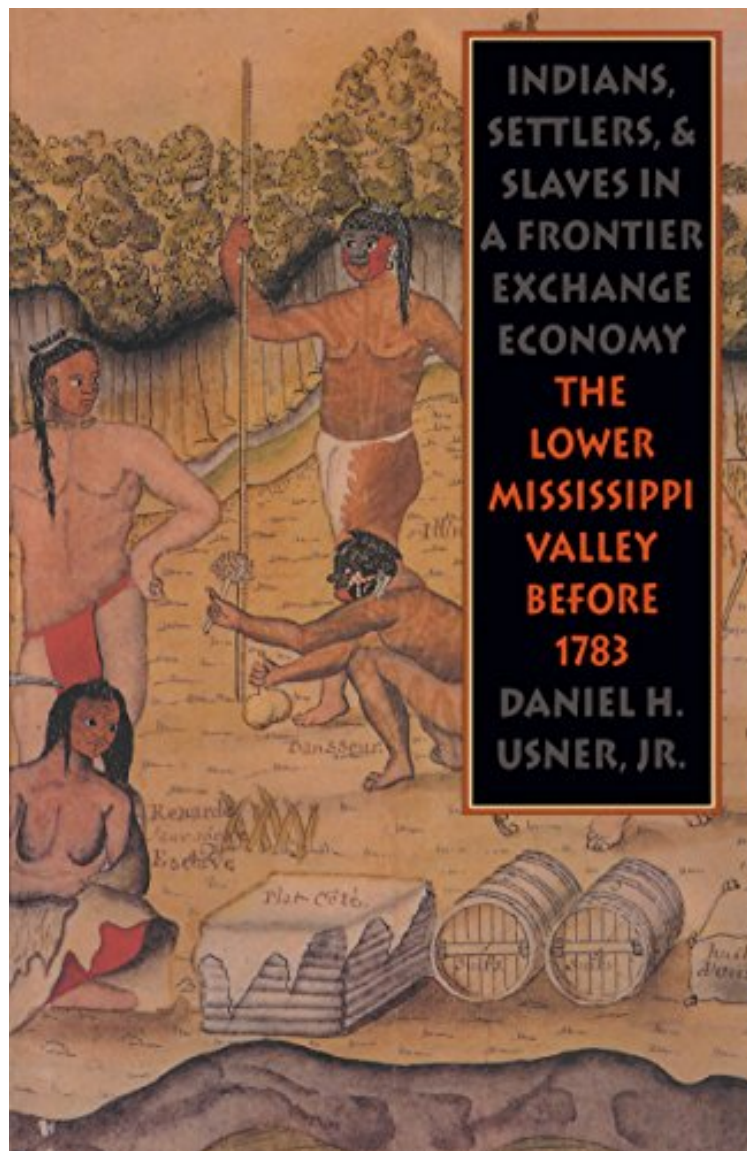


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Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783 (Published by the Omohundro Institute of Early ... and the University of North Carolina Press)

Daniel H. Usner

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before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783 (Published by the Omohundro Institute of Early ... and the University of North Carolina Press):

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. An excellent book. By giI recommend this book highly, both for the historian and the general reader who wants to understand the South of today by learning about the South in which it is rooted. The author relies heavily on a variety of primary sources, and he quotes judiciously from them to immerse the reader in the world of the Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783. His prose is crisp and highly readable, and he organizes his complex subject in a manner that makes reading pure pleasure. It's the kind of book to which I will return often. Usner begins with the French settlement of the region in 1698-99, when settlement density was low, slavery was negligible, and disease and near-starvation among the French settlers was rampant. Food was the first nexus between Europeans and Indians, who early had shared products from their gardens with Bienville's little camp at Biloxi. Because France never supplied Louisiana adequately and its French colonists generally refused to cultivate the soil themselves, food remained a critical trade element throughout the French habitation of the region. The deer skin trade had already brought Europeans and Indian nations together in commerce. The English, with trading firms anchored in Charleston and the West Indies, had an established trade network in the region and English traders were almost always able to provide better and a greater variety of trade goods than the French, though proximity led to a lively exchange between French and Indian inhabitants of what is now Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Slavery, both Indian and African, provided yet another part of the exchange economy in which the three groups encountered one another. Usner stresses that political boundaries were less important than mutual needs in the development of an exchange economy, and long after France lost the territory to Spain the primal exchange networks continued to function. He also cautions against understanding the term "frontier" to indicate an area where a highly developed society encounters an under- or undeveloped region or society. France's settlement of Louisiana had occurred in an era dominated by French rationalism's emphasis on environment as a primary shaping force in men's lives and narrowing opportunities within its realm. Thus, the nation emptied its prisons and local jails of inmates, who, some protesting loudly, were loaded on ships bound for Louisiana. Military units were dispersed throughout the countryside to round up beggars and homeless citizens, who had become a familiar sight and a burden on the economy. Broadside and newspapers spoke of the broad fields and fresh air of the New World, a world rife with opportunity. Disease took a high toll before the ships loaded with colonists even reached New Orleans and a higher toll after new colonists were cast ashore on the marshy lowlands that constituted New Orleans. Yellow Fever took many who had survived smallpox. In 1718, the colony had no more than 300-400 people, a number of them French Canadians who had come downriver with Bienville and Iberville as traders. Not only was the core of colonial society made up of criminals and miscreants of various sorts, but France neglected its new colony grievously, once failing to provision it for a year. By contrast, many of the Indian nations in the region were better organized politically and economically, better able to provide for their needs, and possessed of sophisticated social institutions. Thus complex social linkages among Indian villages, hunting camps, small military outposts and trading posts, plantations, and port towns developed naturally across a large region of the South before cotton became king, based in mutual need for subsistence. Many of them remained surprisingly egalitarian. For example, slaves on plantations along the Mississippi north and south of New Orleans enjoyed more autonomy than in many other areas and a surprising number were able to purchase their freedom. Marketing food was an important leveling influence. New Orleans was always short of food supplies, and colonial officials encouraged planters to permit their enslaved workers to grow gardens and sell produce and poultry at the city's market. Indians also met in that market and others along the river and its tributaries. Slaves skilled in the production of indigo and other vital items of colonial trade also enjoyed special privileges. Usner shows clearly how these early transactions shaped Louisiana into a distinct colonial region with a social and economic system based on mutual subsistence needs. I am not a historian. But I have read pretty widely about the history of the South, the Mississippi Territory, Louisiana, and the Creek Indians, and I'm pleased the region has been explored from so many different perspectives and by such gifted writers of history. Usner's book is among the most interesting and well-written of these. The one error I noted was trivial unless one were to use it as a culinary guide. Usner writes, "roux, from which all forms of gumbo are made is produced by cooking either sliced okra or powdered sassafras in a slowly heated oil." The first time I made duck gumbo, I added fil (powdered sassafras) early in the cooking process. Big mistake unless you want a tough, stringy soup. Fil is added at the table, after the dish is cooked. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Enjoyed it as a non-specialist amateur By Otter You have to be interested in the topic already. It isn't what I'd call a thrilling narrative unless you care about it, and Usner doesn't go out of his way to fascinate you. But it's really informative, given the paucity of records, and pretty clearly written. I'm not any sort of specialist, so I can't challenge the scholarship. But as an interested amateur historian of the period, I found it really worth my time. 0 of 0 people

found the following review helpful. Informative and well written book. By potosapatty I'm half way through the book. It is very informative and well thought out. I'm working on a screenplay about Spains role in the revolution and Glvez. This really gives me a fresh look at the times, since I have read many books about the main characters. I highly recommend this book, its very well done. Hats off to the author!

In this pioneering book Daniel Usner examines the economic and cultural interactions among the Indians, Europeans, and African slaves of colonial Louisiana, including the province of West Florida. Rather than focusing on a single cultural group or on a particular economic activity, this study traces the complex social linkages among Indian villages, colonial plantations, hunting camps, military outposts, and port towns across a large region of pre-cotton South. Usner begins by providing a chronological overview of events from French settlement of the area in 1699 to Spanish acquisition of West Florida after the Revolution. He then shows how early confrontations and transactions shaped the formation of Louisiana into a distinct colonial region with a social system based on mutual needs of subsistence. Usner's focus on commerce allows him to illuminate the motives in the contest for empire among the French, English, and Spanish, as well as to trace the personal networks of communication and exchange that existed among the territory's inhabitants. By revealing the economic and social world of early Louisianians, he lays the groundwork for a better understanding of later Southern society.

From Library Journal Innovative on two counts, this book succeeds both as a narrative that integrates Indians, blacks, and European settlers into a history of Louisiana from French settlement in 1699 until its cession to the Spanish in 1783, and as a detailed examination of the exchange networks that provided subsistence to the peoples of the area and characterized the cultural interchanges among them. Usner (history, Cornell) focuses on food production, transport, and marketing as a way of examining the social relations among Indians, blacks, and French colonists, resulting in new perspectives on slavery, Indian-white relations, and colonial life. He shows how the development of plantation agriculture destroyed the frontier exchange economy, without entirely dismantling the unique society it had created.- David B. Mattern, Univ. of Virginia, Charlottesville Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. Breaks new ground. "Louisiana History" "Usner's pathbreaking study is far more than a social and economic history of early Louisiana. Howard R. Lamar, Yale University" "This detailed and nuanced account represents the most exciting of historical endeavors. Richard White, University of Washington" Usner's pathbreaking study is far more than a social and economic history of early Louisiana. Howard R. Lamar, Yale University This detailed and nuanced account represents the most exciting of historical endeavors. Richard White, University of Washington Breaks new ground, not only in Louisiana or Mississippi Valley history, but in the evolution of interdisciplinary historical research and writing. Usner skillfully blends perspectives from social history, ethnohistory, environmental history, and the new military history, as well as economics, geography, and other traditional disciplines into a study that will influence the field for many years to come.--Louisiana History The book is most interesting in its discussion of how Indians, Africans, and Europeans all contributed knowledge and skills to a common economic community.--Journal of Social History Usner's pathbreaking study is far more than a social and economic history of early Louisiana, for it also explains how different peoples there interacted and how colonial regions develop a complex, distinctive style of life of their own. . . . Usner has rescued a neglected but crucially important sector of American colonial history--that of French Louisiana before 1783--and made it a part of the mainstream narrative.--Howard R. Lamar, Yale University This detailed and nuanced account represents the most exciting of historical endeavors. Studying at once the establishment of European empires and the economics of everyday life, Usner delineates with insight and sympathy a common world of African slaves, Indian peoples, and European immigrants in the lower Mississippi valley.--Richard White, University of Washington