

# People on the Other Side:

## Apalachee Alliance Building in a Changing World

**Background:** The Apalachees are an Indigenous nation with a historic population of 30,000 whose homelands are in Florida’s Big Bend region, including present-day Tallahassee. In 1609, the Apalachees became allies of Spanish St. Augustine. In 1633, some Apalachee chiefs brought Catholic friars to their towns to establish missions. Despite Spain’s goal of colonial control, the powerful Apalachee nation set the tone for relations in this region for more than 40 years after 1633.

**Problem/Question:** The founding of the English colony of Carolina in 1670 created new challenges for the Apalachees and other Spanish-allied Indigenous people. English colonists desired Indigenous captives, whom they enslaved as laborers on their plantations in Carolina and the Caribbean. In exchange for captives, the English were willing to pay in firearms and other trade goods. The English demand for captives sparked a new wave of raiding across the Southeast, which reached the Apalachees by 1675. Existing scholarship on this topic emphasizes the victimization of Apalachees in this Indigenous slave trade (especially since Spain would not trade firearms to their Indigenous allies). Instead, my project asks how Apalachee communities adapted to this new challenge, and what their responses tell us about the Indigenous world of the Gulf South in the late seventeenth century.

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*Major polities of the Native South in the Seventeenth Century*  
*Source: Wikimedia Commons*

**Findings:** Using Spanish and English archival documents alongside published archaeology, I argue that, in the 1670s:

1. To protect themselves from raids, the Apalachees worked to build new alliances with English-allied Indigenous peoples, much to the dismay of Spain. Foremost among these were the Apalachicola (Hitchiti) to their north and the Chacato (Chatot) to their west.
2. To bolster their defenses, the Apalachees invited refugees of the Indigenous slave trade to resettle in their territory. These refugees created their own villages, which encircled Apalachee towns, creating a buffer zone against raids.
3. The Apalachees found creative ways of attaining firearms despite Spain’s official ban on trading them to Indigenous allies, including illicit exchanges with both English and Spanish ships.

In the process, this project shows that the Tallahassee region remained a center of Apalachee Indigenous power well into the late seventeenth century, despite Spanish colonial aims.



*Today, a reconstructed Apalachee council house towers over the cross and church at the historic site of Mission San Luis in Tallahassee.*  
*Photo by the author.*