre. Younger than the majority of his peers by some ten years, Aubin Du Plessis (as he was referred to in company records) had first served as a ship’s officer in 1727, when he sailed as junior lieutenant (ensign) aboard the *Dromadaire*. The *Dromadaire* was also a cargo- and passenger-carrying company flute on the Lorient-to-Louisiana circuit, a route and vessel that gave Aubin Du Plessis the experience necessary for his next commission. In 1729 Aubin Du Plessis received the commission of captain, due in part to his extensive familial connections. His father, Jean Baptiste Aubin, Sieur Duchesne, was the artillery commander for both the city of Le Havre and its citadel. His uncle, Gilles Cambry père, served as master shipbuilder in the French Royal Navy from 1720 to 1725, and as commander of the Company’s shipbuilding facilities at Lorient from 1730 until his death in 1739.

Aubin Du Plessis was joined by four additional commissioned officers. André Jacques Bienvenu, a Lorient native who had served as captain of the half-galley *Espérance* on a 1724 sailing to Senegal and as pilot in earlier sailings, was the *Durance*’s

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243 Aubin Du Plessis headed five voyages for the Company of the Indies between 1729 and 1744. After commanding the *Durance* in 1729–1730, Aubin Du Plessis served as captain on the more lucrative triangular route between Lorient, Senegal, and Saint Domingue in 1731–1732, and then on ships bound for Southeast Asia in 1737–1739 and 1742–1743. During this last voyage, he likely encountered Caillot during a stopover in Balassor, India, where Caillot was then overseeing the provisioning of company ships entering the Ganges River. Crew data such as age, previous experience, and home town comes from armament records for the *Durance*, 16 March 1729, FML, 1P168-244, 2P2-23, no. 624.

244 Personnel records of the *Dromadaire*, 1727, FML, 2 P 2 III, 1727, no. 10.

245 Jean Baptiste Aubin, Sieur Duchesne, is listed as Le Havre’s *commissaire garde de l’artillerie* in Aubin Duplessis’s marriage record. 8 July 1739, Marriage of Louis Laurent Aubin and Marie Anne Capeau, actes d’état civil de Lorient, Archives Départementales du Morbihan.

first lieutenant. François Pardimene, also of Lorient, was ship’s surgeon, while Jean François Haumont of St. Malo, the youngest officer at twenty-two, filled the dual role of ensign and ship’s scribe. Rounding out the commissioned crew was thirty-four-year-old Reverend Father Dennis O’Kelly (“Denys Oquely” in company documents), a prematurely gray chaplain who appeared on the crew register as an “Irish Jacobin” and who Caillot described as a “waggish Irish rogue.”

The nine non-commissioned officers all hailed from the neighboring towns of Lorient and Port Louis. They included a master attendant charged with overseeing docking, mooring, and equipping the ship, as well as securing the rigging; a boatswain and his mate; a coxswain; a pilot and his assistant; a master gunner; master carpenter; and ship’s steward. To the noncommissioned officers were added thirty-four additional crewmembers, including twenty-six sailors; three domestics charged primarily with food preparation; and five ship boys, or apprentice sailors, one of whom, Pierre Guyonard of Lorient, was the Durance’s youngest crewmember at age thirteen. The entire crew, save the Irish chaplain and sixteen-year-old ship boy Jean Mary Blanche from Pontivy (an inland village), was composed of men from Brittany’s coastal communities. Among the seamen and ship boys, four (13 percent) were from St. Malo and its immediate environs; seven (23 percent) from Lorient and neighboring Port-Louis; and nineteen (61 percent) from the naval hub surrounding Brest. Many spoke Breton, a Celtic language prominent in southeastern Brittany, especially along the Atlantic coast. The seamen’s

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247 Armament of the Durance, 16 March 1729, FML, 1P168-244, 2P2-23, no. 624.
248 Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 46.
249 Armament of the Durance, 16 March 1729, FML, 1P168-244, 2P2-23, no. 624.
linguistic disparity further reinforced the difference in dress, manner, and gait that separated them not only from the ship’s uniformed officers, but from even the lowest ranking passenger.

Thirty-one passengers appear on the *Durance*'s passenger list, which can itself be seen as a microcosm of colonization efforts under the Company of the Indies. Caillot’s shipmates represent a striking cross-section of travelers bound for Louisiana. Directly attached to the Company were four *employés de la plume* (administrative or bureaucratic employees), two physicians, and twenty skilled laborers who doubled as soldiers. Among the employés de la plume were three bookkeeping clerks. Caillot and his traveling companion Sieur De Troyes were from the Company’s Paris offices; the third, Charles Gontier, was a Lorient-based clerk. A more senior employé de la plume from Paris, the commissioned bookkeeper named Debussy, joined the three clerks.\(^{250}\)

The *Durance* carried a higher number of administrative and clerical employees to Louisiana than any other company ship. Between 1720 and 1731, the Company sent a total of three bookkeepers and sixteen clerks (including bookkeeping, tobacco inspection, and storehouse clerks) to the Louisiana colony; none of them were accompanied by family members. The absence of family suggests that their anticipated tenure may have been too brief to warrant company subsidy of spouses and children. The high turnover among young men working in clerical capacities may have further deterred company

\(^{250}\) Ship Register for the *Durance*, 16 March 1729, ANOM, F5B 49; Commission for bookkeeper De Bussy, 27 January 1729, B43b, fo. 845. For the French, the use of first names in personal and business correspondence during the first half of the eighteenth century was uncommon. I have not found any reference to Sieur De Troyes’s first name, but the full name of the third clerk, Gabriel Gontier, appears in a search and seizure record 5 September 1729, Abstracts of the records of the Louisiana Superior Council, *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 4.3 (1921), 347.
sponsorship of family members. The pool of clerks engaged in the Company’s overseas offices represented a notoriously unstable group. Typically young men under the age of twenty-five, clerks trained in the Company’s Paris offices—and their propensity toward laziness and unreliability—were the object of derision on both sides of the Atlantic.²⁵¹

In contrast to clerical employees, company officials, engineers, physicians, and military personnel were far more likely to cross the Atlantic accompanied by family members. Of the 354 Louisiana-bound passengers traveling on board company ships sailing from Lorient in the years 1727–1729, 128 are listed on ship registers as individuals engaged by the Company in non-clerical capacities.²⁵² They include a merchant, two administrators, two engineers, three physicians (two of whom, Jean de Reytet and Jean Robert Chierdel, were on the Durance), a pilot, two ship carpenters, and one-hundred and six military personnel. At least fifteen (11 percent) of the 128 individuals in non-clerical roles were accompanied by their wives. Five of their children also made the crossing.²⁵³ Like members of the civilian population, non-clerical company personnel already in Louisiana sometimes had family members join them after they had

²⁵¹ A 1731 report to Jacques Deshayes, one of the Company’s Directors in Paris, mentions “une quantité extraordinaire de commis inutiles” (trans. “an extraordinary number of useless clerks”) scattered throughout the Company’s comptoirs as one of the groups contributing to bloated company spending. “Mémoire au sujet de la Compagnie des Indes et de ce qu’il y a à faire pour soutenir cette établissement,” ANOM, C 2 23, fo. 3–8, 28 July 1730; Giraud, History of French Louisiana, 5: 10–11.

²⁵² Not included in this tally are skilled laborers, such as carpenters and blacksmiths, whose passage and start-up costs may have been paid for by the Company. I have excluded this group from my calculations because it is unclear, based on passenger lists and related correspondence, whether company support was contractual and lasting or rather, used simply as an incentive to attract skilled settlers. I tend to think the latter possibility more likely. Ship Registers, 1727–1729, ANOM, F5B 49.

²⁵³ There were fifteen wives in this category who were enumerated on company ship registers between 1727 and 1729, but in some cases, it appears that soldiers’ wives and children were simply left off the official registers. Soldiers’ wives and children were always the last group listed on ship registers, and unlike other passengers, they were not listed by name or by their relationship to specific individuals. Rather, they appear as the generic categories “femmes des soldats” and “enfants des soldats” along with the number of each group present for rationing purposes. Ibid.
established themselves in the colony. From 1727 to 1729, ten such passengers sailed from Lorient to join husbands, fathers, uncles, or sons attached to the Company in Louisiana.

Military men made up the largest percentage of individuals within the company labor pool. They comprised 83 percent of non-clerical employees and 72 percent of all employees sent to Louisiana between 1727 and 1729. Among those sailing to Louisiana during this three-year period were four officers and one-hundred and two soldiers, most of whom were also skilled laborers sent to Louisiana with Plantin’s Company. Named for its commanding officer, Plantin’s Company was a military unit initially charged with protection of company holdings at Lorient. But what began in 1721 as a sort of local militia overseeing the defense of Lorient had, by the mid 1720s, expanded geographically to points across the French Atlantic. Plantin’s Company also emerged as the primary source of skilled laborers for newly established or struggling comptoirs. French historian Philippe Haudrère estimates that 42 percent of Plantin’s soldiers were artisans, while an additional 30 percent possessed some form of agricultural experience. The remaining 28 percent were unskilled laborers. On board the *Durance*, the ratio of skilled to unskilled soldiers was even higher. Twenty soldiers from Plantin’s Company sailed on the *Durance*. Seventeen were skilled laborers, including silk and metalworkers, weavers,

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254 Soldiers in Plantin’s Company were not soldiers of the king, but rather members of a private security force contracted by the Company of the Indies. In terms of function and form, Plantin’s Company can be understood as an eighteenth-century precursor to Blackwater Security Company (now Xe), the private security contractor employed by the United States during the Iraq War. On Plantin’s Company in Louisiana, see Giraud, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, 5: 284–85, 404.

ribbon and nail makers, carpenters, tanners, and candle makers.  Those without skill were either too young to have learned a trade or were impressed into service with Plantin’s Company.

Also at the charge of the Company was Mademoiselle Margueritte Françoise Le Coq of Le Havre, a young woman of twenty-five who according to Caillot “had a very small build, with a very poorly formed waist, golden blond hair, a long and swarthy face, a flat nose” and “four teeth in her mouth which ran one after the other.” The alluring Margueritte Le Coq, daughter of Suzanne Demorils and François Le Coq, hailed from the port city of Le Havre. Following the death of her father, François, in the early 1720s, her mother, Suzanne, kept one daughter at home to help with the family rope manufactory and sent her other daughters off in hopes they might find means to support themselves. For Margueritte, one of the Le Coq family’s middle children, this meant sailing for Louisiana as a prospective bride. When she boarded the Durance, she joined the ranks of dozens, if not hundreds, of women whose passage to Louisiana was underwritten in full or part by the Company. In an effort to balance the sex ratio between white male and

256 Unfortunately, the extant records from Plantin’s Company (ANOM, series D) do not list soldiers’ place of origin, making any geographic analysis of their labor pool difficult. “Etat des soldats de la Cie de Plantin envoyés à la Louisiane,” 17 March 1729, ANOM, D3C, 51, fo. 71.

257 Caillot, “Relation,” fo.47.

258 Francois le Coq, a successful rope maker, died in the early 1720s, likely putting his wife Suzanne, who continued (on a much smaller scale) his rope manufactory after his death, in a difficult financial position. Tax rolls from Le Havre provide a clear picture of the Le Coqs’ changed circumstances after the death of François Le Coq. In 1705, François paid nine livres to the tax collector, while the average rope maker paid just over three. To put that sum in perspective, those with the highest income in 1705—ship captains and merchants, paid an average of fourteen livres annually, while innkeepers paid an average of eight and bakers six. After François Le Coq’s death, his widow and youngest daughter paid only two livres per annum. That tax rate remained steady through 1750. Capitations des villes, Le Havre, 1705, 1735, and 1750, ADSM, C 314, C 328, and C 337.
white female colonists in Louisiana, the Company of the Indies sometimes financed passage for marriageable white women on board company ships sailing from France.

The effort to balance the sex ratio and provide stability to the colony via the introduction of marriageable French women was not new in the late 1720s, nor was the practice limited to Louisiana.\(^{259}\) As early as 1701, just two years after the colony’s founding, Iberville pleaded with the minister of the Marine for “some families and a few girls” who could be “married off shortly after their arrival.”\(^{260}\) His requests for “sturdy” girls to temper the wandering tendencies of Louisiana’s predominantly male residents and increase the colony’s overall chance at survival continued, resulting in the arrival of the first of many ships carrying prospective brides in 1704.\(^{261}\)

The arrival of single French women in the Louisiana colony, however, was sporadic and the number generally insufficient even after the Company of the West (later the Company of the Indies), under the direction of John Law, changed its approach and began the notorious practice of rounding up known prostitutes, criminals, and destitute, sickly women, and carting them off to Atlantic port cities. Though their numbers were small—historian Marcel Giraud

\(^{259}\) See for example the twelve girls taken from the sanatorium in Nantes in 1729. The girls were brought to Lorient where they were placed on board the Mars, a 650-ton ship that bore them to a company comptoir in China. Armament of the Mars, 1729, FML, 1 P 244. On earlier, seventeenth-century efforts to balance the sex ratio on Saint-Christophe and Martinique through the shipment of poor women from metropolitan sanatoriums to the Caribbean colonies, see Philip Boucher, France and the American Tropics to 1700: Tropics of Discontent? (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 135.


estimated that only about 160 of these women of questionable background, exiled by king’s orders, ever made the crossing, and many died shortly after arrival—their reputed presence in Louisiana loomed large in the collective memory of contemporary visitors and novelists alike.262

262 Giraud, *Histoire de la Louisiane*, 3: 267. Repeated references to the dissolute nature of women in French Louisiana appear in contemporary accounts. See for example, Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 6 September 1723, *Mississippi Provincial Archives* (MPA): *French Dominion*, ed. and trans. Dunbar Rowland and A. G. Sanders (Jackson, MS: Mississippi Department of Archives, 1927–1932), 2: 315; Vallette Laudun wrote, “Je crois que plutot que les femmes qu’on envoie ici sont si mal saines et si usées par les galanteries qu’elles ont eues, qu’elles étoient stériles meme avant leur départ” (trans. “I think that most of the women sent here are so unhealthy and so used up by past relations that they are sterile before they even leave [France]”) in Vallette de Laudun, *Journal d’un Voyage à la Louisiane, fait en 1720 par M.***, capitaine de vaisseau du Roi* (La Haye: Chez Musier fils & Fournier, 1768), 255–56. In 1728, Hachard wrote, “As for the girls of bad conduct, they are closely observed here and severely punished by putting them on a wooden horse and whipped by all the soldiers of the regiment that guards our city. This does not prevent them from being more than would fill a reformory.” Marie Madeleine Hachard to Jacques Hachard, 24 April 1728, *Voices from an Early American Convent: Marie Madeleine Hachard and the New Orleans Ursulines, 1727–1760*, ed. Emily Clark (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 82. Antoine-François Prévost’s fictional account (written in the 1730s, first published in its entirety in 1753) is perhaps the best-known depiction of Louisiana’s female populace as thoroughly debauched, *Histoire du chevalier Des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995).
By the time Caillot’s ship sailed for Louisiana, however, the Company had largely discontinued its efforts to round up women by volume over quality in favor of a more organic approach. The demand for marriageable white women remained high throughout the 1720s, but as the decade progressed and the overall population expanded, male inhabitants were more likely to secure brides through the social and economic networks that tied individuals already in the colony to women in the metropole, than through unions with banished prostitutes.263

A survey of passengers bound for Louisiana from Lorient in the years 1727–1729 reveals that single women traveling alone, with no known connection to other passengers on the same ship (i.e. family members, employers, or sponsors), made up the second largest category of women on company ships (table 1).264 Of the seventy-nine female passengers in the survey, twenty-four (30 percent) were unaffiliated single women whose passage was in some part subsidized by the Company. Among them were four widows and a free black woman. Subsidies ranged from full dining privileges at the captain’s table to basic rations. To further encourage male colonists to marry white French women, the Company sometimes provided modest dowries to single women bound for Louisiana. Thus Le Coq is listed on the register of the Durance with 270 livres of company-paid expenses "tant pour son trousseau [trousseau] que pour nourriture."265

263 For a look at the many divergences between official French policy, which encouraged marital endogamy, and day-to-day practice, which often reflected a far more fluid reality, see chapters 1 and 2 in Jennifer Spear, Race, Sex, and Social Order in Early New Orleans (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

264 Survey based on ships’ passenger records from 1727–1729 found in ANOM, F5B 49.

265 Trans. “for her trousseau as well as her rations,” Ship Register for the Durance, 16 March 1729, ANOM, F5B 49.
Despite Caillot’s unfavorable description of Le Coq, he believed she was in some way related to Louisiana’s governor, Etienne Périer. He suspected, given this supposed tie, that she might carry a substantial dowry. In fact, Le Coq did have ties to Périer, but they were not direct (and the dowry was company-sponsored). Rather, her sister, Marie Louise Le Coq, had traveled to Louisiana three years earlier on board the *Baleine* as one of three European servants attached to the Périer household who made the trip from France to Louisiana with the company ship captain turned governor.\(^{266}\) Marie arrived as Madame Périer’s *femme de chambre* or lady’s maid, but left the Périer household shortly after her arrival to wed Joseph Chaperon, a Montreal native, in 1727.\(^{267}\) For Margueritte Le Coq, like her sister before her, the Company’s investment was sound. She married Joseph Larchevesque, a resident of upper Louisiana and native of Quebec, within four months of her arrival in New Orleans.\(^{268}\)

Rounding out the passengers on board the *Durance* were two *fraudeurs de tabac*, or “tobacco cheaters,” exiled by order of the king for violating the strict trade monopoly that allowed tobacco importation and sales in France to be carried out exclusively by the

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\(^{266}\) Domestic servants made up only 4.2 percent of passengers traveling from Lorient to Louisiana between 1727 and 1729. Of the fifteen individuals identified as domestics, three (20 percent) served religious orders, five (33.3 percent) served households headed by company administrators. The remaining seven (46.7 percent) arrived with perspective colonists. Just over half (53.3 percent) were women. Marie Louise Le Coq appears on the ship Register for the *Baleine*, 1 December 1726, ANOM, F5B 49.

\(^{267}\) Périer served as a witness at the marriage of Margueritte’s sister Marie Louise Le Coq to Joseph Chaperon, 20 May 1727. SLC, Marriage Register of St. Louis Cathedral, Book A, 1 July 1720 to 4 December 1730, 256. Chaperon did not return to Montreal. Instead, he became a landholder who, by the mid-1730s, had a reputation as a brutal slaveholder. See the account of multiple charges brought against him before the Superior Council in Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order*, 52–53.

\(^{268}\) See sacramental record entries for both bride and groom on 7 November 1729. SLC, Marriage Register of St. Louis Cathedral, Book A, 1 July 1720 to 4 December 1730, 333; Ship Register for the *Durance*, 16 March 1729, ANOM, F5B 49.
Company. In the late 1720s, tobacco cheaters comprised the largest group of exiles bound for Louisiana. Between 1727 and 1729, seventeen exiles arrived in the colony; fourteen of them were clearly identified as tobacco cheaters.

Of the various occupational and demographic groups typically present on board company ships, colonists (be they concessionaires, independent tradesmen, or something in between), privately contracted laborers (domestics, contracted tradesmen), and clergy were not among the Durance’s passengers. Also absent from the Durance, as they were from most company ships by the late 1720s, were engagés, or indentured servants. In the early 1720s dozens of engagés had traveled to Louisiana to work large-scale concessions granted during John Law’s tenure. Most migrated with their masters to the rich agricultural lands of the newly established Natchez outpost, where concessionaires hoped to establish tobacco plantations. Those who survived the three-year term of their indenture often stayed in the colony, with some settling in New Orleans, where there were opportunities beyond farming, and some remaining in the Natchez area. By the mid-1720s regular company shipments of enslaved laborers from Africa made the use of indentured labor, and its temporary nature, less attractive to prospective planters.

269 Unlike Louis XIV, his successors did not share an unwillingness to engage in forced emigration schemes. A 1719 royal decree issued during the Regency spelled out a detailed plan to round up undesirables, including galériens (galley slaves) and les gens sans aveu (individuals without professions or other means of support), and ship them to the colonies. John Law’s company was not the first to make the export of social and economic outcasts to France’s colonies a central tenet of a monopoly company’s labor policy. Vagabonds and miscreants had been rounded up and sent to the French Caribbean colonies in the previous century. During the course of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the view that forced emigration was beneficial to the mother country (because they could be rid of the dregs of society) as well as the social outcasts uprooted by the policy (because they would be given a chance to be productive in a new environment) had gained increasing traction outside France; France was likely following England’s example. Déclaration du Roi, concernant les vagabons & gens sans aveu, 12 March 1719 (Grenoble: Gaspard Giroud, 1719), John Law Collection, MSS 606, folder 144, THNOC; James D. Hardy Jr., “The Transportation of Convicts to Colonial Louisiana,” Louisiana History 7 (1966): 210–11.

270 ANOM, D2c, 51, 48–79v.
By March 14, the *Durance* was in the final stages of preparation for the Atlantic crossing. With all passengers and crew in place, Pierre Antoine de Fayet, commander of the port at Lorient, boarded the *Durance* to issue final instructions from the Company’s Paris offices and a revised passenger list to Captain Aubin Duplessis. On March 16, 1729, the *Durance* set sail on what would be a seventeen-week voyage that spanned from Lorient, across the Atlantic to Saint Domingue’s Caye St. Louis, through the Gulf of Mexico to the Balize at the mouth of the Mississippi River, and finally to New Orleans.

*Historians have long acknowledged that for Europeans and Africans arriving in the Americas, the initial period of exposure to New World environments—especially in those colonies south of the Mid-Atlantic region, was one frequently marked by sickness. Newcomers’ ability to survive during the so-called seasoning period depended on a host of factors ranging from the month of their arrival to their exposure to infectious diseases. But seasoning was not limited to the bodily transformations which resulted in death for some and increased stamina or immunity for others. Rather, seasoning is a term that can be applied in a more general sense to describe the complete range of physiological,*

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271 “Mémoire de la Compie des Indes servant d’instruction pour le Sr. Aubin Duplessis Commandant le Navire la Durance destinée pour la Louisiane,” 19 February 1729, ANOM, B43, fo. 840–45. The revised passenger list reflected the absence of Jacquette Mitrot, the new bride of company surgeon Jean Reyet, who was listed on the preliminary passenger list issued at the beginning of the armament process. The two had married on 9 January 1729 and were slated to join another recently married couple, Jean Robert Chierdel (also a company surgeon) and Marie Lamy de Camaret, on the *Durance’s* transatlantic journey. It is not clear why Mitrot’s plans to accompany her husband to Louisiana changed, only that they were changed at the last minute. *Durance*, FML, 1P244 liasse 21; “Etat des passagers embarqués sur le *Durance*,” 15 March 1729, ANOM, F5B 49 fo. 38; Marriage of Jean Reyet and Jacquette Mitrot, 9 January 1729 and Marriage of Jean Robert Chierdel and Marie Lamy de Carnaret 9 February 1729; Reyet served as one of the seven named witnesses at the marriage of Chierdel and Lamy, AVL, CG5 1727–1730.
psychological, and emotional responses of newly-arrived men, women, and children as they struggled not only to stay alive, but also to make sense of their surroundings.

The term “seasoning” is one associated primarily with the unconditioned body’s physical response to the colonial environment, but even the standard geographic applications of the term are unnecessarily narrow and misleading. Seasoning, as a physiological, psychological, and emotional process, began well before colonists, slaves, administrators, soldiers, and the like settled into life on land. Seasoning, in all its forms, began at sea. The experiences of and interactions among passengers and crew at sea left lasting impressions that shaped the earliest understanding of a colony most had yet to see firsthand. Ships served as sites of initiation to the wider French Atlantic world.

Much work has been undertaken by historians in an effort to document the experiences of African slaves during the Atlantic crossing, as well as to examine the impact of those experiences on identity formation and cultural cohesion among the founding generation of slaves in the Americas. While historians remain engaged with the historiography of the Middle Passage, however, there has been little examination of how the Atlantic crossing affected non-captives. Though the circumstances surrounding the Atlantic crossing of European passengers differed greatly from those of

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273 Emma Christopher examines the shipboard experiences of captives and their captors, but even this monograph confines itself to the Middle Passage. Emma Christopher, *Slave Ship Sailors and Their Captive Cargoes, 1730–1807* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). The most notable exception to historians’ tendency to look at the crossing purely from the perspective of the Middle Passage can be found in David Cressy’s *Coming Over: Migration and Communication between England and New England in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Cressy views the Atlantic crossing as “a vital formative part of the colonizing experience” for English settlers bound for New England in the seventeenth century. See especially chapter 6, “‘The Vast and Furious Ocean’: Shipboard Socialization and the Atlantic Passage,” 144–77.
enslaved Africans, there were common experiential elements. In 1959, Stanley Elkins described what he perceived as the shocks of enslavement and the Middle Passage as elemental to the worldview of African slaves in the Americas.\textsuperscript{274} In the fifty years since Elkins put forth his thesis, historians have fleshed out a far more nuanced understanding of that same worldview and in doing so, have poked a considerable number of holes in Elkins’s assertion that the shocks of enslavement rendered enslaved Africans in the Americas empty vessels whose character/personality had been irrevocably corrupted.\textsuperscript{275} Despite the flaws in Elkins’s conclusions, however, his assertion that the experiences of captives during the Atlantic crossing shaped their later experiences on land remains valid (and uncontroversial). Clearly, the horrors of the Middle Passage were not shared or even recognized by most European passengers. But for those undertaking the transatlantic crossing for the first time, for those neophytes of the French Atlantic, shipboard experiences and encounters shaped the way in which individuals (slave and free) came to process their future colonial environments.

In 1729, the majority of the Durance’s passengers were undertaking their first Atlantic sailing, and so had at best only a vicarious understanding of what it might mean to be contained within a ship’s confines for weeks or months on end.\textsuperscript{276} Some had relatives, friends, or patrons who, having made the crossing, wrote letters home.


\textsuperscript{276} Stephanie Smallwood refers to Africans’ and Europeans’ vicarious understanding of life at sea prior to departure from their homelands as “rumor-based knowledge.” Smallwood, \textit{Saltwater Slavery}, 129–31.
describing their voyage. From these letters and the handful of contemporary published accounts in circulation, passengers boarding the Durance likely had heard of the bouts of sickness that plagued shipmates, the outlandish rituals visited upon passengers and crew alike, and the sometimes-brutal force used to maintain shipboard discipline. But stories told of life at sea to the uninitiated did little to prepare first time passengers for the experience of shipboard life.

Direct trade ships between Lorient and Louisiana took an average of 14 months to complete the circuit, with the outbound leg ranging from three to six months, depending on whether the ship stopped in the Atlantic Islands (Canary, Cape Verde, and Madeira islands) or in the West Indies and whether passengers disembarked at the Balize or the port of New Orleans. During the crossing passengers lived in close confines, regardless of their status or ration-level, and faced daily reminders that life as they had known it in France had ceased. Consumed first by seasickness that propelled them to the rail where, as Caillot put it, you could “observe a row of people all making the same music … until

277 Most of the published travelers’ accounts from the first half of the eighteenth century were not published until the second. One notable exception was the best selling-travel narrative written by Robert Challe describing his experiences on the Ecuéil, a French Company of the Indies ship that sailed the circuit between France and Pondicherry in 1690–1691. Challe’s account was published posthumously in 1721 by two separate publishers. Robert Challe, Journal d’un voyage fait aux Indes orientales (Rouen: J. B. Machuel Le Jeune, 1721) and (La Haye, 1721).

278 Average length of completed circuit is based on armament and disarmament records of ships sailing between Lorient and Louisiana for ships that left Lorient between 1723 and 1729. This estimate includes time spent in stopovers in the West Indies, the Balize, and New Orleans. There were 18 completed voyages in the sample. Three additional voyages were excluded: one was condemned and two shipwrecked in the Caribbean. Estienne, Les armements, 21–30; Haudrère, La Compagnie française des Indes, 1: 438–40. See also Banks, Chasing Empire across the Sea: Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713–1763 (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003), 84–87.
[each person] had entirely paid the tribute due to the sea,” passengers then faced some of the perhaps less-anticipated aspects of life at sea.279

Sickness and death loomed large in contemporary travel accounts. Violent storms washed livestock overboard, water infiltrated baking stores, and worms infested water supplies.280 And on some ships, man-made ration crises prompted by captains who purposely withheld rations in order to make the voyage more profitable added to the sometimes considerable distress of those on board.281 The longer the voyage and scarcer the provisions, the more likely it became that passengers and crew weakened by insufficient or unbalanced rations would succumb to fevers, intestinal illnesses, and nutritional deficiencies. But while sickness at sea often chose its victim without regard to age, sex, or standing, only first-time crossers were subjected to rites of maritime initiation.

Ritual bribery under the guise of initiation was a common and accepted practice on board company ships. Sailors’ superstition and their embrace of ritual behavior often fell outside of the commissioned officers’ realm of authority, in practice if not official policy. In general, officers did not interfere with time-honored maritime rituals carried out by the crew, choosing instead to keep watch over the proceedings from a distance. But though a ship’s officers might be exempt—or outright barred—from direct

279 Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 21–22. See also, Hachard, Voices from an Early American Convent, 48.
280 Hachard reported that forty-nine sheep and some chickens washed overboard during a storm before the Gironde reached Madeira, while Caillot lamented the loss of many “hens, geese, turkeys, two pigs, and a donkey” in the same area. Hachard, Voices from an Early American Convent, 49; Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 28, also fo. 55–57.
281 In 1725 members of the Louisiana Superior Council notified Company directors in Paris that “the majority of passengers” arriving from France “complain of the bad manners of the captains and of the bad food.” Superior Council of Louisiana to the General Directors of the Company of the Indies, 27 February 1725, MPA, 2: 416.
involvement in crewmembers’ ceremonial doings, the same could not be said of passengers. Indeed, passengers often bore the brunt of the ritualized coercion carried out by sailors and seamen.

For passengers on board the *Durance*, seamen’s rituals usually ended with the lightening of passenger purses or loss of their spirits, such as wine or brandy. Boredom set in quickly during Atlantic crossings, but passengers tempted to climb to the crow’s nest to break the monotony of life on deck found themselves set upon by sailors who quickly bound the climber to the rigging. In Caillot’s case, he had advised the *Durance*’s captain of his intentions, but Aubin Duplessis “pretended to be ignorant of the events that were about to take place,” leaving Caillot unaware of the reaction his climb would trigger. He climbed halfway up the Jacob’s ladder that led from deck to nest before noticing the dozen sailors in pursuit. Thinking they were concerned for his safety, he “wore [him]self out from shouting to them that they could stay put.” But before Caillot could convince them, the sailors caught him, shoved him through the lubber’s hole, and “bound [him] fast with a rope,” refusing to untie him until he promised “to pay the tribute” due from all first-time climbers. A flagon filled with five-pints of brandy secured Caillot’s freedom. He later consoled himself with the knowledge that by the end of the crossing “one-half to three-fourths of the passengers” had been subjected to “that maritime ordinance.”

While certain actions—typically those that found passengers leaving their proscribed portion of the ship (the deck, dining area, cabins, etc.) in favor of an area

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under the exclusive domain of the crew—set in motion immediate chain reactions among sailors in the passenger’s immediate vicinity, one maritime ritual involved the elaborate machinations of the entire non-commissioned crew. Caillot’s provocative account of the Baptism of the Tropics ceremony, a variation on the more common “crossing the Line” ritual practiced by seamen crossing the Equator, reveals that all uninitiated adult passengers, regardless of sex or standing, were subjected to the ‘bribe us or be drenched’ policy of Tropicus’s “troupe of demons.”

The Baptism took place as ships crossed the Tropic of Cancer and appears to have been practiced largely on board French ships. It represented a rare opportunity for sailors to subvert the ship’s normally-rigid hierarchy. Those passengers and crew—including officers—who had never before crossed the Tropic of Cancer were subjected to “baptism” by Tropicus, a sort of composite sea god who shared attributes of the Greek Poseidon and Roman Neptune. Virgin ships and longboats also were subjected to a ceremonial dousing, a practice that continues today. In Chasing Empire across the Sea, Kenneth Banks expresses uncertainty over whether women were subjected to the baptismal ritual, but a number of contemporary descriptions make clear that both sexes endured the Baptism of the Tropics. Even traveling clergy and nuns were not exempt from baptismal bribes. While traveling from Marseille to Louisiana on board the Toulouse in 1720, Father Laval, who had taken part in the ritual on a previous crossing,

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283 The fullest exploration of the various “crossing the line” rituals remains Henning Henningsen’s Crossing the Equator: Sailors’ Baptism and Other Initiation Rites (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1961), though Greg Dening’s contextualization of the English tradition is also useful for understanding the role of the baptism in maintaining workable shipboard relations within the strict confines of maritime hierarchy. Dening, Mr. Bligh’s Bad Language: Passion, Power, and Theatre on the Bounty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 71–80.

284 Kenneth J. Banks, Chasing Empire across the Sea, 77.
counseled his fellow clergy members to submit and not take the baptism too seriously.

Seven years later, Sister Marie Madeleine Hachard chose to keep most of the lurid details of the ceremony to herself, but in a letter home to her father complained that “one has to pay money to be exempt from participating in it,” and revealed that the crew of the *Gironde* had managed to extort two *pistoles* out of her and her fellow Ursulines.285

Caillot’s vivid description of King Tropicus and his “frightful entourage”—a group which included four tar-covered “African” sailors “daubed with flour” playing makeshift instruments, two sailors dressed as pilgrims, twenty as soldiers, and two more playing the role of Tropicus’s angels who were “completely nude except for a sheepskin whose tail flapped between their thighs”—makes clear that the Baptism was a highly ritualized ceremony, taken seriously by sailors and officers alike. Of the *Durance*’s forty-eight crew members, Caillot recorded the participation of at least thirty in the Baptism. As for the ship’s commissioned crew, the captain took part in receiving Tropicus in his cabin, and the officers further soaked those who underwent the baptism, but their roles were secondary to those played by sailors. Passengers who failed to adequately pay homage to Tropicus through tributes of money, brandy, or other spirits faced a thorough dousing with seawater. One unfortunate female passenger thought she had satisfied Tropicus, only to be “hit with more than 50 buckets full of water.”286

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ceremony, the crew had collected “146 livres and 11 flagons of brandy with which they amused themselves for the rest of the day.”

If passengers often bore the brunt of ritualized coercion carried out by sailors and seamen, crewmembers faced coercion of a more brutal nature at the hands of their superiors. On merchant ships, as on naval vessels, the crew operated under a strict hierarchy. At the pinnacle of the hierarchy was the captain, whose office vested in him the power to punish seamen for any breech—real or imagined—of acceptable conduct. But while the captain wielded the absolute power to maintain discipline, he was not the only authority acting to reinforce the hierarchical divisions among crew members. Power flowed from the captain down through the ranks, with each chain in the hierarchy—from the non-commissioned officers to the novices—exercising some level of control over the group beneath them. The captain at sea could be neither dominated nor disciplined. The crew’s lowest ranking members, ship boys, stood at the opposite end of the chain, and were often both.

Novice (also called apprentice) sailors and ship boys soon learned what Marcus Rediker refers to as the “language of punishment” that permeated verbal relations on board ship, but they were not alone in this lesson. Passengers too bore witness to

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Dawdy, Gordon Sayre, and Carla Zecher (Quebec: Septentrion, 2008), 87–90. Dumont de Montigny wrote that French ships and crews crossing three separate planes—the Grand Banks off the coast of Terre Neuve (Newfoundland), Tropic of Cancer, and Equator—underwent the baptismal ceremony, but that any passengers and crewmembers who had been baptized at the Equator were exempt from the other two by default. A variation on the ceremony also took place on French ships passing through the Strait of Gibraltar, see Vallette de Laudun, *Journal d’un Voyage*, 35–38.

287 Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 45.

288 Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 164, 216–22. B. R. Burg looks at some of the motivations for boys to go to sea as the youngest and lowest ranking members of a ship’s crew in *Sodomy*
shipboard discipline, building their lexicon of words to describe instruments and processes imposed on the punished. Through personal diaries, correspondence, and memoirs, passengers carefully recorded scenes of punishment, taking time to recount in detail differences in process and effect between “wet” vs. “dry” keelhauling; between lashings administered by cat-o’nine-tails with their multiple loose cords vs. garcettes with their braided ones.²⁸⁹

On the Durance, Caillot too recorded episodes of discipline, often with the same clinical clarity he employed when describing noteworthy marine or plant life. But what Caillot found more difficult to note objectively was the public torment and humiliation of the ship boys (whom he refers to as “poor wretches” and “poor creatures”) at the hands of bored officers. “When the wind is lacking,” wrote Caillot, “the officers, in order to amuse themselves, say that the wind is closed up in their breeches, and on these insinuations they are forced to pull their breeches down.” The boys are then tied “to the capstan by the middle of their bodies,” given whips, and forced to run round in circles, with each whipping the boy in front of him—and getting the same treatment himself from the boy behind. When the first boy struck “feels himself hit sharply, he becomes animated and does not go easy on the one who is in front of him, so when they really get going, you see them running after the other, twisting and turning, and all crying out like they are possessed.” The demoralization of the Durance’s five ship boys aged thirteen to sixteen, who often wound “up with bloody buttocks from the force used on them,” struck Caillot

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as being somehow outside the pattern of behavior that his limited experience allowed him to process as expected, or “normal.” The officers’ seemingly senseless abuse of ship boys did not fit neatly into his understanding of hierarchy and order, though Caillot’s objections may have stemmed more from witnessing officers behave in a manner he considered beneath their station, than from any inherent sympathy for the ship’s lowest ranking crewmembers.

How quickly shipmates overcame their boredom by playing cards, dancing, socializing, or witnessing outlandish and sometimes violent spectacles depended largely on the winds. Cooperative winds hastened a ship’s entry into the Caribbean Sea, while the lack of wind or a prolonged presence in the doldrums might delay entry by days or weeks. Either way, once a ship approached the Caribbean, passengers and crew faced fewer opportunities for diversion. For Gulf Coast–bound ships, passengers and crew were most vulnerable to food shortages, parasitic illnesses, and related complications. After spending weeks on the open waters of the Atlantic, supplies were often dangerously depleted or damaged. The time between a ship’s entry into the Caribbean and its arrival at a port of call was critical in determining the overall health of those on board.

As the *Durance* sailed through the chain of Windward Islands toward its first port of call at Caye St. Louis, Saint Domingue, provisions became a point of near daily contention, with a number of passengers accusing Captain Aubin Duplessis of hoarding supplies, “wasting” water on his orange trees, and serving “aphid-infested peas” to passengers entitled to the highest ration level (“à la table”) while the officers “dined on

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After passengers threatened to draw up a signed memorandum to the Company reporting the captain’s ration irregularities—a mutinous suggestion backed up by the presence of twenty ill-fed and disgruntled soldiers from Plantin’s Company, Aubin Duplessis made an attempt to ameliorate passenger rations. His efforts were undermined days later, as the ship was passing Puerto Rico, by rats that had “bitten through” ten barrels of water, forcing him to reduce water allotments to one pint per day. This reduction, combined with the water’s poor quality, which Caillot described as “stinking and greenish” with “little worms wriggling in it,” and the ship’s dwindling provisions, weakened crewmembers and passengers alike. By the time the Durance dropped anchor at Caye St. Louis, Caillot reported that at least twenty-two (28 percent) of the seventy-nine individuals on board showed signs of “scorbu,” or scurvy.

Scurvy has long been associated with those who made their living on board ships during the Age of Sail, but contraction of the nutritional disorder was not limited to sailors. Passengers and slaves on long-haul voyages also succumbed to scurvy, which first appeared as “red spots in the Arms and Legs” that soon turned “black and then blue.” In its more advanced stages, the vitamin C deficiency was characterized by “an extraordinary Weakness, a Redness, Itching and Rottenness of the Gums, and a Looseness

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291 There were multiple ration levels on board Company ships; each was based on passenger rank. Company administrators, including clerks, were at the top of the ration hierarchy and were entitled to eat the same quality and quantity of food found at the officers’ table. Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 56–57.

292 Typical water rations stood at three pints per day, per person, with one reserved for drinking and the other two for cooking and food preparation.


of the Teeth.” Scurvy’s causes were poorly understood, although there was general agreement that nutrition played a role, perhaps because the malady’s most prominent manifestations occurred in the mouth. That the label was often applied to a variety of ailments, including any number of unrelated fevers, further impeded prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. It was not until the decades following James Lind’s 1754 publication of A Treatise on Scurvy that the addition of citrus fruits to seamen’s diets became a recognized method of prevention.

As ships entered the Caribbean then, shipmates often found themselves in a weakened state ill-suited to a changing landscape where heightened awareness of the environment outside the confines of their wooden world was imperative. While sightings of other vessels in the open waters of the Atlantic were rare, once ships entered the Caribbean, maritime traffic increased dramatically, with vessels from across Europe converging on their respective island colonies. In the confines of the Caribbean Sea, the increased presence of cargo-laden ships also attracted a fair number of sloops, galleys, and other ships engaged in piracy. Merchant vessels were on high alert. Crews and

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297 Lind conducted a series of clinical trials in the 1750s aimed at achieving a better understanding of the causes and prevention of scurvy. His 1754 publication was followed in 1757 by An Essay on the Most Effectual Means of Preserving the Health of Seamen, which outlined prevention techniques. Lind’s solution was not immediately embraced by shipping companies and naval administrators, possibly because a number of his scientific predecessors had suggested alternative, ineffectual remedies, making Lind’s solution just one among many. The British Royal Navy did not adopt Lind’s prescription until the mid-1790s. Carpenter, The History of Scurvy, 46, 51–57; James Lind, A Treatise on the Scurvy (Edinburgh: A. Kinkaid & A. Donaldson, 1753); An Essay on the Most Effectual Means of Preserving the Health of Seamen in the Royal Navy (Edinburgh: A. Millar, A. Kineaid, and A. Donaldson, 1757).
passengers (including at times female passengers dressed as men) had to be at the ready to take up arms against perceived threats. Captains were under orders to throw any Company correspondence into the sea (preferably in a “sack weighted down with a cannon ball”) should they “find themselves in danger of being taken by pirates, or by any nation [France] might be at war with.” 298 When the Durance entered the Caribbean, the ship came into direct contact with no less than ten other vessels before it reached its first port of call at Caye St. Louis. Two flew the Flag of No Quarter, two others the English flag, and six more were company ships. 299 Among those chartered by the Company of the Indies were two ships which, like the Durance, were engaged in the direct carrying trade—shuttling a variety of goods, correspondence, and passengers back and forth between France and her circum-Caribbean colonies. Four others were company-outfitted slavers.

The Durance dropped anchor in Caye St. Louis, mid-May 1729. Located on the southern coast of the island’s southern peninsula, Caye St. Louis (modern-day Les Cayes) was home to 797 free inhabitants and 4,818 slaves in 1720. 300 Unlike Louisiana, none of the French Caribbean islands were controlled by the Company. Its presence in Martinique and Guadeloupe was limited to the purchase of tobacco. When necessary, company ships—slavers and cargo ships alike—dropped anchor in Martinique for provisions or to

298 “Mémoire de la Compie des Indes servant d’instruction pour le Sr. Aubin Duplessis Commandant le Navire la Durance destinée pour la Louisianne,” 19 February 1729, ANOM, B43b: 840v.
drop off sick passengers and slaves, but stopovers in the Caribbean took place largely in Caye St. Louis, where the Company maintained a dedicated port. Caye St. Louis was the only company-controlled and operated port in the West Indies. Officials there collected and paid for tobacco and other cash crops bound for France. And for most of the 1720s company slavers called at Caye St. Louis to sell their captive cargo, but the Company ceased delivering slaves to Saint Domingue in 1728 due to difficulty collecting payment from the island’s planters.

The primary function of Caye St. Louis, however, was to serve as a provisioning port for all company ships on the France-Louisiana circuit. Whether inbound or out, Caye St. Louis supplied water, spirits, livestock, fresh fruit, and other rations to transatlantic crews and passengers. When the *Durance* arrived Captain Aubin Duplessis met with local company agents Chalon, Girard, Marlot, and Siroux to deliver packages and letters entrusted to him by company administrators in France, and receive any Louisiana- or France-bound communications in kind. Through these local contacts, the captain also secured the necessary provisions to sustain passengers and crew on the next leg of their voyage. The instructions issued to Aubin Duplessis from company headquarters named two specific provisions he was to procure from Chalon: *guildeve*, a sugar-based distillation known more commonly as taffia, and orange juice. The explicit inclusion of the latter item is curious, given the unsettled state of knowledge surrounding scurvy and its prevention.301

301 “Mémoire de la Compie des Indes servant d’instruction pour le Sr. Aubin Duplessis Commandant le Navire la Durance destinée pour la Louisiane,” 19 February 1729, ANOM, B43b, fo. 840v.
Though the captain’s orders prohibited him from allowing any of the *Durance’s* passengers to disembark at Caye St. Louis, it appears Aubin Duplessis made an exception for the administrative personnel. While the ship’s crew readied the *Durance* and made needed repairs, Caillot and his fellow clerks explored the settlement. In the evenings, they dined with company agents, and with the officers of other ships in port. After an eight-day stopover, the *Durance* left Caye St. Louis on May 27, 1729.

Within days of disembarking from Caye St. Louis, Caillot and his shipmates encountered a slave ship in the Gulf of Mexico. The *Galathée*, a frigate owned by the Company, had sailed from Lorient bound for the west coast of Africa on May 25, 1728. After stops in Senegal and Goree Island, the *Galathée* left Africa with a cargo of four hundred slaves. The ship’s cargo and crew did not fare well on the Atlantic crossing. Usually French ships bound for Louisiana had scheduled stops either in Martinique or, more commonly, in Saint Domingue to stock up on provisions, but Company officials intended the *Galathée* to bypass the West Indies, possibly in an attempt to overcome a series of delays the ship incurred at Lorient. It was not to be. By the time the *Galathée* reached the Caribbean, mortality among captives and crew had soared, forcing Captain Quinet de Préville to make an unscheduled call at Caye St. Louis, where he disembarked forty-five captives, nine sailors, and an officer stricken by scurvy.

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302 The *Galathée* was plagued with setbacks during its outfitting at Lorient, including delays in readying the ship and in receipt of trade goods destined for trade in the Galam region of Senegal, but the most serious stemmed from difficulties securing a qualified team of officers to command the ship. Lorient Port Commander de Fayet spent most of March and April 1728, trying to assign officers and find a replacement for Captain De La Vigne, whose personal affairs in Nantes prevented him from taking the helm of the *Galathée*. In late-April, de Fayet received company approval to replace De La Vigne with Captain Quinet de Préville, an officer who had served as second captain on two previous sailings. “Correspondance de la Compagnie avec M. de Fayet au sujet du Radoub et de l’armement de la Galathée pour le Senegal,” 7 June 1727 through 2 June 1728, ANOM, C2 19, fo. 37–38, 197–98.
The *Galathée* took a lethal 127 days to reach New Orleans. The lengthy voyage resulted in the deaths of 128 slaves and 11 crewmembers. Those figures translate into 32 percent mortality among captives and 20 percent among crew—this at a time when the average mortality on company slavers was 7 percent. In a letter written by governor Etienne Périer and commissioner Jacques de La Chaise to company directors in Paris, the Louisiana officials reported that since the arrival of Quinet de Préville in New Orleans on January 18, 1729, “he has had twenty-five to thirty negroes die—although they have coats—all of scurvy.” Quinet de Préville and the majority of his crew also fell prey to the nutritional malady.\(^{303}\) When the *Durance* encountered the *Galathée* off the coast of Louisiana, the slaver was on its way back to France, commanded by replacement captain Thomas Laisné. Fourteen of the original fifty-six crew members ultimately succumbed to the disease before the ship dropped anchor at Lorient in March 1730. Their deaths stretched literally across the Atlantic from Senegal to Louisiana. Some perished at sea, others in ports at Gorée Island, Caye St. Louis, and the Balize. Still more languished in New Orleans.\(^{304}\)

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“A Place Drowned by the Sea”\(^{305}\)

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the passage from Lorient to Louisiana came not in the open waters of the Atlantic, but near the journey’s end, when company ships reached the

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\(^{305}\) Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 107.
Gulf Coast. Despite New Orleans’s status as a port town, it was unlike many other French Atlantic, Caribbean, or Gulf Coast ports in that it was founded not along the coast itself, but rather thirty-five leagues up one of the world’s most powerful, sinuous rivers. Located in a bend of the Mississippi River, New Orleans was not easily accessible to deep-draft sailing ships. Mud lumps, tangles of dead trees, and sandbars at the river’s mouth complicated navigation and posed a serious threat to heavily loaded ships. To minimize the risk posed to such vessels, cargoes, passengers, and slaves were often unloaded or disembarked at the mouth of the Mississippi at the Balize (figure 13), a swampy, semi-fortified island outpost constructed between 1722 and 1724 at the river’s southeast pass. The Balize served as the point of first contact for arriving cargo and
passenger ships. Passengers were sometimes stranded there for days or even weeks, depending on their health and the availability of boats to bring them further upriver, before they could embark on the final leg of their journey.

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Chapter 4: Louisiana As a Company Colony

When the *Durance* dropped anchor off the coast of the Balize in late June 1729, its civilian passengers were loaded into two pirogues. Six slaves rowed each vessel ashore. Passengers’ trunks, furniture, mattresses, and other possessions followed. At the Balize, the travelers rested briefly at the home of Balize commander Bernard Duvergé before facing the arduous, exhausting final leg from the coast to New Orleans.\(^{307}\)

Traveling this last stretch—which took on average between six and seven days—was often made more difficult by the weakened and often sickly condition of individuals who already had been at sea for months.\(^{308}\)

For vessels engaged by the Company of the Indies, much of the labor required to transfer cargoes from arriving ships’ holds to smaller transports was performed by the more than three dozen adult company-owned slaves assigned to Duvergé and his enslaved African overseer Jolicoeur.\(^{309}\) At least eight of these slaves are identified in a

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1731 inventory as *matelots*, or seamen. Given the nature of maritime work at the Balize, these men likely performed a labor role similar to that of canoemen along the west African coast—a resonance that must have seemed striking to arriving African captives who found themselves shuttled both on and off slave ships from opposite sides of the Atlantic by skilled African seamen. In addition to the *matelots*, there were thirty-eight other company-owned slaves residing at the Balize in 1731: one overseer; seven skilled slaves, including two carpenters, a tailor, baker, nurse, and driver; fourteen male laborers and ten female; and six children ranging in age from three months to six years. Slaves residing at the Balize constituted the second largest concentration of company slaves in Louisiana at 19 percent of the Company’s total slave holdings.

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310 The eight sailors at the Balize were part of a larger group of company slaves tasked with working on the colony’s waterways. Enslaved sailors made up 16.8 percent of the company’s adult slave population, with thirteen assigned to approximately a half-dozen small boats based in New Orleans, seven to the Natchez post upriver from New Orleans, and nine to Governor Périer’s plantation. “Etat general des Dépnses de la Comp. des Indes à la Louisiane pour l’année 1729,” ANOM, B43; “Inventaire de l’habitation de la Comp. des Indes sur le fleuve St. Louis vis a vis la Nouvelle Orléans et de tous les Batiments marchandises, des ustensils, des nègres et bestiaux,” 2 September 1731, ANOM, C2 24.


312 By the mid-1720s this labor force resided in thatched huts on a neighboring island that was accessible to and from the Balize via a wooden footbridge. See keyed letter V in “Plan du fort de la Balise et des isles adjacentes,” July 1731, ANOM, 4 Dépot des Fortifications des Colonies (DFC), 111B (figure 13). For further details on the slaves residing at the Balize, see Appendix A.

313 Of the other 199 individuals owned by the Company in Louisiana, 154 resided at the Company plantation located across the river from New Orleans (in present-day Algiers, Louisiana), 34 were based at the Natchez post, and 21 at Governor Périer’s plantation. “Inventaire de l’habitation,” 2 September 1731, ANOM, C2 24.
The arrival of the *Durance* coincided with that of the slave ship *Vénus*. Operated by the Company of the Indies, the *Vénus* sailed from Lorient on February 4, 1729, and reached the Senegal concession three weeks later. After trading along the West African coast from Gorée Island south to Rio Nunez (in present-day Guinea), the *Vénus*’s captain, Jean-Baptiste Gaultier de La Renaudais, set sail for Louisiana on April 16 with a cargo of 450 slaves.

The *Vénus* reached the Balize two months later, after a sixty-one-day Atlantic crossing, but contrary winds prevented the ship from dropping anchor until early July. When the ship finally landed, it was forced to drop anchor five leagues from the Balize and rely on smaller boats to shuttle its surviving human cargo to land.  

At the Balize the number of African captives from the *Vénus* far outnumbered available crewmembers, many of whom were suffering from scurvy, prompting Duvergé to appoint several company employees from the *Durance*, including Caillot, as impromptu overseers. Each newly arrived white male passenger from the *Durance* was charged with oversight of a pirogue-full of captives on the journey from the Balize to New Orleans.  

Many of the African slaves who had boarded the *Vénus* from company outposts along the Senegambian coast some two months earlier also suffered the advanced stages of scurvy. Two days after pushing off from the Balize, the fleet of lighters (*bateaux* or

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315 Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 94.

chaloupes in French) carrying passengers from the Durance and slaves from the Vénus had traveled only three leagues. Six of the slaves in Caillot’s boat alone had succumbed to scurvy and all of the travelers suffered from the oppressive heat, unavoidable dampness, and swarms of insects.\(^{317}\)

The overwhelming presence of gnats (specifically biting midges, also known as no-see-ums) and mosquitoes on the voyage from the coast was a reoccurring complaint in mémoires from early French colonial Louisiana. Caillot swore that nothing could keep the insects away at night, when “there were so many of them that we smashed them on our faces by the fistful.” The young Ursuline novitiate Marie Madeleine Hachard provided a similar account of her first encounters with “Monsieurs Mosquitoes” and “frappes d’abord,” the latter of which she claimed came “in such great numbers that one could cut them with a knife.”\(^{318}\)

As Caillot and his fellow travelers neared the comptoir’s capital they floated past the habitations, or plantations, of the Canadian-brothers Joseph and François Carrière and then made a planned stop at the Tixerant (also Tisserand) plantation. Louis Tixerant, a Paris native and former ironmonger, had arrived in Louisiana in the early 1720s. He served first as a warehouse guard at Fort Louis in Mobile and later as storekeeper at the company warehouses in Biloxi. By 1725 an inventory scandal had unseated Tixerant


\(^{318}\) Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 96–97; Marie Madeleine Hachard to Jacques Hachard, 27 October 1727, Voices from an Early American Convent, 56, 68. See also Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, Regards sur le monde atlantique, 1715–1747, eds. C. Zecher, Shannon Dawdy, and Gordon Sayre (Québec: Septentrion, 2008), 111 and 137.
from his official company post. On his arrival in Louisiana Jacques de La Chaise recorded multiple complaints issued by colonists “against the keepers of the warehouses,” including Tixerant. Those with grievances pointed to the “magnificence in which those people live” with “many slaves, good table, and good lodgings” as proof of keepers’ profiteering and pilfering of company stores. Based on the nature of company claims against him, it is possible that the basis for at least some of Tixerant’s wealth was secured via personal profiteering, misappropriation of warehouse stores, and illegal personal trade with Spanish vessels stopping at Biloxi. By the late 1720s Tixerand had accumulated enough land and slaves, including forty-five Africans (thirty-three adults and twelve children) and two Indians, to be considered one of the colony’s gros habitants, or large-scale, settled planters.

Playing hosts to the newly arrived company employees while the slaves in their charge remained at the riverbank, Tixerant, who Caillot characterized as a “man who is a friend of pleasures and good food,” and his “young and beautiful” wife Marie served

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319 Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 8 March 1724, MPA, 2: 303.
320 The Company initiated criminal proceedings against Tixerant after relieving him of his duties, but the outcome remained unresolved until ten years after the retrocession of the colony to the Crown. Ibid., 336. The only references in the Superior Council records to Tixerant’s condemnation appear in 1741 and 1743. Both involved Jean Baptiste Prevost, one of the Company’s agents who remained in Louisiana after the 1731 retrocession primarily to collect outstanding debts. On 4 March 1741, Tixerant was ordered by the Superior Council to pay 26,834 livres to the Company, 15,445 of which he owed for inventory missing from the time he had served as warehouse keeper in Biloxi in 1721–22. Two years later, in a petition filed 20 November 1743, Prevost was still trying to collect on the debt, 3 and 4 March 1741 and 20 November 1743, LSM-SCR. Trade with the Spanish for the benefit of the Company was permitted, but it appears some of the warehouse keepers, including Tixerand, were trading company stores on their own accounts. Tixerand also benefited financially from his September 1724 marriage to André Carrière’s widow, Marie Arlut. La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 8 March 1724, MPA, 2: 300, 303, 336.
them a mid-day meal “in as refined a manner as possible for the country and season.” The meal lacked wine due to irregular and damaged arrivals of the staple from France, but the Tixerants compensated by serving their guests generous quantities of brandy.\footnote{Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 97–99.}

Well fed for the first time in weeks, the travelers returned to the river. They continued on through the night, stopping once more two leagues from New Orleans to eat, rid themselves of traveling clothes plagued with “the stench of scurvy-ridden people,” and switch conveyances from a small, sail-powered vessel to a pirogue.\footnote{Those afflicted with scurvy, even in its early stages, often emit a putrefied stench from their mouths. As scurvy progresses, ulcers appear on the body and gums rot worsening the smell of decay. Ibid., fo. 99.}

In contemporary accounts, travelers bore witness to the sheer torment of this last leg of the voyage. In 1727, Sister Hachard lamented to her father that “all the hardships of the Gironde were nothing compared to what” she and her fellow Ursulines suffered “in this little crossing, which is only thirty leagues upriver, from Belize [sic] to New Orleans.” Two years later, Caillot echoed Hachard’s description. “The eight days it took us for that bit of navigation,” he wrote, “tired us more than the whole crossing from France.”\footnote{Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 94; Hachard, Voices from an Early American Convent, 67.} By the time those who had survived this stretch of the journey arrived at their final destination some must surely have wondered if the months-long trials of their watery trans-Atlantic and riverine voyage were just a preview of difficulties ahead.\footnote{On the difficulty of the voyage between the Balize and New Orleans, see also Kenneth J. Banks, Chasing Empire Across the Sea: Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713–1763 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 85–86.}

After an arduous journey upriver marked by leaky boats, man-eating mosquitoes, questionable sustenance, and the scurvy-induced deaths of at least six of the slaves under
his charge, Caillot finally arrived at the port of New Orleans on July 13, 1729, around nine-thirty in the morning.\textsuperscript{326} Caillot, the bookkeeper De Bussy, and two more clerks—De Troyes and Gontier—deposited their pirogue in front of the company warehouses. They turned over the surviving slaves from the \textit{Vénus} and made their way on foot to the home of François Chastang, a chief inspector of the Company’s accounts and the newly arrived employees’ superior. Considered indecisive and “old and broken” by Governor Etienne Périer and Director-General Jacques de La Chaise, Chastang had arrived from France in 1728.\textsuperscript{327} Upon receiving the travelers he initially extended an invitation for them to dine with him, but quickly reversed course when talk turned to the possibility of having their “baggage brought to his house.” The prospect of living as well as working with the new recruits, if only for several days, “frightened him” and made him extremely “apprehensive.”\textsuperscript{328}

If Périer’s and La Chaise’s characterization of Chastang was accurate, perhaps it helps explain Chastang’s reticence toward the Company’s new recruits; or perhaps the auditor’s own past experience with office employees weighed on his mind. Several scandals involving dissolute clerks had unfolded in recent years. In 1724 a bookkeeping clerk named Paulin Cadot had been found guilty of libel and slander, fined, jailed, and dismissed from his company post for writing “verses against the honor of the ladies of

\textsuperscript{326} Etienne Périer and Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 26 August 1729, \textit{MPA}, 2: 659–60.

\textsuperscript{327} Passenger list for the \textit{Aurore}, 1728, ANOM, F5B 49, no. 27; Etienne Périer and Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 26 August 1729, \textit{MPA}, 2: 665–66.

\textsuperscript{328} Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 100.
The content of his dirty limericks was deemed so offensive that twenty of the objectionable versus were ordered stricken from court records. Two more New Orleans clerks—one each from the cashier and bookkeeping offices—were dismissed that year for petty theft.

The year 1728 brought a tidal wave of bad behavior and dismissals. In the spring three clerks had been involved in a forgery scheme; the ringleader, who confessed under torture to forging La Chaise’s signature on promissory notes, was sentenced to “imprisonment for life in the galleys.” Two others were dismissed around the same time: the first, Sieur La Goublaye, for being “lazy;” the second, Nicolas Bion, for being “absolutely incorrigible in the matter of drink.” In the case of Bion, he was not just a drunk; he was severely in debt. When he lost his company post he had no way to support himself or pay his lengthy list of creditors. He had started in 1722 as an assistant director of company accounts with an annual salary of 3,000 livres. 1724 saw Bion sharing that title with another employee and his salary cut to 1,200 livres. La Chaise then authorized an additional payout of 800 livres for Bion’s help with the old accounts and recommended he be reinstated as sole assistant director of accounts if he stayed sober.

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329 Petition to sue Paulin Cadot, 5 and 7 February 1724; Decision and sentencing in case vs. Paulin Cadot, 28 March 1724, LSM-SCR.
331 Etienne Périer and Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 31 July 1728, MPA, 2: 578–79.
332 Ibid., 3 November 1728, 594; “Etat des appointemens accordés aux Directeurs et Employés à la Louisiane à commencer du premier janvier 1722,” ANOM, B 43, fo. 41.
333 When Bion petitioned to return to France, where he stood a better chance of finding work to pay off his debts than in New Orleans, where his reputation prevented him from doing so, he owed a total of 2,336 livres to twenty-seven creditors, including six different bakers, a laundry woman, the chief cashier, a seamstress, provisioners, and many others. List of Creditors and Petition of Nicolas Bion, 9 and 25 January 1729, LSM-SCR.
Bion failed to do so and was demoted yet again, this time to a clerkship post. In 1728 he was dismissed outright.\textsuperscript{334}

The most violent incident involving clerks occurred in June 1728 when a group of company employees gathered at a local tavern to celebrate the feast day of Claude Dubuisson, who worked as a bookkeeping clerk in the New Orleans offices.\textsuperscript{335} Among those in attendance was Sieur Bernaudat, one of Dubuisson’s office mates.\textsuperscript{336} Both clerks were held in poor regard by their superiors who viewed them as sloppy—account books copied by Bernaudat in 1727 contained “a thousand mistakes” and had to be redone—and “very disorderly.”\textsuperscript{337} After passing the evening drinking in Dubuisson’s honor, Dubuisson and Bernaudat staggered out of the tavern into the street, where they commenced to argue. Swords were drawn, and Bernaudat, “glutted with wine,” dealt his friend a fatal blow.\textsuperscript{338}

The incident was at first characterized as a duel but a later investigation revealed it to have been no more than a drunken brawl gone wrong. La Chaise seemed thoroughly convinced that the killing of one clerk by another had been an accident, or at least he framed the story as an accident to avoid upsetting Bernaudat’s patron and godfather, the

\textsuperscript{334}“Etat des appointemens accordés aux Directeurs et Employes à la Louisianne,” 1722; “Estat general des depenses que la Comp. des Indes a ordonné être faites à la Louisianne,” 1724, ANOM, B 43 fo. 41, 376; Etienne Périer and Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 31 July 1728, \textit{MPA}, 2: 578–79.

\textsuperscript{335}Dubuisson arrived from Lorient 29 April 1726. Passenger list for the \textit{Loire}, 18 January 1726, ANOM, F5B 49, no. 19; Father Raphael to Abbé Raguet, 18 May 1726, ANOM, C13A 10, fo. 43.

\textsuperscript{336}Bernaudat arrived from the Company’s Paris offices in early 1727. Passenger list for the \textit{Baleine}, 30 November 1726, F5B 49, no. 21.

\textsuperscript{337}Etienne Périer and Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 2 November 1727 and 3 November 1728, \textit{MPA}, 2: 551, 594.

duc d’Orléans. La Chaise appeared more concerned about Bernaudat’s welfare than the loss of Dubuisson’s life. In a letter to company directors in Paris, La Chaise recommended the Company “obtain a pardon for this young man” as soon as possible.

“We have put him into the fort at Mobile as the safest place while waiting for word from you,” wrote La Chaise, adding that Bernaudat “seemed to us to be deeply touched by the unexpected death of his comrade,” even arranging for “a service held for the repose of his soul.”

Whatever actually happened between Dubuisson and Bernaudat, it is perhaps not surprising that François Chastang was hesitant to assume the new recruits who stood before him bedraggled and sickly after a long voyage would not soon fall prey to similarly transgressive behavior. It was common knowledge in the offices that Caillot, De Troyes, and Gontier were intended as replacements for the string of clerks lost or dismissed in 1728. Rather than put his own home and reputation at potential risk, Chastang led the bookkeeper and three clerks to an inn on Royal Street. The inn, run by Louis and Anne Jarry, was a favorite among visiting ships’ officers and provided Caillot with meals and a room for most of his tenure in Louisiana.

The following day the bookkeeper and three clerks went directly to the offices of Governor Etienne Périer to register their arrival in the colony. From there they crossed

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339 Ibid.
340 Ibid., 664.
341 Louis Jarry is the only New Orleans inhabitant in both the 1726 and 1727 censuses listed as “innkeeper,” though it seems other inns were operational by 1729. Caillot took note of “several inns and taverns where one is not very well served, but is instead well swindled.” Other accommodations could be found in the houses of colonists who rented rooms. Maduell, “General Census of All Inhabitants of the Colony of Louisiana Dated January 1, 1726” and “Census of New Orleans as Reported by M. Périer, Commandant General of Louisiana, July 1, 1727,” The Census Tables, 71, 87; Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 100, 106.
the central square, or Place d’Armes, to company headquarters, where they met with La Chaise. Company regulations required all commissioned officers and employees to be sworn in immediately on arrival by local company directors.\(^{342}\) As director-general, La Chaise oversaw their swearing in, introduced the new recruits to other company bureaucrats and members of the Superior Council, and directed them to their assigned offices.\(^{343}\)

In New Orleans most clerks, bookkeepers, and administrators passed their days at the Company’s headquarters, or la Direction, in a compound of newly constructed buildings that filled the entire block bounded by Chartres, St. Pierre, St. Louis, and the river (figure 14).\(^{344}\) The handful of company clerks employed outside la Direction worked in the warehouses and at the mill. The headquarters were, according to Caillot, “very well built, large, and spacious,” with living quarters for La Chaise and his family, “a great meeting hall”—decked out with a tapestry as well as the requisite crucifix and portrait of the king—and “three offices.”\(^{345}\) The first office was occupied by Superior

\(^{342}\) “Ordonnance pour les Apointemens des Officiers et Employés de la Louisianne,” 30 September 1726, ANOM, B 43b, fo. 652–53.

\(^{343}\) Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 100.


Figure 14. Pierre Baron, Etienne de Périer, and Laurent MacMahon, “Plan des batimens de la Direction,” 1 August 1730 (Courtesy of Archives nationales d’outre-mer, 4 DFC, no. 87c)

Council staff, namely a secretary and two assistants. The second housed the “special accounts” of the old régie. These were, in effect, accounts leftover from the Law regime,

346 The Superior Council, or Conseil Supérieur, was established in 1712 as French Louisiana’s judicial body. Its members were responsible for civil and criminal matters and included the governor, commissioner, attorney general, notary, and between three and five councilors drawn from both visiting
including those established by former governor Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, who was recalled to France in 1723. A staff of seven managed the previous administration’s affairs with an eye toward merging the old accounts with the new. Lastly were the Company’s bookkeeping offices, headed by Chastang, who oversaw a staff of eight subordinate bookkeepers and clerks—Caillot, De Troyes, Gontier, and De Bussy now among them—in the New Orleans offices. Here clerks tracked inventory reports from the Company’s multiple storehouses, balanced incoming and outgoing receipts, and maintained credit and debit sheets for colonists’ trading with the Company. Clerks stationed outside the comptoir’s capital all reported to the central offices in New Orleans. Maintaining correspondence—both with outlying trading posts and company offices in Paris—represented a large portion of a clerk’s daily duties.

Outside company headquarters, clustered around the Place d’Armes, were the government offices housing Périer and his staff, the parish church, prison, guard post, and Capuchin rectory. Land along the river fronting the Place d’Armes had been reserved for a public market and slaughter house, but no work had been undertaken on either by late-1729. Company-owned structures dominated the adjoining riverfront. Two storehouses

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348 Etienne Périer and Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 3 November 1728, MPA, 2: 603.
measuring “220-feet long and 40-feet wide,” one each for inbound and outbound trade goods, stretched from the docks between Ste. Anne and Du Maine Streets nearly to Condé. A hospital stood ready to receive sick soldiers, sailors, settlers, and slaves alike at the downriver corner of Arsenal Street and the docks, and the company bakery supplied outbound ships with bread and hardtack from its location just downriver from la Direction. Those who did not survive time spent in the hospital were interred in New Orleans’s first official burial ground, St. Peter’s (Pierre’s) Cemetery, which was located between St. Pierre and Toulouse streets at the back of the settlement.

Although the settlement’s footprint, laid out by royal engineers Adrien de Pauger and Pierre Le Blonde de la Tour, comprised sixty-six blocks, only thirty-five boasted improvements by 1729. With the exception of the street grid established by Pauger and La Tour, New Orleans at the time of Caillot’s 1729 arrival bore little resemblance to the post one early observer described as “un petit bicoq,” or “a little shanty town,” which comprised no more than “four or five scattered houses.” In 1729 the town was home to more than 1,000 people; its population had more than doubled in the seven years since it

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349 Condé Street was a continuation of Chartres. Chartres was on the upriver side of the Place d’Armes, while Condé was on the downriver side.

350 Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 102 and “Plan de la Nouvelle Orleans.”


352 Dumont de Montigny, Regards sur le monde atlantique, 147.
Figure 15. Marc Antoine Caillot, “Plan de la Nouvelle Orleans,” 14 February 1731 (Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2005.0011)
had become the colonial capital. Most residences, workshops, and businesses were clustered either along the river or within a three-block radius of St. Louis Church. An assortment of artisans, individuals employed in the building trades, company employees, and hospital workers lived along the quay, as did more prominent colonists including military officers and concessionaires. The townhouses of major planters were also found along the river. Louis Tixerant maintained a home between St. Louis and Conti Streets for his in town business affairs, as did the Canadian Chauvin brothers. Chartres-Condé, home to two of the five members of the Superior Council, the town’s notary, and public works’ inspector was the most densely populated street, followed by Royal and Bourbon. Bourbon was the last named street running parallel to the river, but the street behind Bourbon had begun to attract poorer residents, as well. Nineteen settlers, including seven men, six women, and an equal number of children, called the unnamed street home in 1727, though its proximity to uncleared swampland must have made it rather inhospitable, since only one of the families listed as residents of the “street facing the woods” in the 1727 census lived there in 1732.

On opposite ends of the grid, along the outer fringes, were the munitions storehouse and powder magazine. Company troops, laborers, and craftsmen were also

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353 The 1721 census counted 479 inhabitants. That number rose to 913 in 1727. Neither the 1721 or 1727 census enumerated troops or military officers stationed in New Orleans. Based on enumerations listed in annual expense reports, however, there were 53 officers and 130 troops stationed in New Orleans in 1727 and more than 100 additional troops arrived in 1728–1729. Maduell, “General Census of All Inhabitants of New Orleans and Environs Dated November 24, 1721, As Reported by Sieur Diron” and “Census of New Orleans as Reported by M. Périer, Commandant General of Louisiana, July 1, 1727,” The Census Tables, 17–21, 82–95.

354 Dawdy, Building the Devil’s Empire, 158–62.

355 Maduell, “Census of New Orleans as Reported by M. Périer, Commandant General of Louisiana, July 1, 1727,” and “Census of the Inhabitants and Property Owners of New Orleans As of January 1732,” The Census Tables, 82–95, 124–41.
housed on the outskirts of the developed core in one of four barracks. Two hundred men—some from Plantin’s Company, others from the king’s troops—served the settlement’s defense and fortification needs, and also acted as New Orleans’s police force. All were paid (irregularly) by the Company of the Indies, with nearly 90,000 livres per year allocated to officer and troop pay and over 70,000 livres to rations.356 These troops were divided into four companies led by captains Joachim de Gauvry, Bernard Diron D’Artaguiette (also Dartaguette), Renaud d’Hauterive, and Claude Charles Dutisné, who had served as commander at the Natchez post until 1728. In New Orleans Dutisné was head of Plantin’s Company. Henry de Louboey, as garrison commander, oversaw all four companies and reported directly to the Company of the Indies.

Just upriver from the established grid, a community mill pounded corn, rice, and sometimes wheat from the Illinois country into flour. The availability of wheat flour was limited, however, as stores from France often arrived damaged or rotten after months spent in ships’ holds, and colonists in Lower Louisiana had great difficulty coaxing newly sown wheat to full maturity. Le Page du Pratz attributed the grain’s premature failure to an overabundance of acidity in the soil, but surely the high heat and humidity wrought havoc as well.357 More typical than wheat bread were multiple varieties of corn-based bread, in which the maize was sometimes mixed with beans or rice. Indeed, maize was a staple of the colonial diet. “French Louisianans,” according to anthropologist

356 The Company spent 88,456 livres on salaries, 70,775 livres on rations. They also allotted 15,401 livres for merchandise credits extended to soldiers and 13,939 livres for uniforms and shoes. The total military personnel budget for 1729 equaled 188,571 livres. That covered all troops from the colony’s easternmost outpost at Mobile to its northernmost in the Illinois country. “Etat général des Dépenses de la Compagnie des Indes à la Louisiane pour l’année 1729,” ANOM, B43b, fo. 821–25.

Shannon Lee Dawdy, “felt no shame in being corn eaters.” Contemporary accounts are filled with recommendations—many of which derived from Indian examples—for preparing the grain, with *sagamité* (corn stew or gruel), roasted corn, and maize beer being among the most popular preparations.

Despite its proximity to the river, the mill, which Caillot described as “a masterpiece for this country” built “at a cost to the Company of 80,000 livres,” was powered by wind rather than water. Horses stabled nearby powered the mill in times of insufficient wind. Past the mill, “at a distance of a musket shot” from New Orleans, was the large tract of land owned by the Jesuits. From an original frontage of twenty arpents the Jesuits had purchased in 1726, the religious order eventually expanded their holdings to thirty-two frontage arpents that stretched fifty arpents from the river toward Lake Pontchartrain.

In seeking a religious order to guide Louisiana’s colonial population, the French Crown had initially shunned the Society of Jesus. The Crown, following an extensive lobbying campaign by the Seminary of Foreign Missions, barred Jesuit missionaries from establishing a presence in Louisiana, despite their evangelical successes among Indian groups in New France and the Great Lakes region. A 1704 decree awarded the right to shepherd Louisiana’s native and colonial souls to the Capuchin order, a move contested

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by the Society of Jesus and their supporters, including sometime Louisiana governor Bienville. After more than a decade of inter-order infighting, company directors in Paris agreed to a compromise in 1723 that allowed the Jesuits to establish a missionary presence in the areas north of Natchez, while leaving the areas to the south under Capuchin jurisdiction.

Though the compromise was intended to limit the Jesuits’ sphere of influence, Jesuit Superior Ignace de Beaubois convinced the Company that providing him land and slaves with which he could set up a mission just outside of New Orleans would ultimately be beneficial to company interests. Known as a charismatic, wheedling character, who used his connections on both sides of the Atlantic to maintain a Jesuit foothold near New Orleans, Beaubois aimed to establish a fully self-sufficient plantation graced by provisioning and apothecary gardens, as well as fields of tobacco—all of which would be worked by company-allotted slaves—that might serve as a model for other colonists.

In this Beaubois largely succeeded. By 1727 he had further strengthened his order’s position by convincing a group of Ursuline nuns from Rouen to migrate to Louisiana, where they would oversee and staff the colony’s hospital.

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362 The 1704 decree was preceded by an order from Bishop de Saint-Vallier of Quebec, who maintained jurisdictional authority over Louisiana, that granted the Capuchins the right to evangelize tribes on both sides of the Mississippi River. Marcel Giraud, A French History of Louisiana, Vol. 1 The Reign of Louis XIV, 1698–1715 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 26–30, 53.

363 Ibid., 72–76.

In New Orleans, however, ecclesiastic duties remained under the purview of three Capuchin priests who carried out “parish functions” at St. Louis church. Father Raphaël de Luxembourg, whom Caillot described as “a holy man” who “applies himself entirely” to educating the colony’s youth, arrived in 1723 to assume the role of parish priest for New Orleans and as Capuchin superior for the entire colony.\textsuperscript{365} Within three years of his arrival Raphaël established the settlement’s first educational institution. Intended to serve the colony’s male children, including “several young Indians,” the school provided instruction in reading, “Latin and the liberal arts,” and catechism to day students and a handful of boarders.\textsuperscript{366}

Caillot was less impressed by the other Capuchins, whom he claimed “secretly led very excessive lives,” going about town sporting “shirts with lace cuffs, silk stockings, and slippers” while carrying “money, snuffboxes, watches, and parasols.”\textsuperscript{367} Caillot’s characterization echoed concerns raised the previous year by Governor Périer.\textsuperscript{368} Perhaps the wayward Capuchins had procured luxury goods through company employees with easy access to the storehouses along the river; or perhaps they were the beneficiaries of gifts from gracious parishioners. However they secured such items, it seems unlikely that the Capuchins purchased them with funds from the meager allowance each received from the Company of 600 livres per annum.

\textsuperscript{365} Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 104.
\textsuperscript{368} Etienne Périer to Abbé Raguet, 15 October 1728, C13A 11, fo. 239–39v.
Another six Capuchins shepherded flocks in more remote settlements, including the Tchoupitoulas tract, German Coast, Balize, Mobile, Natchitoches, and Natchez.

Raphaël repeatedly complained to Abbé Raguet, his superior and a company director in Paris, of the impossibility of conducting missionary work with so few Capuchins in the colony and so little funds from the Company with which to support such endeavors. Lacking interpreters and “a boat to transport him by water to the villages of his mission,” a Capuchin priest, wrote Raphaël, could not even begin to establish missions among Louisiana’s Indians. Yet the funds paid by the Company that underwrote the entire religious and missionary enterprise in Louisiana were not insignificant. In 1729 alone, the Company disbursed nearly 20,000 livres, or 5 percent of its annual operating budget, to the Capuchins, Jesuits, and Ursulines. And the Company incurred additional expenses each time it granted land or slaves to the religious orders.

Raphaël ultimately failed in both his attempt to convince the Company to provide greater allowances to Capuchins already in the colony and to increase the number of Capuchins. Those who made the Atlantic crossing often served only to replace those who

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369 Caillot referred to the Apalache, who had been converted to Catholicism by the Spanish during the previous century, as “Good Frenchmen and Good Christians” who “observe better than we do what they have been taught about our religion.” Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 122; “Etat general des Dépenses de la Comp. des Indes à la Louisiane pour l’année 1729,” ANOM, B 43b, fo. 825–26. On the Apalache near Mobile, see Usner Indians, Settlers, and Slaves, 61; Alan Gallay, The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670–1717 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 144–49.

370 Father Raphaël to Abbé Raguet, 15 May 1725, MPA, 2: 484–85.

371 ANOM, B 45b, fo. 825–26.
had either died or whose poor health or misconduct prompted a return to France. By 1729 the number of Jesuits conducting missionary work in the colony far outnumbered the Capuchins. With missions established among the Wabash, Yazoo, Alibamon, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and other Native American groups stretching from present-day northern Louisiana to the Great Lakes region, the Jesuits were far more successful than the Capuchins in evangelizing the colony’s native population. But the Jesuit endeavor was not exclusively an evangelical one; agricultural production also played a part. In fact the Jesuits’ commitment to self-sufficiency through agriculture helps explain the Company’s willingness to grant land concessions and slaves to each of the Jesuit missions. Their record of successful evangelization also meant that the Company allotted on average 200 livres more per annum to the Jesuits than they did to their Capuchin brothers.

Across from New Orleans, on the west bank of the Mississippi River, the Company operated a nearly 4,000-acre plantation replete with rice processing mill, brick works, forge, warehouse, slave quarters and hospital, and overseer’s residence. Some of the African captives from the slaver Vénus, whose summer arrival coincided with Caillot’s, may have been bound for the Company’s west bank plantation, but most were so weakened by scurvy that they were dispatched directly to the main hospital at

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373 “Etat general des Dépenses,” 1729, ANOM, B 43b, fo. 826.

374 The company plantation was approximately 250 arpents deep with 18 2/3 arpents of river frontage for a total of just under 4,000 mostly uncleared acres. “Inventaire de l’habitation de la Comp. des Indes sur le fleuve St. Louis vis avis la Nouvelle Orléans,” 15 October 1731, ANOM, C 2 24, fo. 184–87; Alexandre de Batz and Ignace-François de Broutin, 13 January 1732, “Plan du Bâtiment de l’Hopital des Nègres construit sur l’habitation de la Compagnie,” 14 January 1732, “Plan du Rez de Chaussée et Premier Etage du Bâtiment Servant de Magazin construit sur l’habitation de la Compagnie” and “Plan des Moulins à Pilons et à Tonnelle construit sur l’Habitation de la Compagnie,” ANOM, F3 290, no. 36–38.
disembarkation. Of the 450 slaves loaded on board the *Venus* at Gorée Island in mid-April, only 363 remained when the ship dropped anchor off the coast of the Balize in early July. According to Périer and La Chaise, forty-three of the *Vénus*’s captives were so ill by this time that they “could not go up the river or [died] along the river.”

Those deemed healthy enough to ascend the Mississippi met with crowds of eager purchasers at the Company’s plantation, but Périer and La Chaise stressed that the shipment of slaves on the *Vénus* ended in disaster for colonists, company, and slaves alike. Louisiana’s inhabitants were so eager to purchase slaves that they regularly “outbid each other for the scurvyed, consumptive, and ulcerated” captives sold at auction, who sometimes “die half a quarter of an hour after they had been awarded” to the winning bidder. The Company was the only authorized importer of slaves, but they were never quite able to strike a balance between settlers’ demand and slave supply. Colonists insisted that they needed more slaves to grow tobacco, but so little tobacco or other saleable trade goods were actually produced that the Company refused to extend the credit and invest the resources necessary to significantly increase the slave supply.

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376 Auctions and sales of slaves carried to New Orleans on company ships took place across the river from New Orleans at the company plantation. Section, elevation, and floor plans submitted by engineering corps member Chambellan Graton to the Company in September 1729 show plans to build a structure along the east bank of the Mississippi River at New Orleans, where arriving slaves could be housed prior to sale or auction. There is no evidence that the building was ever constructed. ANOM, 4 DFC, no. 80c, 81b, and 82c.


cycle of anemic company investment and settler debt was a vicious one, which ultimately hindered the Company’s mandate to make Louisiana France’s largest tobacco producer.

By August the three hundred and twenty slaves from the *Vénus* who reached New Orleans in mid-July “were so violently attacked by the scurvy that more than two-thirds of those who were sold at auction into the hands of the inhabitants have died.” Périer and La Chaise attributed the slaves’ high mortality to the length of time the captives had spent in slave fortresses along the Senegambian coast prior to boarding the *Vénus*, noting that company officials “must try not to leave them so long since for the greater part of the time they have only one meal there and drink nothing but brackish water.”

Not all Louisiana-bound slaves were destined for service in the private sector. The colony’s largest slave owner was the Company itself. Split between three sites—the west bank plantation across the Mississippi from New Orleans, the Balize at the river’s mouth, and Natchez—the company-owned enslaved population totaled 228 individuals, including one hundred and thirty-eight men, fifty-seven women, and thirty-three children (table 2). Their collective value, according to an inventory conducted in 1731, was 187,050 livres.

As in the settler population, the sex ratio among African slaves owned by the Company was heavily skewed, with 2.3 men for every enslaved woman. This is higher than the 1.58 men per woman ratio that applied to Louisiana’s total enslaved population for the entire French colonial period. Of the fifty-seven women, 88 percent of

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380 For a complete list of slaves held by the Company of the Indies in Louisiana, see Appendix A. “Inventaire,” 2 September 1731, *ANOM*, C 2 24, fo. 183–86.
them were paired with African men and deemed “married,” while only 39 percent of the men could make the same claim. By 1731, 40 percent of these couples had between one and three surviving children living with them in a family unit (tables 2–3).382

Though the Code Noir and Catholic authorities in Louisiana encouraged masters to baptize their slaves, it is unclear if the Company made adult baptism a prerequisite for slave marriages.383 Complaints made by Father Raphël, who in a letter to Abbé Raguet, railed against masters who permitted baptized slaves to marry “infidels,” suggest that slave owners adhered unevenly to the doctrinal requirement that individuals be baptized

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382 “Inventaire,” ANOM, C 2 24, fo. 183–86.

383 Article 2 of the 1724 Code required all masters to educate their slaves in preparation for baptism, but article 8 from the 1685 Code, which required all slaves to be baptized prior to entering into marriage, was stricken from the 1724 Code. Louis Sala-Molins, *Le Code Noir, ou, le calvaire de Canaan* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2003), 95, 106–107.
prior to receiving the sacrament of marriage.\textsuperscript{384} Extant sacramental records note dozens of slave baptisms performed in the 1720s—some of which involved Company slaves, but no corresponding register for slave marriages has been found.

Between the time the 1731 inventory was recorded and when it was sent to company officials in Paris on January 9 of the following year, the Company sold as individual slaves four-year-olds Janneton and Marieanne, six-year-old Charlot, and seven-and-a-half-year-old Isabelle. All of them had one or more parents who were also owned by the Company making their sale a direct violation of the Code Noir.\textsuperscript{385} The Code, originally promulgated by Louis XIV in 1685, was revised and reissued for

\begin{table}[h!]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{lcccccc}
\hline
Site & \textit{Children} & \% & \textit{Children} & \% & \textit{Children} & \% & \textit{Total Children} & \% \\
\hline
\textbf{N.O.} &  &  &  &  &  &  &  &  \\
Plantation & 6 & 24\% & 6 & 24\% & 13 & 52\% & 25 & 76\% \\
Balize & 1 & 17\% & 4 & 67\% & 1 & 17\% & 6 & 18\% \\
Natchez & 0 & 0\% & 1 & 50\% & 1 & 50\% & 2 & 6\% \\
\hline
\textit{Total} & 7 & 21\% & 11 & 33\% & 15 & 45\% & 33 & 100\% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Creole Slave Children Owned by the Company by Site and Age Group}
\end{table}

\textit{Source:} “Inventaire de l’habitation de la Comp. des Indes sur le fleuve St. Louis vis avis la Nouvelle Orléans et de tous les Batiments, marchandises, denrées, utensils, Negres et Bestiaux à la charde de S. Le Page,” 2 September 1731, ANOM, C 2 24, fo. 183–86.

\textsuperscript{384} Father Raphaël to Abbé Raguet, 18 April 1727, ANOM, C13A 10, fo. 326v; Jennifer M. Spear, \textit{Race Sex and Social Order in Early New Orleans} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 71; Clark, \textit{Masterless Mistresses}, 170–71.

\textsuperscript{385} During the interim, the Company also sold six unmarried men and a married couple. All slaves sold in the interim are included in tables throughout this chapter and in Appendix A. “Inventaire,” ANOM, C 2 24, fo. 183–86.
Louisiana in 1724. Article 43 of the 1724 Code sought to prevent the breakup of slave families by explicitly prohibiting the sale of husbands from wives and of children under fourteen from their mothers. The Company’s sale of prepubescent slaves away from their parents is a direct contradiction of Gwendolyn Midlo Hall’s assertion that “the slave family was scrupulously protected in practice as well as in law. Mother, father, husband, wife, and children under the age of fourteen were not sold separately.” With regards to Article 43, and others promulgated in the Code Noir, colonial practice often deviated from Crown preference, especially in colonies like Louisiana, which lacked any real enforcement mechanism. Technically the Superior Council maintained ultimate powers of oversight, but as a whole its members tended to stay out of master-slave affairs in all but the most extreme instances of abuse.

The vast majority of company-owned slaves, men and women alike, lived on the west bank plantation and worked on site or across the river in New Orleans. The 1731 inventory lists only the occupations of adult male slaves, though adult females toiled at a variety of tasks on the plantation and were just as likely as their male counterparts to be engaged in manual labor. Of the eighty-nine adult male slaves located in New Orleans, 63 percent were skilled workers (table 4).

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386 For a detailed discussion of the differences between the 1685 and 1724 Codes, see Sala-Molins, *Le Code Noir* and Spear, *Race Sex and Social Order*, 59–68.


389 Spear also provides a useful discussion of the selective application of the Code in Louisiana in *Race, Sex, and Social Order*, 68–75.

390 See for example the case of Joseph Chaperon discussed in Ibid., 52–53.
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</tbody>
</table>

*apprenticed

Table 4. Occupations of Male Company-Owned Slaves

*Source:* “Inventaire de l’habitation de la Comp. des Indes sur le fleuve St. Louis vis avis la Nouvelle Orléans et de tous les Batiments, marchandises, denrées, utensils, Negres et Bestiaux à la charde de S. Le Page,” 2 September 1731, ANOM, C 2 24, fo. 183–86.
One of the most labor-intensive activities company slaves engaged in was clearing the cypress forest surrounding both the plantation and the settlement across the river. In this company slaves were joined by other, privately owned slaves assigned to corvée, or forced labor for the settlement’s public works. By Superior Council mandate, all slave owners were required to furnish each of their slaves to colonial authorities for a 30-day term of public works’ labor. In Louisiana corvéed slaves were frequently responsible for levee construction, drainage-ditch digging, and land clearing. Teams of long sawyers worked to fell and prepare the tallest, strongest trees for use in shipbuilding and trade, while others felled and processed lesser trees for end-uses ranging from home construction to shingles and naval stores. Timber and its byproducts were consistently listed among the items circulated in the Company’s trade with the island of Saint Domingue and with Spanish settlements along New Spain’s Gulf Coast, and naval stores were often used in the trans-Atlantic trade between Louisiana and France.

On the west bank plantation, some slaves labored in the indigo works or rice fields, or in the combined lumber and rice processing mill. Others held skilled positions as carpenters, caulkers, hospital workers, brick- and sailmakers, carters, and blacksmiths. More than thirty slave cabins were constructed on site during the 1720s. Plantation manager Le Page du Pratz drew up the plans and slave carpenters likely played a significant role in their construction.

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391 Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 118.
392 Le Page du Pratz, History of Louisiana, 382–83; Alexandre de Batz, “Plan du Camp des Negres,” 9 January 1732, ANOM, 04 DFC, 91B. See also Patricia Galloway, “Rhetoric of Difference: Le Page du
While some Africans arrived in Louisiana possessing knowledge of and tangible skills in metal-smithing, construction techniques, healing, and even agricultural cultivation of crops such as rice and indigo, others learned a trade on arrival. Across the river from the company plantation fifteen company slaves were apprenticed to thirteen different master artisans across eight different professions, including blacksmithing, carpentry, cooperage, locksmithery, masonry, roofing, tool-making, and woodworking (table 4). All slaves serving as apprentices were valued at the highest level—1,200 livres each—and all trained under New Orleans–based artisans. The Company made a concerted effort to train slaves as craftsmen in an effort to create a stable, proficient, skilled workforce, largely because it had achieved limited success in attracting the number of French artisans necessary to support the colony. And unlike French craftsmen, who were often deemed too expensive to support and who could not be counted on to remain in the colony, skilled slave labor and the initial investment in their purchase and training often paid for itself over time.

The use of skilled African labor in Louisiana was not limited to land-bound endeavors. Twenty percent of the Company’s slaves were classified as sailors. Only general, unskilled laborers made up a larger proportion of the enslaved workforce at 42 percent. The use of slave-sailors in the Americas was not unique to Louisiana. Colonial enterprises undertaken by virtually every European power from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century depended on the skills of African boatmen on both sides of the

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393 “Inventaire,” ANOM, C 2 24, fo. 183–86.
Atlantic. Historian W. Jeffery Bolster in his 1997 study of the role of African seamen in the Americas writes, “The New World plantation system relied on canoes and pettiaugers to transport supplies and plantation products; and African boating skills kept that plantation system afloat.” In Louisiana, where the plantation system had barely gotten off the ground by the late 1720s, boatmen were employed not only in the circulation of agricultural products but of trade goods. Pilots, captains, rowers, sailors: all were roles filled by African slaves navigating Louisiana’s watery landscape.

At the mouth of the Mississippi boatmen were charged with ferrying cargo and passengers from arriving blue-water vessels to the Balize and then shuttling the same goods and passengers thirty-five leagues upriver to New Orleans. Once ships at the Balize had unburdened themselves of enough cargo to pass the bar at the river’s mouth, enslaved company pilots guided them into port at New Orleans. There Balize-based sailors passed the duties to their New Orleans–based counterparts, who loaded hogsheads of naval stores and sometimes tobacco, bales of pelts and skins, crates of letters and reports, indigo, and timber into the holds of the same ships as they prepared for the return journey to Lorient. Sailors based at both New Orleans and the Balize plied the waterways that snaked across lower Louisiana, just as they navigated the coastal trade between the Balize, Biloxi, Dauphin Island, Mobile, and even Pensacola. In a March 1729 letter to company directors in Paris about the colony’s maritime personnel, Périer and La Chaise wrote, “We are putting in as many blacks as we can in the place of white men.”

394 W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 45. Though Bolster’s study primarily focuses on the British Atlantic after 1740, his findings on the translation of skills from Africa to the Americas and the opportunities available to seamen in the colonial context are useful for understanding African seamen in the Atlantic world writ large.
suggesting that on water, as on land, the Company preferred skilled slave to free white labor.\textsuperscript{395}

A select few slave-sailors managed to translate their valuable skills in navigating the colony’s waterways into service on board deep-draft sailing ships, where they joined other seasoned sailors of European descent. Service at sea tended to have a leveling effect. All seamen had a role to fill; each was dependant on the other. And crewmembers regardless of race fell within the ship’s pre-established hierarchy, with each sailor subject to the same inflexible code of discipline that flowed from the captain down through the ranks. That is not to say that race disappeared entirely on board ship, but rather that the lines between slavery and freedom blurred, sometimes creating unique opportunities for advancement or freedom.\textsuperscript{396}

Such was the case with Scipion, a slave formerly held by the Company, who sailed as a crewmember aboard the transatlantic vessel \textit{Dromadaire} between Louisiana and Lorient in 1724. Scipion was subsequently reclassified as a free black, and in the 1730s he made a living hiring out his services as a rower and bargeman to merchants and traders traveling between lower Louisiana and the Illinois country.\textsuperscript{397} Examples such as Scipion’s validate Bolster’s view that African slaves and free men who filled maritime roles in the colonies often had greater access to economic opportunities—and even freedom—than their counterparts who labored in other contexts.\textsuperscript{398}

\textsuperscript{395} Etienne Périer and Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 25 March 1729, \textit{MPA}, 2: 634.


\textsuperscript{397} Hall, \textit{Africans in Colonial Louisiana}, 130.

\textsuperscript{398} Bolster, \textit{Black Jacks}, 131–34.
Slaves plying the waters between Louisiana’s outposts also had access to a different kind of opportunity, one marked more by the power of knowledge than by increased access to trade goods or other tangible resources. As they sailed from settlement to outpost, from the Gulf Coast to the interior, slave-sailors carried with them news of the wider world. In their travels they became cultural and literal go-betweens, transmitting tidings at times insignificant, at times monumental. Enslaved sailors were among the key individuals, who Bolster asserts “were at once racial go-betweens straddling black and white worlds and channels of communications among dispersed blacks.”

Present among company administrators; Indian, French, and sometimes Spanish traders; Breton sailors; and religious personnel alike, African sailors played a key role in disseminating information borne upon the “common wind” to other slaves throughout the colony.

As the Company increased its physical presence upriver from New Orleans, so too did it add to the population of company slaves assigned to waterways linking upriver outposts to the capital. This was particularly true for the route between New Orleans and Natchez. Since 1719 the Company had pinned its hope of turning Louisiana into a French version of the Chesapeake on the rich agricultural lands surrounding the settlement at Natchez. What began as a temporary trading post and storehouse in 1714 became by


1716 a permanent outpost named for Minister of Marine Louis Pontchartrain’s wife, Rosalie.\footnote{Located in the midst of the Natchez chiefdom’s lands, Fort Rosalie’s construction during the summer of 1716 occurred as a result of negotiations that took place in order to end the First Natchez War. Usner, *Indians, Settlers and Slaves*, 28–29; James F. Barnett Jr., *The Natchez Indians, A History to 1735* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 57–60, 70–71; Arnaud Balvay, *La Révolte des Natchez* (Paris: Editions Félin, 2008), 68–76.} Within three years of its establishment, Natchez was considered the nexus of what John Law hoped would become the center of large-scale tobacco production in the French Atlantic world.

Tobacco cultivation began in Louisiana during the first decade of the eighteenth century as a largely private endeavor whose end product was intended for local or in-home consumption. Settlers grew their own leaf for smoking and chewing because supplies from France were virtually nonexistent. Early tobacco farmers found some profit could be made within the domestic economy by selling locally produced tobacco to sailors, soldiers, and neighbors. Indeed, so great was demand for the “stinking weed” that locally grown tobacco supplies often had to be supplemented by leaf bought from Cuba via Spanish traders along the Gulf Coast. Prior to the establishment of concessions in Natchez, local production took place in the colony’s coastal reaches, where the soil was too poor to withstand large-scale cultivation, or in the vicinity of New Orleans, where farmers struggled against flooding and insect infestations to bring the crop to maturity.\footnote{Price, *France and the Chesapeake*, 1: 302–308.}

When Law’s company took over the Louisiana monopoly from Antoine Crozat in August 1717, Law set in motion a master plan to turn the colony into France’s largest and most successful commercial tobacco producer. In September 1718 he acquired France’s lucrative tobacco farm, a monopoly over the commodity which guaranteed Law’s
company 4 million livres in revenue per annum. Law predicted that Louisiana would supply all 8 million pounds of the tobacco then consumed under the monopoly by 1722. Within months of acquiring the tobacco monopoly, he had secured the ailing Senegal Company with the publicly declared intention of using the slave trading company’s pre-established infrastructure—ships, trading networks, personnel, etc.—to bring African laborers to Louisiana. These slaves were to be taught crop-specific expertise by skilled Germans from the Rhineland and Frenchmen from Clérac (both tobacco growing regions), who were sent to Louisiana at the Company’s expense in 1718–1719.403

The proposed concessions were to be located at Natchez, long a stopover point for travelers and fur traders journeying between lower Louisiana and the Illinois country. A settlement at Natchez offered distinct advantages for colonists and administrators eager to pursue plantation agriculture. Situated along the Mississippi River about ninety leagues upriver from New Orleans, Natchez benefited from the river valley’s rich alluvial soils, but also from its location perched atop a flood-resistant bluff, which Iberville described in 1700 as “about 150 fathoms high” and “covered with hardwood trees.”404 Yet the area was also home to the Natchez Indians. Descended from the pre-contact Plaquemines culture, the Natchez population at the time of French colonization occupied five settlement districts—Flour, Grigra, Jenzenaque, Tiou, and White Apple—and a ceremonial center at the Grand Village.405 The French settlement established near Fort

403 Ibid.
Rosalie brought the Europeans and Natchez into close contact, a situation that produced both opportunities for frontier exchange and persistent tensions over land ownership and usage. Further complications arose from pre-existing Indian slave trade relationships between the northeastern-most Natchez villages and English traders from Carolina. By physically occupying the area and encouraging settlement, the French hoped to cut off English encroachment from Carolina.

Between 1721 and 1726 free French settlers migrated north to Natchez in search of greater agricultural prospects, bringing with them indentured servants and African slaves. In 1726 there were roughly 260 newcomers residing in the area, including some 140 French settlers, company administrators, representatives of absentee concessionaires, and soldiers; sixty-five African and nine Indian slaves; and forty-five indentured servants. Ten years earlier the land had been almost exclusively inhabited by Natchez Indians. Natchez’s population of white indentured servants made up a larger proportion of the population there than in any of Louisiana’s other settlements. While the total percentage of indentured servants residing in Louisiana was less than 7 percent, in Natchez the percentage was nearly 21 percent. They, along with the area’s enslaved

408 Of the ninety indentured servants brought from France as laborers on the St. Catherine (sixty engagés) and Terre Blanche (thirty engagés) concessions in 1720, only thirty-eight remained in 1726. Some paid off their debts and either returned to France or made their way in Louisiana; others did not survive their years in the colony. André Pénicault, *Fleur de Lys and Calumet: Being the Pénicault Narrative of French Adventure in Louisiana*, ed. Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1953), 237. Contemporary memoir writers estimated that there were between twenty-eight and fifty soldiers garrisoned at Fort Rosalie. Maduell, “General Census of All Inhabitants of the Colony of Louisiana Dated January 1, 1726,” *The Census Tables*, 56–57.
Africans and Indians, bore the burden of clearing, tilling, and planting lands meant for tobacco and indigo cultivation.

Unlike land agreements elsewhere in the colony, where purchases were overseen by the Superior Council, land transactions in the Natchez region took place directly between settlers and the Natchez Indians. Most colonists established small farms either along the path connecting Fort Rosalie to the Grand Village or on the outskirts of Natchez villages. The two largest land tracts were held by the Company of the Indies, administrator of the Terre Blanche (White Earth) concession established in 1718, and Marc-Antoine Hubert, commissaire-ordinateur for the colony and owner of the St. Catherine concession established in 1720. Both entities employed skilled tobacco workers from France to oversee and develop tobacco culture on their respective plantations.

The Company hired sieur Montplaisir de la Guchay (Montplaisir in company records) as principal overseer of the Terre Blanche concession at an annual salary of 1,500 livres. Because the Company had executed no plans for feeding him, the Clérac workers, and the handful of African slaves sent to clear the land, however, Montplaisir spent most of his early years in Natchez supervising the establishment of provisioning

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409 Patricia Galloway, Jason Baird Jackson, and James Barnett suggest that the mounting tensions between French settlers and the Natchez that built over the course of the 1720s stemmed from different understandings of property ownership between the two groups. They posit that while the French viewed land transactions as a permanent transfer of ownership between buyer and seller, the Natchez may have perceived the conveyance as an usufruct agreement bestowing usage rights only. Galloway and Jackson, “Natchez and Neighboring Groups,” 609; Barnett, The Natchez Indians, 78–79.

410 “Extrait de l’acte de Société entre la Cie des Indes et les associés en la Concession de Ste. Catherine,” 4 September 1719, ANOM, G1, 465. Hubert sold the St. Catherine concession to a group of Paris-based investors sometimes known as the St. Catherine Company in 1721. After the property transfer, management was overseen from France by Jean Daniel Kolly, who arrived in Louisiana in 1727 to inspect the plantation’s progress in person.
crops. By 1721, Montplaisir had managed to send only five hundred pounds of tobacco to France.\textsuperscript{411} During the company reorganization in 1723, Terre Blanche was sold to a group of investors that included Claude François Bidal, marquis de Dasfeld and comte de Belle-Isle; Girard Michel de La Jonchère, treasurer general of the Order of Saint-Louis; and Louis Claude Le Blanc, secretary of state in the war division.

Tobacco prospects beyond the company concession looked grim as well. In 1718 the Company initiated efforts to encourage tobacco cultivation by small farmers in Natchez, offering 25 livres per quintal\textsuperscript{412} for high quality tobacco, but within a year Bienville reported to Company directors in Paris that “the lazy colonists” and “sauvages” prefer not to grow tobacco because there was more money to be had with less effort through trade.\textsuperscript{413} Even Jean-Baptiste Faucon Dumanoir, who purchased the St. Catherine concession from Hubert on behalf of a group of Paris-based investors in 1721, refused to commit all of the concession’s land to tobacco cultivation. He claimed he could make more money for St. Catherine’s absentee owners by growing indigo and food crops. George Desfontaines, Dumanoir’s counterpart at the nearby Le Blanc concession (formerly Terre Blanche), came even more to the point when company officials pressed him to grow more tobacco. When asked to explain his unwillingness to develop additional land for tobacco cultivation, Desfontaines’ response made clear that the Company’s expectation that farmers willingly sell tobacco to its agents for 25 livres per quintal when they could fetch eight times that price in the local economy was

\textsuperscript{411} Price, \textit{France and the Chesapeake}, 307–308.

\textsuperscript{412} One quintal equaled 100 French livres (48.95 kilograms or 107.9 pounds).

\textsuperscript{413} Bienville to [?], 15 April 1719, ANOM, C13A 5, fo. 208v.
Until the Company increased the price it paid for tobacco—or until it established an infrastructure that brought down production costs, farmers would grow just enough to sell within the colony and would dedicate additional land to alternative crops.415

Prospective tobacco planters in Louisiana contended with some of the same dilemmas planters had faced some fifty years earlier when the French West India Company’s monopsonistic policies made expanding tobacco cultivation in the West Indies untenable. Unlike in the Caribbean, however, settlers in Louisiana had few fallback options. Switching to sugar was not an option for most colonists in French Louisiana. Start-up costs were too high and the supply of slave laborers too anemic. And unlike in the Caribbean, where early contact with Europeans had decimated Native American populations nearly to the point of extinction by the seventeenth century, Louisiana’s numerous Indian groups remained highly visible and relevant throughout the French colonial period, bringing their presence to bear on nearly every aspect of life in the colony from land negotiations and trade to military and economic alliances. The presence of a well developed frontier exchange economy in which settlers could and did sustain themselves through trade with local Indians and fellow Europeans undermined company efforts to encourage tobacco cultivation. Settlers could grow indigo, and the

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414 Company Directors to Louisiana Council, 26 August 1723 and 4 January 1724; Jean Baptiste Faucon Dumanoir to Company Directors, January 1724; George Desfontaines to Company Directors, 4 January 1724, ANOM, G1, 465.

Company could continue its limited trade with local Indians, but what company directors in France wanted was tobacco.

The quantity of trade goods destined for circulation among local Indians, whose numbers far exceeded the French, remained insufficient throughout the 1720s even though proposed agricultural expansion required the French to maintain good relationships with polities such as the Natchez.

Inadequate supplies allowed the French to buy neutrality at best, rather than allegiance against the English and their allied polities to the east. According to Périer the only way to succeed in Louisiana was to strengthen the relationship between the French and the Indians. To secure that alliance required a steady supply of “negroes and merchandise suitable for the Indians.” Otherwise, stressed Périer, “the English who wish to penetrate into this colony” will take advantage of France’s weakness, offering the Indians “as much as they wish at a better rate.”

Périer was not the first to make the connection between the paucity of available French trade goods and the potentially fickle loyalties of their Indian allies. As early as 1703 Nicholas de La Salle observed that the French were at a distinct disadvantage in their relationship with the Chickasaw because they could not maintain the supply of desired trade goods. Nine years later Bienville and Dartaiguette echoed La Salle’s complaints in letters to Minister of Marine Pontchartrain, stressing that the French could not possibly prevent

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417 Etienne Périer to Abbé Raguet, 25 April 1727, *MPA*, 2: 542. See also the letter of 14 August 1728, 585–86.

418 Gallay, *The Indian Slave Trade*, 143.
English raids on their Chickasaw allies without access to weapons and gunpowder for use in trade.\footnote{Ibid., 289–90.}

Further complicating the Company’s trade relationship with local Indians, including the Natchez, Choctaw, and Chickasaw, was the price of certain trade goods, like gunpowder and cloth, relative to their value in the peltry trade. Deer and other animal skins were among the only consistent trade goods shipped from Louisiana to France during the Company’s reign. To maintain trade relationships with Native Americans, the Company and its agents needed access to a steady supply of powder, cloth, and other goods that was not subject to drastic fluctuations in price. But the Company was unwilling to ensure a consistently priced supply—choosing instead to focus on developing tobacco plantations, which then undermined the bread and butter business of the peltry trade and eroded their standing with Indian suppliers.\footnote{Etienne Périer and Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 22 April 1727 and 2 November 1727, \textit{MPA}, 2: 537, 549–50.}

By the mid 1720s the Company found itself in a quandary. Elsewhere in the world it focused largely on the buying and selling of trade goods that were already available through existing supply lines. Cotton piece goods and cowry shells from India, dozens of varieties of tea from China, spices from Southeast Asia, and even slaves from Africa were all funneled into the Company’s trade network by local suppliers. In Louisiana, however, company officials supported not the peltry trade, which was Louisiana’s equivalent of cowries or textiles, but rather a commodity that required the creation of an entire agricultural and distribution system. Such an undertaking—one that they hoped
would transform the colony from a struggling outpost on the edge of empire to a powerful player of global significance—required significant and sustained investment in land, labor, and infrastructure.

Cargo inventories for ships returning to Lorient from company comptoirs around the globe provide a useful snapshot of the types of merchandise being traded in the East Indies versus Louisiana. The 1728 inventories for three ships returning from the East Indies—the Solide, Jupiter, and Badine—including crates of Chinese porcelain, hundreds of bolts of silk, bricks of tea, casks of whole peppercorns, sacks of cowry shells, and more than 1,200 crates of “assorted merchandise from the Indies.”421 Cargo inventories from Louisiana also include goods extracted from local supply lines, including squirrel and deer skins, sassafras, pitch, tar and construction wood, and items like quinine and campeche wood procured through coastal trade with the Spanish, but these types of goods brought in far less profit for the Company than their trade equivalents from the East.422

Company officials in Louisiana repeatedly sought to convince their counterparts in Paris and Lorient of the worthiness of developing Louisiana’s coastal trade with Pensacola, Vera Cruz, Campeche, and Cuba. Officials in Paris agreed in theory, but failed to send both the variety and quantity of goods from France necessary for a profitable coastal trade with the Spanish colonies. Throughout the 1720s, Spanish ships came to call at Dauphin Island and the Balize. From the Spanish the Company purchased cattle, Cuban tobacco, quinine and other apothecary stores, and an indeterminate number of

421 Comte de Volvire, Marine commander at Port Louis, to Minister of Marine, 12 December 1729, ANOM, B3 322, fo. 177.

422 On typical Louisiana cargo inventories, see Comte de Volvire, Marine commander at Port Louis, to Minister of Marine, 30 January 1728, 2 August 1728; 24 January 1729, ANOM, B3 322, fo. 134, 171.
slaves. In exchange, the Spanish bought “fine linens, Brittany linens, laces, and other goods.”

On rare occasions the Company also set aside African slaves for sale to the Spanish. More often than not, however, company warehouses had nothing of interest to Spanish traders, who left Louisiana’s coast with cargoes of no greater value than they had been on arrival.

The Company tried to compensate by encouraging tobacco, and to a lesser extent indigo, production, but after years of investment, it was still not unusual in the late 1720s for ships departing Louisiana to have only ballast in their holds. These ships often stopped at Saint Domingue on their way back to France to pick up excess cargo from the Caye St. Louis, which served primarily as a provisioning port for company ships.

This was the case with the *Durance*, which left Louisiana and sailed for Caye St. Louis, where the crew loaded 42 barrels of white sugar, more than 680 of unrefined sugar, three bales of cotton, and more than six barrels of indigo.

Yet for all these setbacks the Company was not ready to abandon Louisiana. Administrators on both sides of the Atlantic remained hopeful that with enough support the colony would become France’s primary supplier of tobacco. This hope—as well as the Company’s corresponding willingness to continue pouring money into Louisiana—was primarily motivated by the potential for future profit. Because the Company relied heavily on income generated from the tobacco

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424 On trade with the Spanish, see also in *MPA* two letters from Périer and La Chaise dated 2 November 1727, 561; 24 November 1727, 561; 3 November 1728, 593, 603–605; 22 June 1729, 614.

425 Comte de Volvire, Marine commander at Port Louis, to Minister of Marine, AN, B3 329, fo. 118; B3 330, fo. 58; B3 329, fo. 118.

426 Comte de Volvire, Marine commander at Port Louis, to Minister of Marine, AN, B3 337, fo. 83.
monopoly renewed by Louis XV in 1723, company officials who might otherwise have lobbied to write off Louisiana as a hopeless cause instead rallied around the idea that tobacco might yet be cultivated there given the right circumstances. If Louisiana could reinvent itself as a French version of the Chesapeake, the Company stood to benefit not only from its role as the sole authorized seller of the narcotic within France, but also from its role as the largest producer in the French Atlantic world. To that end, rather than scale back investment in the colony following the 1723 reorganization, the Company renewed efforts to make Louisiana profitable.427

The quest to turn Louisiana into a tobacco powerhouse was not exclusively motivated by profit. It was also, in the eyes of Louis XV and his advisors, a question of national pride. A steady supply of tobacco from Louisiana would allow the Company to stop purchasing the bulk of the tobacco it sold in France from the Chesapeake. Doing so required Crown subsidization to offset the higher shipping costs associated with French tobacco, but these would be offset in the short term by the state’s satisfaction in supporting French instead of English growers.

Between 1723 and 1729 the Company invested millions in the Louisiana colony. Determined to make tobacco profitable, administrators increased shipments of African laborers to Louisiana from roughly 1,800 slaves in 1721–1725 to over 4,000 in 1726–1730.428 They sent additional skilled workers from France’s tobacco growing


428 Of the 5,680 slaves shipped to the colony between 1720 and 1730, approximately 4,999 reached the Gulf Coast. Among those who disembarked, countless numbers perished soon after their arrival in Louisiana, as they succumbed to scurvy, the yaws, and other nutritional and infectious diseases contracted during the journey. Eltis, *TASTDB*. 

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regions, and even convinced three experienced Englishmen, including one from Carolina, and a Swiss-born spy named Lunel, who had spent time observing English-style cultivation (and had reportedly stolen Chesapeake seeds for Louisiana planters), to show colonists how to grow and process the crop in the Chesapeake style. They addressed some of Natchez’s infrastructure needs by establishing a support operation for growers, where they could purchase provisions or newly constructed hogsheads for shipping from the new company plantation, established in 1724. They employed company slaves to clear settlers’ land, grow provisions, and construct flatboats (that could be broken down and sold for wood scrap in New Orleans) for tobacco transport. They even built new drying sheds for curing privately-grown tobacco and agreed to purchase and process tobacco directly in Natchez, rather than requiring colonists to foot the bill for transporting tobacco bundles downriver to New Orleans.

All of these efforts, combined with an overall increase of what the Company paid per quintal from 25 livres to between 30 and 40, helped make tobacco cultivation more attractive to prospective growers because they lowered the cost of production, processing,

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429 One of colonists’ most persistent complaints was of the lack of cooperers, and therefore the lack of proper storage vessels for tobacco shipments from Natchez to New Orleans. Because there were no casks and hogsheads available, tobacco sat too long waiting for shipment and ended up rotting. Further shipping difficulties occurred at New Orleans, from where France-bound ships left with such infrequency that even the tobacco sent downriver often sat too long in warehouses and spoiled before it was even loaded into transatlantic vessels. Price, *France and the Chesapeake*, 1: 308, 311–12, 315, 320–21.

430 The steps taken to reduce costs for tobacco producers were a response to repeated complaints from colonists and company representatives in Louisiana about the high costs and limited profitability of tobacco cultivation. See for example “Memoir on Tobacco at Natchez,” October 1724; Committee of Louisiana to Company Directors, 8 November 1724; Etienne Périér and Jacques de La Chaise to the Directors of the Company of the Indies, 22 April 1727, *MPA*, 2: 396–97; 398–99; 532–35.
and transportation, thereby increasing potential profits.\textsuperscript{431} Yet by the end of the 1728 growing season, the Company had amassed perhaps 150,000 pounds of tobacco for export to France, and much of it, according to their tobacco inspector, was of very poor quality.\textsuperscript{432} The previous two years had been even worse, with less than 100,000 pounds shipped during both years combined. Year after year projections for Louisiana tobacco cultivation topped 300,000 pounds but each year brought far more disappointment than tobacco.

By the time Caillot arrived in the summer of 1729 fissures of internal discord over Louisiana’s value had appeared among company directors, shareholders, and syndics in France. The amount of unpaid debt colonists owed the Company topped 4,400,000 livres. Louisiana continued to produce only meager quantities of substandard tobacco, and its administration had become a significant drag on the Company’s overall financial well-being. At the same time supply problems in Senegambia threatened to undermine Louisiana’s access to slave laborers.\textsuperscript{433} Abandonment of Louisiana was first discussed in an annual company report in 1727, but the suggestion was seen as what Price terms “inconsistent with state objectives” that revolved around “the development of an autarkic supply of tobacco in Louisiana.”\textsuperscript{434} Just two year later, though, what had begun as

\textsuperscript{431} The Company paid thirty livres per quintal as a standard, unless the purchase price was applied to old debt, in which case they credited tobacco farmers with forty livres per quintal. Price, \textit{France and the Chesapeake}, 316.


\textsuperscript{433} Hall describes the “widespread revolts against the French” along the coast of Senegal and the Senegal River that erupted in 1729 bringing slave trading by the Company to a standstill in \textit{Africans in Colonial Louisiana}, 92–94.

\textsuperscript{434} Price, \textit{France and the Chesapeake}, 325.
scattered whispers of dissent had become a chorus of voices questioning the Company’s continued presence in Louisiana.

Many of those who challenged company objectives pointed to the significant disparities in profit realization between Louisiana, where the balance sheet always reflected a loss, and the East Indies and China, the Company’s most lucrative markets. Some backed proposals requiring the Company to farm out the tobacco monopoly and let private traders handle tobacco production in Louisiana. Others supported a retrocession of the colony to the king, with the Company’s involvement in Louisiana limited to the purchase of all tobacco produced there. And still others pushed for a complete break with the French Atlantic, in which the Company would relinquish all ties to Louisiana and the African slave and Canadian fur trades in favor of exclusive involvement with Indian Ocean markets.  

Caillot, for his part, claimed that Natchez’s inhabitants “grow good tobacco” with “each harvest weighing up to 150,000 pounds” His estimation was an exaggeration. Conversations overheard and correspondence read at company offices in New Orleans later tempered his enthusiasm for the colony’s tobacco prospects. He made no other references to the crop and certainly earned no profits from tobacco himself, choosing instead to supplement his income and provisions with goods traded through the local frontier exchange economy. In this Caillot was like many other inhabitants of French

\footnote{Ibid., 325–27.}
\footnote{Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 110.}
colonial Louisiana who relied on local barter and trade networks to satisfy needs and wants.\footnote{On colonists’ reliance on the local frontier exchange economy to satisfy their needs and sometimes advance themselves economically, see Usner, *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves* and Sophie K. White, “‘A Baser Commerce’: Retailing, Class, and Gender in French Colonial New Orleans,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2006): 517–50.}

*In early December 1729 Caillot “and a band of friends were walking together along the levee” at New Orleans when they “saw a little pirogue coming down the river [...] being rowed” and “going very fast.” Thinking it might be the vessel bearing “several pieces of merchandise” he expected from upriver, Caillot “began to calculate the profit that [he] was going to make” in goods destined for petty trade. Instead of trade goods, however, the pirogue bore a handful of half-naked survivors of the Natchez War.\footnote{Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 143.} They brought with them accounts of the bloody attack that brought the dream of creating a French version of the Chesapeake in Louisiana to a violent close.\footnote{The Natchez War, also called the Natchez Uprising, Natchez Rebellion, or Natchez Revolt, and less frequently in recent decades the Fort Rosalie Massacre, has been documented at length in the primary and secondary literature. For the purposes of this chapter, I will provide only a summary of the events at Natchez. No eyewitness accounts have survived, but several contemporary secondary accounts informed by survivors’ tales, including those penned by Caillot, Charlevoix, Diron D’Artaguiette, Dumont de Montigny, Le Page du Pratz, and Périer, provide a basic outline of events. See Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 143–50; Diron D’Artaguiette to Minister of Marine Maurepas, 9 February and 20 March, 1730, *MPA* 1: 56–61, 76–81; Dumont de Montigny (who provides a scathing indictment of the Company), * Regards sur le monde atlantique*, eds. Carla Zecher, Gordon M. Sayre, and Shannon Lee Dawdy (Sillery, Quebec: Les éditions du Septentrion, 2008), 235–58; Antoine Simon Le Page du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana*, ed. Joseph G. Tregle Jr. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 79–95; and Etienne Périer to Minister of Marine Maurepas, 5 December 1729 and 18 March 1730, *MPA* 1: 54–56 and 61–70. More detailed recent interpretations can be found in Barnett, *The Natchez Indians*; Balvay, *La Révolte des Natchez*; George Edward Milne, “Picking Up the Pieces: Natchez Coalescence in the Shatter Zone,” *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone: The Colonial Indian Slave Trade and Regional Instability in the American South*, eds. Robbie Ethridge and Sheri M. Shuck-Hall (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 388–417; and Gordon Sayre, “Plotting the Natchez Massacre: Le Page du Pratz, Dumont de Montigny, Chateaubriand,” *Early American Literature* 37 (2002): 381–413.}
In October 1729 there were an estimated three dozen military personnel; four hundred French settlers; two hundred and eighty African slaves; and some two thousand Natchez warriors and their families residing in and around Natchez. The following month, on November 28, 1729, the number of colonists was reduced by more than half when Natchez Indians from the neighboring villages of White Apple, Flour, Grigra, and Jezenaque engaged in a violent campaign of protest against recent actions by French commander Sieur De Chépart (also Deschépart). Tensions between French settlers and the Natchez over land use and occupation came to a head that November, when De Chépart—who was by many accounts a man of limited intellect, prone to poor judgment—ordered the decampment of the Natchez from the White Apple village. There De Chépart planned to establish his own tobacco plantation. After convincing De Chépart to allow the Natchez to stay at White Apple until the fall crops could be harvested, the Natchez chiefs set in motion a plan that shattered all hope of developing the area into the center of large-scale tobacco cultivation, and one that ultimately spelled a near total elimination of the Natchez polity.

On the morning of November 28, the Great Sun of the Natchez arrived at Fort Rosalie with thirty armed warriors. They bore the calumet and explained their intent to conduct a day-long hunt to be followed by a feast that evening in honor of continued peace and mutual prosperity between the Europeans and the Natchez. The Great Sun then sang the calumet song. At its conclusion the Natchez warriors raised their weapons and

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440 Diron D’Artaguette to Minister of Marine Maurepas, 20 March 1730, MPA 2: 76; Galloway and Jackson, “Natchez and Neighboring Groups,” 610.
441 Le Page du Pratz estimates that the Natchez inhabited more than eighty cabins at the White Apple site at the time De Chépart made his demands. Histoire de La Louisiane 3: 235.
fired on De Chépart and the soldiers garrisoned at the fort. The scene was repeated throughout the area, as pre-positioned Natchez Indians entered the homes of each French resident, killing nearly every white man—and some white women and children—in their path.\textsuperscript{442} By the end of the day, the death toll numbered 235 Europeans and 12 Natchez.\textsuperscript{443} The hostage count stood at “54 French women and children” and between 50 and 150 African slaves.\textsuperscript{444}

In the wake of the bloodshed the Natchez pillaged moveable goods, weaponry (including cannons) and livestock from the fort and victims’ properties, and seized the entire cargo of a recently arrived half galley from New Orleans, distributing the bounty of trade goods and supplies throughout their settlements. The final blow to the French at Natchez came in the form of fire, as warriors set the fort, trading post, houses, and field upon field of nearly mature tobacco aflame.

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\textsuperscript{442} There is a general consensus among historians of the Natchez War of 1729 that approximately twenty to thirty men survived the November 1729 attack, including two men taken hostage—a tailor and a carter—that the Natchez deemed useful.
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\textsuperscript{443} Father Philibert, the Capuchin priest charged with shepherding colonists in Natchez, was in New Orleans at the time of the attack. In 1730, Philibert recorded the names of 235 French victims, including 144 men, 35 women, and 56 children. Father Philibert, 9 June 1730, \textit{MPA} 2:122–26.
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\textsuperscript{444} Diron D’Artaguiette to Minister of Marine Maurepas, 10 February 1730; 18 March 1730; and 20 March 1730, \textit{MPA} 2: 61; 68; 78. Some African slaves escaped to New Orleans, some were taken hostage, and some seem to have willingly allied with the Natchez against their owners. It is possible that the Natchez intended to sell those Africans they had taken hostage to English traders from Carolina.
\end{flushright}
Chapter 5: The Company Retires to the East

Word of the Natchez War reached the port of Lorient via the *Saint-Michel* nearly three months after the November attack.\(^{445}\) Within days of the ship’s arrival from Louisiana, the news had spread among company officials and bureaucrats stationed in Lorient and neighboring Port Louis. On February 23, 1730, Port Director Pierre de Fayet set out for Paris to personally bring news of the war to Minister of Marine Maurepas. Arriving early March, de Fayet delivered Governor Périer’s initial account of the onslaught: the Natchez “massacred not only all the men who were in the fort in our village, but in addition attacked the concessions from which no one was able to escape,” save the “women, children, and negroes” the attackers took as captives.\(^{446}\)

Périer was eager to strike against the Natchez and any allied Indians but felt hamstrung by what he described as a dearth of capable troops, who were “scattered about the posts of this colony.” After pleading with Maurepas to send “five to six hundred men” and warships to Louisiana “as quickly as possible” Périer signed off, making no account

\(^{445}\) In a letter dated 24 February 1730, the Conte de Volvire informed the Minister of Marine of the Natchez uprising in Louisiana, explaining that de Fayet had left the previous day to bring the full account to company directors in Paris, AN, B3 337, fo. 19.

\(^{446}\) Périer must have based his brief account of the uprising on survivors’ stories. At least three survivors, including tobacco inspector Lunel, made it to Pointe Coupée on 1 December. From there word was sent downriver to New Orleans. Others arrived in the capital over the course of the first week in December. Arnaud Balvay provides a useful snapshot of how conflicting news and rumors of the rebellion spread through New Orleans in *La Révolte des Natchez* (Paris: Éditions du Félin, 2008), 133–37. Etienne Périer to Minister of Marine Maurepas, 5 December 1729, *Mississippi Provincial Archives* (MPA), 1729–1740, *French Dominion* (Jackson: Press of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1927), 1: 54.
of the destruction of tobacco or company structures at Natchez. Focused almost entirely on retribution, Périer convinced the colony’s Choctaw allies to march against the Natchez. A Choctaw contingent of between five and seven hundred warriors ambushed the Natchez on January 27, 1730, killing approximately one hundred Natchez, capturing an additional fifteen to twenty, and recovering a handful of French and some African captives. With the Choctaw mobilized, Périer sent out a combined French-Indian force under the command of Henry de Louboey from the Pointe Coupée settlement. Louboey’s men joined the Choctaw outside Natchez on February 8; they spent the next two weeks engaged in near-daily skirmishes before the two camps reached an agreement to end the fighting. On February 23 the French agreed to draw back from their current position at the Grand Village to the east bank of the Mississippi River. In exchange, the Natchez agreed to release French captives to the Choctaws stationed at the St. Catherine concession. Each side carried out its end of the bargain, but in an unexpected turn—and perhaps with the complicity of the Choctaw, the remaining Natchez, including more than two hundred men, women, and children, abandoned their villages and escaped into the night.

While the recovery of the French hostages could be seen as a major success of Périer’s initial strike against the Natchez, the flight of the remaining members of the

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447 Etienne Périer to Minister of Marine Maurepas, 5 December 1729, MPA, 1: 55.
448 The Choctaw succeeded in recovering fifty-four French hostages and some one hundred African slaves. The hostages remained with the Choctaw until the French agreed to pay a per hostage bounty in trade goods. Diron D’Artaguiette to Minister of Marine Maurepas, 10 February 1730 and 20 March 1730, MPA 1: 61, 78; Etienne Périer to Minister of Marine Maurepas, 18 March 1730, MPA 1: 68; James F. Barnett Jr., The Natchez Indians, A History to 1735 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 116–18.
Figure 16. Marc Antoine Caillot, “Plan de la guerre des Natchez,” 23 September 1730 (Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2005.0011)
Natchez polity, along with a number of African captives, enraged the governor and made him look rather inept. Périer blamed the Indians’ escape on the incompetence of his French troops and the collusion of the Choctaw with the enemy, but the governor had to account for more than just the absconding of the Natchez. As unconfirmed reports of the assault began to trickle into France via ships arriving at the port of Lorient, company officials and shareholders heard conflicting information on the extent of property damage in the Natchez area and sought an official account of company losses. Not until after the hostages were recovered did Périer disclose the full extent of what had been lost.

In a letter dated March 18 (that likely reached company directors in Paris toward the end of May) he disclosed the grim reality: “After massacring the French” the Natchez “burnt all the houses and sheds with two hundred thousand-weight of tobacco. The galley and a boat of eighteen oars were not spared.” As the first loaded trade vessel to arrive from New Orleans in many months, the galley carried a cargo valued at “300,000 livres.” Its arrival was intended to convey the Company’s continued commitment to trade in the Natchez region. Without trade goods to pave the way to stable relationships with Indians in the area, settlers had little chance of successfully maintaining—and later increasing—land holdings. Natchez’s fertile land, perched high above the Mississippi River, represented settlers’ best hope for developing the tobacco crops company officials were so eager for them to cultivate.

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449 Etienne Périer to Minister of Marine Maurepas, 18 March 1730, MPA 1: 71.
Caillot provided an explicit accounting of “the booty” raided by the Natchez, which consisted “mainly of brandy and flour” with lesser quantities of “dry goods such as shoes, hats, powder, bullets, etc.”451 Intended for native and French inhabitants alike, such a loss undermined company efforts to maintain stability beyond the bounds of Fort Rosalie and the Natchez villages. North and east of Natchez the French were in constant competition with the often better supplied English traders from Carolina who peddled their wares among the area’s Indians. If the French lost their status as active agents in the Indian trade, they lost any hope of creating an environment conducive to the establishment of plantation agriculture. There could be no settled tracts of agricultural land in a colony where Indians outnumbered the French by more than ten to one without stable French-Indian relations, and without agriculture—and tobacco in particular—there was no motivation for the Company to continue its presence in the colony.

The loss of trade goods also made it difficult for the French to bargain with their Choctaw allies for the release of French and African captives secured during retaliatory campaigns. Without a reward for their efforts against the Natchez and later the Yazoo, the Choctaw retained the captives, preferring to plead their case for payment before the “Great French Chief” (Périer) in New Orleans, rather than risk a possible loss of bounty with an immediate, uncompensated release.452 The paucity of available trade stores complicated an already tenuous alliance between the French and their Indian allies. When

451 Ibid.
Mobile infantry captain Joseph-Christophe de Lusser scoured the lower Mississippi Valley in early 1730 looking for French and African captives, he found one “little French boy in the band of Chickasawhays” rescued from the Natchez, who had been passed over for release because Sieur de Louboey “had been willing to give only one limburg blanket for him.”\(^453\) Like members of the Yellow Cane and other Choctaw villages, the Chickasawhays felt “very much dissatisfied because they had been promised many things when it was a question of setting out for war, but the promise to them had not been kept.”\(^454\)

Fort Rosalie was not the only comptoir affected by the Natchez War. At Fort St. Pierre (est. 1719), a military and trade outpost north of Natchez along the Yazoo River, a party of Yazoo Indians who had witnessed events at Natchez killed commander Du Codère, Jesuit missionary Jean-François Souel, and the entire seventeen-man garrison. In the Illinois country, events downriver at forts Rosalie and St. Pierre disrupted supply lines between New Orleans and the settlements around Fort de Chartres and Kaskaskia. For the whole of 1730 settlers throughout the Mississippi Valley were on high alert.

In the capital fear of a pan-Indian conspiracy and rumors of planned slave uprisings gripped the French populace throughout 1730. In January the capital’s inhabitants “were warned that the colony’s Negroes wanted to turn against [them], too. There were,” wrote Caillot, “at least 1,500 or 2,000 of them, which frightened us a great

\(^453\) Joseph-Christophe de Lusser to Minister of Marine Maurepas from journal entries dated 1–16 March 1730, MPA, 107–108.

\(^454\) Ibid., 109. On the Yellow Canes’ dissatisfaction with the French, see 105–106. Conversely, surviving members of the Natchez used pilfered trade goods and African captives in their attempts to entice other native groups to join them in attacks carried out against the French throughout the winter and spring of 1730.
deal because they are great fighters” and are “more formidable than 10,000 Indians.”

Word of another conspiracy leaked out later that year when an enslaved woman warned a soldier that “the French should not long insult negroes.” Dumont de Montigny, who documented the rumor in his mémoire, claimed that each slave planned to rise up against their master at night, commandeering their masters’ weapons and powder supplies, and moving through the capital killing on-guard soldiers and militiamen. While neither of these alleged conspiracies bore fruit, perceived threats from Indians outside the capital and enslaved blacks within fed colonists’ sense of insecurity and left many residents wondering if they should board the next ship out of the colony.

In the midst of the chaos Jacques de La Chaise, Director General of the Company in Louisiana, died on February 6, 1730. La Chaise was a colorful correspondent prone to long-winded accounts throughout his time in the colony; he provided far more detail about company affairs in Louisiana than his governmental counterpart Périer. His death during the retaliatory campaign against the Natchez in the winter of 1730 meant that one of the few voices present for most of the post-1723 reorganization period was silent during an especially critical period in Louisiana’s relatively brief history. La Chaise’s absence also meant that company business was largely set aside as Périer channeled all able-bodied men, including company clerks, councilors, and colonists into four newly

455 Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 146.
456 Dumont de Montigny quoted in Usner, Indians, Settlers, and Slaves, 75.
457 In 1731 Périer caught word of another conspiracy through an enslaved domestic servant, who warned of a pending Bambara-led revolt led by one of the Company’s overseers, Samba Bambara. The domestic servant claimed that Bambara slaves would set fire to New Orleans while its inhabitants were at mass. Whatever the actual plan of attack, Périer quashed the reputed rebellion before it began, sending Samba Bambara and several other alleged co-conspirators to the Place d’Armes to be broken on the wheel. Dan Usner conflates the conspiracy reported by Dumont de Montigny with the later 1731 plot, Ibid., 74–75. For more on the 1731 conspiracy, see reports dated 21 and 28 July 1731, ANOM, C13A 13, fo. 85.
formed militia units. Intended to supplement the colony’s existing French troops and allied Choctaw forces in protecting the settlements as well as in the retaliation campaign against the Natchez, these civilian- and bureaucrat-populated units comprised one hundred and fifty men each.\footnote{Etienne Périer to Minister of Marine Maurepas, 18 March 1730, \textit{MPA} 1: 71; Jean-François Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, \textit{Regards sur le monde atlantique}, eds. Carla Zecher, Gordon M. Sayre, and Shannon Lee Dawdy (Sillery, Quebec: Les éditions du Septentrion, 2008), 260.}

It is difficult to determine exactly which colonists became rank and file militiamen, but it is likely that all available company employees were deputized. Caillot noted that the physician and botanist Louis Prat, king’s prosecutor François Fleuriau, and Superior Council members Antoine Bruslé and Renaud d’Hauterive (also Dauterive) were appointed commanding officers, with colonists and company personnel divided into separate units. Out of the company employees, including perhaps any ships’ officers present in the city, the “governor formed a company of cadets, which numbered 40.” Because all the colony’s military officers were already engaged elsewhere, the cadets “chose from among [them] a captain.” They selected a storehouse guard, who conveniently advanced each cadet a “justaucorps of red goatskin,” a “hat edged with silver” and embellished with a “white cockade,” a vest and trousers “of white bazin, white silk stockings,” rifles, “and gloves, too” from company stores.\footnote{According to Caillot, each of the company cadets paid the storehouse guard cum militia captain a “20 livre reduction per month” from their company wages, “Relation,” fo. 152.} This smartly outfitted militia company patrolled the capital throughout 1730, alternating shifts with the colonists’ corps.
While the Company’s paper pushers took turns mounting the guard and parading in the Place d’Armes, bookkeeping and letter writing at company headquarters came to a near standstill. A total of just twenty letters and memoires were received in France from the Louisiana offices in 1730, half the volume received in each of the two previous years. When not on guard duty, Caillot reported that he and his office mates were “bored to death.”\textsuperscript{460} La Chaise was not immediately replaced as company director in Louisiana, leaving his staff to occupy themselves for more than two months. After Laurent MacMahon was named the new company agent on April 17, 1730, officials remained more focused on security in New Orleans and events unfolding in outlying comptoirs than on day-to-day company business.\textsuperscript{461} Official correspondence was not the only information vessel available to bureaucrats in the French Atlantic, however. Given the nature of verbal communication networks—with ships’ officers and passengers bearing rumors of Louisiana’s fate from abroad—it seems unlikely that company clerks such as Caillot, who fraternized frequently with ships’ officers, were unaware that the fate of the Company’s Louisiana comptoirs was a topic of much metropolitan debate.

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Even before company directors and syndics in Paris understood the magnitude of the damage wrought by the Natchez in Louisiana plans were being put forth to limit the Company’s losses outside the Indian Ocean trade zone. In March 1730 Director Jacques Deshayes proposed splitting the global trading company into three smaller, more self-

\textsuperscript{460} Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 154.

sufficient units, so that expenses and liabilities in one sector could not drag down other, more profitable ones. Deshayes’s proposal called for the creation of three relatively separate sub-companies, including “one for the East Indies, China, and all other areas past the Cape of Good Hope; one for Guinea, Senegal, the French Caribbean islands, and the Barbary Coast; and the third for Louisiana and Canada.” This would allow the Company to isolate its losses and invest “the most funds possible” in India, where “cargoes stood at the ready to be embarked [for France] the moment company ships arrived from Europe.”

A scenario in which all the Company had to do was send ships to pay for and pick up high-demand cargoes was completely unlike the scenario faced by company officials in Louisiana. There ships waited months at the port of New Orleans to fill their holds, and even then, were sometimes forced to leave Louisiana with only ballast. When Deshayes penned his memoire it was unclear how much of Natchez’s tobacco had been lost during the late-November attack, but his hesitancy to propose a complete withdrawal from Louisiana suggests that even after years of poor returns on substantial investments, directors were not ready to give up North America.

By July 1730, however, after Périer’s more explicit report had revealed the instability of French-Indian relations in the colony, as well as the loss of tobacco and all

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462 This sort of limit of liability gained by isolating certain sectors within a larger company umbrella is common today. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the 2005 hurricane that wrought so much destruction along the Gulf Coast of the United States, companies such as Entergy, Louisiana’s primary energy supplier, were able to limit the liability incurred by the parent company by declaring bankruptcy of Entergy Louisiana, even as other sectors of the company in other areas of the country continued to reap large profits.

463 Memoire by Jacques Deshayes, March 1730, ANOM, C2 23, fo. 9v.

464 Ibid, fo. 10v.
tobacco-related structures at Natchez, directors and syndics began to openly question the Company’s continued presence (and long-term role) in Louisiana.\textsuperscript{465} In a memoire dated July 28, a Sieur Ramont recognized the utility of a French-directed global trading company, which allowed the French to bypass the Dutch (and English) in its trade relationships abroad, but decried the way in which the Company conducted its affairs.\textsuperscript{466} He cited two primary faults as undermining the Company at every turn: The pursuit of too many lines of trade in too many areas and the inefficient and bloated state of the Company’s administration. Ramont warned directors that unless something was done to address these faults, the Company would “be totally lost within four to five years.”\textsuperscript{467}

After pointing explicitly to repeated losses in Africa and Louisiana, Ramont insisted that the only way for the Company to remain profitable was to focus its activities on the East Indies and China. Like Deshayes, Raimont viewed the Company’s projects outside the Indian Ocean as an unnecessary drag on company resources. “Merchants from Marseille, Rouen, St. Malo, La Rochelle,” and other ports, wrote Ramont, should be “charged with trade in Barbary, Senegal, Guinea, and Canada.”\textsuperscript{468} As for French holdings in the Mississippi Valley, instead of continuing to pour money, time, and bureaucrats into a colony whose value after 1729 was increasingly strategic (as a buffer against further English encroachment in North America), rather than economic, Ramont viewed it as

\textsuperscript{465} Etienne Périer to Minister of Marine Maurepas, 18 March 1730, \textit{MPA} 1: 71–76.

\textsuperscript{466} “Memoire au sujet de la Compagnie des Indes et de ce qu’il y a à faire pour soutenir cet établissement,” 28 July 1730, ANOM, C 2 23, fo. 3–8. Raimont’s role in company affairs is unclear. His mémoire is filed as a company document, suggesting that he was likely a syndic, director, or investor.

\textsuperscript{467} Ibid., fo. 3.

\textsuperscript{468} Ibid., fo. 4v–5.
During the second half of 1730, debates over Louisiana’s future—and in the longer term, the Company’s future—centered increasingly on a possible retrocession of the colony to the Crown. Shareholders and their syndics argued against further investment in Louisiana, urging directors to arrange a retrocession. The events of late 1729 threw additional support behind those who had pressed for a more limited company scope prior to the Natchez War. If the Company’s primary reason for involvement in Louisiana was tobacco cultivation, many believed that the destruction of crops and infrastructure, disruption of labor, and exposure of French-Indian fault lines in the Natchez area meant that the Company’s objective was no longer attainable.

Company involvement in Louisiana was not the only target of would-be reformers. As Ramon suggested, the Company itself relied on too many administrators, a tendency that was costly and often ineffective. When Philibert Orry was appointed controller-general of France in March 1730, he took an active interest in the king’s investment in the Company and sought ways to make the entity a more profitable one. As a former company director he was well aware of the overstretched nature of the Company’s global commitments and had witnessed first-hand the inefficiency with which it conducted business from Paris.

The possible retrocession of Louisiana was but one of Orry’s desired reforms. Within months of accepting the commission of controller-general, he initiated a series of changes that streamlined the Company’s Paris operations, reducing the number of

469 Ibid., fo. 5.
directors from twelve to six, and syndics from six to two. He then eliminated the team of four inspectors general who had been appointed during the Regency as the king’s representatives. The inspectors’ appointments had followed the 1723 company reorganization, but Orry insisted that by 1730 their services—and accompanying salaries—were no longer necessary.470

Orry also sought to make existing lines of business more profitable and to eliminate those, like Louisiana, whose perpetual losses threatened the Company’s long-term stability. To that end he lobbied successfully for the cessation of company involvement along the Barbary Coast and began negotiations to lease the Company’s tobacco monopoly to the United General Farms.471 The Company reached a settlement with the Farms July 1730. Two months later when the contract was confirmed, the farmers general took over purchase of tobacco from Louisiana and any other colonial or domestic producer, but were no longer obliged to pay subsidies. All Farms-purchased tobacco would be paid for at rates competitive with the price of Virginia tobacco. In exchange the Company would receive 7.5 million livres per year for the first four years of the lease, and 8 million annually for the last four years.472 Like the per-slave income


472 Though the initial lease was for an eight-year term, the United General Farms retained the monopoly until 1791. Both the United General Farms and the Company of the Indies profited from the arrangement. Jacob Price, France and the Chesapeake: A History of the Tobacco Monopoly, 1674–1791, and of Its
generated by the Company’s 1725 agreement that allowed privately funded slave traders to operate between Africa and the circum-Caribbean, income generated by the tobacco lease was guaranteed to be higher than what the Company had been able to reap through its own efforts.

In a summary of the arguments put forth in favor of retroceding Louisiana to the king in early December 1730, Louis Henry Brinon de Caligny, one of the two remaining company syndics, described the untenable nature of the Company’s continued presence in Louisiana.473 The Company had “in the past thirteen years invested more than 20 million livres” in Louisiana. Company funds had transported settlers to inhabit the colony and enslaved laborers to clear and tend settlers’ lands. They had underwritten design and construction expenses for the establishment of New Orleans. They had provided for colonial defenses in the form of forts, munitions, and soldiers, and had watched over the souls of natives and settlers alike through their investment in foreign missions. Yet in spite of all the Company’s contributions, stressed Brinon de Caligny, the recent destruction of the Natchez post, “where tobacco culture had shown the most promise,” forced the Company to reconsider its commitments.474 Since the Company in Louisiana now found itself in dire military and financial straits, he continued, “it was no longer possible to consider the colony a concession in perpetuity”—as it should have been by

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474 Ibid., fo. 29v.
the terms of its charter, but rather “as a valuable entity entrusted to its care” whose safety and security it could no longer guarantee.475

The Company’s focus was above all commercial. The foremost concerns of its administrators were the protection of investments and the maintenance of a fiduciary climate that allowed them to pay out guaranteed dividends to its shareholders. If France wished to keep Louisiana, and thereby prevent the spread of English settlement to the Mississippi, the king would have to find another entity to manage the colony. The only logical choice to take on an initiative of such magnitude was the Crown.

By the close of 1730, the retrocession of Louisiana was nearly complete. Writing from Versailles on December 31, Orry sought final approval from the king for new plans that would open up trade in Louisiana to private merchants. The ordinance drafted by Orry required the Company to continue transporting “the provisions and merchandise necessary to the survival and well-being of its inhabitants,” as well as goods to be employed in “the Indian trade.”476 Orry’s plan obliged the Company to send ships to the colony each year for those purposes, but released it from all other obligations. No stipulation was made for future Company shipments of African laborers to the colony.

The official edict transferring control of Louisiana to the king was signed in Paris on January 23, 1731.477 Rather than require further company participation in Louisiana as specified in Orry’s scheme, the terms severed all company ties to the colony, including

475 Ibid., fo. 30.
the Illinois country. In return for such generous concessions, the Company agreed to pay 1.45 million livres to the king over the course of the next ten years as compensation for any outstanding obligations.⁴⁷⁸ Beginning July 1 the Company’s commercial monopoly, granted August 1717, was rescinded. Under the terms of the retrocession trade between France and Louisiana would be thrown open to any and all interested French merchants, and ownership and responsibility for all “public squares, forts, buildings, artillery, armaments, and troops” in Louisiana was transferred from Company to Crown.⁴⁷⁹ The only right the Company retained in the colony was debt collection.

By April word of the retrocession had reached Louisiana.⁴⁸⁰ In a letter from Maurepas Périer learned that the promotion of commerce was to be the new “primary object” of his attention. Maurepas stressed the importance of building confidence among Louisiana’s inhabitants and recommended that Périer promote the development of coastal and circum-Caribbean trade. Stronger ties with Saint Domingue and Martinique were essential. Both could prove profitable outlets for Louisiana’s nascent timber industry.⁴⁸¹ Left unsaid was that closer ties to the French islands would also make the colony’s survival more likely. Without regular arrivals of supplies from France—which had


⁴⁸⁰ Details of the retrocession were sent to Governor Etienne Périer in a letter from Maurepas dated 30 January 1731, ANOM, B 55, fo. 583–86.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., fo. 585v.
previously been guaranteed by the Company—colonists in Louisiana might find new, practical value in relationships with their West Indian counterparts.

Maurepas also charged Périer with communicating the terms of the retrocession to all inhabitants, including company employees, and with overseeing a smooth transfer of power. Within days of Périer’s receipt of his orders company and crown officials began the process of inventorying slaves, tools, buildings, and warehouse stores to be transferred to the king. Bureaucrats Bruslé and Bru were to remain in the colony as company debt collectors, but all other company bureaucrats were to be removed from their posts and returned to Lorient via available company ships.

For Caillot the process of attempting to leave Louisiana had begun months before. In early February the governor had returned to New Orleans from his most recent and final campaign against the Natchez. With the help of soldiers, militiamen, and some two hundred additional troops who had arrived in Louisiana via the king’s ship the Somme in September 1730, Périer and his brother Périer de Salvert (who also arrived on the Somme) had defeated the Natchez and captured nearly five hundred of them as slaves.482 As news of Périer’s victory spread, inhabitants in New Orleans also learned of successful allied campaigns by the Illinois the previous fall against the Foxes.483 Confident that his

482 Balvay estimates that Périer’s forces took approximately 450 Natchez women and children and more than 45 warriors captive in January 1731. The captives were brought downriver to New Orleans, where many of them died due to overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions in the jail. On 28 May the surviving 280 captives were boarded onto the company ships Vénus and Aurore bound for Cap Français, where they were to be sold as slaves to the profit of the Company. One hundred and twenty-seven Natchez perished en route to St. Domingue. Contemporary reports suggest that at least several hundred Natchez men, women, and children escaped Périer’s 1731 campaign, taking refuge with various Indian groups in the Lower Mississippi Valley. Balvay, La Révolte des Natchez, 144–48, 169.

victory eliminated the Natchez threat to Louisiana’s capital and comptoirs, and buoyed by good news from the Illinois country, Périer gathered the “troops of the army, navy, and militia” in the Place d’Armes, where troops joined civilians in singing the *Te Deum* February 8.\textsuperscript{484} The assembled companies then fired their guns in salute along with “324 cannon discharges.” With the Natchez defeated, Périer thanked Caillot’s company of cadets “on behalf of the king and Company” and discharged them from militia duty.\textsuperscript{485}


\textsuperscript{484} Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 180. The *Te Deum*, according to historian Daniel Roche, served three primary functions in ancien régime France. “First, it called attention to major events, distinguished by the king’s presence; it marked historical commemorations which confirmed the importance of military and dynastic aims; and it played a diplomatic role by speaking to allies and enemies as well as Frenchmen. Second, it indicated the king’s intention to dominate all of French territory from the palace of Versailles to the most remote diocese. Finally, the ceremony ritualized magnificence in a brief burst of consumption (of food, wood, candles, and fireworks), as if pressing a claim against nature and scarcity while at the same time upholding the established order.” For more on the use of the *Te Deum*, see Roche, *France in the Enlightenment*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 269–71.

\textsuperscript{485} Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 180.

\textsuperscript{486} Ibid., fo. 181.
personal possessions and everything he had put aside for petty trade, Caillot appealed to members of the Superior Council, to whom “I explained that some very pressing personal affairs were calling me incessantly to France.” His fabricated personal affairs “combined with the illness of the country, which I pretended to have [...] resolved them to agree to my request.” His request granted, the clerk wasted no time preparing to depart. “I left New Orleans the first of April of the year 1731,” he wrote, “as happy as I had been sad upon arriving there.”

Given that Périer received the official notification and terms of the retrocession in April, it is likely that Caillot had left the capital before the news had arrived. His boat may even have been headed downriver to the Balize as word of the retrocession traveled upriver on another vessel to New Orleans. Or, the news may have arrived in the capital while Caillot “stayed on land” at the Balize “waiting for ships to pass a sandbar where there was shallow water, and where almost all the ships ran aground very easily.”

Once Caillot’s return vessel, the *Prince de Conty*, passed the bar, he and his fellow passengers were rowed from shore to ship. They set sail in early April, but after a short time at sea “a great noise arose in the ship.” It had struck a sandbar and begun to sink. Passengers and crewmembers scrambled to board the longboat as the ship went down. “We were no more than two rifle shots away when there was no more question of a ship,” wrote Caillot. “On the one side you saw animals drowning, on the other, barrels,

487 Ibid., fo. 182.
488 Ibid.
489 Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 182–83. On the sinking of the *Prince de Conty*, see also Etienne Périer to Minister of Marine Maurepas and Sieur Laye to Philibert Orry, 16 April 1731, ANOM, C13A 13, fo. 55 and 212. A 1733 watercolor drawn by Sieur Callot (no relation to Marc-Antoine Caillot) clearly shows the wreckage of the ship, see *Plan et Veuë Du Fort de la Balize*, ANOM, 04DFC115A.
Figure 17. “Le Saint Louis” by Marc Antoine Caillot, 20 June 1731 (Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2005.011) En route to France, perhaps from sketches done during a provisioning stopover on Saint Domingue, he drew the Saint Louis, the last of the detailed watercolors he included in “Relation.”

chests, boards, chairs, beds, and ten to twelve men that we could not save, because the sea was too agitated.490 All but one of those men ultimately survived the shipwreck, as did nearly three dozen crates of assorted peltry (beaver, deer, and squirrel) and 294 barrels of pitch.491 The rest of the ship and its cargo were a complete loss. On April 3 the Saint Louis (figure 17), the last company ship to deliver slaves to Louisiana, left New Orleans, sailing downriver to the Balize. Its captain Etienne Bréban, a former officer in

490 Ibid.
491 “Etats par vaisseaux des officiers, officiers mariniers, et matelots decedés ou noyés de 1721–1770,” FML, I P 246, liasse 2; inventory of cargo taken on board the Saint Louis from the shipwrecked Prince de Conty, Archives Départementales du Morbihan (ADM), 9 B 208
the royal navy, learned of the *Prince de Conty*’s shipwreck on April 9, likely from arriving survivors.\footnote{Because the shipwreck of the *Prince de Conty* resulted not only in material losses to the company in the form of cargo, but also financial losses on the part of all of the ship’s crewmembers, whether from loss of salary or personal possessions, many of the ship’s records were placed on deposit with Brittany’s admiralty court in Vannes, France. See especially Etienne Bréban, “Journal du navire le *Saint Louis*,” which chronicles the ship’s journey from the Senegambian coast in 1729 to its departure from Louisiana in 1731, ADM, 9 B, article 99. Also useful is the ship’s log with observations recorded by the *Saint Louis*’s ensign, AN, 4 JJ 17, 50.}

In early May, after Bréban received instructions from Périer, the *Prince de Conty*’s salvaged cargo along with its five passengers and dozens of crewmembers were loaded onto the *Saint Louis*. Caillot closed his account of his first overseas commission with the ship’s departure: “We left the Balize on May 4, 1731, at five and a quarter hours in the evening after suffering many gales while in the harbor, which produced a frightful sea for us for five days.”\footnote{Caillot, “Relation,” fo. 184.}

* Caillot’s return to France was the earliest in what would by mid-summer become a steady outflux of company bureaucrats, clerks, sailors, and ships’ officers. After fourteen years spent attempting to build a viable commercial presence in Louisiana, the French Company of the Indies spent less than six months dismantling operations there. By the fall of 1731 company officials had packed up their ledgers and their staff (leaving behind an unlucky few charged with debt collection) and left North America entirely.

In France plans were underway to consolidate company operations even further. Administrators hoped that streamlining shipping, warehousing, and shipbuilding functions would allow them to extract maximum profitability from the Company’s most lucrative trade zone: the Indian Ocean.
The 1730s brought significant changes to the Company’s home port of Lorient. By the end of the decade the town established by the Company in 1719 had become the central headquarters for company operations. Five of the six company directors, both syndics, and the central office staff remained in Paris, but all other operations took place exclusively in Lorient. Whereas Lorient’s role in the 1720s was primarily one of outfitting the Company’s myriad ships, by 1734 all other support services had been relocated there. Shipbuilding, which had previously taken place in Hamburg, London, and Nantes, occurred exclusively within Lorient’s domain beginning in 1730, following construction of the first of three shipyards constructed there between 1730 and 1750.494

Then in 1733 officials laid the first stone in what was to be a multi-million-livre merchandise complex, where the Company intended to hold the annual sales of imported trade goods that had taken place in Nantes since 1719. Lorient’s first sale, which showcased the cargoes of twelve ships recently returned from the East Indies, took place September 1734. By moving the warehouses, sales, and associated financial and merchant services to Lorient, the Company not only retained greater control over sales, but more importantly, it eliminated transportation costs from the port of Lorient to Nantes and greatly reduced annual expenses it had incurred from goods damaged while in transport between the two towns.

The relocation of shipbuilding and merchandise sales to Lorient brought new residents and new opportunities, as carpenters, sail makers, and caulkers joined merchants, factors, bankers, and hoteliers in making Lorient their home. Lorient’s civic

status improved as well. In 1733 the town became a municipality, whose day-to-day and longer-term management was overseen by a local council, mayor, notary, and king’s representative, with only limited input from the Prince de Guéméné (Louis XII of Rohan), who previously had asserted exclusive seigneurial rights over the town. Five years later the municipality became a chartered entity.495

In 1729 the Company outfitted two ships bound for the East Indies and four for Louisiana (table 5). The following year the number of Louisiana-bound ships remained the same, but the number of East Indies-bound ships doubled. In 1732, just one year after

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>1729</th>
<th>1730</th>
<th>1731</th>
<th>1732</th>
<th>1733</th>
<th>1734</th>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Canary Islands</td>
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<td>Terres Australes</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Destination and Number of Outbound Company Ships, 1729–1739
Source: FML. *The Indies category includes ships bound for Bengal, India, and Mocha.

the Company relinquished its claims in North America and eliminated its Louisiana
route, the Company sent twelve, fully outfitted ships to India and one to Ile de France in
the Mascarenes (the Indian Ocean archipelago east of present-day Madagascar).496

The value of cargoes arriving from India rose apace, as company officials
redirected funds from aborted business sectors in the French Atlantic to the Indian Ocean.
In 1730–1731, sixteen company ships hauled 4,930,000 livres worth of trade goods from
India. Between January 1733 and September 1734 the number of ships returning from
India was reduced by three, but the value of imported trade goods increased to
10,974,000 livres, with a corresponding increase in sales from 9,401,000 livres in 1730–
1731 to 19,421,000 in 1733–1734.497

As for Caillot, his fortunes followed those of the Company. The Saint Louis
arrived in Lorient June 5, 1731.498 Just over six months later Caillot boarded another
company vessel, the Atalante.499 This time he, like the Company itself, was bound for the
East Indies. He arrived in Pondicherry, the site of his new clerk’s commission, August
22, 1732, after more than seven months at sea.500 Over the next twenty-six years, Caillot

496 The Company did not entirely abandon the French Atlantic. The slave and gum trades, centered at the
Company concession in Senegal, continued to play an important and profitable role in company operations
but there, too, the object was trade, not colonization. Even though the Company traded slaves for
agricultural products, such as sugar, coffee, tobacco, and cotton, in Martinique, St. Domingue, and later in
the eighteenth century Guadeloupe, it did not itself play a role in the production of those agricultural
products.

497 These figures relate to sales generated in Nantes. There is no available data for sales out of the Lorient
warehouses prior to 1758. It seems likely, however, that profitability increases were even greater after
company sales moved to Lorient in September 1734 due to the elimination of transport costs and the great
reduction in expenses from damaged goods. Leon Vignols and Henri See, “Les Ventes de la Compagnie

498 Disarmament of the Saint Louis, 5 June 1731, FML, 1 P 168, no. 123.
499 Armament of the Atalante, 14 January 1732, FML, 2 P 3, no. 25.
500 Disarmament of the Atalante, 4 May 1733, FML, 2 P 25, no. 7.
moved through a series of increasingly important commissions in India and Bengal, eventually joining the ranks of Pondicherry’s Superior Council before dying in a shipwreck off of India’s western coast in 1758.501

* 

The results of the Company’s decision to refocus their attentions on the Indian Ocean trade zone after 1731 are clear. Having consolidated its operations—both in terms of personnel and support services—and jettisoned its unprofitable colony building schemes in North America, the French Company of the Indies became for the first time since its inception a stable, profitable trading company. In abandoning Louisiana, the Company relinquished its role as colony builder in favor of confirming itself as a pure trade entity. By reducing its global presence and strengthening its ties to trade networks in places such as Pondicherry, Mocha, Chandernagore, and Mahé, the Company chose trade over colonization, thereby ensuring its survival for the next sixty years.

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Archival Repositories

AVL- Archives de la ville de Lorient, Lorient, France
ADLA- Archives Départementales de Loire-Atlantique, Nantes, France
ADM- Archives Départementales du Morbihan, Vannes, France
ADHS- Archives Départementales des Hautes-de Seine, Nanterre, France
ADSM- Archives Départementales de Seine-Maritime, Rouen, France
AN- Archives Nationales, Paris, France
ANOM- Archives nationales d’outre-mer (formerly the Centre des archives d’outre-mer), Aix-en-Provence, France
BAnQ- Bibliothèque et Archives nationales de Québec, Quebec City, Canada
BnF- Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France
FML- Fonds de la Marine à Lorient, Service historique de la Défense, Lorient, France
LSM-SCR- Louisiana State Museum, Superior Council Records, New Orleans, Louisiana
SLC- Saint Louis Church/Cathedral, New Orleans, Louisiana
THNOC- The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana

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### Appendix A: Slaves Owned by the Company of the Indies in Louisiana, 1731

#### NEW ORLEANS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Families</th>
<th>Value in l.t.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bambara, laborer</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlot, male, age 5</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genevieve, female, age 1.5</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baraca, sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taco</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanette, female, age 2</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernard, manager</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yando</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bocary, manager</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verandique</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michel, male, age 3</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis, male, age 1.5</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin, male, age 8 months</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boucault, long sawyer</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manon</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Françoise, female, age 7</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph, male, age 5</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marieanne*, female, age 4</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cochard, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pacheo</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marieanne, female, age 7</td>
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</tr>
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</table>
Malice, female, age 4.5 400  
Madeleine, female, age 3 months 100

Families (continued)  

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<tr>
<td>Combadjuy*</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dauvillé, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bossy</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’Eveillé†, carter or brickmaker</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comba</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estienne, male, age 6 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>La Fatigué, long sawyer</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabelle*, female, age 7.5</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlot*, male, age 6</td>
<td>400</td>
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<td>Louisa, female, age 3</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gou, overseer</td>
<td>1,200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gros Jean, overseer</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walez</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guey, sailor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alouga</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guey†</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Fatima</td>
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<td>Value in l.t.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Fanetron</td>
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<td>Catherine</td>
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<td>Jean, laborer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anissa</td>
<td>900</td>
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<td>unnamed male child, age 6 months</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pierrot†</td>
<td>1,200 or 900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierrot†</td>
<td>1,200 or 900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marieanne</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sans Cartier, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayo</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seigu, sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatimens</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semba, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippa</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabrielle*, female, age 4</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanette, female, age 2</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slaraguey, blacksmith</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coudou</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[?]</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perette</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanne</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Unmarried Men**

*Value in l.t.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baril, caulker</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belheumeur*, blacksmith apprenticed to Canot</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bimba, sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceriba, sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cery*, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dace, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dau Chareter*, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diaman, carpenter apprenticed to Blampin</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimba*, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djay, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domingues, sailmaker</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domingue, toolmaker apprenticed to Bonnet</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubou, carpenter apprenticed to Blampin</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estienne, cooper apprenticed to Jacques Ozanne</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’Eveillé†, carter or brickmaker</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’Eveillé, mason apprenticed to Durivage</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’Eveillé, woodworker/joiner apprenticed to Jacques Sautier</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faujau, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Febouary, sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Fortune, woodworker/joiner apprenticed to [?]</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grattif, toolmaker apprenticed to Bonnet</td>
<td>1,200 or 900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guey†</td>
<td>1,200 or 900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janot, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kibly, sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kictou, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurent, locksmith apprenticed to Chevaly</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Liberté, long sawyer</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Lime, locksmith apprenticed to Philipe Le Duc</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maham, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malbouroux, carter</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malin, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamouroux, gardener</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millard, gardener</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Mou, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moulou, sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moussa, locksmith apprenticed to Bequet</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Moustache, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namba, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unmarried Men (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Value in l.t.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Niama, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niama, sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Ouosau, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petit Brulas, sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petit Senga*, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierrot le Jeune, gardener</td>
<td>1200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierrot†</td>
<td>1,200 or 900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierrot, roofer apprenticed to Daniel Rafland</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queniguy, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quenquey, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabot, woodworker/joiner apprenticed to Pierre Thomelin</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Rose, woodworker/joiner apprenticed to Jacques Dupré</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samazaté</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sans Chagrin, long sawyer</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sans Esprit, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semba, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semba Nouveau, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songarou, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telemaque, woodworker/joiner apprenticed to Pierre Thomelin</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vieux Moulou, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarache, blacksmith</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[?]ry, sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unmarried Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Value in l.t.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conaco, widow</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamens</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamens, widow</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Value in l.t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jolicoeur, overseer</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rene</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne, female, age 2</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamouroux, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ouary</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jannot, female, age 8</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Therese, age 2.5</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unnamed nursing newborn</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paté, tailor</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semba</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominique, male, age 4</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quant Amoy, sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gueyman</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis, male, age 2.5</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baraelouy, carpenter</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonnaud, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buda, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comba, sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demon, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domé, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facavo, laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folanges, sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

260
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gros Moussa</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gueblay</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guigny</td>
<td>Sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean Gueux</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis</td>
<td>Sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnan</td>
<td>Nurse/hospital worker</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Unmarried Men (continued)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moque</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moreau</td>
<td>Sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mory Tambara</td>
<td>Sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petit Moussa</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierrot</td>
<td>Sailor</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samané</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sera</td>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tournebouche</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trudeau</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Venus</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Natchez**

**Families**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belieck</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Levy</td>
<td></td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estienne, male, age 1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grosbrutal</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lima</td>
<td></td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grosjean</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therese</td>
<td></td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latrique</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goneis</td>
<td></td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Anne, female, age 2.5  

Masolimens, sailor  
Fatimens  

Moulou, laborer  
Comba  

Families (continued)  

Value in l.t.  

Niama, sailor  
Salba  

Raeme, laborer  
Comba  

Raourez, laborer  
Calice  

Solimens, overseer  
Kiemen  

Unmarried Men  

Amoriere, laborer  
Araca, sailor  
Boubou, laborer  
Calfat, laborer  
Donnama, sailor  
Guiba, sailor  
Maga, sailor  
Niara, laborer  
Proupou, sailor  
Sembaseau, laborer  

Unmarried Women  

Isabelle  

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* Sold prior to submission of inventory (January 9, 1732)
† Occupation unclear; more than one slave in the inventory shared this name

Source: “Inventaire de l’habitation de la Comp. des Indes sur le fleuve St. Louis vis a vis la Nouvelle Orléans et de tous les Batiments marchandises, des ustensils, des nègres et bestiaux,” 2 September 1731, ANOM, C2 24