

"French Colonial Louisiana and a World of Things"

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This paper is anchored by one criminal investigation into theft in the French colonial settlement of Natchitoches, Louisiana. As revealed in this investigation from 1757, a stunning range of goods figured among the goods stolen, traded, pawned or purchased by African slaves and their accomplices in the hinterlands of French colonial Louisiana. Among these were deerskins and linen cloth, printed cotton handkerchiefs and tomahawks, garters and shirts, mirrors and silver rings, flasks of alcohol and cooking pots, chocolate and *beignets*, sugar and hams, specie and horses. These goods served to link French settlements to Spanish ones; connected cash, barter and credit economies; and bound African slaves to the French, as well as to Indians, métis, Spaniards, and even to an English military deserter living in Natchitoches.

The variety of products and objects mentioned in this court case alone evoke a world of things. Derived from multiple corners of the Atlantic, these 'things' served to couple European manufactured goods with indigenous objects, African cooks with French food traditions and implements, local staples with South American products, as well as animals traded by Indians to Spaniards (from stocks originally brought over from Spain), with sugar from the West Indies, and textiles imported from India. In foregrounding these and other "objects in motion," this court case provides a starting point for understanding how problematic the Atlantic World framework becomes when applied to the study of material culture, especially textiles and clothing, in early America. On one level, it mutes consideration of the protean character of material goods in cross-cultural context. On another level, it suggests that the Atlantic paradigm fails to recognize the full panoply of global cultural influences that came to bear upon North American populations by means, for example, of a stolen reversible-print "palliaca" handkerchief from Pullicat on the Madras coast of India..