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## Introduction

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The voyages of exploration fielded by western European nations in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were the impetus that led to the creation of the Atlantic world, a network of interactions linking four continents across the Atlantic Ocean. Although sailors under the license of the Spanish nation were the first to successfully initiate regular crossings from Europe to the Americas, word of the vast wealth falling into the lap of Spain quickly spread, and mariners from other coastal nations of Europe joined in the search for plunder, power, and possessions. For readers in the United States and the United Kingdom, the role of English and later British explorers in the developing colonial world is familiar, and the importance of other nations is less known. However, this myopic perspective overlooks the important role the colonial ventures of other nations played in shaping the world we know today. While Spain played a relatively minor role in the Lesser Antilles and in North America north and east of the Rio Grande, with the exception of exploration *entradas* and the settlements of La Florida, the history of North America and the Caribbean was profoundly shaped by the colonial designs of France. From the earliest and short-lived sixteenth-century attempts to establish forts and permanent settlements along the eastern seaboard and along the waterways of the St. Lawrence River, to the later, more successful colonization efforts in various islands of the Caribbean, Canada, the Gulf Coast, and the Mississippi Valley, France rapidly rose to a position of wealth as a colonial power (Waselkov 1997). Yet as we well know, history tends to be written by the “winners” in order to construct national narratives that solidify their position. The same has held true, until that last couple of decades, for historical archaeologists who have tended to focus on the

British colonial sphere. Until relatively recently, the importance of the other contenders in the colonial struggle has tended to be overlooked.

Historical archaeology, which uses archaeological methods such as excavation, material culture studies, and spatial analysis in conjunction with historical sources such as letters, accounts, wills, and probate inventories, has contributed immeasurably to our understanding of the people not usually accorded importance in traditional history, such as poor people, workers, women, slaves, and children (Deetz 1996; Kelly 2005). Equally, historical archaeology can help to reintegrate complexity into national and international narratives by considering the nature and role of other colonial powers in the creation of the modern world (Orser 1996; Funari 1999). In this volume, we bring together researchers investigating a variety of French colonial ventures in the present-day United States, the Caribbean, and the northeastern coast of South America in an effort to explore the differences, similarities, and complexities of the French colonial experience in those regions outside the better known regions including Canada, the upper Mississippi Valley, and the Great Lakes. For those interested in the nature of French colonization and interaction in the northern portion of the continent, there is an extensive literature in French and English based upon a wide range of studies that have been carried out in Canada and, to a lesser extent, in the Great Lakes and upper Mississippi Valley regions of the United States (see the extensive bibliography in Waselkov 1997).

For 130 years, from the beginning of the second third of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century, the scope of the French colonial venture was truly outstanding (Boucher 1989; Eccles 1990). In North America, there was a permanent French presence that penetrated nearly halfway across the continent, spanning from Canada and the Great Lakes to the mouth of the Mississippi and spreading out along its tributaries. Additional French settlements extended both east and west from the Mississippi along the Gulf Coast, from the border of Texas to Florida. The nature of the settlements necessarily varied depending on their location and the resources and environments available for exploitation. In eastern Canada, there were farmers and fishers who had emigrated from France with the intent to settle, whereas in the Great Lakes region the French population was comparatively sparse and more itinerant, spread out among forts and trading establishments and geared toward taking advantage of the trade in fur. Farther south, along the middle Mississippi Valley,

settled agricultural villages produced surplus grain for the Caribbean, and miners exploited lead deposits. New Orleans acted as the funnel or “node” for distribution to the Caribbean and beyond. In the subtropical climate, Louisiana agriculture was increasingly modeled on the plantation economies of the Caribbean and grew to rely to a greater extent on the labor of enslaved Africans. This pattern was evident along the Gulf Coast, though here the initial concerns of subsistence and survival tended to outweigh profit. By the middle of the eighteenth century, a nearly continuous belt of French settlement encircled the British colonies along the eastern coast of North America from Georgia to Maine. Yet even within the British colonies there were areas where the French presence was significant. For example, in South Carolina’s Low Country, Protestant Huguenot refugees from France established plantations based on slave labor and grew rice and indigo among their British neighbors (Shlasko, this volume; Steen 1999). At the turn of the nineteenth century, a new wave of French immigrants would spread to Jamaica and the United States, especially to New Orleans, as refugees fleeing the turmoil of the Haitian Revolution settled and attempted to renew their lives (Geggus 2001; Rivers 2002; Rivers-Cofield, this volume).

The West Indies was another region where French and English endeavors got under way at an early date. During the 1620s and 1630s, French colonial ventures began to whittle away at the Caribbean possessions of the Spanish, first acquiring small toeholds on islands unoccupied by the Spanish such as St. Kitts, Nevis, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and St. Croix. Once it was clear that Spain was either unable or unwilling to contest these claims, English and French plantation economies became established, first producing tobacco and, in the second half of the seventeenth century, sugar. With sugar came slavery and profits heretofore undreamed of. By the end of the seventeenth century, nearly every habitable island of the Lesser Antilles had been claimed from the Spanish by either France or England, a few exceptions notwithstanding. The Greater Antilles were also claimed, with England seizing Jamaica from Spain by force in 1655, and France taking control of the western third of Hispaniola as the colony of Saint-Domingue at the close of the seventeenth century. In less than 100 years, Saint-Domingue would grow to be the richest and most populous (in both enslaved and free people) colony in the Caribbean, with nearly half a million enslaved Africans. Although Saint-Domingue overshadowed all other island colonies of any nation in virtually every

way, during the eighteenth century the three principal French islands of Saint-Domingue, Guadeloupe, and Martinique, taken together, produced more sugar, rum, coffee, and indigo with more captive Africans than all the British Caribbean colonies combined (Blackburn 1997). To place the numbers of enslaved laborers in context, Martinique, an island “one fourth the size of Long Island . . . receiv[ed] roughly the same number of enslaved Africans as the whole of the United States” (Price 2001:58).

Yet a third arena in which French colonization occurred lay on the northeast coast of South America. There, between British and Dutch Guyana to the west and Portuguese Brazil to the east, the French colony of Guyane was established. This was the only mainland South American French colony, although in many ways it had more in common with its Caribbean cousins. Despite controlling a vast area of tropical forest, the relatively sparse settlement was focused on the coastal strip and a few rivers, where plantations producing tropical commodities could be established (Bain et al., this volume; Mam Lam Fouck 1997). The colonial population remained small; in 1759 the total population of Guyane was 5,847, of whom 5,571 were enslaved. After 1855, gold prospectors began to move into some of the interior regions, but to this day they remain largely the province of indigenous people (Mam Lam Fouck 1997).

Once the colonial chessboard was laid with pieces from Canada to Guyane, other historical developments played a role in the way the colonial world would be shaped. European conflicts between Britain and France repeatedly extended themselves to the Americas in a variety of ways. Some Caribbean islands changed hands as many as 17 times over 200 years. The Seven Years War of 1756–1763 was much more than the “French and Indian War” by which it is known from the U.S. perspective, and at its conclusion defeated France chose to surrender all of its Canadian territory to Britain rather than part with the small islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique. The aftermath of the Seven Years War also led to the arrival in Louisiana of the displaced French population of Acadia, who became known as les Acadiens (today’s “Cajuns”), first in and around New Orleans and later moving to southwest Louisiana. The Gulf Coast east of New Orleans was ceded to the British, but over the following decades Spanish Louisiana (west of the Mississippi River) marched eastward and claimed the former French territories. Though the region was now Spanish, it was in name only. French colonial culture remained dominant until after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 (Dawdy 2008).

Other historical developments continued to change the complexion of the French colonial experience, none more dramatically than the French Revolution and its aftermath. In the Caribbean, the debates surrounding the possibility of continued slavery in face of the universal rights of man led to civil upheaval between “free people of color” and white colonists. These, in turn, probably contributed to the slave uprisings in Saint-Domingue (1791), Guadeloupe (1790, 1791, 1793), Martinique (1789, 1791, 1793), and Guyane (1790) (Bénot 1997; Dubois 2004a, 2004b). In Martinique, rather than see their slaves turned into citizens, the planter class invited British occupation (Blackburn 1997). In contrast, in Guadeloupe and Guyane, slavery was officially abolished in 1794, only to be reinstated eight years later by Napoleon (Bénot and Dorigny 2003).

As should be clear from this short review of the diverse range of French colonial economic and geographic experiences outside of Canada, the French colonial endeavor was no less varied or diverse than that of the English. It is worthwhile to investigate these settings for that reason alone. However, as the geography and economy of colonization varied between regions, so, too, did the worldview, or *mentalité*, of colonization vary between regions, and, more important, between colonizing nations.

In addition to the diversity of the French colonial experience, it has been suggested that the French worldview concerning colonization was just as distinct. Just as James Deetz (1996) and others have identified the development and spread of the “Georgian World View” and sought its origins in nascent capitalism (Leone 1988; Shackel 1994), so, too, have researchers posited that there were unique manifestations of French national and regional culture that placed their distinct imprint on French colonial endeavors. Aspects of French culture are proposed to have facilitated interaction with indigenous Native peoples through convergence (Moussette 2003), impacted the way slavery was conceived and implemented in the Gulf Coast and the Caribbean (Kelly 2002; Kelly, this volume; see also Rivers 2002; Rivers et al. 2003; Rivers-Cofield, this volume; Dawdy 2008), and resulted in unique attitudes toward the permeability of the “color barrier,” as expressed in contemporary accounts and in the relatively large number of free people of color in French colonies. In addition to the ways French colonists interacted with others, were they Native peoples or enslaved Africans, French colonists also created new lives that were based upon deeply held cultural values that penetrated every aspect of colonial life. These include such mundane but fundamental notions as

the ideas surrounding what foods are appropriate and how they should be prepared and consumed (Hardy, this volume; Scott and Dawdy, this volume), the correct ways to use architectural rules (Edwards and Kariouk 2004), and the notions governing the use and organization of space, whether domestic, urban, rural, or public.

### **Why this Volume?**

With the recognition of the unique history and experience of French colonization, the researchers contributing to this book have taken it upon themselves to explore, through historical archaeology, the ways in which French colonists in a variety of settings created distinctive ways of life. Perhaps surprisingly, the chapters in this book signal a vanguard, because despite more than half a century of significant historical archaeological research on a range of sites relating to the colonial period of North America and the Caribbean, the French contribution to the history of North America and the circum-Caribbean region has often been relegated to the periphery of historical study. In spite of France's diverse colonial holdings, ranging from the fishery, farming, and trade settlements of Canada, to the farms and mines in the middle Mississippi Valley region, to the plantations and farms on the Gulf Coast, to the French refugee plantations in South Carolina, Maryland, and elsewhere, and to the vast colonial endeavors of the Caribbean, comparatively few historical archaeological studies have explored this history. In some of these regions, such as the circum-Caribbean, historical archaeological research of any kind on French sites is in its infancy, with very few published results and even fewer in English. In light of this situation, it is perhaps not surprising that there are no collections of French historical archaeological research that bring all this diversity together. The few that do exist, such as those edited by John A. Walthall (1991) for the Illinois Country, Kenneth G. Kelly (2004) for the French Caribbean, and Gregory A. Waselkov (1991; Waselkov and Gums 2000) for colonial-era Mobile Bay, deal with single regions within the broader French colonial venture (see Waselkov 1997 for an excellent overview and bibliography). This book brings together, in a single collection, historical archaeological research on the middle Mississippi Valley region, the Gulf Coast and Louisiana, the French Huguenot planters in British South Carolina, refugees from the Haitian Revolution in Maryland, and the Caribbean and Guyane (Figure 1.1).