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Author(s): William L. Ramsey
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“Something Cloudy in Their Looks”: The Origins of the Yamasee War Reconsidered

William L. Ramsey

The Reverend Francis LeJau, writing from South Carolina early in 1712, remarked on the aloof manner of the “free Indians” living near his parish in Goose Creek. “They goe their own way,” he observed, “and bring their children like themselves with little conversation among us but when they want something from us.” He did not identify them by nation, but, whoever they were, he felt discomfited by “something cloudy in their looks.” Few other Carolinians appear to have noticed those clouds; certainly no one else wrote about them. But LeJau was correct. There were clouds, and they had been gathering in the “looks” of southeastern Indians for several years. When the storm finally broke in April 1715, it nearly washed South Carolina off the map. Warriors from virtually every nation in the South, from the Catawbans and their piedmont neighbors in the Carolinas to the Choctaws of Mississippi, joined together in one of the most potent native coalitions ever to oppose the British in colonial North America.¹

The Yamasee War, as it has come to be known, has long been recognized as one of the most important events in southern colonial history. According to the historian Gary B. Nash, Native American combatants came “as close to wiping out the European colonists as ever [they] came during the colonial period.” Southeastern Indians destroyed most of South Carolina’s plantation districts and came within a few miles of Charles Town (now Charleston) during the first year of the war. By 1718, when peace returned to much of the region, over four hundred colonists and an untold number of Native American warriors had perished, making the conflict a serious candidate for America’s bloodiest war in proportion to the populations involved. The war spurred extensive tribal migrations and alliance realignments that changed the diplomatic and cultural landscape of the region for the remainder of the eighteenth century, and it led directly to the collapse of South Carolina’s proprietary government

William L. Ramsey is assistant professor of history at the University of Idaho.

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Ramsey may be contacted at <wramsey@uidaho.edu>.

¹ [Francis] LeJau to the Secretary [of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts], Feb. 20, 1712, in *The Carolina Chronicle of Dr. Francis LeJau, 1706–1717*, ed. Frank J. Klingberg (Berkeley, 1956), 109.

in 1719. British imperial responses to the war, moreover, prompted the first calls for a buffer colony to protect Carolina's southern border against Indian or even French or Spanish attacks, which culminated in the establishment of Georgia in 1733. Recent work even indicates that the war ended South Carolina's experimentation with Indian slavery and committed the colony to an exclusive reliance on African labor from 1715 onward.²

Despite its significance, however, the Yamasee War has attracted surprisingly little scholarly attention over the last half century, and explicating its origins in particular remains very much open to debate. Early efforts to understand the causes of the war focused mainly on the inflammatory behavior of English traders. In its most sophisticated expression, crafted in 1925 by the historian Verner Crane, this approach viewed the war as a "far reaching revolt against the Carolinian trading regime" in which Native Americans across the South rose up in anger over the "tyrannies of the Charles Town traders." John R. Swanton, writing in the same decade, also felt that the "misconduct of some traders" had been the "immediate cause" of the war but went on to add that fears of enslavement may have prompted the Yamasees to action as well. Elements of those two versions were refined, interwoven, and reiterated for a generation and, indeed, continue to influence current scholarship in subtle ways. Yet they depend on a number of premises that do not bear modern scrutiny. First, the application of moralistic judgments concerning English trade behavior makes the mistake of assuming that what is just and proper in one culture will necessarily be recognized as such in another. Second, they err in presuming that a single, uniform cause of action operated everywhere, in the same way, throughout the entire region.³

More recent studies have explored multicausal approaches to the war's origins that also include environmental pressures and the consequences of dependency on Anglo-Indian relations. James Merrell's work moved the discussion forward significantly by recognizing for the first time the need to consider geographical differences, and his work on the Catawbas broke new ground by assessing native perceptions and misperceptions of Europeans as filtered through the unreliable "lens" of trade. With few exceptions, however, these studies routinely fall back upon the vocabulary of abuse and misconduct pioneered by Crane and Swanton. Efforts to apply dependency theory, in particular, have demonstrated a decidedly teleological tendency. Perhaps because Anglo-Indian trade relations had such a brief history prior to the Yamasee War, dating only to the 1680s, such studies tend to accelerate the advance of trade dependence excessively. At the same time, they often oversimplify the correlation between purportedly abusive English traders and the hegemonic power supposedly

² Gary B. Nash, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early North America* (Englewood Cliffs, 2000), 123. For the war's diplomatic repercussions and tribal migrations as well as the collapse of the colony's proprietary government, see Verner W. Crane, *The Southern Frontier, 1670–1732* (1925; New York, 1981), 137–68. For the decline of Indian slavery, see William L. Ramsey, "All and Singular the Slaves': A Demographic Profile of Indian Slavery in Colonial South Carolina," in *Money, Trade, and Power: The Evolution of a Planter Society in Colonial South Carolina*, ed. Jack P. Greene, Rosemary Brana-Shute, and Randy Sparks (Columbia, S.C., 2001), 166–86.

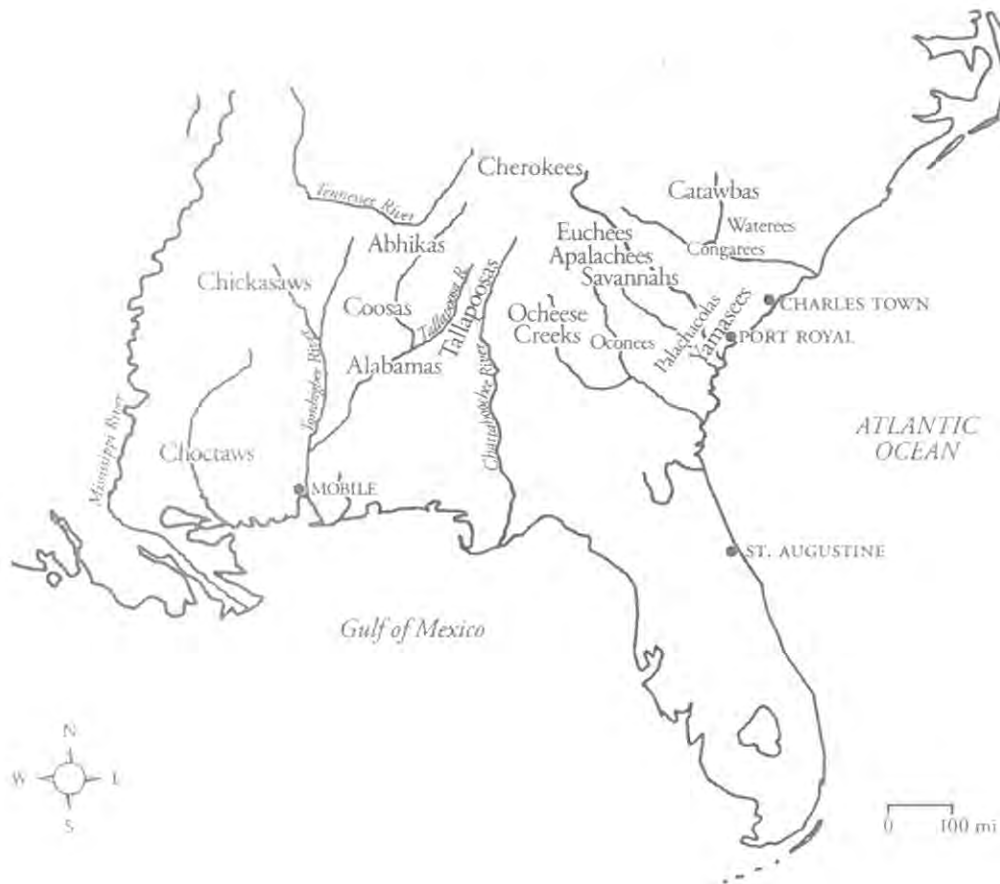
³ Crane, *Southern Frontier*, 162–67, esp. 162. John R. Swanton, *The Early History of the Creek Indians and Their Neighbors* (1922; Gainesville, 1998), 97. For a modern example of this line of thinking, see John Philip Reid, *A Better Kind of Hatchet: Law, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Cherokee Nation during the Early Years of European Contact* (University Park, 1976), 52–55.

conferred on Englishmen by advanced dependency. In short, they anticipate too much in too simple a manner in too little time. The present study invokes dependency theory sparingly, and only to recalibrate scholarly assumptions about its rate of progress in the colonial South, on the one hand, and to urge, on the other, a more complex treatment of its local manifestations that includes not only the behavior of English traders but economic, cultural, and social changes as well. In the process, it seeks to restore to the discussion the driving mechanism that led to Native American dependence, as the historian Richard White saw it: the market.⁴

The essay proposes an alternative explanation for the origins of the Yamasee War in which the nature of the trade itself, more than the traders, and in which efforts at trade regulation, rather than their absence, played important roles in provoking the conflict. By analyzing the extant dialogue of Anglo-Indian exchange relations, it seeks to sketch a more accurate portrait of the trade and its diplomatic implications and escape at last the gravitational pull of the vocabulary of the Crane and Swanton school. It takes as one of its working premises the symbiotic relationship between trade and diplomacy among Native American groups, recognizing that indigenous participation in commodity exchange was more than purely economic, especially during early phases of the trade. As recent scholarship has made abundantly clear, Native American approaches to exchange were embedded in complex cultural and political systems that Europeans ignored at their own peril. It is that multifaceted aspect of the trade, it is argued here, that has been missing in previous attempts to grapple with the problem. Although trade lay close to the heart of the conflagration, the Yamasee War ultimately represented a diplomatic breach between Charles Town and the native peoples of the South, fostered not only by the personal offenses of English traders but, more significantly, by long-term structural trends in the Anglo-Indian trade and finally provoked by specific diplomatic missteps with respect to trade regulation on the part of South Carolina. That the native coalition included at its height such nations as the Choctaws, Upper Creeks (Abhikas, Coosas, Tallapoosas, and Alabamas), and Catawbias, who had relatively few trade-related complaints of any sort, was almost exclusively the result of diplomatic concerns.⁵

⁴ See Richard L. Haan, "The 'Trade Do's Nor Flourish as Formerly': The Ecological Origins of the Yamasee War of 1715," *Ethnohistory*, 28 (Fall 1981), 341–58; and James H. Merrell, *The Indians' New World: Catawbias and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal* (New York, 1991), 68–75, esp. 50. For efforts to explain the origins of the Yamasee War in terms of dependency theory, see James H. Merrell, "Our Bond of Peace": Patterns of Intercultural Exchange in the Carolina Piedmont, 1650–1750," in *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast*, ed. Peter H. Wood, Gregory A. Waselkov, and M. Thomas Hatley (Lincoln, 1989), 207; and Nash, *Red, White, and Black*, 124–26. For a concise summation of Richard White's ideas about dependency theory, see Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln, 1983), xiii–xix.

⁵ For the political significance of trade among southeastern Indians, see Joel W. Martin, "Southeastern Indians and the English Trade in Skins and Slaves," in *The Forgotten Centuries: Indians and Europeans in the American South, 1521–1704*, ed. Charles Hudson and Carmen Chaves Tesser (Athens, Ga., 1994), 308. See also Merrell, "Our Bond of Peace," 198–99; and James Axtell, *The Indians' New South: Culture Change in the Colonial Southeast* (Baton Rouge, 1997), 47. Some of the most rewarding efforts to gain perspective on intercultural exchange have thus far been produced by scholars of the northern fur trade; see, for instance, Arthur J. Ray and Donald B. Freeman, *Give Us Good Measure: An Economic Analysis of Relations between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company before 1763* (Toronto, 1978); and Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, Eng., 1992). Perhaps the best general introduction to the substantivist position (which takes into account native cultural approaches to economic transactions) is Marshall Sahlins,



Locations of southeastern Indian nations on the eve of the Yamasee War, 1715 (with the eventual state boundaries). Map by William L. Ramsey and W. L. Ramsey Jr.

Ultimately, in attempting to see past traditional assumptions about English trade behavior and assess the diplomatic meaning of exchange, the study seeks to do more than advance an alternate explanation for the war's origins. It begins the process of bringing the Yamasee War in a usable form into the broader ethnohistorical discussion that has already done so much to transform our understanding of the region. On a larger scale, it also seeks to establish for the first time a basis for comparative analyses between the Yamasee War and other regions, events, and epochs. Far from being *sui generis*, the origins of the war as presented here exhibit elements that are strikingly similar to the difficulties experienced in French-Algonquian trade relations in the Great Lakes region, or Pays d'en Haut, during the late seventeenth century, and they have a clear significance with respect to ongoing discussions over the influence and development of the Atlantic economy. As the war begins to figure more

Stone-Age Economics (New York, 1972); see also Abraham Rotstein, "Karl Polanyi's Concept of Non-Market Trade," *Journal of Economic History*, 30 (March 1970), 117–26.

prominently in those broader debates, it may at last take its place beside the other great "Indian wars" of the colonial period as a historical moment of the highest importance.

The Discourse of Trade

As earlier accounts have emphasized, there were numerous instances of reprehensible conduct committed by English traders. But misconduct and abuse as defined in European terms does not necessarily add up to an explanation of war. Around 1711, for instance, a trader named Alexander Longe became embroiled in a bitter feud with the Euchee Indians after having "his hair torn off," possibly in a scuffle over outstanding debts. Nursing his resentment, Longe got his revenge a few years later when a Euchee warrior unwisely came to his store to purchase gunpowder. According to a Cherokee man named Partridge, the trader piled up the powder next to his unfortunate client and then "sett fier to itt and blew him up." Longe's behavior clearly qualified by European standards as "misconduct," and the Commissioners of the Indian Trade moved aggressively to prosecute him for that and other offenses. Nevertheless, Longe's actions did not preclude his enjoying the support and friendship of the Cherokee Indians, who subsequently sheltered him even as Charles Town officials sought to bring him to justice. South Carolina's regulatory diligence did more to alienate the Cherokees in this instance than had Longe's behavior. Indeed, as Carolinians languished in their fever-ridden fortifications, Longe safely spent the entirety of the Yamasee War in Cherokee country and continued trading there as an honored guest through the 1720s.⁶

Obviously, misconduct meant different things to different people. For purposes of historical analysis, the term does more to obscure than to explain the causes of the Yamasee War. Southeastern Indians had their own ideas about proper and improper conduct and, for their own reasons, submitted a large number of trade-related complaints to Charles Town officials. Those complaints need to be analyzed as far as possible on their own terms as part of a complex, ongoing dialogue between southeastern Indians and Europeans. In order to do so, however, Native and European voices must be untangled from each other and the basic outlines of the discourse restored. Many of the complaints traditionally cited as evidence of trader misconduct, for example, were not submitted by Native Americans at all. In many cases they were submitted by English traders themselves and probably represent partisan rhetoric directed at opposing trade factions. In the *Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, by far the richest and most systematic source of such complaints, roughly 32 of the 65 cases adjudicated from 1710 to 1715 involved internecine squabbles between English traders. The 30 cases that clearly emanated from Native American sources, however, contain a wealth of information about the sometimes

⁶ May 6, 1714, in *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade: September 20, 1710–August 29, 1718*, ed. W. L. McDowell Jr. (Columbia, S.C., 1992), 56; Alexander Longe, "A Small Postscript on the Ways and Manners of the Indians Called Cherokees," ed. David Corkran, *Southern Indian Studies*, 21 (1969), 55–56, 3.

subtle problems plaguing Anglo-Indian relations. The priorities framed in these complaints differed in several respects from those of English traders, and the well-founded frustrations of the peoples who submitted them deserve a more thorough analysis than mass categorization as complaints about abuse. By plotting the Anglo-Indian dialogue and insisting on the importance of identity as a determinative element in the shaping of discourse, the following study seeks to build the foundation for a native interpretive perspective that revolves around specific, practical issues raised by Native Americans themselves, recognizes geographical distinctions, and acknowledges the asymmetrical distribution of power.⁷

It may be best to begin where many historical accounts of English trade behavior prior to the Yamasee War have ended: with accusations of beatings and murders. These glaring incidents figure prominently in many characterizations of the Anglo-Indian trade relationship, yet they represented a distinct minority when compared with other categories of complaint. Only five English traders were ever accused of such crimes by Native Americans in the *Journals of the Commissioners*. At Altamaha, for instance, the principal town among the lower Yamasee settlements near Port Royal, South Carolina, an Englishman named Alexander Nicholas reportedly “beat a Woman that he kept for his Wife so that she dyed and the Child within her.” He later beat up “another Woman being King Altimahaw’s Sister.” Nicholas then proceeded to a nearby Yamasee town and beat “the Chasee [probably Chechese] King’s Wife.” The headman of Altamaha finally sent word to the Commissioners of the Indian Trade in 1711 that, if Nicholas were not removed and punished, the Indians “would quit the Town.” A warrant was quickly issued for his arrest. At Savano Town on the Savannah River, meanwhile, the Apalachee Indians had reason to resent the presence of Jess Crosley who, “being jealous of a Whore of his, beat and abused an Apalachia Indian Man in a barbarous Manner.” At another unidentified Apalachee village, Phillip Gilliard “took a young Indian against her Will for his Wife.” He reportedly got her “drunk with Rum and locked her up” and then threatened to kill the girl’s mother “because she would not leve her Daughter behind.”⁸

There is no excuse, of course, for such behavior, but there is none either for historians who have taken it at face value, for it conceals a deeper set of issues that must be considered in assessing the nature of Anglo-Indian relations. These incidents over-

⁷ For one of the first efforts to untangle this trader factionalism, see Alan Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670–1717* (New Haven, 2002), 315–34. My survey of the *Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade* counted only those cases from 1710 to 1715 where a clear complainant and defendant(s) could be identified. Only two, however, involved an unidentified complainant or defendant. One additional case in 1711 involved a Yamasee request for clarification of policy with neither complainant nor defendant. I have also followed the threads of each case through the journals in order to avoid counting the same case multiple times, since the commissioners often resumed deliberations after lengthy recesses. For the first identifying references to the 32 cases involving complaints lodged by English traders against other English traders, see McDowell, ed., *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, 5–6, 11–13, 17–18, 20–23, 25, 27–28, 38, 41–43, 46–47, 57–58; for the first identifying references to the 30 cases involving complaints lodged by Native Americans against English traders, see *ibid.*, 3–5, 9, 11, 18–19, 23, 26, 37–38, 42–43, 49–50, 52–53, 57, 59–60.

⁸ For complaints against Alexander Nicholas, see Oct. 25, 1712, in *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, ed. McDowell, 37, 4. For complaints against Phillip Gilliard and Jess Crosley (identified elsewhere as Joseph Crossley), see Sept. 21, 1710, *ibid.*, 4. For other cases of beatings, see *ibid.*, 50, 52.

whelmingly involved affronts to native women. Though perhaps prevalent in the patriarchal societies of western Europe, violence against women was virtually unheard-of among many of the matrilineal societies of the indigenous South. Englishmen among the Cherokees, for instance, marveled that “the women Rules the Rostt and weres the brichess.” On those occasions when domestic violence did erupt, moreover, it was invariably the women who “beat thire husbands within an Inch of thire life.” Indeed, the typical Cherokee man would “not Resesst thire poure if the woman was to beate his breans out.” Traders who raised their fists against native women therefore struck at more than a single victim. They attacked the social values of the community at large.⁹

Traders who married native women encountered a variety of sociocultural perils. Such unions offered immediate advantages for traders, such as kinship privileges and assistance in learning the language, but they also produced long-term problems for all concerned. The two parties brought opposing expectations and presumptions to the marriage. Native women probably anticipated that they would rule the “roost” and wear the “brichess,” while their English husbands viewed the roost and the briches as rightfully theirs. Marriages that produced offspring may have been particularly prone to trouble. The typical English trader probably expected his children to take his surname and be subject to his authority as head of the household. His native wife, on the other hand, may have anticipated that her children would belong to her lineage, as was customary, and fall primarily under the authority of herself, her mother, and her siblings. Indeed, in the typical Indian household, the dominant male figure in the lives of the children was the mother’s brother, not the children’s father. Such divergent agendas may have led to frequent episodes of domestic turmoil.¹⁰

Some traders responded to the dilemma by simply removing their children from the mother’s influence and sending them to be raised in Charles Town. In March 1715, for instance, Rev. William Osborne of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts reported the presence of five “molatto children being those of our Indian traders by Indian women” in St. Bartholomew’s parish. Traders who resorted to that solution may have won a victory of sorts over their native wives, but they did so at the risk of offending many other members of her kinship network who may have considered their responsibilities and rights as much violated as hers.¹¹

⁹ Longe, “Small Postscript on the Ways and Manners of the Indians Called Cherokees,” ed. Corkran, 30. Admittedly, not all southeastern nations held women in such high esteem. The Chickasaws and Catawbas, for instance, exhibited pronounced patriarchal traits. Indeed, the Chickasaws occasionally mocked the “Ochesees” or Lower Creeks for being so obedient to their womenfolk. Significantly, however, these nations were also relatively content with English trade relations. For Chickasaw opinions of Lower Creek gender relations, see Thomas Nairne, *Nairne’s Muskhoegan Journals: The 1708 Expedition to the Mississippi River*, ed. Alexander Moore (Jackson, 1988), 48.

¹⁰ Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700–1835* (Lincoln, 1998), 45–46; also see Robin Fox, *Kinship and Marriage: An Anthropological Perspective* (Baltimore, 1967), 97–121; and J. Leitch Wright Jr., *Creeks and Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulge People* (Lincoln, 1989), 19.

¹¹ Mr. Osborne to the Secretary, March 1, 1714/15 (microfilm: frame 93, reel PR0085), Series A, Contemporary copies of letters received, vols. 7–17, 1712–1723, Selected Pages Relating to South Carolina from Library of Congress Transcripts of the Papers of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia). See also Mr. Tredway Bull to the Secretary, Jan. 20, 1714/15, frame 91, *ibid.* Dual years in dates indicate both the Julian calendar year, observed in England, which began in late March, and the Gregorian calendar year, observed in most of Europe, which began on January 1.

In such matters, private acts could carry very public consequences. Indian women who married English traders were often viewed by native societies as providing a valuable diplomatic service. They assisted in bringing outsiders into a familiar, understandable relationship with the community and, in doing so, secured the benefits of trade and the power that control over it conferred for themselves and their clansmen. In practical terms, this meant that trader's wives were likely to be the relations of local dignitaries, thus adding a political dimension to seemingly private domestic problems. In the town of Tuckesaw in the winter of 1706, for instance, two English traders, John Musgrove and William Stead, became involved in a dispute with the leaders of the town. The nature of the domestic problems that precipitated the conflict are unknown, but, according to the two traders involved, the situation came to a head when the mico of the town stepped in and took "away . . . [their] Indian wives." Musgrove was apparently so enraged by the intervention that he "threatned the lives of the Tuckesaw Indian king and another." He demanded, moreover, four slaves as compensation for the loss of his wife. Other reports gave a slightly different version of events, suggesting that in fact "the said Musgrove and Stead had turn'd away their said wives on purpose." It is also possible, perhaps even probable, that the women simply abandoned their husbands and sought protection with their family members. The traders eventually settled the matter "with the Tuckesaw King and the other Indian ffor three slaves in satisffac'on ffor their wives," but the basic problems that caused domestic turmoil in the first place went unresolved. Official relations with the "King" no doubt suffered in direct proportion.¹²

Violence against women may well have been the most corrosive form of misconduct perpetrated by Englishmen in Indian territory. Despicable in European circles, it must have been particularly jarring among Cherokee and Lower Creek towns where female control of the agricultural and domestic sphere was rarely questioned. Amplified by the prestigious clan connections possessed by many of those women, private disputes sometimes broadened, as in the case of Musgrove and Stead, into political quarrels that threatened to disrupt trade relations. If English traders themselves, living and working among southeastern Indians, failed on many occasions to recognize and adjust to local patterns of gender relations, the Commissioners of the Indian Trade could hardly be expected to solve their cultural myopia from Charles Town. None of their regulatory instructions indicates that they ever considered the problem. Alexander Longe, however, a prime specimen of misconduct in European eyes for blowing up a Euchee Indian in his store, understood that different customs applied in Indian country. "Wee shold be well sett to worke," he warned his fellow Englishmen, "to take notice of womens actions." His sensitivity to such issues may

¹² For the diplomatic function of Euro-Indian marriages in the northern fur trade, see Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Norman, 1983), 4, 9-121. For a discussion of Creek-European intermarriage with respect to trade relations, see Joshua Aaron Piker, "Peculiarly Connected: The Creek Town of Oakfuskee and the Study of Colonial American Communities, 1708-1785" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1998), 359-70. See also Joel W. Martin, *Sacred Revolt: The Muskogees' Struggle for a New World* (Boston, 1991), 76-79. For the incident between John Musgrove, William Stead, and the Tuckesaw king, see A. S. Salley, ed., *Journal of the Commons House of Assembly of South Carolina, March 6, 1705/6-April 9, 1706* (Columbia, S.C., 1937), 22.

explain why he was still welcome in Cherokee territory once the Yamasee War began.¹³

Yet gender-specific violence was not the only outcome of English-Indian marriages. In many cases, such unions fulfilled the diplomatic expectations of native communities and actually provided women with new avenues to power and influence. Indeed, the prevailing historiography suggests that the status of women within native societies tended to benefit from involvement in trade and, conversely, decline as women were excluded from access to European trade. The corrosive effects of gender-specific violence on Anglo-Indian exchange relations thus did their damage selectively, depending on tribal affiliation and the specific clans or lineages involved, and always within the simultaneous context of positive influences for other native women and their kinship networks. Appalling as the behavior of some English traders may have been, their example cannot be applied as a formulaic constant among all southeastern nations or even, for that matter, among the towns of a single nation. It is even less pertinent when submerged with other problems as generalized trade abuse and swabbed liberally across the entire region.¹⁴

Other forms of trader abuse masked similarly complex issues. Seven of the 30 complaints levied against English traders by Native Americans in the *Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, for instance, involved incidents of "taking away" the Indians' personal belongings. A series of resolutions passed in the Commons House of Assembly on January 26, 1702, also indicates the prevalence of this activity. Of 6 resolutions concerning traders, 5 required them to give back or make restitution for what they had taken away from someone. The expropriation of goods from Indians was practiced by many traders across much of the Southeast. Indeed, it appears to have been regarded more as an established and reputable order of business than an act of burglary. In 1713, for instance, when Cornelius Meckarty was accused by two Indian leaders of "beating two of their people that came from North Carolina and taking some cloaths from them," he produced affidavits from eyewitnesses "to prove that he had not beaten" the Indians. He apparently considered it unnecessary to defend or deny the simple act of taking away their "cloaths."¹⁵

The key to understanding most of these incidents is probably linked to credit. Meckarty behaved as he did, for example, not necessarily because he was perverse or abusive, though he may have been, but because the Indians in question owed him eighty-three deerskins. He probably considered himself guilty of nothing more than

¹³ Longe, "Small Postscript on the Ways and Manners of the Indians Called Cherokees," ed. Corkran, 33.

¹⁴ For the empowering aspects of women's involvement in the northern fur trade, see Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*, 4–6, 9–121. For similar processes in the southern trade, see Piker, "Peculiarly Connected," 359–70; and Kathryn E. Holland Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1685–1815* (Lincoln, 1993), 84–85. For women's declining status as a result of their exclusion from the trade, see Perdue, *Cherokee Women*, 76–94; and Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733–1816* (Cambridge, Eng., 1999), 139–63; see also Nancy Shoemaker, "Introduction," in *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women*, ed. Nancy Shoemaker (New York, 1995), 10–12.

¹⁵ For complaints about "taking away" lodged by Native Americans against English traders, see McDowell, ed., *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, 11 (two accounts), 13, 38, 42, 43, 50. A. S. Salley, ed., *Journals of the Commons House of Assembly of South Carolina for 1702* (Columbia, S.C., 1932), 21. For Cornelius Meckarty's case, see Nov. 24, 1713, in *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, ed. McDowell, 52.

repossession of merchandise for nonpayment. Similarly, when William Ford went before the Commissioners of the Indian Trade on June 27, 1712, to answer charges that he had taken away a slave belonging to a Yamasee Indian named Enaclega, he defended his action on the grounds that Enaclega "owed him 39 skins and that he took the said slave for security of his debt." Far from condemning Ford, the commissioners ordered the Indian to pay the debt in exchange for the return of the slave.¹⁶

In its basic form, the practice of forcible confiscation did not overtly violate indigenous norms. Among the Creek Indians, whenever a particular individual contributed less than his or her quota of labor to the tilling of the communal fields or to village improvements, the mico and his council routinely dispatched warriors to "pillage his house of such things as they [could] find." The confiscated goods were then sold and added "to the town stock." In cases involving personal debts between individuals, moreover, "if the debtor prove too negligent the creditor only goes to his house and takes the value of his debet in what he can find." These methods undoubtedly possessed a compelling logic among early historic period societies rooted in communal values, where property was generally held in common and private ownership was not yet pronounced, but English traders did not belong to that community. They did not share in the demands of communal labor, and they owned property exclusively as private individuals or, at best, as part of joint trading companies. As European markets increasingly cast their influence over the Southeast, moreover, the rate of seizures rose at an alarming rate.¹⁷

Credit emerged as a point of concern in the first decade of the eighteenth century. Gov. James Moore, certainly no friend to southeastern Indians, nevertheless advised his fellow Carolinians as early as 1702 that "care must be taken to prevent trade wth the Indjans on trust." "That alone," he cautioned, "in a short time will force the Indjans to apply them selves to the French for a trade, as well as protection from the severity of their creditors." Troublesome enough in itself, credit introduced a number of unforeseen complications into Anglo-Indian relations. In May 1714, for instance, the Commissioners of the Indian Trade discussed a case of indebtedness that had become too complicated even for the English to untangle. A trader named Sheppy Allen, perhaps seeking to get out of the Indian trade, "made over his debts," as owed to him, to another trader named Glenhead. This transfer of debt from one trader to another no doubt puzzled Allen's native clients, who may not immediately have recognized their obligations to a man they had never done business with. Their confusion must have been multiplied when Glenhead again transferred the debt to Samuel Hilden. A fourth trader named Mackey then stepped forward to dispute Hilden's claim and demand payment of "his debts as assignne from Allen." Meanwhile, an Indian named Ingetange informed the commissioners that Allen was still indebted to *him* for the purchase of "severall slaves." Since other Indians still had outstanding debts owed to Allen, Ingetange argued, they should simply make their payments directly to him rather than to Allen, or Glenhead, or Hilden, or Mackey. In another

¹⁶ For William Ford's case, see June 27, 1712, in *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, ed. McDowell, 28.

¹⁷ Nairne, *Nairne's Muskogean Journals*, ed. Moore, 34–35.

case, an Indian named Egabugga complained to the commissioners that the debt of “fower Hundred Skins” that he owed to “Capt. Mackey” had been purchased from Mackey by John Cochran for only 80 skins. If Mackey had accepted 80 skins as settlement of the debt from Cochran, Egabugga must have reasoned, why was he still required to pay Cochran 400?¹⁸

Sometimes the intermixture of native and European worlds produced hybrid concepts that created more problems than they solved. One such case involved the practice of collecting what traders termed “relations’ debts,” a fusion of European credit and native devotion to communal or clan responsibility. Many traders discovered that, even if a particular Indian could not repay his debts, his family and friends, or even the leaders of the town, could often be counted on to fulfill his obligations. In one instance, a Chiaha Indian man named Tuskenehau, who had “gon to warr,” returned home to find

that the Head Men of the Cussetau Town had taken away the said Tuskenehau’s wife named Tooledeha, a free woman, and her mother, a slave belonging to the said Tooskenehau, . . . upon pretence of paying some town debts due from others of the said town to Mr. John Pight when the said Tuskenehau was no wais indebted to the said John Pight or any other person trading att the said town.

The Commissioners of the Indian Trade recognized “relations’ debts” as an unorthodox practice but refrained from banning it entirely. Instead, they attempted to refine it by insisting that traders first obtain the assent of all those who might be affected, after which “such relations or chief men of the town shall be liable and answerable for the payment of all such debts.”¹⁹

Perhaps the clearest indication that issues related to credit played an important role in producing the Anglo-Indian rupture of 1715 comes from the close relationship between the outbreak of the Yamasee War in April and the seasonal nature of the credit cycle. Aside from the handful of traders who operated warehouses year-round, the majority of traders made only two trips into the interior during the course of the year: once in the fall and once in the spring. In the fall, traders laden with new merchandise arrived in villages across the Southeast and began selling their wares. Indians unable to purchase all the supplies they needed outright were extended credit. The traders then returned to Charles Town, and Indian men set out to gather as many deerskins as possible during the winter hunt, usually from about October until March. Then, as the weather improved the following spring, traders once again trekked into Indian territory, this time to purchase deerskins and collect payment of outstanding debts. In the spring of 1715, however, they found another sort of payment altogether waiting for them.²⁰

¹⁸ For James Moore, see Salley, ed., *Journals of the Commons House of Assembly . . . 1702*, 26. For credit-related complications, see May 20, 1714, in *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, ed. McDowell, 57.

¹⁹ For early concerns about “relations’ debts,” see Aug. 3, 1711, in *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, ed. McDowell, 15. For Tuskenehau’s case, see June 12, 1712, *ibid.*, 26. For official instructions on the matter, see July 10, 1712, *ibid.*, 36.

²⁰ Louis R. Smith Jr., “British-Indian Trade in Alabama, 1670–1756,” *Alabama Review*, 27 (Jan. 1974), 71; Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 62.

There is reason to believe that several nations had run up heavy debts during the early eighteenth century. The Yamasees alone had amassed a collective trade debt of about a hundred thousand deerskins by 1711, a figure greater than South Carolina's entire yearly export total. The historian Richard Haan has suggested that the Yamasees' plight resulted from environmental and demographic factors, primarily the depletion of white-tailed deer in coastal regions and difficulties in acquiring new Indian slaves. Yet they had access to extensive hunting grounds that extended along most of the coast of modern-day Georgia and may have included portions of the abandoned Apalachee cornfields in northern Florida. It remains uncertain whether they could have denuded that region of game in only thirty years of trade, and Carolina's deerskin exports continued rising dramatically for several decades after the Yamasee War. Some ethnohistorians have even begun to question whether deer populations were in decline by the mid- to late eighteenth century, well after the trade had reached its peak. Yamasee participation in the Tuscarora War (1711–1713), moreover, swelled the number of unfortunate captives brought in for sale on the Charles Town slave market and provided Yamasee warriors with a significant new source of income. While Haan's arguments deserve consideration, credit problems among the Yamasees and several other of Carolina's oldest trading partners probably had as much to do with a rapidly deteriorating exchange rate between English pounds sterling and Carolina currency, which must have increased the price of European trade goods dramatically, and changing market demands that drastically restricted the range of permissible exchange commodities. Whatever the causes of the Yamasees' credit dilemma, such enormous sums meant that they and many other Indians were increasingly obliged "to goe to war and a'hunting to pay their debts," with very little to show for their exertions afterward.²¹

Yet indebtedness, like gender relations, cannot be applied as a formulaic constant. Not all Native Americans were debtors, and lines of credit did not extend solely from Carolina into Indian country. They sometimes ran in the other direction. The *Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade* listed five separate occasions when Native creditors sought the assistance of Carolina officials in forcing English traders to pay their debts. Several of these involved Yamasee Indians, including "King Lewis" of Pocotaligo Town, where the first shots of the war ultimately broke out. At about the same time, the "Coosata King" sought action against Theophilus Hastings for the sum of a thousand deerskins. The commissioners recognized the validity of his claim and persuaded Hastings to honor his commitment. Considered alongside incidents of "taking away" and "relations' debts," the prevalence of Native creditors indicates

²¹ For Yamasee trade debts, see Crane, *Southern Frontier*, 167. For an environmental perspective of the topic, see Haan, "Trade Do's Not Flourish as Formerly," 341–58. For a discussion of late-eighteenth-century deer populations, see Gregory A. Waselkov, "The Eighteenth-Century Anglo-Indian Trade in Southeastern North America," in *New Faces of the Fur Trade: Selected Papers of the Seventh North American Fur Trade Conference, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1995*, ed. Jo-Anne Fiske, Susan Sleeper-Smith, and William Wicken (East Lansing, 1998), 203–5. The exchange rate in terms of pounds Carolina currency per 100 pounds sterling jumped from 150 in 1712 to 200 in 1713 and then to 300 in 1714. See John J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600–1775: A Handbook* (Chapel Hill, 1978), 222. For a discussion of changing market demands and viable commodities, see below. July 27, 1711, in *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, ed. McDowell, 11.

that credit constituted a serious hot spot in the trade that produced tension on all sides.²²

Finally, incidents related to the Indian slave trade represented one of the most common categories of misconduct attributed to English traders. Six of the 30 complaints brought by Native Americans before the Commissioners of the Indian Trade in the five years preceding the Yamasee War had to do with slavery. English traders themselves appear to have been even more concerned about it, filing 11 complaints on that issue against rival English traders. With few exceptions, the incidents stemmed from legal ambiguities involved in the process of transforming human beings from a state of freedom into forms of property. The profitability of the slave trade, for native warriors as well as for English traders, placed individual liberties at risk across the South and led many to seek their victims among vulnerable friends and allies as well as legitimate enemies. As a result, the Commissioners of the Indian Trade spent much of their time adjudicating cases in which free Indians had allegedly been sold unjustly into slavery.²³

The commissioners appear to have approached the cases conscientiously, and they ruled in favor of the enslaved parties in a surprising number of instances, though often leaving the door open for additional evidence to reverse their decisions. On September 21, 1710, for example, they determined "that Ventusa, an Appalachia Indian, and his wife are to continue as free people," but their freedom was not unconditional. They were entitled to their liberty only until such time as "Phillip Gilliard by a hearing before the board can prove the contrary." In another case reviewed the same day, the commissioners ruled that an "Ellcombe" (elsewhere Illcombe) Indian named Wansella was "to be a free man till Mr. John Pight can prove him a slave." The Commons House of Assembly also heard such cases on occasion. On May 12, 1714, they reviewed allegations that William Bray, a trader who worked primarily among the Yamasee Indians, had sold "a free Indian woman and her two children." In contrast to the quick, if irresolute, decisions of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade, the house moved at a snail's pace, often referring cases to committees where they languished for months at a time. Such was the fate of William Bray's case. It was apparently still in committee when the Yamasee War erupted a year later.²⁴

South Carolina officials never recognized the underlying patterns of the cases that came before them or else considered them unimportant. Incidents related to the slave

²² For complaints of Indian creditors, see McDowell, ed., *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, 19, 42 (two accounts), 53, 57.

²³ For a more detailed discussion of Indian slavery and its complications, see William L. Ramsey, "A Coat for 'Indian Cuffy': Mapping the Boundary between Freedom and Slavery in Colonial South Carolina," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 103 (Jan. 2002), 48–66. For complaints lodged by Native Americans about slavery, see McDowell, ed., *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, 3, 4 (two accounts), 23, 26, 49. For complaints lodged by English traders against other English traders concerning the issue of Indian slavery, see *ibid.*, 6, 11, 20, 22–23 (two cases), 25, 41 (two cases), 42, 47, 57.

²⁴ Sept. 21, 1710, in *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, ed. McDowell, 3–4. May 12, 1714, Journals of the Commons House of Assembly of South Carolina, 1706–1721 (microfilm: frame 4: 255), John S. Green transcripts (South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia).

trade, gender-specific violence, and credit inundated the Commissioners of the Indian Trade with personal anecdotes, affidavits, and details that undoubtedly obscured the larger picture. Nevertheless, those subcategories of trader misconduct suggest that Anglo-Indian relations were marred by much more than the personal failings and abuses of individual Englishmen, reprehensible though they often were. Anglo-Indian relations were riven by distinct lines of stress that formed in particularly troublesome areas. Native complaints and irritation clustered conspicuously around those cultural, economic, and social fault zones, not around individual traders. The nature of the exchange relationship itself thus appears to have concentrated tension along these lines, and few traders could wholly avoid contributing to the problem in one way or another.

In addition to the fault zones, the complaints attributable to Native Americans prior to 1715 displayed a striking geographical pattern. Although Cherokee, Upper Creek, and Catawba voices occasionally found their way into the journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade or the Commons House of Assembly, the vast majority belonged to Ocheese (or Lower) Creek, Euchee, Savannah, Apalachee, and Yamasee villages. Those nations formed a coherent zone of settlement along Carolina's oldest and most lucrative trade route, extending south and southwest from Charles Town into central Georgia. The volume of complaints from that region probably reflects their deeper involvement in trade more than it does any regional differences in the behavior of English traders. At the same time, however, those nations had fewer options for European trade open to them than others. They had done much themselves, in fact, to limit their access to alternative sources of European goods between 1680 and 1704 by assisting in the destruction of the Spanish mission system in Florida. Having thus entered into what economists term a monopsony relationship with Charles Town by the first decade of the eighteenth century, one in which there is only a single buyer of goods, Yamasees, Eucheas, Lower Creeks, and others may have found it necessary to engage English officials more aggressively in order to affect the terms of exchange. Even so, their prominence in the historical record should not be read simply as evidence of greater victimization. In many cases, their protests suggest they were active, intelligent participants in exchange, attempting purposefully to influence and direct the process for their own advantage.²⁵

The Market

The stress fractures plaguing Anglo-Indian trade in the South were not unique and need not necessarily have resulted in warfare. They appeared at various points in other regions of North America as well. In the normal course of business in 1684, for instance, cultural, economic, and social friction led to the deaths of thirty-nine

²⁵ For excellent accounts of the English-Indian attacks on the Spanish missions, see Paul E. Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers* (Bloomington, 2002), 174–82; and Amy Turner Bushnell, *Situado and Sabana: Spain's Support System for the Presidio and Mission Provinces of Florida* (Athens, Ga., 1994), 193–95. For a speculative discussion of the diplomatic repercussions of the collapse of the Spanish mission system from a Yamasee perspective, see Bradley Scott Schrage, "Yamasee Indians and the Challenge of Spanish and English Colonialism in the North American Southeast, 1660–1715" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 2001), 167–230.

French traders in the hinterlands of New France. Cordial relations between Quebec and its native clients did not break down, however, because the two groups, meeting each other on what the historian Richard White has termed the “middle ground” between cultures, managed to resolve their differences and arrive at mutually agreeable ways of interacting with one another by observing and accommodating the cultural values of the other. Indeed, as complaints about English misconduct poured into Charles Town, Frenchmen in Louisiana and New France were engaged in some of the most adept and creative frontier diplomacy of the age. If English abusiveness no longer functions as an analytical tool, it is not immediately apparent why Carolinians and their native clients could not arrive at a similar accommodation. Why did Englishmen and Indians in the colonial South move further apart when other groups experiencing similar difficulties managed to establish a sustainable, responsive dialogue?²⁶

In the aftermath of the Yamasee War, a number of Native American voices found their way into the records on this topic, and they tell a complicated story. Many accounts denied that there was a problem at all. Cherekeileigie (Cherokeeleechee) of the Lower (Ocheese) Creeks, recalling “the Yamasee Wars” in 1735, insisted that he was “not the occasion of breaking the peace at that time.” He was “averse unto it because [he] lived as happily as any white man in those days in my own house . . . [and] wore as good apparel and rode as good a horse as most of them.” Nevertheless, once “engaged in the wars, [he] did the English all the harm he could.” Such statements make it clear that many southeastern Indians made war on South Carolina for reasons that had nothing to do with traders or the trade. Other comments, however, do cite English trade relations as a source of irritation, and, at first glance, they seem to reinforce arguments about trader misconduct. In 1747, for instance, Malatchi of the Lower Creeks recalled that “we lived as brothers for some time till the traders began to use us very ill and wanted to enslave us which occasioned a war.” The Cherokees also reported in 1716 that English traders “had ben very abusefull to them of latte, and not as whitte men used to be to them formerly.” According to those sources, relations between Englishmen and Indians were not always troubled. Native accusations of generalized abuse were almost always framed in comparison to earlier periods of supposed harmony. What these documents really say, therefore, is that traders and the trade, and therefore their relationship with Native America, had changed in a way that did not please Native Americans.²⁷

²⁶ White, *Middle Ground*, 75, 50–93. The general utility of White’s model for other regions and epochs remains a point of controversy. Scholars of the colonial South have been especially suspicious of the “middle ground,” preferring to emphasize local accommodation and variation over the development of a shared trade culture. For insightful discussions of intercultural exchange, see Andrew R. L. Cayton and Fredericka J. Teute, “Introduction: On the Connection of Frontiers,” in *Contact Points: American Frontiers from the Mohawk Valley to the Mississippi, 1750–1830*, ed. Andrew R. L. Cayton and Fredericka J. Teute (Chapel Hill, 1998), 1–15; and Leonard Thompson and Howard Lamar, “Contemporary Frontier History,” in *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared*, ed. Leonard Thompson and Howard Lamar (New Haven, 1982), 6–10; see also Gregory H. Nobles, “Breaking into the Backcountry: New Approaches to the Early American Frontier, 1750–1800,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 46 (Oct. 1989), 641–47.

²⁷ For Cherokeeleechee’s recollections, see Patrick Mackay to James Oglethorpe, March 29, 1735, in *General Oglethorpe’s Georgia: Colonial Letters, 1733–1743*, ed. Mills Lane (2 vols., Savannah, 1975), I, 152. For Malatchi’s comments, see Speech by Malatchi Opiya Mico to Alexander Heron, Dec. 7, 1747 (microfilm: frame 316, reel

If a mature “middle ground” had not yet emerged in the early-eighteenth-century South, Malatchi and others had nevertheless developed a clear set of ideas about the protocols of intercultural exchange that allowed them to assess the adequacy of French, English, and Spanish behavior. Although grounded in traditional notions of reciprocity, gift giving, and alliance, such ideas had undergone more than a century of contact with and adaptation to European approaches to exchange by 1715. According to the ethnohistorian Gregory H. Waselkov, a low-level but significant Spanish-Indian trade in the early to mid-seventeenth century prepared aboriginal cultures in the region for more intensive trade relations in the eighteenth century, primarily by introducing them to a broad range of material goods. The lessons learned in that trade served southeastern Indians well during the early phases of trade with South Carolina and, following the establishment of Louisiana in 1699, with the French. In the first fifteen years of the eighteenth century, however, trade relations with South Carolina began to accelerate and take on new dimensions, adding tension to the inherently delicate process of intercultural trade. Measured against previous exchange patterns, the Cherokees had no trouble recognizing that English traders were not behaving “as whitte men used to be to them formerly.”²⁸

The observations of Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne de Bienville, the principal architect of French Louisiana’s frontier policy, may provide some insight into the nature of this new behavior. He conceded in 1715 that the English of Carolina had a natural economic advantage in that they “sold . . . merchandise very cheap and . . . took the peltries at a high price and here [in French Louisiana] it is quite the contrary.” But he understood that southeastern Indians factored more into the bargain than simple economics. Unable to offer a better deal, he chose to focus French efforts instead on what he later called “*good faith* in trading” (italics mine). This meant a good deal more in practice than equitable treatment and honesty. For the first half of the eighteenth century, French Louisiana remained very much at the margins of the emerging Atlantic economy. The historian Daniel H. Usner has aptly described the colony as being involved in a “frontier exchange economy,” dominated by indigenous, regional patterns of exchange rather than the demands of external markets. The informal nature of this “exchange economy” allowed Indians greater freedom to control and adapt the volume and terms of trade with Europeans to their own needs. As a result, French trade was conducted not only in “good faith” but in closer accordance with traditional forms of ceremonial gift exchange and tribute.²⁹

12), Original Manuscript Books, vol. 36, Colonial Records of the State of Georgia (Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta). For the Cherokee assessment of English traders, see “Journal of the March of the Carolinians into the Cherokee Mountains,” in *City of Charleston Year-book, 1894*, ed. Landgon Cheves (Charleston, 1894), 335.

²⁸ For seventeenth-century Spanish-Indian trade, see Gregory H. Waselkov, “Seventeenth-Century Trade in the Colonial Southeast,” *Southeastern Archaeology*, 8 (no. 2, 1982), 117–30. For the classic statement on the acceleration of trade in the first decade of the eighteenth century, see Converse D. Clowse, *Economic Beginnings of Colonial South Carolina, 1670–1730* (Columbia, S.C., 1971), 162–66.

²⁹ [Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne de] Bienville to Pontchartrain, Sept. 1, 1715, in *Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion*, ed. and trans. Dunbar Rowland and Albert Godfrey Sanders (3 vols., Jackson, 1927–1932), III, 187. Price differences probably had much to do with Louisiana’s marginal position in the French empire. In regions where distributional problems were not as severe, Native American consumers in the early eighteenth century often preferred French goods. See W. J. Eccles, “A Belated Review of Harold Adams Innis, *The Fur Trade in*

Bienville believed that the Indians noticed and appreciated the differences between the respective English and French approaches to trade. Those differences, he felt, were most evident in relation to the trade in Indian slaves. According to Bienville, the majority of southeastern Indians had come to "despise" the English "because of the little scruple that they have against buying slaves of the nations with which they are not at war, which we [French] do not do at all." On those rare occasions when overzealous French traders took slaves from allied nations, Bienville invariably had them returned. "Barbarians as they are," he wrote in 1711, "they do not fail to make the distinction between our sentiments and those of the English."³⁰

The difference in French and English sentiments regarding Indian slaves, like their differences on other aspects of trade, was not the result of French moral superiority or English deficiency. It reflected, rather, the contrasting economic imperatives at work in Louisiana and South Carolina. Whereas Louisiana remained an insular and economically backward region, allowing Bienville to cultivate "good faith," the burgeoning South Carolina economy had come to depend on a continuous flow of unfree labor by the end of the first decade of the eighteenth century, both for use within the colony on rice plantations and for export as trade credit to other plantation colonies. Increasingly, that dependence encouraged English traders to take risks they may not have taken formerly in order to secure an adequate supply of slaves. The deerskin trade accelerated as well, transforming the trade, in the words of the historian Clowse, from "haphazard bartering . . . to a business carried on by professionals." Although English traders were able to offer goods at competitive prices, by the first decade of the eighteenth century their attention was more attuned to the demands of the Carolina and Atlantic economies than to the complaints of their native clients. In short, they had less power to shape the basic contours of trade or to fashion it to fit local conditions than did their French rivals.³¹

In some cases the influence of the market made English trade behavior seem almost suicidal. In 1706, for instance, an English trading partnership involving John Pight, James Lucas, and Anthony Probert attempted to augment its profits by having a small, English-allied, Indian nation called the Illcombees declared and taken slaves en masse. The plan encountered opposition among neighboring Indian nations, but

Canada," *Canadian Historical Review*, 60 (Dec. 1979), 430–31; and Walter L. Dorn, *Competition for Empire* (New York, 1940), 254. Bienville to Maurepas, April 20, 1734, in *Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion*, ed. and trans. Rowland and Sanders, III, 670–71. For Louisiana and the frontier exchange economy, see Daniel H. Usner Jr., *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill, 1992), 277, 8, 26–27.

³⁰ Bienville to Pontchartrain, Oct. 27, 1711, in *Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion*, ed. and trans. Rowland and Sanders, III, 160.

³¹ For South Carolina's economic development, see Clowse, *Economic Beginnings of Colonial South Carolina*, 165; see also Russell R. Menard, "Financing the Lowcountry Export Boom: Capital and Growth in Early Carolina," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 51 (Oct. 1994), 659–76; Peter A. Coclanis, "The Hydra Head of Merchant Capital: Markets and Merchants in Early South Carolina," in *The Meaning of South Carolina History: Essays in Honor of George C. Rogers Jr.*, ed. David R. Chesnut and Clyde N. Wilson (Columbia, S.C., 1991), 1–18; and R. C. Nash, "South Carolina and the Atlantic Economy in the Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Economic History Review*, 45 (Nov. 1992), 677–702. The long-standing presumption that French attitudes toward Native Americans were inherently more beneficent than those of the English are explored in Cornelius Jaenen, "French Attitudes towards Native Society," in *Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference*, ed. Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray (Toronto, 1980), 59–72.

the traders continued to pursue their aims undeterred. At length, during a "consultation" about the issue in an unidentified native "round house," their persistence almost cost them their lives. "Affraid least the Indians would rise upon them," they ordered another of their associates, Theophilus Hastings, "to loade all his guns." Even after this episode, remarkably, they remained committed to the scheme. Not until the South Carolina Commons House of Assembly stepped in and reprimanded the traders later that year did they drop their plans.³²

Although assembled together in the same "round house," Indians and Englishmen were worlds apart on this occasion. It is not enough, moreover, to blame the failure on English misconduct, for Pight, Lucas, and Probert brought something more than their own recklessness into the round house with them: they brought the market. Even as they were loading all their guns, several members of the partnership faced legal actions in the South Carolina Court of Common Pleas for collection of debts. Both Pight and Probert were in desperate financial trouble in late 1706; Probert was sued in November by William Smith for the enormous sum of 1,500 pounds Carolina currency. He was forced to put up bail in order to continue trading. His inflexible performance in the round house had much to do with market forces beyond his control.³³

Market influence over English traders involved much more, however, than credit stress. In the decade preceding the Yamasee War, the market effected a sweeping reconfiguration of the South Carolina Indian trade. It is a phenomenon that has entirely escaped scholarly notice thus far, perhaps because export totals for deerskins, the most obvious barometer of Anglo-Indian exchange for most of the eighteenth century, do not reflect this early transformation. Although deerskins became the primary staple of the trade and had predominated from the beginning, there was initially a trade in other types of pelts that more closely resembled the northern "fur trade." During the 1690s, black bear, panther or wildcat (listed as cat), fox, muskrat, woodchuck, otter, raccoon, and beaver pelts were traded in meaningful volumes. From 1699 to 1701, southeastern Indians received European goods in exchange for 3,373 beaver pelts, 3,675 fox furs, 1,228 otter pelts, 2,460 raccoon skins, and 529 cat skins. By the end of the first decade of the eighteenth century, however, the trade in beaver had declined drastically, while the rest had virtually disappeared as viable items of exchange. From 1713 to 1715, English traders accepted only 1,469 beaver pelts, 39 fox furs, 12 otter pelts, 7 raccoon skins, and not a single cat skin. Mean-

³² A. S. Salley, ed., *Journal of the Commons House of Assembly of South Carolina, November 20, 1706–February 8, 1706/7* (Columbia, S.C., 1939), 34.

³³ *William Smith v. Anthony Probert*, Nov. 12, 1706, box 2A (microfilm: frames 731–32, reel 1705–1707), Judgement Rolls, South Carolina Court of Common Pleas (South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia); *Peter Mailbitt v. John Pight*, Jan. 17, 1706/7, box 2A, frame 803, *ibid.* The same may be said for most of the traders cited earlier with respect to the forcible confiscation of goods and issues of credit. Most were sued for debts, including Joseph Bryan (Brynon), Phillip Gilliard, Shippy (Sheppy) Allen, Richard Gower, Samuel Hilden, and John Wright: see *John Buckley v. Joseph Brynon*, Oct. 23, 1706, box 2A, frame 758, *ibid.*; *Richard Beresford v. Phillip Gilliard*, 1710, box 2C, frame 143, reel 1710–1711, *ibid.*; *John Buckley v. Shippy Allen*, Aug. 2, 1712, box 2D, frame 2, reel 1711–1712, *ibid.*; *Isaac Mazyck v. Shippy Allen and Alexander Nicholas*, Aug. 2, 1712, box 2D, frame 15, *ibid.*; *Richard Beresford v. Richard Gower*, June 22, 1711, box 3A, frame 206, *ibid.*; *John Wright v. Samuel Hilden and John Cocket*, Aug. 13, 1712, box 2D, frame 81, *ibid.*; and *William Smith v. John Wright*, Nov. 4, 1706, box 2A, frame 752, reel 1705–1707, *ibid.*

while, deerskin exports during the same three-year period increased by about 50,000 skins to 167,044.³⁴

The market clearly lay behind this transformation. English traders purchased from their native clients only those items they could expect to sell most profitably abroad or else offered such unappealing compensation that the skill and labor involved in acquiring, for instance, panther or wildcat skins made the trade unattractive. Those economic imperatives stemmed in part from the disruption of shipping routes as a result of Queen Anne's War from 1702 to 1713 and in part from depressed European fur markets. Although additional studies on transatlantic shipping and trade need to be done, it seems likely that new British imperial legislation making South Carolina's most profitable export, rice, an enumerated commodity in 1704 had some impact as well. The legislation eliminated a number of lucrative Iberian markets for the colony's rice planters because their fall harvests could not be transshipped from English ports in time to satisfy seasonal needs. As a result, much of the colony's rice was diverted into the coastwise trade to other North American colonies. Fur shipments dependent on those pre-1704 routes may have been curtailed as a consequence. A profitable reexport system capable of serving northern as well as southern European markets did not emerge in Great Britain until the 1720s, by which time furs had disappeared from South Carolina shipping lists. Whatever the causes, Charles Town officials were painfully aware of this process. As early as 1708, the first Indian agent, Thomas Nairne, was already reminiscing about the days "when beavor was a comodity." Observing "multitudes of beavor dams" in Chickasaw country, he lamented not only the loss of revenue but also the diplomatic leverage the trade conferred against French Louisiana. "We can easiely ruin Mobile," he argued, "meerly by purchasing beavor skins." He urged the Commissioners of the Indian Trade to "study all means" by which the beaver trade might be revived, suggesting ultimately that "if it's no comodity in England" it might "be sent else where."³⁵

Lost in the backwaters of the French empire, Louisiana apparently escaped such transatlantic economic pressures, but, at the other end of the Mississippi River, New France was turned inside out. Beaver was "no comodity" anywhere in the first decade of the eighteenth century. Plagued by a declining European market, interrupted shipping routes, and runaway local overproduction, profits from the Canadian beaver trade fell off spectacularly from 1696 to 1713. The collapse was so complete that the French ministry proposed at one point a total cessation of the Indian trade. It continued only because officials in New France explained to the ministry how catastrophic the diplomatic repercussions of such a move might be. Unprofitable as it had

³⁴ For fur trade export totals, see *America and the West Indies, Virginia: Original Correspondence, Board of Trade, 1715–1717*, 5/1317, p. 178, Colonial Office (British Public Record Office, London); also available in photocopy in *British Records Calendar, 1712–1716*, X77.594, pp. 1–2 (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

³⁵ For new imperial regulations concerning rice and their consequences, see Clowse, *Economic Beginnings of Colonial South Carolina*, 139; see also R. C. Nash, "The Organization of Trade and Finance in the Atlantic Economy: Britain and South Carolina, 1670–1775," in *Money, Trade, and Power*, ed. Greene, Brana-Shute, and Sparks, 77; Stephen G. Hardy, "Colonial South Carolina's Rice Industry and the Atlantic Economy," *ibid.*, 115; Marc Egnal, *New World Economies: The Growth of the Thirteen Colonies and Early Canada* (New York, 1998), 100; and Peter A. Coclanis, "Bitter Harvest: The South Carolina Low Country in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Economic History*, 45 (June 1985), 254–55. Nairne, *Nairne's Muskhoegan Journals*, ed. Moore, 47, 50–51.

become, they argued, the beaver trade nevertheless kept valuable Indian allies in the French interest. For that reason alone, while taking a loss, Canadian merchants continued to exchange European goods for beaver pelts, consciously sublimating the demands of the market to the greater good of friendship and alliance. Much has been written on the subject of “administered” or “treaty” trade, that is, trade conducted predominantly for political purposes rather than profit. If the Canadian trade was not generally “administered,” it nevertheless displayed on this occasion the wisdom to shield its native allies from the harshness of the market.³⁶

Aside from the comments of Thomas Nairne, Carolina officials made no such effort to assist their native client/allies in making the transition from a mixed skin and fur trade to one based solely on deerskins during the same period. It may be argued that increased deerskin exports smoothed the transition by offsetting the decline in other commodities, but the net equivalency in economic terms concealed a drastic redeployment of labor on the part of native hunters and trappers. Such a process demanded the curtailment of diversified, probably pre-market, activities that drew on a variety of species and habitats in favor of a single, seasonal pursuit targeting a single species. The practical difficulties of that transformation, involving issues of hunting territory, technique, and technology, must have been immense.

Archaeological excavations at Upper and Lower Creek town sites in Alabama and Georgia corroborate the period of the transformation and suggest how profoundly it altered traditional lifeways. Before 1700, the Muskogee- and Hitchiti-speaking towns that later made up the Creek Confederacy routinely constructed circular winter houses, built with a sunken floor and wattle-and-daub construction techniques. The winter houses were sturdier than the rectangular summer houses and provided additional warmth and protection during cold winter months. As the commercial deerskin trade came to dominate native economic life, however, hunters were forced to extend their winter hunting expeditions for months on end. Labor formerly devoted to the construction of winter housing may have been devoted increasingly to the hunt, and the extended absence of hunters and often their families may have rendered such housing unnecessary as villages emptied during much of the winter. Not surprisingly, winter houses uniformly disappeared from villages across the region. That loss involved much more than mere architectural technique; the demise of winter housing altered the actual and social landscape of proto-Creek villages. The appearance and spatial structure of southeastern towns changed, and seasonal patterns of family life and gender relations must have shifted to fit the new order as well.³⁷

³⁶ For the failure of the Canadian trade, see Dale Miquelon, *New France, 1701–1744: “A Supplement to Europe”* (Toronto, 1987), 55–76; Eccles, “Belated Review of Harold Adams Innis,” 422–23; and W. J. Eccles, *Frontenac: The Courtier Governor* (Toronto, 1959), 285–94. For an effort to gain perspective on the issue of “treaty trade” in light of more dominant market features, see Ray and Freeman, “Give Us Good Measure,” 2–9, 231–45. Early efforts to apply the theoretical framework of treaty trade to the northern fur trade may be found in E. E. Rich, *The History of Hudson’s Bay Company, 1670–1870* (2 vols., London, 1958–1959); and E. E. Rich, “Trade Habits and Economic Motivation among the Indians of North America,” *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 27 (1960), 35–53.

³⁷ Gregory A. Waselkov, John W. Cottier, and Craig T. Sheldon Jr., *Archaeological Excavations at the Early Historic Creek Indian Town of Fusihatchee (Phase I: 1988–89)* (Washington, 1996); Cameron Wesson, “Households

In the first fifteen years of the eighteenth century, deer hunting drew Native American men farther into the Atlantic economy than ever before, and their mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters followed them. As raccoons, wildcats, foxes, muskrats, otters, and beavers disappeared from South Carolina shipping lists between 1699 and 1715, the entries for deerskins displayed, in addition to an increase in volume, a pronounced shift toward a certain method of preparation. Whereas exports had previously included large numbers of "undrest" deerskins, comprising about 30 percent of the total number of deerskins exported at the start of this pivotal period, only about 10 percent continued to be undressed by 1715. By contrast, roughly 90 percent of all deerskins exported from Charles Town from 1713 to 1715 were "half-drest," a process of partial preparation (scraped but untanned) specifically geared toward trade. Because women were generally responsible for the preparation of deerskins, this may indicate their growing involvement in at least one aspect of the trade. We may never know whether it was a voluntary strategy to maximize exchange rates or a grudging concession to market demands. Since half-dressed skins generally commanded higher prices, however, the shift benefited native consumers and may thus have represented an effort on their part to counter the largely negative developments underway at the time. Such a strategy would have been particularly useful in offsetting the deteriorating exchange rate between South Carolina currency and British pounds sterling. Kathryn E. Holland Braund has identified a reverse process at work in the 1760s, when the trade shifted back toward undressed skins. She viewed this as a market-driven transformation that carried with it a built-in price rise for Creek consumers, since undressed skins had less purchasing power. It may be that this initial shift away from undressed skins just prior to the Yamasee War marked the adoption of a defensive economic posture that southeastern Indians could no longer maintain after the 1760s.³⁸

Scholars of the southern deerskin trade (often working from a more abundant mid- to late-eighteenth-century document base) typically take for granted the wholesale transformation of Native Americans into full-fledged participants in the Atlantic economy without scrutinizing the process by which it supposedly occurred. The result is a sometimes glib generalization of their transformation into a "forest proletariat" as "rapid and easy," made "with minimal adjustments." As the current essay seeks to demonstrate, however, it was a more complex, culturally demanding, and extended process than is generally supposed. Gregory Waselkov's suggestion that the seventeenth-century Spanish-Indian trade prepared southeastern Indians for more intensive trade relations with Carolina was limited mainly to the integration of Euro-

and Hegemony: An Analysis of Historic Creek Culture Change" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1997); Gregory A. Waselkov and Marvin T. Smith, "Upper Creek Archaeology," in *Indians of the Greater Southeast: Historical Archaeology and Ethnohistory*, ed. Bonnie G. McEwan (Gainesville, 2000), 247; John E. Worth, "The Lower Creeks: Origins and Early History," *ibid.*, 284-85. For Creek town life and spatial organization, though at a later period, see Piker, "Peculiarly Connected," 1-37, 163-274.

³⁸ For Carolina exports to Great Britain, see *America and the West Indies, Virginia: Original Correspondence, Board of Trade, 1715-1717*, 5/1317, p. 178, Colonial Office (British Public Record Office); also available in photocopy in *British Records Calendar, 1712-1716*, X77.594, pp. 1-2. For the deteriorating exchange rate, see McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America*, 222. For Braund's discussion, see Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 69.

pean goods into indigenous material cultures. The limited nature of that early trade did not require native participants to depart radically from preexisting economic pursuits. It had hardly reduced them to a "forest proletariat." Developments in the Carolina trade during the first decade of the eighteenth century represented a marked departure from prevailing seventeenth-century patterns of exchange and from continuing French and Spanish models. Southeastern Indians were forced to alter their habits in order to meet the increasingly ardent and specific demands of the market. The process was coerced, moreover, by the credit power of English traders, whose behavior was often in turn a credit-generated reflex.³⁹

Although an integral part of the phenomenon, Carolina traders were in part the unwitting personification of larger economic forces over which they had little control. In contrast to the scattered effects of gender-specific violence or the localized hardship of indebtedness among the Yamasees, the new economic imperatives communicated by English traders touched all native communities involved in trade relations with South Carolina. The torque thus exerted on Anglo-Indian relations further strained the inherently delicate mechanisms of intercultural exchange, already critically stressed in key areas, and placed Carolina's extensive alliance network on a tenuous footing. By 1715, South Carolina's relationship with its native clients and allies had come to depend more than ever on official acts of diplomacy from Charles Town, carried to the frontier by the Indian agent.

Trade Regulation and the Breakdown of Diplomacy

The office of Indian agent for South Carolina was scarcely eight years old when Thomas Nairne and John Wright, the only two men ever to hold the position, were both killed in 1715 in the Yamasee town of Pocotaligo in the opening drama of the Yamasee War. Created by the Commons House of Assembly in 1707, the agency represented the colony's most visible diplomatic connection with southeastern Native America; it was entrusted with the responsibility of adjudicating differences between Indians and traders, policing the trade, and delivering diplomatic messages to and from Indian country. Simultaneously, the assembly created a board of commissioners responsible for overseeing the Indian trade and the activities of the agent. The regulatory legislation of 1707 was part and parcel of the market phenomenon already rippling along the frontier, and, while its full economic consequences for southeastern Indians have not been recognized to date, historians have long considered 1707 a watershed year. For Converse D. Clowse, it marked the "dividing line between an Indian trade conducted informally and a regularized commerce," while Verner Crane saw it as a transformation of the Indian trade from a "profitable sideline" into a "mercantile interest second only to the exportation of rice." Scholars have traditionally

³⁹ The unfortunate phrase "forest proletariat" was coined by Harold Hickerson in "Fur Trade Colonialism and the North American Indians," *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 1 (Summer 1973), 39. For a characteristic discussion of the transformation of southeastern Indians into producers for a world economy, see Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*, 61. For the seventeenth-century Spanish trade with southeastern Indians, see Waselkov, "Seventeenth-Century Trade in the Colonial Southeast," 117–30.

agreed as well that the new regulatory legislation contributed, though indirectly, to the outbreak of the Yamasee War by failing to curtail trader misconduct and abuse. It is argued here, however, that the office of Indian agent, and particularly the two men who competed for it between 1707 and 1715, played a central, even decisive, role in provoking conflict.⁴⁰

Although neither man by himself intended to compromise Carolina's diplomatic standing among southeastern Indians, together they produced a rare chemistry that managed to dissolve the colony's reputation utterly. Beginning as a simple competition for sole ownership of the Indian agency, which changed hands between them twice, their rivalry soon expanded into a vindictive conflict that ultimately transcended the personal enmity between Nairne and Wright and drew South Carolina traders and officials into one camp or the other. The specific circumstances of the rivalry's inception, though compelling as human drama, are perhaps irrelevant to the current discussion. Yet Wright felt himself wronged, first by his ouster as agent in 1712 and subsequently by Nairne's enthusiastic application of the regulatory laws to Wright's own trading ventures. Wright first sought legal redress through the Court of Common Pleas; from 1713 to 1715 he became a master of nuisance suits, designed to harass and annoy his enemies. They followed a common formula, citing clauses of the 1712 Act for Regulating the Indian Trade with such an emphasis on details and technicalities as to seem almost comical. He appears to have changed only a few key phrases and names from case to case in order to save time. Soon, other traders sympathetic to his cause also began filing suits, utilizing his exact format and targeting the same defendants. By the summer of 1714, Wright and his supporters were ready to move beyond nuisance suits and the Court of Common Pleas to mount a more serious challenge to the colony's regulatory administration.⁴¹

Wright fired the opening salvos of that broader battle on June 8, 1714, when he submitted a list of "remonstrances" to the Commons House of Assembly, accusing Nairne of "irregularities & ill practices." Only four days later, the trader John Pight revealed the full extent of the offensive when he too submitted a petition to the assembly, this time accusing the Commissioners of the Indian Trade of exercising poor judgment in a case they had decided the previous year. Although filed separately, it became clear as time went on that the two traders were coordinating their efforts, often drafting and submitting letters for their respective cases to the same people on

⁴⁰ For a political history of the Commons House of Assembly during this period, see Alexander Moore, "Carolina Whigs: Colleton County Members of the South Carolina Commons House of Assembly, 1692-1720" (M.A. thesis, University of South Carolina, 1981); see also Alexander Moore, "Royalizing South Carolina: The Revolution of 1719 and the Transformation of Early South Carolina Government" (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1991). Clowse, *Economic Beginnings of Colonial South Carolina*, 165. According to Verner Crane, the 1707 regulatory legislation represented a victory of merchant interests over the prerogatives of the governor and his planter allies in the governor's council; see Crane, *Southern Frontier*, 120.

⁴¹ The best introduction to the early history of Nairne's problems as agent may be found in Alexander Moore, "Introduction," in *Nairne's Muskogean Journals*, ed. Moore, 12, 16-17. For examples of Wright's nuisance suits, see *John Wright v. John Cochran* (elsewhere Cochran), Jan. 10, 1713/14, box 5A, frame 268, reel 1714, Judgement Rolls, South Carolina Court of Common Pleas; *John Wright v. John Cochran*, April 19, 1714, box 6A, frames 490-94, reel 1714, *ibid.*; *John Wright v. Alexander Parris*, Jan. 16, 1712/13, box 4A, frame 8, reel 1713, *ibid.*; and *John Wright v. John Beauchamp*, Oct. 1714, box 5A, frame 310, reel 1714, *ibid.* For an example of a copycat suit, see *Edmund Ellis v. Alexander Parris*, Sept. 21, 1714, box 6A, frame 498, reel 1715, *ibid.*

the same or consecutive days and calling on a common pool of witnesses. Pight later testified that he had in fact spent much time at Wright's Goose Creek plantation during this period, a revelation that struck contemporaries as "very strange," since he was "notoriously known" to spend most of his time "in the Indian country."⁴²

By August, Wright began to flout Nairne's authority openly on the frontier. When the agent locked up a cask of Wright's rum (an illegal commodity) in the mico's own "hous" at the Yamasee town of Pocotaligo, Wright sent two of his henchmen to take it back. They "broke open" the headman's house and carried away the rum. Nairne issued a warrant for their arrest, but the residents of Pocotaligo saw no immediate local action. The real problem of bringing Wright and his supporters to heel was another matter entirely. For the Yamasee Indians, who had seen both Nairne and Wright in the same official capacity, the incident could not possibly have made sense. It signaled the disintegration of a coherent policy and voice from Charles Town. The two agents were at war with each other. Several questions must have passed repeatedly around Yamasee council fires in late 1714 and early 1715: which man is the official agent, which man is more powerful, which man's policy is best, and *which man is to be believed*?⁴³

No answers to those questions ever came from Charles Town. Beginning in November 1714, when the Commons House began considering in earnest the complaints brought to it by Wright and Pight, Thomas Nairne was forced to neglect his duties as agent and remain in town to defend himself. Likewise, the Commissioners of the Indian Trade foreswore their normal business and devoted themselves exclusively to their own defense. Virtually no routine business was conducted either by the agent or by the commissioners in the five months preceding the outbreak of the war the following April. In essence, therefore, South Carolina ended all official contact and correspondence with all corners of Native America from November 1714 onward, creating an abrupt and utter diplomatic vacuum everywhere. The colony simply disappeared on a diplomatic level, and the trade that continued pulsing outward from it carried a confusing array of messages, depending on the factional loyalties of individual traders. Alexander Longe, for instance, who had been arrested for his participation in a slave raid against the Euchees (allies of Carolina), capitalized on the confusion in Charles Town by running away to the Cherokees. Once there, he reportedly told them "that ye Einglish was goeing to macke warrs with them and that they did design to kill all their head warriers wich was ye reason he ran away." With no counterstatement forthcoming from reputable Carolina officials, the Cherokees may have found it difficult to distinguish truth from falsehood.⁴⁴

⁴² Journals of the Commons House of Assembly . . . 1706–1721, frames 4: 272, 285, Green transcripts. For a common example of the coordination that appears to have existed between Messrs. Wright and Pight, see *ibid.*, frame 289. For information on Pight's time at the Wright plantation, see Anne King Gregorie, ed., *Records of the Court of Chancery of South Carolina, 1671–1779* (Washington, 1950), 189.

⁴³ Aug. 31, 1714, in *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, ed. McDowell, 59.

⁴⁴ Journals of the Commons House of Assembly . . . 1706–1721, frames 4: 289 ff., Green transcripts. For the complete preoccupation of Nairne and the commissioners, see McDowell, ed., *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, 60–65. For Longe's behavior, see "Journal of the March of the Carolinians into the Cherokee Mountains," 334–35.

In fact, information filtering into Cherokee territory from other Indian nations rather tended to support Longe's allegations. When the Yamasees observed English preparations to build a fort at Port Royal on the edge of their settlements, their initial concern over the cessation of diplomatic communications turned to alarm. Again, Charles Town offered no official explanation, leaving the Yamasees to search for their own answers. Some apparently became convinced that Carolina was preparing for war, and a Yamasee delegation conscientiously made a circuit of neighboring allies to warn them of the threatening English behavior.⁴⁵

With the breakdown of diplomacy in late 1714, the trade was stripped of its political dimension just when it was needed most. The growing inflexibility of English trade behavior during the first fifteen years of the century had placed an unusually high premium on competent diplomacy from Charles Town, first to smooth over the difficulties of intercultural exchange (exacerbated by recent market developments), and second to reassure concerned clients and confirm valuable alliances. Its absence now proved fatal. As the diplomatic blackout continued into the spring of 1715, and English traders began arriving in native villages across the South to collect their debts, the situation became critical for some nations. After having "made severall Complaints without Redress," the "Creeks" (probably the Ocheeses or Lower Creeks) finally issued an ultimatum that "upon the first Afront from any of the Traders they would down with them and soe goe on with itt." The Creeks, to be clear, did not simply kill the traders outright. They issued a warning clearly intended to be heard and passed up the trading path to Charles Town. It was an effort, born of desperation, to break through the diplomatic pall that had fallen over the colony and to elicit some sort of official response. Similar warnings emanated from the Yamasee settlements around Port Royal at the same time, and they had their desired effect. Carolina officials snapped to attention, stopped their bickering, and organized their first diplomatic overture in over five months. Given the importance and delicacy of the venture, it was entrusted jointly to the colony's most experienced frontier diplomats: Thomas Nairne and John Wright.⁴⁶

The fate of that famous effort at negotiation has become a favorite staple of Carolina lore. Meeting the Yamasees in their principal town of Pocotaligo on April 14, 1715, Nairne gave reassurances of Carolina's friendship and concern for its trading partners and promised to address their concerns. All parties shook hands amicably that evening as if the problem had been resolved. Then, in the morning, the Yamasees, adorned in red and black war paint, swarmed in upon Nairne and his colleagues, killing most of them outright. Nairne was not so fortunate. He was tortured for three days "before he was allowed to die." (Wright was killed as well, though the circumstances were not recorded.) The standard account of this incident has not

⁴⁵ Larry E. Ivers, "Scouting the Inland Passage, 1685–1787," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 73 (April 1972), 125. For Yamasee diplomatic activities among neighboring Indian nations, see Gov. Francisco de Corcoles y Martinez to King Philip V, July 5, 1715, Audiencia de Santo Domingo 843, Archivo General de Indias (microfilm: reel 36), 58-1-30/42, John B. Stetson Collection (P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville).

⁴⁶ April 12, 1715, in *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, ed. McDowell, 65.

changed in any of its details since the publication of *The Southern Frontier* more than seventy years ago. It is generally taken as proof that the Yamasees had already committed themselves to war and that Nairne had little chance of changing their minds. The friendly goodnight exchanges thus became a sinister facade, masking the Yamasees' deadly intentions. Yet there is a face missing from this time-honored portrait: that of John Wright. Only the previous August, the Yamasees had seen the battle between the two agents played out violently in that very town over a cask of rum. Wright's presence alongside Thomas Nairne at what may be termed ground zero of the Yamasee War inevitably raises a number of questions. Foremost among them, did he bring the same political agenda to Pocotaligo Town that had governed his actions for the last two years in the Court of Common Pleas and the Commons House of Assembly?⁴⁷

Carolina lore also holds that, after the first pitched battle with the Yamasees, a note addressed to Gov. Charles Craven was found on one of the fallen warriors. Rumored to have included an explanation of Yamasee motives, it disappeared as quickly and completely as the musket smoke of that battle. The note, however, did and does exist. It has spent the last three centuries, astonishingly, tucked inside another letter in the British Public Record Office, where it was never cataloged on its own merit. Signed by the "Huspaw King," it was written in "gunpowder ink" and dictated to a young English boy taken captive for precisely that purpose. True to legend, it is an explanation in the Yamasee Indians' own voice of why they acted as they did. Amidst voluminous English, French, and Spanish sources, this is the only extant primary document ever produced by the Yamasees themselves during this crucial period.⁴⁸

The first few lines of the note confirm the central role played by John Wright during those final hours of delicate negotiation. According to the Huspaw King:

Mr. Wright said that the white men would come and fetch [illegible] the Yamasees in one night and that they would hang four of the head men and take all the rest of them for slaves, and that he would send them all off the country, for he said that the men of the Yamasees were like women, and shew'd his hands one to the other, and what he said vex'd the great warriar's, and this made them begin the war.⁴⁹

Wright's message seems intended to stir up trouble and could hardly have been compatible with the official reassurance of peace and friendship proffered by Thomas Nairne. If he did in fact say those things, as the Yamasees asserted, he must have

⁴⁷ For an account of the attack and Nairne's torture, see "Letter of Charles Rodd to His Employer in London," May 8, 1715, in *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies, August, 1714–December, 1715*, ed. Cecil Headlam (London, 1928), 167–68; for the standard account of the incident, see Crane, *Southern Frontier*, 168–69. The only version of these events to depart from Crane's original portrait is the groundbreaking account in Steven James Oatis, "A Colonial Complex: South Carolina's Changing Frontiers in the Era of the Yamasee War, 1680–1730" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1999), 176. Oatis was the first scholar to question the assumption of predetermined action and to propose that the Yamasees were engaged in legitimate debate over the issue of war or peace while Nairne slept. He argued that they ultimately experienced a crisis of faith in the promises of English officials.

⁴⁸ Letter of Capt. Jonathan St. Lo and Enclosure, July 12, 1715, Admiralty Office, 1:2451 (British Public Record Office); also available in photocopy in *British Records Calendar, 1712–1716*, 72. 1409: pp. 1–4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

arranged a private meeting at some point that did not include the acting Indian agent. It would have been difficult while the main negotiations were still underway, but less so once Nairne had said his friendly good-night and gone to sleep.

Regardless of the circumstances, it now seems clear that two separate, conflicting messages were delivered to the Yamasee Indians gathered at Pocolaligo Town: Nairne's message of peace and Wright's message of war. According to Spanish accounts of Yamasee testimony shortly after the outbreak of hostilities, the assembled warriors and headmen debated the problem throughout the night, unable to arrive at a consensus. Having seen both Wright and Nairne previously in an official capacity, they knew that one of the two messages reflected the colony's true intentions. After much soul-searching and a rousing predawn oratory by a Yamasee warrior, they ultimately found it easier to believe the worst about the Carolinians. Even so, if English sources are to be believed, a number of warriors may have clung to Nairne's message of peace to the bitter end and lost their lives along with him. This was not an angry, reflexive outburst provoked by trade abuse or dependency, nor was it necessarily the first premeditated act in a grand Native American "conspiracy" to destroy South Carolina. It was, rather, an agonized, deliberate response to English diplomatic behaviors that can only be described as schizophrenic.⁵⁰

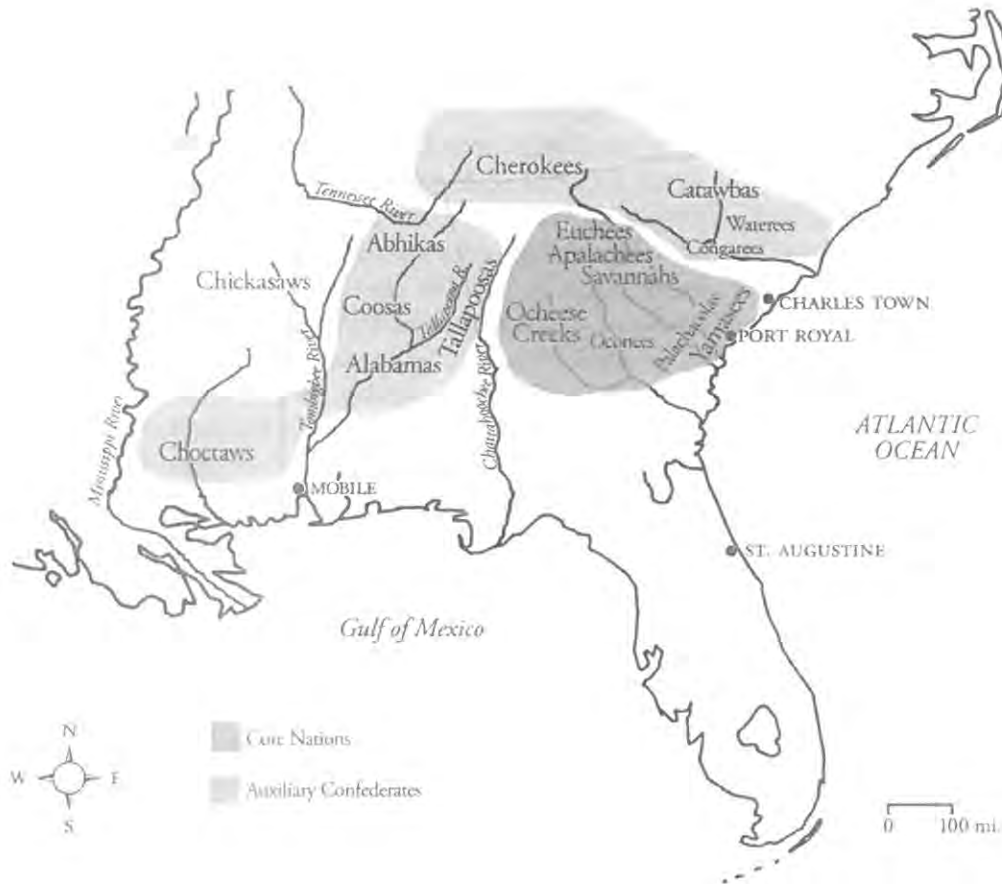
Cataloging the Combatants

Rather than assuming that the Yamasees orchestrated a massive conspiracy among southeastern Indian nations, we must now begin asking a whole new set of questions. How and with whom, for instance, did they form an alliance network prior to the outbreak of hostilities, and why did those allies respond as they did upon hearing the news that the Yamasees had broken off relations with South Carolina? The question is complicated by the likelihood, as Steven Oatis has pointed out, that the unified native front perceived by Carolinians masked a series of interlocking alliance networks, each acting on its own set of diplomatic considerations. The problem is too complex to receive a thorough treatment here, but the actions of the various members of the 1715 coalition suggest a few basic patterns.⁵¹

It is not surprising that the first native voices to break through South Carolina's diplomatic paralysis in early 1715 came from the same geographical range and set of nations that had been most vocal in protesting various trade practices over the previous fifteen years. Having become, on average, routine participants in the Carolina trade network during the mid-1680s, the Savannahs, Lower (Ocheese) Creeks (including the splinter towns of Oconee and Palachacola), Eucheas, and Yamasees were more deeply engaged in trade and consequently more attuned to the tenor of the exchange relationship by 1715 than any other groups in the South. The frictions

⁵⁰ Martinez to the King, July 5, 1715, Audiencia de Santo Domingo 843, Archivo General de Indias (microfilm: reel 36), 58-1-30/42, Stetson Collection. Francis LeJau reported in May 1715 that as many as 25 Yamasee peace advocates had been killed; see LeJau to the Secretary, May 14, 1715, in *Carolina Chronicle of Dr. Francis LeJau*, ed. Klingberg, 156.

⁵¹ Oatis, "Colonial Complex," 157-58.



Components of the 1715 Indian coalition at war with South Carolina (with the eventual state boundaries). Map by William L. Ramsey and W. L. Ramsey Jr.

of intercultural exchange, exacerbated by disturbing market trends, demanded a continuous dialogue between those nations and Charles Town officials and made the diplomatic breakdown of late 1714 all the more conspicuous. News of open conflict between the Yamasees and the English in April 1715 undoubtedly confirmed suspicions about the meaning of Carolina's silence and drew the Lower Creeks, Savannahs, and Euchees (and the recently relocated Apalachees) into the war in short order. Along with the Yamasees, they formed the core of the native war effort. They struck the first and fiercest blows against Carolina, often in concert with each other, and ultimately refused to make peace until long after the rest of the indigenous South had resumed trade with Charles Town.⁵²

⁵² For the beginnings of trade among these nations, see Chapman J. Milling, *Red Carolinians* (Chapel Hill, 1940), 84–85; Letter of Caleb Westbrooke, Feb. 21, 1684/5, in *Records in the British Public Record Office Relating to South Carolina*, ed. A. S. Salley (5 vols., Columbia, S.C., 1946), II, 8–9; James W. Covington, "Stuart's Town, the Yamasee Indians, and Spanish Florida," *Florida Anthropologist*, 21 (March 1968), 9–10; Herbert E. Bolton, "Spanish Resistance to the Carolina Traders in Western Georgia (1680–1704)," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 9

Those core combatants were flanked on several sides by less enthusiastic confederates: the Upper Creeks (including Abhikas, Coosas, Tallapoosas, and Alabamas) and Choctaws to the west, and the Cherokees, Catawbias, and Carolina piedmont tribes (Waterrees, Congarees, and others) to the north. Their complaints had appeared much less regularly, if at all, in the English records. Although they all participated in the spring massacres of South Carolina traders, only the Cherokees and Carolina piedmont tribes mounted additional attacks against the colony, and even they grew quiet by the end of the first summer. While the destabilizing effects of market influence and diplomatic breakdown must have shaken them, it is doubtful that the auxiliary participants would have struck at the English of their own accord. Their decision to do so ultimately depended on the interplay and compatibility of local concerns with the emergence of a powerful war movement among the core nations.

In contrast to the Lower Creeks, Savannahs, and Yamasees, the auxiliary confederates were generally influenced by two meliorating factors that set them apart in significant ways. First, they were relative newcomers to trade with Carolina. Englishmen did not move west into Upper Creek territory until the mid-1690s, and Carolinians continued to regard the Cherokees as "but little known to us" as late as 1713. The Choctaws, meanwhile, remained outside the Carolina trading sphere until 1714. Although subject to the same market-driven changes as the core nations, the auxiliary confederates felt them less intensely due to their more limited involvement in the English trade. The only exception to this rule may be the Catawbias and other piedmont nations, who had been engaged in trade with Virginia before the establishment of South Carolina in 1670. Yet here a second factor of profound significance came into play. All of the auxiliary confederates enjoyed access to alternative sources of European goods. The Upper Creeks and Choctaws reaped the benefits of direct relations with French Louisiana, while the Catawbias and their Carolina piedmont neighbors routinely welcomed Virginia traders into their villages. Although geographically remote, Cherokee consumers also managed to acquire French goods via the Tennessee and Tallapoosa river systems and Virginia goods through Catawba middlemen. Competition with Virginians on the one hand and Frenchmen on the other forced South Carolina traders to provide those groups with better terms; and, because French and Virginia traders were still willing to purchase beaver pelts and other traditional staples of the old fur trade, those nations were spared the hardships of converting abruptly to an exclusive reliance on deerskins. Consequently, participation in the war against South Carolina was a less compelling decision for Upper Creeks, Choctaws, Cherokees, and Catawbias.⁵³

(June 1925), 115–30; and McDowell, ed., *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, 3–65. For a narrative discussion of the Yamasee War, see Crane, *Southern Frontier*, 162–86.

⁵³ For the origins of trade, see Crane, *Southern Frontier*, 45; Pryce Hughes to the Duchess of Ormond, 1713, in Five Pryce Hughes Autograph Letters, Proposing a Welsh Colony, 1713 (South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia); and Jean-Baptiste Bernard de la Harpe, *Historical Journal of the Establishment of the French in Louisiana*, ed. and trans. Glenn R. Conrad, Virginia Koenig, and Joan Cain (Lafayette, 1971), 89. For the positive benefits of trade competition among the Catawbias, see Merrell, *Indians' New World*, 68. For a discussion of the same process in the Mississippi Valley, see Daniel H. Usner, "Economic Relations in the Southeast until 1783," in *Handbook of American Indians: History of Indian-White Relations*, ed. Wilcomb E. Washburn (17 vols., Washington, 1988), IV, 391–95. For Cherokee access to alternative trade, see Tom Hatley, *The Dividing*

Discovering the means by which the auxiliaries became aligned with the core combatants in 1715 will require a separate study, analyzing each nation individually and in depth. One common element, however, deserves a brief mention here. Access to alternative sources of trade also brought rival diplomatic overtures into Upper Creek, Choctaw, Cherokee, and Catawba villages. It is clear, for instance, that Jean-Baptiste le Moyne de Bienville of French Louisiana made concerted efforts to counter English influence among the Choctaws and Upper Creeks in early 1715, distributing gifts liberally and promising attractive terms of trade. Balanced against Carolina's continuing diplomatic blackout and the power of the core nations, his message must have carried more than its usual weight that spring. For the Catawbas of the Carolina piedmont, as James Merrell has pointed out, trade rivalry between South Carolina and Virginia encouraged the belief that war with South Carolina would not affect the flow of merchandise from its colonial rival, as indeed it had not during the Tuscarora War in 1711. That war in fact had never really ended for the Catawbas and their piedmont allies, who continued fending off Tuscarora and Iroquois attacks long after Carolinians had closed the book on it. For the Catawbas, therefore, the events of 1715 may have represented less a new declaration of war than a reshuffling of alliances in mid-conflict.⁵⁴

Each of those auxiliary participants faced a complex set of local considerations that defy generalization. Common elements shaped their decisions, to be sure, such as prospects of alternative trade, market influence, the ambiguous silence of Carolina's diplomatic voice, and finally the unambiguous clamor of warfare in April. But the nature and value of those elements differed from region to region, and among them stretched a "thousand threads" that wove them into the local reality. The enduring marvel of the Yamasee War may be that they all led to the same solution: political alignment with the core nations and token "war" with South Carolina.⁵⁵

Only one nation in the entire region, the Chickasaws, remained loyal to the English. Significantly, they were the only nation to receive a formal declaration of friendship from the colony in the five months preceding the war. Even then, it was extended only because a Chickasaw delegation had walked five hundred miles to Charles Town for that very purpose in December 1714 and waited patiently for the Commons House of Assembly to notice them. Their example suggests how little might have been required of South Carolina to maintain peace.⁵⁶

Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians through the Revolutionary Era (Oxford, 1995), 22. Evidence of Virginia's continuing interest in fur trade commodities may be found in *America and the West Indies, Virginia: Original Correspondence, Board of Trade, 1715–1717*, 5/1317, p. 178, Colonial Office (British Public Record Office); also available in photocopy in *British Records Calendar, 1712–1716*, X77.594, pp. 1–2.

⁵⁴ For Bienville's diplomatic overtures, see Bienville to Pontchartrain, June 15, 1715, *Mississippi Provincial Archives: French Dominion*, ed. and trans. Rowland and Sanders, III, 183; and Bienville to Pontchartrain, Sept. 1, 1715, *ibid.*, III, 186–88. For James Merrell's arguments, see Merrell, *Indians' New World*, 69–70; and Merrell, "Our Bond of Peace," 209. For evidence of continuing warfare between the Tuscaroras and Iroquois and the Carolina piedmont nations, see "Account of a Conference with the Iroquois," *America and the West Indies*, New York: Original Correspondence, Board of Trade, 1710–1715, 5/1050, p. 640, Colonial Office (British Public Record Office); also available in photocopy in *British Records Calendar, 1712–1716*, X77.572, pp. 1–5.

⁵⁵ The textile metaphor is Herbert Butterfield's; see Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York, 1965), 20.

⁵⁶ For the Chickasaw delegation, see Dec. 17, 1714, in *Journals of the Commons House of Assembly . . . 1706–1721*, frame 4: 334, Green transcripts.

South Carolina's diplomatic failure from late 1714 onward became a critical problem only because the colony's trade behavior, increasingly influenced by external market demands, had become progressively less responsive to indigenous needs over the previous decade. Charles Town officials never rose to the challenge of establishing the sort of meaningful discourse with southeastern Indians that might have resolved the tensions generated by the trade. They dissolved, instead, into internecine squabbles over who should control that discourse, ultimately forcing the Yamasees and others to infer the colony's intentions. While the Yamasee response to Carolina's incoherent diplomatic communication undoubtedly colored the responses of other southeastern Indian nations, it represented only the first in a series of independent actions, each determined by its own set of local considerations.

Sprung from this politico-economic thicket, the Yamasee War produced a matrix of related consequences that influenced the terms of Anglo-Indian exchange for the next half century. As Carolina negotiated the terms of peace with southeastern Indians, an unprecedented antimarket modification of the trade emerged: the price agreement. It is generally considered a standard feature of the deerskin trade for most of the eighteenth century, but the earliest set price schedules date only to 1716. The Cherokees were the first to extort such an agreement from Charles Town in April 1716, when they received a list of permanent prices for all items "as they are always to be sold." Prior to this, Anglo-Indian exchange rates had been determined by the market mechanism of supply and demand, requiring Indians to "bargain," "deale," and "agree for" purchase prices. The Cherokee breakthrough was followed by a fixed price agreement with the Creek Indians in 1718. Thereafter, Anglo-Indian exchange rates throughout the South were always established at a fixed level by treaty.⁵⁷

It may also be significant that accusations of cheating on the part of English traders appear in the records only *after* fixed price schedules became a regular feature of the Indian trade. Although scholars often assume that such behavior was part of trader misconduct prior to the Yamasee War, relatively few traders were in fact ever accused prior to 1715 of tampering with scales, watering down rum, or other familiar eighteenth-century forms of underhandedness. Such behaviors appeared primarily after the Yamasee War and may thus represent an effort on the part of English traders, who were not themselves immune to the market mechanism of supply and demand, to maintain a profit margin in an era of inflexible exchange rates.⁵⁸

As the historian Joel W. Martin has demonstrated, moreover, the Yamasee War marked the beginning of regular, ritualized gift exchange between Charles Town and its native allies and clients. Although Carolinians had grudgingly participated in gift exchange prior to the war, their approach to the custom had been tinged with a cyni-

⁵⁷ For the Cherokee agreement, see July 23, 1716, in *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, ed. McDowell, 89. For bargaining behavior prior to set price schedules, see Aug. 3, 1711, *ibid.*, 15. For the Creek agreement, see June 3, 1718, *ibid.*, 281–82.

⁵⁸ Ray and Freeman argue that fixed exchange rates in New France were circumvented in a similar manner by both Europeans and Indians. See Ray and Freeman, "Give Us Good Measure," 234.

cal concern for profit. The prewar Carolina policy had been to reciprocate at the rate of “one half the value” of any gifts received from Native American allies. The resumption of trade relations after the war, however, was accomplished, on a nation-by-nation basis, through official ceremonies, treaties, and exchanges of gifts in which the indivisibility of trade and diplomacy became undeniably apparent. From that point onward, the colony renewed its pledge of friendship and trade annually, lavishing southeastern Indians with gifts and entertainment in order “to keep up a good understanding.” Rather than rationing its goodwill as it had once done, Carolina petitioned the crown for and received a royal subsidy of three thousand pounds sterling per year for Indian presents, a practice that French Louisiana had adopted long before.⁵⁹

Martin also argued convincingly that South Carolina’s commitment to ritual gift giving collapsed shortly after the British victory in the Great War for Empire in 1763, when southeastern Indians were reduced to an exclusive reliance on British trade. If so, the Yamasee War may serve as a counterweight to that event, anchoring a distinct historical phase between 1715 and 1763 that requires treatment on its own terms. The shift *away* from half-dressed deerskins that Kathryn Holland Braund has documented for the 1760s may have its counterpart in the shift *toward* half-dressed skins in the first decade of the century. New evidence concerning the “real price” or purchasing power per deerskin demonstrates a steady improvement for southeastern Indians during much of this period, suggesting again that the years between 1715 and 1763 were characterized by an exchange paradigm that differed from what had come before and what would come after. In many ways, then, the war’s consequences and its origins were of one cloth and logically connected. In the midst of imperial rivalries and alien economic systems, the indigenous peoples of the North American Southeast made a series of decisions in 1715 about their place in the world and succeeded, to a surprising extent, in determining both their place in and the nature of that new world.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ For Carolina’s prewar gifting policy, see July 10, 1712, in *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, ed. McDowell, 36. For Joel Martin’s ideas, see Martin, *Sacred Revolt*, 62–63.

⁶⁰ For the demise of gift giving after 1763, see Martin, *Sacred Revolt*, 64–65. For the rise in the “real price” of deerskins, see Edward Murphy, “The Eighteenth-Century Southeastern Indian Economy,” in *The Other Side of the Frontier: Economic Explorations into Native American Economy*, ed. Linda Barrington (Boulder, 1998), 154–55.

