

# FIT FOR WAR

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Sustenance and Order in  
the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Catawba Nation

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## Introduction

The Catawba Indian Nation is a federally recognized tribe located south of present-day Charlotte, North Carolina. Smaller and less well-known than other Southeastern Indian groups, the Catawba nonetheless played an important role in the geopolitical landscape of the early colonial Southeast, and continue to live within their homeland despite a series of divestments. The persistence of the Nation as a corporate entity has been attributed in part to the Catawba's willingness to "cross the cultural divide" between themselves and European colonists during the eighteenth century (Merrell 1989:281). While this may have been the case, such an approach was not always successful for American Indian polities. Many who brokered relationships with European colonists during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries fell victim to the capriciousness of their new allies. In the pages that follow, I seek to further clarify the conditions of Catawba persistence through an examination of the intertwined strategies of militarism and settlement aggregation that the Nation undertook during the first half of the eighteenth century. I do so not only by examining the documentary record, but also through analyses of materials from two mid-eighteenth-century Catawba towns that can be used to access characteristics of everyday life. Detailed examination of these materials will help determine whether the political process of centralization through which communities were incorporated into the Catawba Nation was accompanied by parallel economic changes, particularly with regard to foodways. Were political alliances and settlement aggregation accompanied by community building, and how did this process unfold? By emphasizing corporate strategies, this study provides a counterbalance to literature concerning colonial period American Indian groups that focuses primarily on trade and the adoption of Enlightenment-period individualism.

Settlement aggregation in the lower Catawba valley began during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as the Catawba incorporated refugees from other American Indian groups who were destabilized and displaced by European colonial undertakings along the Atlantic coast. At the same time, the Catawba adopted a militaristic strategy of serving as auxiliaries for the Carolina colonies. One aspect of this militaristic strategy was settlement aggregation, which provided security and reduced the amount of time necessary to mobilize warriors for military operations. This study will characterize how the associated processes of militarization, refugee incorporation, and settlement aggregation impacted Catawba community organization and subsistence during the mid-eighteenth century. In addition to colonial documents, I examine pottery and macrobotanical remains from the archaeological sites of Nassaw-Weyapee (38Yk434) and Charraw Town (38Yk17), which were excavated by the Research Laboratories of Archaeology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, between 2007 and 2011. Nassaw and Weyapee were adjoining towns inhabited by groups affiliated with seventeenth-century inhabitants of the lower Catawba valley, while Charraw Town was home to refugees that arrived among the Catawba in the 1730s. Both of these locations were occupied during the mid-eighteenth century, making it possible to interpret patterned artifact distributions in terms of variation in contemporaneous communities of practice. Since women likely produced many of the archaeological materials I examine, this study also provides a window into the organization of women's activities, a realm that often escaped documentation.

Catawba settlement aggregation, while partly a consequence of their militaristic orientation, resulted in spatial proximity that may have increased interaction between communities, enabling the development and maintenance of an inclusive corporate identity. While this proximity was an important aspect of the process of Catawba ethnogenesis, I argue that it also made the Nation vulnerable to a food security crisis between 1755 and 1759. During this period Iroquois and Shawnee raids, settler encroachment, a regional drought, and the Seven Years War all interfered with the ability of Catawba households to feed their families. This situation can be understood as an instance of structural violence (*sensu* Galtung 1969, Farmer 2004), as most of these conditions were brought about by colonial policies that informed the decision-making processes of people living far beyond the administrative centers of Charles Town and Williamsburgh. Thus in addition to examining the organization of Catawba communities, I also

evaluate Catawba foodways with regard to expectations concerning household mitigation of food insecurity.

In sum, this study addresses the following questions: How did Catawba refugee incorporation, settlement aggregation, and political coalescence affect the scale of interaction networks and communities of practice in the lower Catawba River valley? What strategies did people employ in response to the food security crisis of the 1750s? And ultimately, what was daily life like for Catawba families during the mid-eighteenth century and how did the activities of Catawba men and women contribute to the persistence of the Nation?

### People of the River

The first Europeans to enter the Catawba River valley were associated with Spanish military expeditions. Juan de la Bandera, notary for Juan Pardo's 1567 march from Santa Elena—located on the coast of present-day South Carolina—up the Catawba River to the base of the Appalachian Mountains, recorded the names of the indigenous leaders they encountered along the way. One of these was “Yssa,” or *í-suwá* in Catawban orthography, meaning “river” (Rudes 2004:405). Over a century later, English speakers recorded the corporate name “Nassaw.” In addition to containing an English rendering of the Catawban word for river, “Nassaw” begins with a preposition abbreviated from *nieya* / *nieye*, meaning “people” or “Indians” (Mooney 1894:69). These “people of the river” were part of what was quickly becoming a diverse polity centered at the Catawba River crossing of the Great Trading Path that Virginia traders used to reach the Cherokee.

Stephen Davis and Brett Riggs (2004) have divided late seventeenth-through early nineteenth-century Catawba history into five periods based on significant political and economic trends. During the English Contact period (ca. 1675–1715), traders from Virginia and Carolina began to travel to the lower Catawba valley, exchanging goods imported from Europe for deerskins. It was also during this period that South Carolina merchants subsidized an intercolonial trade in Indian slaves that destabilized the region. The following Coalescent period (1716–1759) is bracketed by the Yamasee War, a conflict that encouraged Carolina colonists to better regulate the Indian trade, and a high-mortality smallpox epidemic that led to an evacuation of Catawba towns. The spatial aggregation of Catawba towns increased during the Coalescent period, until most were situated within

an area of about three square miles. When Catawba families returned after the epidemic of 1759, they established new villages slightly downriver from those inhabited during the first half of the eighteenth century. During the Late Colonial period (1760–1775), Catawba women began to produce pottery in European forms for the colonial marketplace. The Nation broke its alliance with the British and sided with the Americans at the outset of the Revolutionary period (1776–1781), serving with South Carolina troops during the war. In the ensuing Federal period (1781–1820), Catawba households subsisted on a mixed economy of farming, making and selling pottery, and collecting rent payments from the settlers that leased land from their reservation. By 1820 most Catawba families had left the east side of the river—where the majority had lived throughout the eighteenth century—in favor of the western side, where the present reservation is located.

The Catawba continued to reside in this area throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, they were dispossessed of most of their corporate holdings in 1840, after a sustained effort by South Carolina to extinguish the Nation's title (Merrell 1989:249–250). The earliest diplomatic agreement the Catawba made with regard to landholding and residence occurred during the administration of South Carolina Governor John Glen, sometime between 1743 and 1755. Glen promised the Catawba that no land grants would be issued within 30 miles of their towns, effectively reserving them a circular area 60 miles in diameter (Brown 1966:204) (Figure 1.1). After the smallpox epidemic of 1759, and perhaps more importantly the Anglo-Cherokee War, Superintendent of Indian Affairs John Stuart brokered a 1763 treaty with the Catawba at Augusta, Georgia, in which they accepted a 15-square-mile reservation encompassing portions of present Lancaster, York, and Chester counties (Brown 1966:240–241, 250–251). It is this area that South Carolina obtained in the 1840 Treaty of Nation Ford, with a promise of acquiring land for the Catawba near the Cherokee in North Carolina and providing funds for resettlement. However, only a 630-acre parcel within the existing reservation was held in trust for the Catawba by South Carolina, and the treaty itself was never ratified by the United States Senate, rendering it illegal under the federal Nonintercourse Act (Rudes et al. 2004:312). Catawba representatives mounted legal protests to the Treaty of Nation Ford beginning in 1885. In 1943, the Catawba became “federal wards” under the Indian Reorganization Act and obtained an additional 3,434 acres from South Carolina (U.S. Senate 1994:4). Despite federal “termination” of the tribe in 1959, the Catawba continued to seek compensation for the 1840 treaty. The matter was resolved in 1993, when