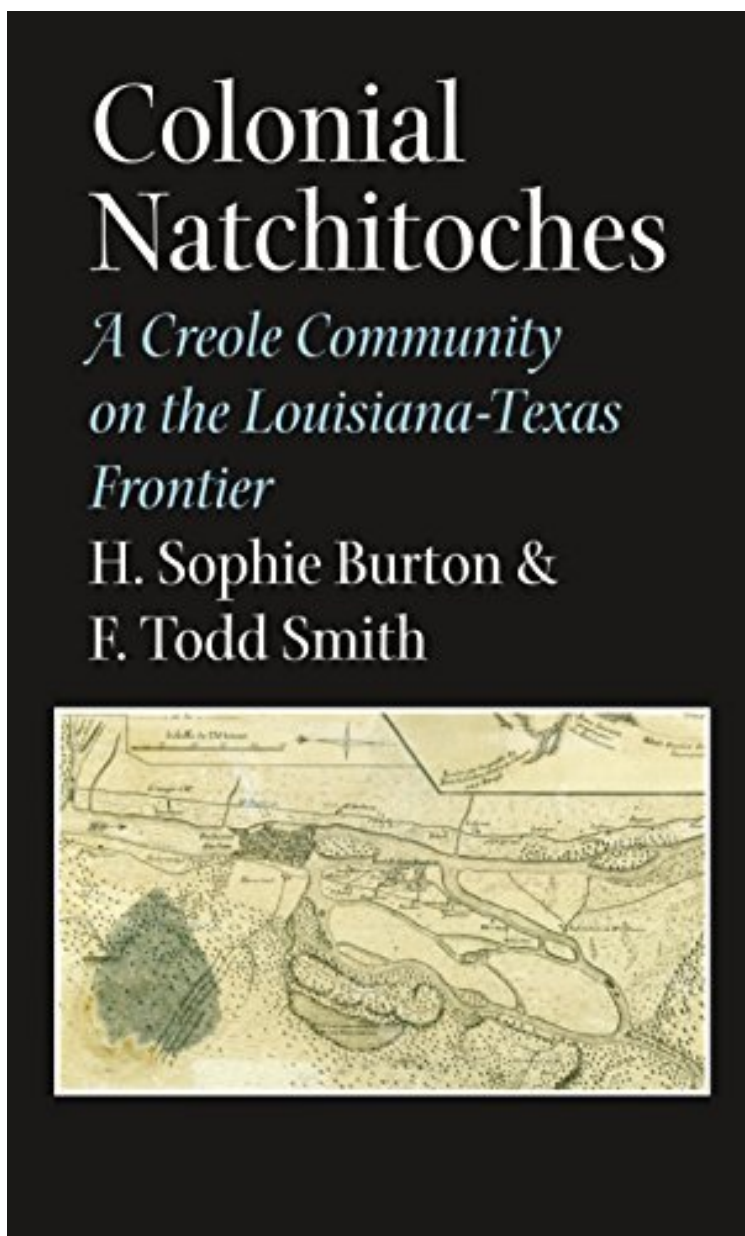


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## Colonial Natchitoches: A Creole Community on the Louisiana-Texas Frontier (Elma Dill Russell Spencer Series in the West and Southwest)

*Helen Sophie Burton, F. Todd Smith*  
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before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Colonial Natchitoches: A Creole Community on the Louisiana-Texas Frontier (Elma Dill Russell Spencer Series in the West and Southwest):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Lots of detail!By CustomerLove this book!4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating, but slightly weak on Indian womenBy Dr Jacques COULARDEAUAn extremely interesting book on this Natchitoches community. The book is trying to contrast the two essential periods of that colonial enterprise, the French period up to 1766-69 and the Spanish period up to 1801-03 (Louisiana Purchase).It scrutinizes the community under nearly all possible angles. First an institutional overview. Then the creation of the community and its development as a trading post under the French. Then the development essentially as a productive community under the Spanish. The problem of slavery is examined, both Indian slavery and African slavery, though the Indian side of the problem is from my point of view under-estimated. Then the three economic dimensions are examined more specifically: the trading post, the agricultural plantation expansion and the ranching period of development.Many details, information, data are provided but you have to be careful with the text and especially some tables that are completely berserk at times, like tables 2.3 and 2.4 with less wives or husbands than married couples, table 3.11 when the raw figures do not correspond at all to the percentages, or table 7.4 that gives figures that are in contradiction with those used in the text. I must also say that some of these tables are slightly obscure as for the categories used by the authors, especially some missing categories that would be essential in understanding some phenomena, like for example the ethnic (both Indian and Black, racial is definitely not politically correct) elements concerning the wives of many people, and particularly the Indian wives (or husbands: one case of this is given page 156). These Indian women are at least not sufficiently specified in marital, pseudo marital, concubinage or simply casual and occasional sexual and even procreative relations. This fuzzy non-specification is especially true with some categories of perambulating males and the local Indians they come across along their ways. The best anachronism in that sexual field is the explanation of the great number of children for the women of Natchitoches by the fact that there was no contraception (page 34). In the 18th century that was not even a grain of imagination in the mind of the people. There was only abortion and in a Catholic community that was murder so out of the question.But those are details. True enough. Let's get into some deeper considerations.The French, from the very start, entrusted the exploitation of the newly claimed territory known as Louisiana by explorers coming from Quebec down the Mississippi valley (note the Missouri and Upper Mississippi were inverted on the maps after the Second World War) to a private company that received a royal monopoly, the Company of the West under the responsibility of Antoine Crozat in 1717. This first company was merged with the Company of Senegal in 1718, a company specialized in triangular slave trade, thus giving to the colonization of Louisiana a slave dimension. The two companies became the Company of the Indies. That monopolistic exploitation of the territory will find its end with the Natchez War in 1731. The Natchez Indians from the Arkansas valley tried to take the control of the northern part of Louisiana and even besieged Natchitoches. The danger in that war was that the Natchez got the support and active help of the black slaves of the tobacco plantations that were encroaching on their traditional land. The French managed to negotiate the support of Choctaw Indians to route the Natchez and recapture or kill the black slaves, and to break the siege they had to get the support of nearby Spanish soldiers and the Caddo Indians. The Caddo Indians killed forty Natchez and captured forty more that they gave to the French as slaves. The French king, Louis XIV transformed Louisiana into a royal colony.That brings up the nature of this Indian trade. It provided the Indians with guns, ammunitions, metal tools and artefacts, woollen blankets and clothing, plus some cheap locally produced rum and all kinds of more or less useless beads, in exchange of valuable deerskins, bear oil, buffalo robes (and other hunting products), but also horses and cattle pilfered from the Spanish missions in Texas, and Indian slaves, mostly women and children captured by the Caddos or the Comanches essentially from the Lipan Apaches in warlike raids. The surviving Lipan Apache men were kept for ritual sacrificial activities, and the women and children were sold to the French who disposed of them down south in Mobile, Biloxi or New Orleans, or kept them for their own use. The fact that the authors do not speak of the capturing procedure shows clearly that they are embarrassed about it and they also marginalize the fact that most of these Indian slaves are women and children. This is mentioned here and there but the sexual level of these slaves is always ignored. These women become home slaves for the housework and the satisfaction of the men of the house, especially since all along there always was a deficit of women in the colony and a fair number of single males who had to be satisfied.That is also not used properly as for the black slaves who were vastly male-dominant. It was quite obviously the interest of the white owners to provide these black slaves with women to avoid too much promiscuity among the blacks themselves especially since the whites were also taking their share of the procreative activities of the female black slaves. The problem of Black Indians is totally ignored and the use of Spanish statistics and the Spanish name is not enough; especially since starting in 1776 the Spanish did not count Indians or part Indian people at all. That is regrettable since three types of workers in the Indian trade spent long periods in Indian territory every year accompanied by their own slaves for the first two categories: traders, hunters and engageacute;s, the last category comprising Indian and Black slaves along with free hired people of any status. When you spend six months in Indian territory in close contact with women who are properly described as rather liberal as for sexuality considering that hospitality also implies some

sexual services it is difficult to imagine these men practicing abstinence, especially since the children that may come from such unions are totally integrated in the Indian community and provided with the parents or foster parents they would need. The best part of the book is the contrast between the rather Indian friendly colonizing method of the French based on rather equal commercial exchanges on one hand and the Spanish method which is essentially based on developing mining activities (in Mexico) and various agricultural or animal raising activities with the help of Indians that are converted to Catholicism and attached to missions, or with the help of African slaves. The mission project failed totally in Texas and when they took over Louisiana, they adapted the French method to their own objectives, and the Indians being in the way their christening and their labor was no longer considered, especially since a smallpox or plague epidemic in 1777-1778, just after the Spanish takeover, annihilated about three quarters of the Indian population. Then the Spanish in Louisiana set the main objective as being plantations for tobacco, which was a success that was short-lived because the Spanish partners in Seville or in Mexico dumped it after a few years, then indigo for a couple of years and finally cotton which was an immense success. That created a very hierarchized society from the massive use of Black slaves to the elite of the richer planters and the development of a white middle class, but that does not imply the pauperization of free people in Natchitoches: in fact in spite of what the authors say, the poorer layers of the society are tremendously reduced over time both in number and proportion if we believe the figures of table 6.5 page 143. The book shows how those who were just drifting through Louisiana, or those who were recently manumitted people of color, Indians, Blacks, mulattos, grifos or pardos, or just the poor whites could find decent activities in ranching. It was a socially syncretic development bringing together in close contact all kinds of people from different ethnic (including blacks and mulattos), social, national, educational, even religious backgrounds. It was also a syncretic activity that brought together various methods of raising cattle or horses: the free ranging method of Texas, the parc raising of the Carolina coast, and some other more European methods, like dairy farms implying milking the cows everyday, or the use of dogs for herding, and of course the raising of cows and horses, pigs and sheep or goats on the same ranch. This activity did not use the rich earth occupied by the plantations but moved to the poorer land along the rivers or the wooded land further inland. The planters even had some ranches, called vacheries, along some close by rivers as some kind of buffer activity in a market economy that was at times chaotic as for economic results. There would be a lot more to say about the book, but it is unavoidable if you want to understand anything about that period and that territory. If your interest is the role played by women and particularly Indian women in that period in Louisiana you will have to dig the information out and get a lot more from other sources because this book does not provide the reader with any systematic presentation of the problem. Dr Jacques COULARDEAU 2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Excellent book By Dianne C This is a great book to get the whole picture of early Natchitoches, more than just born died!

Strategically located at the western edge of the Atlantic World, the French post of Natchitoches thrived during the eighteenth century as a trade hub between the well-supplied settlers and the isolated Spaniards and Indians of Texas. Its critical economic and diplomatic role made it the most important community on the Louisiana-Texas frontier during the colonial era. Despite the community's critical role under French and then Spanish rule, *Colonial Natchitoches* is the first thorough study of its society and economy. Founded in 1714, four years before New Orleans, Natchitoches developed a creole (American-born of French descent) society that dominated the Louisiana-Texas frontier. H. Sophie Burton and F. Todd Smith carefully demonstrate not only the persistence of this creole dominance but also how it was maintained. They examine, as well, the other ethnic cultures present in the town and relations with Indians in the surrounding area. Through statistical analyses of birth and baptismal records, census figures, and appropriate French and Spanish archives, Burton and Smith reach surprising conclusions about the nature of society and commerce in colonial Natchitoches.

“With publication of H. Sophie Burton and F. Todd Smith's *Colonial Natchitoches*, the history of colonial Louisiana has taken a giant step forward. Their meticulous analysis of French and Spanish archival documentation for the social and economic components of a frontier settlement through nearly a century lays bare the fabric of its development. This study sets a standard that future histories of colonial settlements will want to follow.” --Gilbert C. Din, author, *Spaniards, Planters, and Slaves*