The Natchez Diaspora: A History of Indigenous Displacement and Survival in the Atlantic World

On January 24, 1731, near modern-day Natchez, Mississippi, the French colonists of Louisiana defeated the Natchez after a bloody two-year war. The French army captured some Natchez while others escaped. The French enslaved over two hundred Natchez and, fearing prolonged resistance, sent them to Saint Domingue (modern-day Haiti) for sale. Those who escaped enslavement fled northwest to live with the Chickasaws; in the 1740s the escapees moved again and settled among the Creeks and Cherokees. In the 1830s, the U.S. government again displaced most of the Natchez to “Indian Territory” (Oklahoma) during the decade of the “Trail of Tears.” Today, the Natchez exist as part of the Creek Nation of Oklahoma and are working towards Federal recognition. Some Natchez remained in the South after removal and live today in two distinct communities in South Carolina. My dissertation uncovers the history of the Natchez diaspora after 1731 and highlights the significance and interconnectedness of French, Spanish, English, and American colonialism to Native American history in the Atlantic World. Through the use of French and English written sources and Natchez oral history, the project enlarges the temporal scope of Natchez history and its significance to larger colonial processes, emphasizing the importance and impact of Natchez interactions with a number of different European and Native American powers in different geographical spaces over time.